

September 11, 2020

Updated Visiting and Absence Policies, Consultations with Residents' and Family Councils, Residents' Council Guidance Document and more...

Dear Residents and LTC Team Members,

In the past few days, there have been significant changes to government policy that have direct impact on your experience in these challenging times.

One announcement given by government on Friday August 28th, outlined the parameters for residents to be absent from your home either for a few hours or for an extended period of time. The second important announcement from government came Wednesday September 2nd which detailed an enhanced Visitor Policy, to be implemented by September 9th.

OARC has been working with government for many weeks, sharing the tension that has been expressed from residents that, as they see the community open up around them, they are still required to remain on the LTC home property. I am proud of the fact that government heard your voice and is working to provide policy changes that provide a better balance between residents' self-determination and dignity with infection control and prevention.

I understand the concern from residents, families, team members and government that we provide avenues for supporting the psychosocial and emotional health of residents, while developing processes that minimize the risk of COVID exposure.

There is no perfect answer, and sometimes things can seem very confusing. OARC is proud to be part of the discussions with government on matters of importance to residents. Here are some highlights from the two important recent announcements.

1. RESIDENT ABSENCES: EFFECTIVE FRIDAY AUGUST 28TH:

- a. Short stay absences: residents may enjoy a leave from the LTC home property for a few hours for "health care related, social, or other reasons." If a resident would like to go for a meal with friends/family, carry out personal errands, attend a doctor's appointment etc., they may do so, provided that they:

- i. wear a medical mask at all times (if tolerated). This mask is to be provided by the home if necessary.
- ii. be reminded of the importance of public health measures including physical distancing.
- iii. be actively screened upon returning to their home.

Note: Upon returning from their short stay absence, residents are not required to be tested for COVID-19 or to self-isolate.

If a resident is away from the home for an emergency room visit, and that visit requires one overnight stay, this is considered a short stay absence, and therefore the resident upon return, is actively screened, but is not required to self-isolate or be tested for COVID-19.

- b. Temporary absences: residents may leave the home's property for one or more nights (called a temporary absence) for personal reasons. For these longer absences, upon return the resident would be required to self-isolate for 14 days.

Note: The management team of the home has the authority to review and approve/deny requests for temporary absences due to the increased risk that can be associated with these types of activities and the home's ability to isolate the returning resident. Specifically, when reviewing the request on a case-by-case basis, the home is to consider risk based on (but not limited to) the following:

- The home's ability to support self-isolation for 14 days upon the resident's return
- Local disease transmission and activity
- The risk associated with the activities that the resident will be engaged in
- The resident's ability to comply with policies and bylaws

If the request is denied, the home must communicate this to the resident/substitute decision maker in writing, including the rationale for the decision.

These changes announced on August 28th are captured in a document called "COVID-19 Directive #3 for Long-Term Care Homes under the Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007". The information on resident absences can be found on pages 5-6. To read the entire document, click here:

[https://www.ltchomes.net/LTCHPORTAL/Content/Snippets/CMOH%20Directive%2003%20\(EN\).pdf](https://www.ltchomes.net/LTCHPORTAL/Content/Snippets/CMOH%20Directive%2003%20(EN).pdf)

2. VISITING POLICY CHANGES: ANNOUNCED WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 2, EFFECTIVE WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 9

The Visiting Policy was re-developed and announced with one week 'lead time' so that homes could put policies and practices in place to align with the changes and ensure lowest risk to residents, team members and family members. Government also hosted a few webinars for homes so that the policy could be reviewed and questions addressed.

There are many aspects to the Visiting Policy, and I'll highlight a few here in this bulletin. To read the entire policy, click here:

[https://www.ltchomes.net/LTCHPORTAL/Content/Snippets/Policy%20-%20Resuming%20Visits%20to%20LTC%20Homes%20\(EN\).pdf](https://www.ltchomes.net/LTCHPORTAL/Content/Snippets/Policy%20-%20Resuming%20Visits%20to%20LTC%20Homes%20(EN).pdf)

You may have questions about what you read in the policy, how you interpret what you read, or how your home has produced procedures in alignment with the policy.

