

Residents’ Councils: Considerations and Strategies for Long-Term Care Homes During Outbreaks – Questions and Answers

This document was created to address some of the specific questions that have been posed by Resident Leaders and Residents’ Council supporters. The ideas presented are suggestions from the OARC team with the hope that Residents’ Councils (RC) are equipped and empowered to maintain meaningful connection and effective influence in their long-term care (LTC) homes during outbreaks.

IMPORTANT: Always follow the advice of the Ontario Government and Ontario Public Health Units. It is important to work together to balance risks/infection protection and control (IPAC) with the needs and legislated rights of residents. The OARC team recommends that home management teams engage residents and Residents’ Councils when developing and implementing home-specific policies and infection control guidelines and to always consult with residents when operational changes will impact residents’ routines, interpersonal interactions and measures that contribute to their quality of life.

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GOVERNANCE/OPERATIONS AND INCLUSIVE PRACTICES:

Q1. Our Residents' Council Executive/Leadership team live mostly on one or two floors – how do we stay in touch with residents from other areas if we can't come together?

Bring current Resident Leaders together (virtually or in-person) to discuss whether there might be value in adapting and expanding your current Residents' Council governance structure. Consider including 1-2 residents per floor/home area as Resident Representatives to provide a home area update at a Residents' Council meeting and/or help to chair a small meeting on their respective floor.

Once you have identified interested residents, explore virtual/teleconference or in-person distanced meetings to connect as a leadership team in advance of or in lieu of your regular Council meeting (depending on your home situation).

Work with your Residents' Council Assistant to inform residents that the Residents' Council is looking for home area representatives. This can be achieved through word of mouth, your home's newsletter, posters or through other means identified by your Council. Residents may volunteer or be nominated. Be sure to document your process in minutes and reference/update your Residents' Council bylaws as needed.

Q2. Should every meeting give every resident the opportunity to attend? As of now, it is only our small group of Council executive members attending meetings.

Long-term care homes may be working with group size restrictions and infection control protocols that prevent Councils from having larger meetings. You might need to start small, and this is okay. The Residents' Council belongs to all residents, so it is important to try and collect information from your peers in order to advocate on their behalf (including those living with cognitive changes).

With your current Residents' Council leaders, brainstorm strategies for collecting information from other residents throughout the home until you can safely meet again. Are small or virtual meetings a possibility? Can you work with your Council Assistant and Programs team members to facilitate 1:1 check ins and collect questions, concerns and good news stories? (See Q19. for communication strategies)

Q3. The population of our long-term care home includes more residents living with cognitive changes.

a. How can we educate our cognitively-well residents about dementia and mental health to create a more inclusive Council experience?

Help residents to reframe the situation by asking themselves "how can I be a supportive ally and advocates for my peers". If your home has an in-home Behavioural Supports Ontario (BSO) team, consider inviting a member of the team as a guest to provide education and answer resident questions. Virtual education opportunities may also be sought from your local Alzheimer Society or other organizations.

Explore tools/videos to deepen resident understanding such as:

- OARC’s “I AM” Statement exercise (from Through Our Eyes Program) helps residents and others learn what makes each resident unique:
http://www.ontarc.com/assets_publications/TOE/WorksheetRBR001.docx
- Ontario Centres for Learning, Research and Innovation in LTC (CLRI) resource webpage: How to Support Residents Living with Dementia:
<https://clri-ltc.ca/resource/how-to-support-residents-living-with-dementia/>
- Shifting Focus - A Guide to Understanding Dementia Behaviour:
<https://brainxchange.ca/Public/Files/Behaviour/ShiftingFocusBooklet.aspx>
- OARC archived webinar: Supporting Residents with Cognitive Changes During COVID-19:
<https://attendee.gototraining.com/r/9058160927032605697>

b. How can we support residents living with cognitive changes to be engaged in Council activities in meaningful ways?

Encourage Resident Leaders to take the time to get to know resident peers and communicate with them (or their family/caregivers). Share information, as appropriate, at Council meetings.

Small group meetings might make it easier for Council meetings to be more inclusive of all residents, especially if you are gathering in a familiar area/environment. Virtual meetings by contrast, might not be appropriate or enjoyable for all residents (example: seeing faces on screens and hearing different voices speaking might be upsetting or overstimulating). Perhaps Resident Leaders can effectively converse with residents with cognitive changes by wearing a clear mask, positioning themselves at the doorway of their co-resident’s room, initiating a conversation.

