

*News Release***Ontario Implements Enhanced Measures to Protect the Safety of Residents in Long-Term Care Homes**

March 24, 2020

Additional protocols help keep province's most vulnerable safe

TORONTO— Ontario is taking further steps to ensure that health sector workers, including those that work in the long-term care sector, are available, where and when they are needed. These enhanced measures will support the province's extensive efforts to contain the spread of COVID-19.

On March 23, Ontario enacted a new order under the March 17, 2020 declaration of emergency to ensure personnel are properly deployed to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 to keep staff, volunteers and residents in long-term care homes safe. This temporary order would give long-term care homes the ability to free-up valuable staff, identify staffing priorities, and develop, modify and implement redeployment plans.

Under this temporary order long-term care homes will be able to respond to, prevent and alleviate an outbreak of COVID-19 by carrying out measures such as:

- Redeploying staff within different locations in (or between) facilities of the health service provider;
- Changing the assignment of work, including assigning non-bargaining unit employees or contractors to perform bargaining unit work;
- Changing the scheduling of work or shift assignments;
- Deferring or cancelling vacations, absences or other leaves, regardless of whether such vacations, absences or leaves are established by statute, regulation, agreement or otherwise;
- Employing extra part-time or temporary staff or contractors, including for the purpose of performing bargaining unit work;
- Using volunteers to perform work, including to perform bargaining unit work; and
- Providing appropriate training or education as needed to staff and volunteers to achieve the purposes of a redeployment plan.

Dr. David Williams, Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, has also issued a new directive for long-term care homes under the *Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007* that restricts residents from leaving a home for short visits with family and friends. In doing so, the province is ensuring residents do not inadvertently contract COVID-19 while out of the home and spread the virus upon their return. Instead, residents who want to go outside will be able to remain on the home's property and maintain safe social distancing from any family and friends who visit them.

"Ontario is implementing critical and necessary measures to ensure that we are able to protect the health and well-being of Ontarians, in particular our seniors," said Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health. "We have been working for several months now, with all our partners across the system, from public health to hospitals and long-term care operators, to put processes in place to contain this virus and be ready to respond to any scenario."

"The health and well-being of all Ontarians, including long-term care residents, their families, and staff will continue to be our government's number one priority," said Dr. Merrilee Fullerton, Minister of Long-Term Care. "Our government is taking all the necessary precautions to ensure our loved ones in Ontario's long-term care homes are safe and secure."

To help maintain the health and safety of residents, staff and essential visitors, Ontario is also increasing long-term care bed availability to ensure homes are able to provide isolation rooms when required, as well as providing long-term beds for people on the long-term care waitlist. In particular, patients in the hospital who no longer require hospital services will benefit from this increased long-term care bed capacity, and their placement into long-term care will also free up hospital beds to treat acute patients.

In addition, Ontario is making necessary adjustments to ensure both resident and families' wishes are taken into account, and a sufficient number of staff are available to support long-term care home residents. Updated procedures will bring further clarity around admitting, discharging, and readmitting long-term care home residents at a time when homes are trying their best to prevent the spread of COVID-19 among residents, staff and essential visitors.

Lastly, the province is ensuring sufficient nursing and personal support care staff are available to support long-term care home residents. All new nurses and personal support workers hired to help long-term care homes cope with COVID-19 will be screened to ensure they are qualified and present no risk to long-term care home residents.

These critical steps add to the protocols that have recently been implemented to ensure a safe and secure environment for residents.

Long-term care homes continue to restrict non-essential visits and actively screen essential visitors, staff, students, volunteers, residents moving into a long-term care home and residents returning to a long-term care home.

As of March 9, 2020, when long-term care homes submit samples for standard respiratory testing, they are also being tested for COVID-19 automatically to ensure the province identifies potentially unknown cases.

QUICK FACTS

- When utilized by long-term care homes, redeployment plans under the new order temporarily supersede the provisions of a collective agreement, including lay-off, seniority/service or bumping provisions.

As part of the ongoing government effort to prevent and contain the spread of COVID-19 across the province, the government has provided initial emergency funding to the long-term care home sector of \$50 million effective immediately.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- Visit Ontario's website: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/2019-novel-coronavirus> to learn more about how the province continues to protect Ontarians from COVID-19.

If you are a health care professional, learn how to protect yourself and your patients by reading our guidance documents at: http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/2019_guidance.aspx

CONTACTS

David Jensen

Communications Branch, Ministry of Health
416-314-6197

Hayley Chazan

Minister's Office, Press Secretary Ministry of Health
416-726-9941

Mark Nesbitt

Ministry of Long-Term Care
647-302-8450
MLTC.Media@ontario.ca

Rebecca Bozzato

Office of the Minister of Long-Term Care
rebecca.bozzato@ontario.ca

Ministry of Long-Term Care

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/ministry-long-term-care>