



CLIFF 1159699

March 31, 2020

HCC Vice Presidents  
Regional Health Authorities

Re: Policy on temporary absences from Long Term Care

The Ministry of Health continues to focus on limiting the spread of COVID-19 in our communities and at a provincial level.

As you know, seniors residing in Long Term Care facilities are at a higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19. The risks associated with communal living during the current environment has motivated some families to want to care for their loved ones in their own homes. Health authorities are seeking provincial direction on how to respond to clients requests for temporary absences from Long Term Care facilities by family members, in the context of the current COVID-19 public health emergency.

Current policy on temporary absences from Long Term Care (LTC) states that: a client can be temporarily absent when it is in the client's best clinical and personal interests; absences are limited to 30 days in a calendar year; and clients continue to pay their fees while absent from the facility.

To support families wanting to care for their loved ones in their own homes and to address anticipated pressures on the acute care system the Ministry of Health (the Ministry) is making a temporary change to this policy. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Health Authorities are advised to:

- **waive the limit on the length of time a client can be absent from LTC;**
- **waive the fees for LTC during the period of absence**, if return is not imminent; and,
- diverge from existing practice and **allow for temporarily vacated beds to be used** to accommodate surge capacity from acute care, where necessary and appropriate.

Considering these changes to existing practice, clients and their families must be made aware that clients may be unable to return to the LTC home if:

- their bed is utilized (to address surge capacity);
- the facility is under outbreak protocol and closed to admissions;
- the client has been exposed to COVID-19 or is exhibiting symptoms.

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It is acknowledged that if a temporarily vacated bed becomes occupied and a client is unable to return to the LTC home, clients may be required to wait for an undetermined and potentially lengthy period for re-admission into care and potentially not within their original care home. Additionally, due to increased pressure on the health system and potential increased demand, home and community care services may not be available for residents being removed from LTC.

The Ministry's expectation is that health authorities will ensure clients and families are fully informed that the client may not be able to return to the facility at the time of their choosing, due to the considerations listed above, and as such a client's belongings need to be completely removed. Health Authorities must also guarantee that if a client is unable to return to the facility from which they were absent, the client will be given priority to return to the LTC home (and if this is not available, offered accommodation in another appropriate care home). Families should also be made aware that home care services may not be available during the absence from LTC.

**The LTC bed capacity that is made available through changes to the policy on temporary absences is expected to be dedicated to support COVID-19 and will be managed through your surge capacity planning leaders.**

As the transmission of COVID-19 is expected to continue to increase across the province, ministry staff will continue to engage with health authority home and community care leads to discuss issues and provide direction and advice in response to the situation as it evolves.

Sincerely,

Teri Collins  
Assistant Deputy Minister  
Specialized Services Division  
Ministry of Health