Resident Leaders could reach out to “Essential Caregivers” of residents who are living with cognitive changes by telephone, email, letter writing, or engage in physically-distanced conversations in the home, etc., to ascertain if there are any concerns from their resident’s perspective that could be understood and even actioned via the Residents’ Council. This is not to suggest that family/caregiver issues are to be leveraged through the Residents’ Council, it is to suggest that Resident Leaders can obtain valuable information to consider in terms of raising resident specific issues with management.

Using a strengths-based approach, try to identify ways that residents can contribute based on their unique interests and abilities. Reference OARC Fact Sheet: Applying A Strength-Based Approach For Leading And Supporting Residents’ Councils:
<http://www.ontarc.com/documents/factsheets/20190821OARCFactSheetStrengthBasedApproach.pdf>

Q4. Our Residents' Council is due to have an election – how can we do this?

Given the logistics and complexity of coordinating Residents' Council elections, OARC suggests that there may be no need to have an election. Instead, focus your efforts on engaging residents from throughout your home as potential leaders.

As we move forward, what is most important is that your Council (with the support of your Residents' Council Assistant, as needed), document your efforts/process as you continue the important work of Council, including your modified meetings and steps taken to keep residents informed and engaged in home operations. Demonstrate that your home/Council has done their due diligence to capture the residents' voice and varied lived experiences from residents throughout your whole home.

While Roberts' Rules of Order and having a formalized process for elections has been the "gold standard" for many Residents' Councils, the OARC team understands that this is not always achievable, realistic or necessary, especially under the current circumstances.

Depending on your home's situation and your Council's ability to gather/hold meetings, it might also be beneficial to seek resident volunteers to serve as Resident Representatives to represent and provide updates from their respective areas (see page 1 for the process).

If your Council's leadership team has multiple vacancies, OARC recommends that this may be an opportunity to transition to a more inclusive Shared Leadership Team model. *Reference OARC's Shared Leadership Fact Sheet:

<http://www.ontarc.com/documents/factsheets/122018OARCFactSheetSharedLeadership.pdf>).

Any resident who wishes to support the work of Council in a leadership capacity should be considered/included. It is unlikely that you find yourself in a situation where you have *too many* residents interested in taking on a leadership role.

Remember to update your Residents' Council Bylaws to reflect your adapted Residents' Council governance structure.

Q5. Our Residents' Council meeting format has changed. Do we still have to follow OARC's Agenda and Minute template?

Resident Leaders have the flexibility to create a more simplified Agenda. Your first few meetings might need to be less structured as you allow the shifting needs/priorities of residents to guide your discussion. This is okay.

Follow your regular Council processes including capturing and reviewing draft minutes, approving the accuracy of the draft. Forward a copy to Administration for follow-up and post approved minutes, as agreed-upon by Council. The OARC Minute template is fully customizable and allows you to prioritize and defer discussions on a particular topic for a future meeting.

If your Council has one dedicated Residents' Council Communication Board/Display (perhaps located in your home's lobby) consider creating Residents' Council Communications Boards/Displays on every floor/home area to make information (including minutes) more accessible to all residents and make extra hardcopies of minutes available to those who prefer this format.

Q6. How can we enhance the flow of our virtual Residents' Council meetings?

It is helpful to have an Agenda to follow and enlist the assistance of additional team members to support residents when running a virtual or combined virtual/in-person meeting (especially when bringing people together on every floor).

Identify an “organizer”/facilitator” who can assist with muting and unmuting lines to eliminate background noise if using a virtual meeting platform.

As technology can be unpredictable, and it takes an adjustment period to get more comfortable with a new format, it might take some trial and error to make virtual meetings work for your needs. Ask residents for input/suggestions of how to make the experience more enjoyable.

Q7. We tried a virtual Residents' Council meeting, but our internet speed won't support it – what can we do?

Consult with your IT specialist in your home (if available) and/or your home's Administrator to determine if the speed/service can be improved (i.e. location of computers, firewall access, limitation of bandwidth).

If internet continues to be a barrier, explore alternate formats including telephones. Most homes have phone systems that might allow you to set up a teleconference line that can be used by Residents' Councils to maintain their connection (be sure to schedule usage).

Q8. We are used to having the Administrator or other guest speakers attend Residents' Council meeting by invitation several times throughout the year. How can we continue this if residents are unable to leave their floors and/or we're having mini Residents' Council meetings?

It is important that residents continue to hear from their home Administration on an ongoing basis.

Depending on your meeting format, your Administrator or other guest speaker may be asked to attend several small meetings on each home area/floor or arrangements could be made to have them join a virtual Council meeting.

Q9. Prior to the pandemic, our Residents' Council meetings were held behind closed doors but under current circumstances this is not possible. Any suggestions for making residents feel more comfortable when our meeting space is not very private?

