

July 17, 2020

COVID-19: Updated Visiting Policy in LTCH, Partners in Care Tool Kit and more...

Dear Residents and long-term care team members,

We are now almost 5 months into the new COVID-19 reality; living and working with infection prevention, precautionary measures, physical distancing, and missing the personal connections with people we love and care about. In this bulletin, I speak about psychosocial and emotional wellbeing, coming at the topic from a few different angles. We are getting through this. Where we are today, in terms of social, physical and isolation restrictions, is better than where we were 4 months ago. With each passing month, our collective hope remains steadfast that we will come through on the other side changed for the good. My heart goes out to all residents, family members and team members who have been irrevocably affected by COVID-19. I hope that the information contained in this bulletin gives you cause to feel encouraged, supported and above all....hopeful.

Updated Visiting Policy

On July 15 the Ontario government announced an expanded framework for visits occurring with LTC home residents. Highlights of this announcement include:

- All visiting practices are to follow the guiding principles of safety, emotional well-being, equitable access and flexibility
- **Outdoor visits** can include up to 2 visitors at a time and visitors do not need to verbally attest to a negative COVID-19 test and must wear a face covering. Visitors are required to bring their own face covering
- **Indoor visits** are permitted as of July 22, can include up to 2 visitors at a time, visitors must verbally attest to a negative COVID-19 test within the past 14 days, and must wear a surgical/procedure mask at all times. LTC homes are



responsible for supplying the masks for indoor visits and to outdoor visitors who do not have a face covering.

- All visitors must comply with LTC home infection prevention and control (IPAC) measures
- The LTC home, when developing policies to support visiting programs must take variable into account including physical/infrastructure of the home, staffing availability, and availability of a supply of personal protective equipment
- LTC homes have discretion in scheduling, may regulate how many visitors come to the home at any one time, and may discontinue visits if non-adherence to the rules is evident

To read the full document, click here: [English](#) | [French](#)

Remember

In light of the requirements for LTC homes to establish safe, equitable, flexible visits that meet the emotional wellbeing needs of residents, I encourage you to be patient as the policies, practices and procedures are worked through. Remember that we all want the same goal – the reunification of residents with their loved ones so that psychosocial and emotional wellbeing can be restored. I also want to encourage you to adhere to recommended infection prevention and control practices. Remember, that if even one resident or team member tests positive for COVID-19, the entire home is declared to be in outbreak, and all non-essential visitations stop. Visitors, be sure to consider your own personal health and susceptibility to the virus when thinking about visiting a resident in LTC too.

OARC was consulted regularly during the development of this expanded visiting policy. It was important to move as swiftly as possible, recognizing that supporting the psychological and emotional health through a visiting program is critically important. While this ‘next step’ in opening our LTC homes to visiting is welcomed, we still have a journey ahead of us. There is a balance to be achieved; one that minimizes the risk of exposure to COVID-19 and provides meaningful opportunities for residents and family members to come together.

This is a unique time. Through listening, exercising creativity and patience, we will seize every opportunity to make this expanded visiting policy the very best it can be. To that end, OARC and FCO (Family Councils Ontario) are working together on a resource that will help homes make visits meaningful and successful. Stay tuned for a survey that will inform the development of leading practices to ensure that families, residents and the home staff who support visiting initiatives have the tools they need to make the visits successful, meaningful, and engaging for everyone.

Partners in Care: A resource for welcoming back caregivers to hospitals and long-term care

I have had the privilege of becoming familiarized with organizations and people who are working diligently to make life and work during the COVID-19 pandemic as meaningful and safe as possible. One such organization is Ontario Caregiver Association, led by CEO Amy Coupal. She shared with me (and our LTC sector) a toolkit that could prove to be very helpful to the process of bringing visiting back to LTC homes. Managing infection control and keeping caregivers, team members and residents safe is a key priority. The resource I speak of is called “Partners in Care: A resource for welcoming back caregivers to hospitals and long-term care.”