There are many unique situations that present themselves and in situations like these, each one is important to the people involved, especially since the topic deals with reunifying residents with their loved ones. This is an emotional topic, one that must balance safety with emotional/psychological wellbeing. Government issued an accompanying document called "[Frequently Asked Questions, COVID-19 Visiting Policy](#)" (Released: September 2, 2020, Effective: September 9, 2020) that seeks to capture some of the most pertinent questions.

Based on the questions that came from the webinars last week, government promised the subsequent release of future FAQ documents so that as many questions as possible can be answered in writing. As soon as these documents are released, we will send to you via another bulletin, just like this one.

Here are some highlights and details of the new Visiting Policy:

1) Section 4.0 gives details on the 'types of visitors' that the policy refers to.

An "**Essential Visitor**" is anyone performing essential support services (e.g. food delivery, inspector, maintenance, health care service (e.g. phlebotomy)) or a person visiting a very ill or palliative resident.

Note: While Government inspectors are classified as essential visitors, they are not subject to the policy.

The category of "Essential Visitor" has been expanded to include support workers and caregivers.

A "**Support Worker**" is a type of essential visitor who is visiting to perform essential support services for the home or for a resident at the home (e.g.

doctors, nurse practitioners, maintenance workers, food delivery people – as long as they are NOT staff (team) members according to how the Long-Term Care Homes Act defines staff members).

A “**Caregiver**” is a type of essential visitor who is DESIGNATED by the resident and/or their substitute decision-maker. This is important because this acknowledges that the preferences and needs of the resident, as defined BY THE RESIDENT are most important. A designated caregiver visits with their resident to provide direct care to the resident in aspects of care including assistance with eating, mobility, personal hygiene, cognitive stimulation, communication, meaningful connection, relational continuity and decision-making. People who may be designated as caregivers include family members, privately hired caregivers, paid companions and translators. Caregivers must:

- Be at least 18 years of age
- Be limited to 2 i.e. a maximum of 2 designated caregivers per resident at a time, and this designation is in writing.

If the LTC home is experiencing an outbreak, or a resident is self-isolating or symptomatic, essential visitors are the **only type** of visitors permitted into the home to visit their resident. If a resident is self-isolating or is symptomatic, only **one** caregiver is permitted to visit that resident at a time.

LTC homes are to **not** require scheduling or impose time limits or frequency limits for caregivers.

A “**General Visitor**” is someone who visits to provide non-essential services or for social reasons (e.g. family members and friends) and are different that the people who have been designated by the resident (or substitute decision-maker) as essential visitors who contribute to direct care and wellbeing.

A maximum of 2 general visitors may visit a resident at a time provided that the resident is not self-isolating or symptomatic and the home is not in outbreak. General visitors under the age of 14 must be accompanied by an adult (this forms the maximum of 2) and the youth must follow all applicable infection prevention and control precautions that are in place at the home.

LTC homes have the discretion to require the scheduling of general visitors for both indoor and outdoor visits, and to limit the length of each visit (provided that visits are at least 30 minutes long), and may limit the frequency of visits (as long as at least one visit is accommodated for each week). Homes have the discretion to determine where these visits may be held in order to minimize risk.

All visitors that fall under this policy must be actively screened before being permitted entry into the LTC home. Support workers and caregivers and general visitors (who intend to visit INDOORS) must verbally attest to the home that they have tested negative for COVID-19 within the previous 2 weeks and have not subsequently tested positive. Homes are not required to provide the testing.

LTC homes are responsible for providing surgical/procedural masks, gloves, gowns, and eye protection for essential visitors as required. General visitors visiting outdoors are responsible for bringing their own face covering, but if the visit is to take place indoors, the home is responsible for the provision of surgical/procedural masks.

LTC homes are not required to supervise visits, but have the discretion to do so, in order to manage health and safety concerns. All supervision must be implemented in a manner that respects the right for residents to communicate in confidence, receive visitors of their choice, and have privacy.