Wherever possible, try to avoid holding meetings during shift changeover or other “high-traffic” times. Consider the use of posters to reinforce your message, for example: “Private Meeting in Session.”

If using a dining room or another multi-use space, try and coordinate with other home departments (dietary, housekeeping, nursing) to minimize disruptions and limit the number of team members entering or using the space during your meeting time. With foresight and planning, routines can shift accordingly. Let them know who they can come to (Resident Leaders/Residents' Council Assistant etc.)

Residents' Council can write a letter to their team members that can be shared during shift report, management meetings and posted in team/staff lounge areas that describes the importance of Residents' Council meetings and asks for minimal interruptions during the meetings. Encourage and facilitate ways for residents to share their concerns in writing or verbally to Resident Leaders and/or Residents' Council Assistants in advance of Residents' Council meetings, so that sensitive issues can be

discussed anonymously. Creating Residents' Council Information Boards on every home area with photos of Resident Leaders/Floor Representatives may help establish relationships/strengthen understanding. Some Councils continue to use Suggestion Boxes on each floor/home area for residents to share ideas, questions etc.

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INFECTION CONTROL:

Q10. Are residents required to wear masks when coming together for Residents' Council meetings?

Some residents have been advised to wear masks when leaving their home areas and moving throughout the home. According to the Office of Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ministry of Health, masks can be removed in the Residents' Council meeting space if residents are seated 2 meters (6 feet) apart from one another. If the room has poor ventilation, consider keeping the masks on to decrease the risk. If residents cannot maintain the recommended 2 metre distance then masks should be worn at all times.

Q11. It's difficult to hear and understand someone when we are masked and 6 feet apart from one another. How can we improve this?

Utilize Smart TV/Screen, whiteboard, flipchart and other visual aids/enlarged handouts so residents can follow along. Encourage resident peers and team members to support the Residents' Council in this new format.

Ask a volunteer or team member to help facilitate communication. This may mean repeating what someone has said or typing it on a tablet or large screen so that others can read it.

Explore the possibility of obtaining clear masks/face shields for meeting facilitator so residents can see facial expressions and read lips if necessary.

Q12. What are the guidelines/restrictions around group sizes for Residents' Council meetings?

As guidance in this area is subject to change and may vary according to Public Health region, please refer to your local Public Health team for the most up-to-date numbers. It is likely that there will be varying rules directing group size depending on whether the home is located in an area with higher community spread.

The size of your meeting room and your ability to physically-distance will be another important consideration when meeting at this time. Work with your home's management team to understand the stipulations for group sizes in your home.

RESIDENTS' COUNCILS POWERS/SCOPE (ANNUAL/QUARTERLY ITEMS REVIEW, ETC.):

Q13. How can Residents' Councils review menus and give meaningful input about the dining experience during an outbreak?

If residents are isolated in their rooms and/or unable to come together in person or meet virtually, distribute enlarged hardcopies of proposed seasonal menu to residents for 1:1 feedback (if possible, include photos of the meals to accompany text to make the process more meaningful).

Collect suggestions from residents on how to make in-room or modified outbreak dining more enjoyable.

Using a "treat cart" format, encourage your home Dietary's team to work with food suppliers and other team members to distribute samples of new products/recipes for direct resident feedback (even from the comfort of their own rooms).

If residents are able to come together for a modified Food Committee/Residents' Council meeting (in-person or virtual), extend an invitation to your home's Director of Dietary, Food Services Manager or Dietician to attend as a guest to present/review the proposed menu. Note: if you're running mini meetings on each floor/home area, your guest may be invited to multiple meetings. Consider covering the following areas in the meeting:

- Present highlights from the proposed seasonal menu cycle using a slide show presentation, using pictures and food descriptions if available
- As the team member will be wearing a mask, use visual aids as much as possible so residents can follow along easier

Consider working with your home's Dietary team to implement a "comment card" system as a quality improvement tool to collect "in-the-moment" feedback about the dining experience. This gives residents the opportunity to give ongoing feedback about the menu and daily meal offerings. Residents will feel they have a voice and that their feedback is being taken into consideration.

Q14. How do we manage Residents' Council banking during outbreaks if we keep funds at an external institution/community bank branch?

If your Council is not currently set up for online banking, explore this possibility with support from your Residents' Council Assistant. Discuss steps required with Residents' Council leaders or at your next meeting.

Getting set up with an online account might make it easier for residents to access account records before/between meetings without waiting for hard-copy statements. Having a bank card might help to make your Council's process for making deposits easier.

Consider expanding your Residents' Council account signing authorities to include trusted team members if residents are unable to leave their home to conduct bank business: Reference OARC's Finance Fact Sheet for more info:

<http://www.ontarc.com/documents/factsheets/122018OARCFactSheetFinances.pdf>

Q15. Can Residents' Councils do any kind of fundraising during an outbreak?