Perhaps your LTC home may see value in using the resource. I encourage you to view the toolkit in its entirety at <https://ontariocaregiver.ca/partnersincare/> The Partners in Care Tool Kit, developed in collaboration with Ontario caregivers and The Change Foundation, is designed to help hospitals and long-term care settings re-engage essential family caregivers as access restrictions are eased.

The Partners in Care Tool Kit includes:

- **Caregiver Identification** – to be given to family caregivers. The Partners in Care Tool Kit includes a template that can be used to create Caregiver I.D badges or stickers. Wearing an I.D badge helps to identify the family caregiver and indicates the caregiver has been screened and is allowed access.
- **Partners in Care Pledge** – outlines the responsibility of the home and caregivers in keeping hospital staff, physicians, patients and other caregivers safe. Upon entry, caregivers and health care providers agree to follow the protocols and to ask questions if there is any confusion. This tool can be used as is or customized to meet the needs of the hospital or long-term care home.
- **What Family Caregivers Can Expect** – outlines what caregivers can expect so that when they arrive, they understand the process, where to find information or how to escalate concerns. This one-page overview can be added to an organization’s website or provided to caregivers in another way. It can also be used as is or customized to meet the needs of the hospital or long-term care home.

If you have questions about the Partners in Care Tool Kit please contact The Ontario Caregiver Organization at 416-362-2273 or 1-888-877-1626.

OARC's Residents' Council Forums

After nearly 2.5 months of running weekly Resident Forums, it has become increasingly clear to the OARC team that residents across Ontario are **craving meaningful connection**. While visitation practices with family and friends continue to be ironed out and executed, virtual peer-to-peer interactions are another way that residents can access a private and confidential outlet for sharing, learning and connecting.

Facilitated by Barry Hickling, OARC Board member and resident leader from the Village of Aspen Lake in Windsor, Resident Forums continue to be offered on a weekly basis. Forums are not a replacement for formal counselling or therapy, but they can help residents to work through feelings of loneliness and isolation by providing reassurance and validation from resident peers.

Beth, a resident leader from True Davidson Acres in Toronto has joined the Forums on a few different occasions since they started. She shared, *"Every time I have participated in the Forum, I have enjoyed the meeting greatly! It's so informative and I always have a warm feeling when I hear of the situations of such a variety of people from different locations, all of us in similar or the same daily living."*

Residents can participate in the Forums by phone by dialing a toll-free number, through a meeting platform on a computer or through an app on either a smart phone* or tablet device* (*download of GoToTraining required). We understand from previous Forums that some residents may require additional support during the sessions to participate in a meaningful way (un-muting lines, speaking into phone receiver, moving closer to computer screen or microphone, encouragement to speak up and share etc.). **Our hope/intention with the Resident Forums is to hear directly from residents as much as possible. We have added new July dates – get registered today!**

<https://attendee.gototraining.com/rt/4948757107395787522>

Note: Ongoing participation in the Forums is encouraged, however, we ask that residents come back to join us on a monthly basis, rather than weekly, to allow other residents the chance to participate.

COVID-19 and Residents' Experiences

The Prevention of Error-Based Transfers (PoET) Project is an award-winning, Ontario-based Ethics Quality Improvement project that aims to reduce consent-related errors in long-term care homes, and the transfers to hospital that can follow. PoET was started at William Osler Health System and is aimed at helping LTC homes align practices and habits as closely to Ontario's Health Care Consent Act as possible.

OARC recently met with Dr. Jill Oliver, Community Ethicist and PoET Project Lead to discuss a unique opportunity her team created in conjunction with McMaster University

for residents to voice their experiences during the COVID-19 pandemic. Dr. Oliver explained that her team feels strongly that residents' voices must be heard and COVID-19 has made this more difficult. They have created a public page on their website (<http://www.poetproject.ca/care/>) to post residents' messages so that others around the world can read them. This effort has been coined C.A.R.E. meaning COVID-19 and Residents' Experiences. Dr. Oliver says that they are "interested in hearing anything from any resident from any long-term care home in Ontario."