Homes are required to have comprehensive policies in place to support the visiting programs, including procedures to follow if visitors do not adhere to the requirements. If visitor(s) do not adhere, the home must:

- provide strategies for supporting the visitor(s) in understanding and adhering to the policy
- recognize visits are critical to the emotional well being of residents
- consider the impact of discontinuing visits
- develop consequences that are proportionate to the severity of the non-adherence
- specify any education/training that needs to be completed before the visitor(s) are permitted re-entry

[Homes are encouraged to consult the Residents' Council and the Family Council in the home on procedures for addressing non-adherence by visitors.](#)

The new policy changes are significant. While they bring with them an increase to residents' ability to self-determine where they go, when they go and with whom, and provide a framework for additional people to visit residents we must acknowledge that these changes do increase the risk of contracting COVID-19 and therefore your home is at a higher risk of going into outbreak.

We all must do our very best in exercising patience with management teams who are putting procedures in place to maximize safety balanced with dignity and freedoms that support quality of living for residents. It is to EVERYONE's best interest to protect themselves and those around them from exposure to COVID-19, and to take the

precautions/policy changes very seriously. With even one case in the home amongst residents or team/staff members, the home is in outbreak and all general visiting must be halted. Please be diligent in practicing physical distancing, wear your mask, wash your hands, and be understanding and compassionate with one another during these very challenging times. I also encourage you, through your Residents' Council to acknowledge your care teams who are working tirelessly to put procedures in place to keep everyone safe. Use your Residents' Council to raise questions, concerns and to celebrate what is working well under these new guidelines.

NEW: September 8, 2020 - Memo from Ministry of Long-Term Care: Residents' Councils are Mandated in LTCHA, 2007 and Must be Supported

As the voice for long-term care residents across the province, resident councils play a central role in shaping the communities their members call home. Councils provide an important forum for residents to come together as neighbours and provide input on the issues that matter to them, as mandated under the Long-Term Care Homes Act. While COVID-19 presented a barrier, council meetings are now getting back up and running across the province, reconnecting residents who are as committed as we are to the wellbeing of Ontario's long-term care homes.

Our province's first ever Residents' Council Week begins on September 14th, 2020. It will be an exciting opportunity for councils to showcase who they are, what they care about, and how they make a difference in their communities.

The Ontario Association of Residents' Councils (OARC) has played a key part in making this week of celebration a reality, as they do year-round to support residents and the councils that represent them. The OARC team welcomes all opportunities to support you in reviving your Residents' Councils; they are a fantastic resource and we encourage you to engage them as you return to normal operations.

To kick-start Residents' Council Week, please visit the [OARC website](#) for access to posters, activity pages, and event ideas to help you celebrate. For more information or to request support, contact Melisa McVie at mmcvie@ontarc.com or 1-800-532-0201 x260.

Celebrate Residents' Council Week

The Ministry of Long-Term Care memo was released just in time to punctuate the first ever [Residents' Council Week](#) in Ontario. We are thrilled to celebrate with you, and we encourage you to re-convene, re-envision, re-create a new normal for your Council! COVID-19 has caused a great deal of stress and sadness in our LTC homes, but it will NOT TAKE RESIDENTS' COUNCILS AWAY!! Let us know how you celebrate, and how you are moving forward with supporting residents' voice in your home. Contact Melissa McVie, Education and Home Support Facilitator 1-800-532-0201 x 260 mmcvie@ontarc.com

Residents' Councils: Considerations and Strategies for Long-Term Care Homes During Outbreaks

RESIDENTS' COUNCILS ARE ESSENTIAL: Armed with knowledge and the proper personal protective equipment we can maintain Residents' Councils' operations in long-term care during outbreaks. Residents' Councils play an essential role in every long-term care home. With some modification and creativity, residents can continue their structured outlet for peer support and sharing and their legislated safe space for asking questions, raising concerns and engaging in home operations.

To assist you in the re-convening of Residents' Council, OARC has developed a guidance document that is designed to ignite conversation, planning and teamwork as you move forward with Residents' Council. To access the Guidance Document click here:

<http://www.ontarc.com/tools/20200831RCOutbreakGuidance.pdf>

This guidance document was created in consultation with Resident Leaders, Residents' Council Assistants and Administrators. It is based on their lived experience, direct feedback and promising practices and is intended to help residents and their home teams to take the safe and necessary steps to move forward in our current pandemic and beyond.

OARC SUPPORT: Do you have questions or require support with your Residents' Council? Contact us for telephone, email or video consultation.