

# 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.

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.



4261 Highway 7 East  
Suite #A14-360  
Markham, ON L3R 9W6  
1-800-532-0201  
[info@ontarac.com](mailto:info@ontarac.com)  
[www.ontarac.com](http://www.ontarac.com)



## Key Considerations and Strategies for Residents' Council Home Teams

**OUTBREAK STATUS:** Is your home virus free? Is the virus impacting your whole home or is it isolated to one home area/floor? Can residents leave their own rooms? Their home areas/floors? With these guidelines in mind, begin to explore your options.

If your home is currently virus-free but this changes in the future, consider how can residents continue to maintain a Residents' Council connection in an adapted format so that there isn't an extended period without meetings in the future, even during flu/enteric outbreaks.

**SIZE AND DESIGN OF YOUR HOME:** Is your home's size and layout conducive to an in-person adapted meeting or could you convene smaller meetings on each floor/home area? If smaller meetings are being held, are there ways to connect virtually to share the outcomes of these meetings or hold a virtual Residents' Council meeting in real-time?

**GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE:** Is your Residents' Council led by 1 President, a small executive or leadership team? Do the resident leaders at your home live in different parts of the home? How can you ensure resident representation and increase engagement in all home areas? Consider adding the role of "home area/floor representatives" from each area to help act as spokespeople to provide updates on behalf of their peers who may be unable to gather.

**ASSESS PREFERENCES OF RESIDENTS:** Ask residents to share their ideas and vision for how Residents' Council meetings might work during outbreaks. How can you work together to make it happen in a safe and viable way?

**DON'T BE AFRAID TO BE LESS STRUCTURED:** Your meetings do not need to adhere to a strict agenda or cover all aspects of the OARC Meeting Minute template. Council meetings are intended to be safe spaces for residents to speak about what is important to them and provide peer to peer support. The format can be relaxed as residents guide the discussions in the meeting.

**WORK WITH WHAT YOU'VE GOT:** Utilize existing technology, redeploy or leverage resources and use a bit of creativity when exploring solutions to re-establish Residents' Council meetings. If additional support is required to facilitate smaller meetings, who can the Council rely on for this additional facilitation support? Residents' Council operations need time and effort to be executed successfully.

**EMBRACE A TRIAL AND ERROR APPROACH:** You will likely encounter challenges when trying new approaches to Residents' Council. Use a "[Plan Do Check Act](#)" approach and wherever possible, seek direct resident feedback following your meetings to get a better understanding of what worked well, and what enhancements might be made for next time.

**INVEST WHERE YOU CAN:** Is there an opportunity to invest in upgrading equipment and infrastructure to help set Residents' Council and other home meetings up for success? For example, could you purchase and install Smart TVs in dining rooms or another suitable room (on each floor) where residents can be safely spaced out for meetings? Could your home's internet connection be boosted to support virtual meetings?

### RESIDENTS' COUNCIL BYLAWS

Consider updating your Residents' Council bylaws with a Pandemic/Outbreak Protocol for Residents' Council. For more information about creating bylaws see "OARC's Residents' Council Bylaw Template" here [http://www.ontarc.com/documents/bylawtemplate/OARC\\_RC\\_BylawTemplate\\_112017.docx](http://www.ontarc.com/documents/bylawtemplate/OARC_RC_BylawTemplate_112017.docx)

## Residents' Council Meeting Suggestions

### RESIDENTS' COUNCIL APPROACH 1: MEET WHERE YOU EAT...OR PLAY

If you already have a group of residents gathered together, safely physically distanced, in a dining room or other suitable activity space, considering using this as an opportunity to host a modified Residents' Council meeting. This will involve some planning and collaboration between the Council and other home teams (including Dietary, Housekeeping and Care teams). You might need to adapt by holding a shorter meeting and/or meeting more frequently to allow adequate time to cover topics of interest. You may also consider hosting a Council meeting outdoors where residents are already gathering (weather-permitting).

### RESIDENTS' COUNCIL APPROACH 2: GO VIRTUAL

One silver lining of the current pandemic is that it has opened us up to new ways of connecting with friends and loved ones using different communication formats and technology. Working with your Residents' Council Assistant and home Administrator, explore what technology might be available to support a "virtual" Council meeting.

For example, if residents from throughout your home are unable to come together safely in one place for a traditional meeting, you might gather small clusters of residents, safely and physically distanced, to participate in a virtual meeting from the comfort of their own floors/home areas. In some cases, you can connect a computer or a tablet device to a television or screen so that residents can see and interact with their peers from other home areas in real time. There are a number of free and paid meeting platforms that can be used for this purpose.

Don't have a steady internet connection or technology available? Are residents isolated to their own bedrooms or home areas? Consider connecting resident leaders using telephones. A teleconference line can allow multiple residents to meet and share without being in the same room or part of the building.

### RESIDENTS' COUNCIL APPROACH 3: BREAK LARGE MEETINGS INTO SMALLER ONES

If you find yourself in a situation where residents are unable to leave their respective home areas/floors, it might be necessary to host mini Residents' Council meetings in each part of your home. You might be surprised to see that you get more resident engagement in these intimate settings.

Meetings can still be held in your preferred format, following an agenda. As with your previous meetings, minutes can be captured by your Residents' Council Assistant, or another person of the residents' choosing. There may be a vast number of people, who traditionally would not be approached, that would be willing or able to assist, e.g. team members from administrative office, finance, dietary, etc. Meeting minutes from each home area can be collated and shared with the Residents' Council President and/or resident leaders in your home, as per your agreed-upon process for minute review.

Action Items requiring follow up will also be handled in the same format as your previous meetings, with an approved draft of minutes being forwarded to your home Administrator for written acknowledgement and responses within the 10-day period. If resident leaders are located throughout the home, consider making multiple copies to share amongst the team.