OARC encourages all residents to contribute to this project. You have the opportunity to contribute to a growing body of information and opinion that can be used to understand your lived experience best. To find out more, and to read about the project in more detail, click here: <http://www.poetproject.ca/care/>

Residents' Councils and COVID-19

All LTC homes in Ontario have a Residents' Council. With life and work deeply affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is important to note that the importance of Residents' Councils has not been diminished. However, with infection prevention and control practices including isolation, co-horting (in some cases), physical distancing, wearing of personal protective equipment, together with the human resource challenges exacerbated by the pandemic, Residents' Councils may have become paralyzed to move forward in meaningful ways.

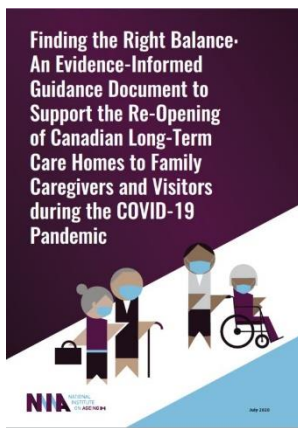
We understand that the function of Residents' Councils is twofold:

1. To provide forums for peer-to-peer support, where residents speak with one another about the challenges and successes involved with living in LTC homes
2. To provide consensus opinions and suggestions to management of LTC homes to work towards improving the quality of living for all residents

Both functions are important, now more than ever! Government has iterated that EVEN during COVID-19 precautions, Residents' Councils need to function. Their purpose is critical.

Every home is unique, and COVID-19 has further accentuated this uniqueness. OARC is working to create leading practices that will unite our efforts and interests in re-igniting effective Residents' Councils. There are creative and wonderful ways to support the voice of residents and encourage peer to peer support, and we are excited to share our work with you as soon as we can. In the meantime, if you have ideas you wish to share, success stories and how you've overcome the challenges presented by COVID-19 so that your Council can continue, please share with us! Email me directly at dlender@ontarc.com or call me at 1-800-532-0201 x 240. With over 600 LTC homes in Ontario, there is a plethora of ideas and we want to help spread the word so that COVID-19 does not rob our LTC residents of their valued Residents' Councils.

Balancing Risk of COVID-19 and Emotional Wellbeing



Recently OARC was given the opportunity to be involved as one of over 50 contributors to a position paper led by the National Institute on Ageing, Ryerson University and Mt. Sinai Hospital that articulates the balance needed between providing disease protection and supporting psychosocial/emotional wellbeing of residents. The paper takes an evidence based, leading practice approach pulling from research and study from around the world. Titled, “Finding the Right Balance: An Evidence-Informed Living Guidance Document to Support the Re-Opening of Canadian Long-Term Care Homes to Essential Family Caregivers and Visitors during the COVID-19

Pandemic,” the paper expresses that experts and advocates have “grown increasingly concerned that visitation policies and essential family caregiver access to LTC settings remain overly restrictive and are causing substantial and potentially irreversible harm to the health and wellbeing of residents.”

Six core principles were proposed in the paper based on a review of literature and hearing from residents, essential family caregivers and visitors. They are:

1. Policies must differentiate between “essential family caregivers” and “general visitors”, and residents, substitute decision makers and their families should have the authority and autonomy to determine who is essential to support them in their care.
2. Restricted access to visiting must balance the risks of COVID-19 infection with the risks of social isolation to resident health, wellbeing and quality of life.
3. Visitor policies should prioritize equity over equality and be both flexible and compassionate.
4. Governments, public health authorities and LTC homes must provide regular, transparent, accessible and evidence-based communication and direction about visitor policies and access.
5. Collect and report robust data related to re-opening LTC homes to essential family caregivers and general visitors.
6. Establish and provide a mechanism for feedback and a process for rapid appeals.

This paper was given to our Ontario Government early in July. To read the entire document, [click here](#)

On behalf of your OARC team, I wish you peace and joy as we move into this next phase of managing life and work with the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,



Dee Lender
Executive Director