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February 23, 2021

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Norm Peters, HCC VP  
Fraser Health Authority  
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Dear Yasmin Jetha and Norm Peters:

Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in BC, the Ministry of Health (the Ministry), in consultation with BC's Provincial Health Officer, mobilized to rapidly respond to the risk of COVID-19 transmission in congregate care settings. Several enhanced protective measures have been put in place to minimize the risk for introduction and transmission of COVID-19 in long-term care homes and seniors' assisted living residences and protect those most vulnerable to serious illness. As the Province continues to respond and manage the COVID-19 pandemic in BC, response measures taken have been reviewed and amended based on transmission trends in the province and system, resident, and family impacts.

Seniors residing in long-term care homes and seniors' assisted living residences are at a higher risk of serious illness from COVID-19, which requires enhanced protection measures aimed at limiting the spread of the virus in these settings. Additionally, increasing COVID-19 case rates lead to significant increased pressure in the acute care system, resulting in the need to transfer appropriate patients to alternative care settings, such as long-term care.

On November 27, 2020 in recognition of the significant increase in transmission of COVID-19 in specific regions and in alignment with the Ministry's interim risk-based policies for admissions, transfers, in-facility respite, and adult day programs, the Ministry advised Vancouver Coastal Health Authority (VCHA) and Fraser Health Authority (FHA) to:

- **Prioritize admissions to long-term care and seniors' assisted living from acute care;**
- **Temporarily suspend admissions from community** to publicly funded long-term care beds, except in cases of intolerable risk (not applicable to Assisted Living);
- Temporarily **suspend inter-facility transfers** (between long-term care facilities or between senior's assisted living facilities), except in circumstances of intolerable risk, until further notice and **ensure clients' place on the wait list for transfer is maintained** during the suspension of transfers;

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- Temporarily **suspend all health authority operated/funded Home and Community Care adult day programs** and;
- Temporarily **suspend the provision of in-facility respite**, except in circumstances of intolerable risk.

As the COVID-19 transmission trends and outbreaks in the VCHA and FHA regions have steadily declined in recent weeks, and BC's COVID-19 immunization plan has prioritized residents and staff in long-term care (LTC) for vaccination, consideration has been given for the resumption of certain temporarily suspended services. The Ministry recognizes that suspending interfacility transfers may impact clients waiting to transfer from short-stay beds or to their preferred care homes. The Ministry, in consultation with the Public Health Officer and health authorities, has determined that admissions from community, and interfacility transfers may now resume. VCHA and FHA are advised of the following:

- **Prioritize admissions to long-term care and seniors' assisted living from acute care;**
- **Resume admission from community** to publicly funded long-term care beds, in accordance with established precautions to mitigate the risk of introduction and transmission of COVID-19. All new admissions from community are required to isolate for 14-days;
- **Resume inter-facility transfers** (between long-term care homes or between senior's assisted living residences) in accordance with established precautions to mitigate the risk of introduction and transmission of COVID-19; and
- Continue to **prioritize the vaccination of all residents, staff, and essential visitors** in long-term care homes and seniors' assisted living residences, including individuals in acute care or the community "assessed and awaiting placement" for long-term care or assisted living.

As per the [\*Infection Prevention and Control Requirements for COVID-19 in Long-Term Care and Seniors' Assisted Living\*](#), in the event of an outbreak in a care facility, this direction changes and restricts all admissions/transfers to long-term care and senior's assisted living in accordance with advice and direction from the local Medical Health Officer (MHO). The risk of the transmission of COVID-19 differs regionally in the province, and MHOs are in the best position to assess local circumstances. As such, the regional MHO may, when indicated, impose restrictions on LTC admissions and interfacility transfers in a geographic area for which the MHO is designated, or with respect to a particular facility or class of facilities.

The November Ministry direction also restricted **in-facility respite and adult day programs** which provide important respite for caregivers. While the priority continues to be to minimize transmission in these settings as well as respond to and manage outbreaks, you may give consideration for these activities to resume at the direction of your Chief Medical Health Officer.

The Ministry's expectation is that FHA and VCHA will ensure that any required service normally provided during adult day programming (e.g. community nursing, nutritional supports) are provided through home visits where possible, given prioritization base on relative need for home care services.

I continue to commend your hard work to put necessary safety measures in place. Your thoughtful planning will help seniors and staff stay safe as we move through the next phases of our pandemic in BC. 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,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Teri Collins".

Teri Collins  
Assistant Deputy Minister  
Health Services Division