OARC recommends working with your LTC home's team to explore creative solutions/alternatives. For example: if you can't host your annual holiday bazaar, is there a virtual/online format that might work for your group for an art auction/sale etc.?

Consider working with the Family Council and/or Essential Caregivers to create a calendar featuring photos of residents, families and team members enjoying life and work. The calendar could be sold to family members, LTC home supporters and residents.

Refer to OARC's archived webinar for fundraising ideas and bring forward to Residents' Council to discuss possible adaptations: Councils Making Coin: Exploring Residents' Council Finances, Fundraising and Spending <https://attendee.gototraining.com/r/6968872226092543233>

Q16. How can residents continue to be involved in Quality Improvement/Internal Committees at their long-term care home?

Include Residents' Council representatives in the interviewing and orientation of new team members (this can be done virtually).

Invite members of your home's management team to attend part of a Residents' Council meeting to learn about current committees, education and other consultation opportunities for residents.

Perhaps the Chair of the Quality Improvement Committee could speak with Resident Leaders about possible ways to engage residents in the work. The Committee could develop a questionnaire that could be circulated amongst the residents on a 1:1 basis asking for ways in which their lived experience could be improved. Team members would likely be engaged in 1:1 visits with residents to facilitate fulsome conversations about the questionnaire.

Consider implementing and harnessing the positive impact of OARC's Through Our Eyes: Bringing the Residents' Bill of Rights Alive program. Many homes have incorporated residents as facilitators of this education for orientation/onboarding purposes.

PEER SUPPORT AND COMMUNICATION:

Q17. How can residents communicate and support peers/neighbours throughout a pandemic/outbreak?

- Introduce one-to-one distanced visits
- Use telephones, consider creating a resident phonebook for residents who wish to connect this way and obtain permission to share their number
- Virtual connections/meetings
- Write notes, draw/colour pictures, create greeting cards for each other – have a letter writing/pen pal exchange
- Introduce regular, facilitated, coffee chats in the home or each home area – chat while residents enjoy their nourishments

Q18. Residents' Council usually gives input and/or sponsors activities and outings. How can residents participate in events when they are not able to meet inside the home or travel outside the home?

Residents can continue to give feedback through modified format Council meetings. Brainstorm what programs/entertainment can be brought into the home (delivered in-person/safely distanced, performed outdoors or streamed virtually). For example:

- Rent casino equipment for physically distanced casino event
- Bring live theatre into the home – in-person or virtually
- Invite musicians into the home – in-person or virtually
- Virtual visits: zoos, museums, art galleries, etc.
- Church service/prayer groups – could be live in the home or streamed from another source
- Virtual activities: bingo, board games, scrabble, bowling, etc.

Other adaptable program ideas could include:

- Movies (instead of one whole-home movie-night, host movie screenings on every home area with popcorn and treats)
- Birthday and welcoming new residents' parties on each area
- Wine and cheese events (travelling-cart style or small group)
- Memorial/celebration of life for residents who have passed (small discussion group format if residents cannot gather)
- Townhall communication meetings with Administrator

Q19. Are Residents' Council meetings the only way that residents can receive information about home operations and outbreak procedures?

There are a number of ways to stay connected and informed *between* meetings:

- Set up Residents' Council centres in each home area and post information
- Adapt and use OARC's [Tool for Communicating with Residents in LTC During COVID-19](#)
- If you are sending out email updates to families, include residents who have email accounts/access
- Invite residents if/when holding virtual town halls/information meetings with family members and other stakeholders
- Informal resident check-ins or verbal survey during management rounds and peer to peer check-ins facilitated by Resident Leaders
- Create a home specific Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Document for residents
- Ensure that all team members are informed of pertinent and timely information so that in their regular daily interactions with residents, consistent messages are given to residents. Encourage information sharing between team members and residents
- Utilize in-house televisions/screens to share updates
- PA Announcements (if applicable/appropriate)

Q20. How can we make technology more accessible/overcome barriers?

Where possible, explore complimentary highspeed internet that residents, staff and families can access throughout the home. If you currently offer WIFI, explore how the current system can be boosted/expanded.

Consult with team members dedicated to IT/administrative support for solutions and consider setting up a virtual station in each home area that offers tablets, computers and telephones/conference phone to facilitate internal meetings, education and social gatherings.

Review the [Virtual Visits Toolkit](#) – developed by Family Councils Ontario and OARC, located on OARC’s website.

Invest in monitors/screens in activity rooms and dining rooms to facilitate resident meetings, entertainment, education.