



May 5, 2020

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HCC Vice Presidents
Regional Health Authorities

The Covid-19 pandemic in the province is evolving rapidly and the Ministry is committed to ongoing review of policy changes to ensure our response is evolving to meet the needs of seniors. On March 31, 2020 the Ministry provided direction to health authorities regarding temporary absences from Long Term Care (LTC) to support families who were requesting to take residents home on extended leaves as well as potentially utilize vacant beds to address surge capacity. This direction allowed health authorities to vary from existing policy, on a temporary basis.

Over the last few weeks, the Ministry and health authorities have been engaging regularly to assess the number of residents that are on extended leave from LTC and monitor the number of new requests. During this time the impact of COVID-19 on acute care capacity has been less than anticipated and health authorities have largely addressed the need to build acute surge capacity. The Seniors Advocate has also raised questions regarding the length of time residents can be absent from LTC and the potential impact on individuals should they not be able to return to their bed at the end of their requested absence. Additionally, health authorities have cited implementation challenges with the temporary policy revision, as in some regions this has required health authorities to discharge residents from their systems and impacted pharmacy services while residents reside in the community.

The Provincial Health Officer and the Seniors Advocate have publicly stated that there is a risk in removing seniors from LTC, which is their home and an environment where their complex care needs can be met. However, the Ministry acknowledges that individual family circumstances may vary and there is still a need to support this request from families, where appropriate.

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Considering the pressure to utilize vacant beds in LTC to decant from acute has not materialized, the temporary policy revisions are now being modified to support residents on extended leave from LTC to retain their bed in their facility during the absence. As such, the Ministry is adjusting the temporary policy revision and advising that:

- a client can be temporarily absent **when it is in the client's best clinical and personal interests** and up to a **maximum of 90 days**;
- clients will **maintain their bed** for the duration of their absence;
- clients **continue to pay their fees** while absent from the facility.

As outlined in previous communication, it remains essential that families are informed of what to expect if removing the client from LTC, including the following:

- Home care services may not be available (due to current demand from existing clients in the community) and if available may have an associated cost in alignment with client rate policy;
- residents will be required to self-isolate for 14 days upon return to their facility; and
- residents may be delayed in return to their LTC home if the facility is under outbreak protocol and closed to admissions or the resident has been exposed to Covid-19 or is exhibiting symptoms.

If the situation changes and a vacant bed is urgently needed to address unanticipated capacity issues related to COVID-19 the client should be advised of this need and any changes to the readmission plan is to be developed in consultation with the family and resident. This may include waiving the fee if the bed is utilized along with a priority readmission process.

As the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve, 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.

Sincerely,



Teri Collins
Assistant Deputy Minister
Specialized Services Division
Ministry of Health