

Ministry of Long-Term Care

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Soins de longue durée**

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Dear Residents in Long-Term Care and Families,

During this challenging time, nothing is more important than protecting your health and wellbeing. Our government has been using its full might to defend against COVID-19 since the global pandemic reached Ontario.

Many of Ontario's long-term care homes have experienced unprecedented circumstances related to COVID-19, and we have been taking extensive, on-going measures to protect residents and staff. The Ministry of Long-Term Care has been working around the clock to support our long-term care homes from the beginning with the many groups involved in addressing this terrible virus. They include the Ministry of Health, Ontario Health, Public Health Ontario, public health units and the federal government.

I wish to share with you what we have been doing to provide support to our homes, including those that are in urgent need.

Building on many important measures introduced over the previous months, our government launched a [COVID-19 Action Plan for Protecting Long-Term Care Homes](#) on April 15th. The plan added even more efforts to protect residents and staff through increased COVID-19 testing, strengthened infection prevention and control, and extended efforts to grow our long-term care workforce of nurses, personal support workers, cooks, cleaners, and other staff needed to get through this pandemic.

These enhanced measures are outlined below under three pillars.

Aggressive testing, screening, and surveillance

As of today, more than 55,000 of our long-term care residents have been tested for COVID-19. Good progress is being made with testing underway for every single resident and staff, regardless of whether they are experiencing symptoms. With our province's growing testing capacity, this universal testing will be completed in the next few weeks. This is a critical step to defeating COVID-19 because the sooner we can identify cases, the sooner we can act to prevent spread and save lives.

Managing outbreaks and spread of the disease

What has occurred in some of our long-term care homes is tragic, and we are at a critical point in our fight against COVID-19. I want to assure you know that we have dedicated our full support to those homes in urgent need, and our efforts are showing results.

We have introduced additional policies and procedures to protect our residents and staff. These include mandating universal masking, restricting staff to one workplace only to limit spread between long-term care homes, and as you know, closing our homes to all but essential visitors. As hard as it is to be apart, it is important to remember that keeping COVID-19 out of our long-term care homes means only permitting visits from family members of palliative residents at this time.

Enhanced, active screening continues at all homes to limit the potential for staff or essential visitors to bring the virus into the home. Visitors who are deemed essential and all residents will continue to be actively screened. Active screening was implemented very early in our effort to prevent the virus. This screening includes twice-daily temperature checks and assessment for typical and atypical symptoms.

We have also worked very hard to ensure that personal protective equipment (PPE) needs are being met quickly and we are responding to urgent requests for additional equipment within 24 hours.

Growing our long-term care workforce of heroes

Along with infection prevention and control, staffing is one of the biggest challenges that homes are facing. Many teams from local hospitals are answering the call from long-term care homes in need, and we are grateful that so far, 113 partnerships are underway. To make this easier, our government issued a memo on April 25th enabling hospitals to temporarily reassign frontline staff to provide support in long-term care homes.

The Canadian Armed Forces have also stepped up to assist. As we speak, nurses, medical technicians, and general personnel are on the ground in five homes with the greatest need for staffing support. We are pleased to see some positive results and will consider redeployment as the situation evolves across the province.

In addition, in recognition of the dedication of our front-line staff, we have introduced pandemic payment increase of \$4 per hour worked for 100,000 workers in long-term care. This payment will be in place for sixteen weeks to assist workers during this very challenging time. You can learn more about it [here](#).

Since the Premier created a standalone Ministry of Long-Term Care in June 2019, my team and I have been working tirelessly to address decades of neglect of the long-term care sector. We've been working diligently on plans to address the staffing crisis, redevelopment of older homes, and a general lack of capacity for our growing numbers of seniors. We've been working on serious shortcomings in long-term care that should have been addressed years ago.

We have taken significant steps, but there is still a long road ahead of us.

The Ministry of Long-Term Care's Family Support and Action Line continues to be available to residents, families, staff, and the general public to get information, raise concerns, or even just have a chat. The phone number is 1-866-434-0144 and the line is available between 8:30 am and 7:00 pm, seven days a week.

I want to express my thanks to the Patient Ombudsman for sharing with us concerns they have received about the impact of COVID-19 on long-term care homes. I encourage concerned Ontarians to contact the Patient Ombudsman through their central phone line at 1-888-321-0339 or via their [online form](#).

Long-term care touches us all. The devastating impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is being felt by us here in Ontario and around the world. Every option to support our long-term care residents, staff, and communities is on the table. We must do everything possible to fix our current long-term care situation and look ahead to a brighter way forward.

With you,

Original signed by

Dr. Merrilee Fullerton
Minister of Long-Term Care