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February 25, 2021

HCC Vice Presidents
Regional Health Authorities

Dear HCC Vice Presidents:

Visitor policies continue to be essential to reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19 into LTC homes and seniors' AL residences. Provincial essential and social visitor policies in long-term care and assisted living aim to protect vulnerable seniors and elders who are residing in these settings from COVID-19 while lessening the negative impacts associated with being apart from family and friends.

In March 2020, long-term care (LTC) and seniors' assisted living (AL) facilities in BC were advised by the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) and Ministry of Health (the Ministry) to restrict visitors to essential visits only. On June 30, 2020 the visitor guidelines in the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) *Infection Prevention and Control Requirements for COVID-19 in Long Term Care and Seniors' Assisted Living* were updated to allow for a single designated social visitor per resident.

On January 7, 2021, the Ministry released *Overview of Visitors in Long-Term Care and Seniors' Assisted Living*, a guidance document intended to support a consistent approach to visits in LTC and Seniors' AL that enables person-centred care. This guidance was updated on February 25, 2021 in response to concerns raised by the Ombudsperson. The visitor guidance outlines expectations regarding the provision of essential and social visits and identifies the process for resolution of complaints related to visitation. The restrictions and guidance on visitation are now legally grounded in an order of the PHO (see [Visitation and Visitor Appeal and Review Order](#)).

Key details of the visitor guidance, including responsibilities related to the process for review and resolution of complaints are provided below.

To ensure provincial consistency, the Ministry is requesting that you please use the attached template letter to inform, in writing, all long-term care and seniors' assisted living operators of the new PHO *Visitation and Visitor Appeal and Review Order*, and up-to-date operator expectations as described in the recently published guidance ([Overview of Visitors in Long-Term Care and Seniors' Assisted Living](#)), highlighting operator responsibilities and timelines of the appeal review process.

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To support compliance with the legal requirements of the order and associated guidelines, as well as ensure fair and consistent decision making, the Ministry would like to highlight the following key expectations:

- **Health authorities are expected to provide consistent and easy access to information regarding the complaints process and mechanism for appealing decisions related to visitor status.** Visitation information, including a link to the PHO order, policy, process for appeal, and timelines for response must be posted on the health authority's main public-facing website.
- **Facility operators are expected to ensure that an initial response and decision regarding a visitor request is communicated within 24 hours.** If visitation is denied, the individual making the request is given written reasons, and notified of option to contact the site administrator for a review of the decision. Individuals can request an immediate review of decisions made related to visitor status.
- **Operators are expected to support individuals with visitation concerns to speak immediately with an administrator or administrator on call.** Upon receiving a request for review the administrator or administrator on call must review the concern and provide the individual with a decision in 24 hours to be followed by a written response outlining reasons for the decision within 48 hours.
- **Individuals can request a thorough and timely review of decisions made related to visitor status.** Health authorities are expected to support individuals with visitation concerns through the designated process and timelines.
- **Upon receipt of a visitation complaint forwarded by the Patient Care Quality Office (PCQO), the program area designate is expected to review the concern and provide a response within 7 days. The decision is to be documented with rationale and written response provided to the complainant.** Outcomes of any decision should be documented in the PCQO file and the resident's file at the facility.
- **Health authorities are responsible for ensuring that thorough review and consideration is provided, and the regional Medical Health Officer (MHO) is aware of the case, prior to further escalation.** It is expected that all efforts are made to resolve the issue at the regional level including consultation with the MHO.
- **For complaints that require further escalation to the PHO, the PCQO or the complainant will submit the request for review through hlth.visitorappeal@gov.bc.ca.** The PCQO or the program contact will provide the email address to the complainant if the complainant prefers to submit directly for further escalation.

Your continued thoughtful consideration of visitor status will help seniors, staff, and visitors stay safe while continuing to ensure the essential needs of residents are being met. The Ministry will continue to engage with health authorities to discuss issues and provide advice/direction related to visitor concerns.

Sincerely,

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

Teri Collins
Assistant Deputy Minister
Health Services Division