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March 29, 2021

HCC Vice Presidents
Regional Health Authorities

Dear HCC Vice Presidents:

As you know, since March 2020, visitation has been restricted in all long-term care (LTC) homes and seniors' assisted living (AL) residences in BC to prevent the introduction and spread of COVID-19 and protect those most vulnerable to serious illness from the virus. The restrictions and guidance on visitation are legally grounded in an order of the Provincial Health Officer (PHO) (*Visitation and Visitor Appeal and Review Order*: <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/covid-19/covid-19-pho-order-visitation.pdf>).

Phase 1 of BC's Immunization Plan focused on priority populations including residents, staff, and essential visitors in LTC and AL settings, as well as individuals awaiting placement in LTC. While the Ministry recognizes that rates of community transmission and the impact of COVID-19 variants are still a concern across BC, active outbreaks in LTC and AL have significantly decreased since vaccinations began.

In acknowledgement of the increased level of protection provided by COVID-19 vaccination, as well as the impact of ongoing visitor restrictions on staff, residents, and their loved ones, the Ministry is now directing the partial easing of certain restrictions in LTC and seniors' AL.

Beginning April 1, 2021, the following changes to social visitation in LTC and AL will come into effect:

- Social visits are no longer limited to one designated family member or friend. Additional family members and friends are allowed with a maximum of two adult visitors and one child at the same time if the visit is indoors.
- Every resident is entitled to regular, routine, frequent opportunities for social visitation, allowing for a minimum of 60 minutes every week if desired.
- Residents may have more social visitors outdoors, in an appropriate location, and in alignment with current provincial health officer guidelines. Infection prevention and control measures (e.g., screening for signs and symptoms of illness prior to every visit, practicing hand hygiene, respiratory etiquette and wearing medical masks when not physically distanced) must be followed.

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- There are no longer restrictions on the location, frequency, or duration of visits, and visits can now take place in residents' rooms. Any limitations on frequency and duration of visitation should be by exception only and specifically to meet WorkSafe BC Safety Plans and facility site safety plans
- Physical touch between residents and their visitors is now allowed with infection prevention and control measures in place.

Other practice requirements for social visitation remain in place, including:

- Social visits will be scheduled in advance and tracked for the purpose of contact tracing.
- Visitors are required to be screened, practice hand hygiene, wear a medical mask, and adhere to physical distancing requirements in the facility other than with the resident they are visiting.
- Facilities will continue to adhere to a written plan for visitation with dedicated staff to support safe visits.
- The essential visitor policy remains in place as per existing guidelines.

Further guidance for safe essential and social visitation practices is available in the attached *Overview of Visitors in Long-Term Care and Seniors' Assisted Living* (http://www.bccdc.ca/Health-Info-Site/Documents/Visitors_Long-Term_Care_Seniors_Assisted_Living.pdf). This document will be posted to the BC Centre for Disease Control and Ministry of Health Websites this week, replacing the previous guidance, to reflect the changes coming into effect April 1, 2021. Health authorities are also asked to update their websites.

Additionally, to increase the quality of life for individuals residing in LTC and AL facilities health authorities and operators are also advised to implement the following by **April 1, 2021**:

- Remove the requirements for physical distancing between residents to support re-establishing communal dining and small group activities within a floor or unit of the facility, as well as group outings such as bus trips.
- Enable residents to go on appropriate (i.e., in accordance with general public health guidance) outings with family and friends, including visiting family homes.

Furthermore, in support of a smooth and successful transition for residents into LTC or AL, health authorities and operators are advised to implement the following by **April 1, 2021**:

- Remove the requirement for new residents to undergo a 14-day isolation upon admission to a LTC home or AL residence.
- Health authorities and operators will proactively determine resident vaccination status and offer vaccine to new residents at the earliest opportunity.

Attached is a letter for health authorities to send to all LTC and AL operators, outlining the changes and confirming expectations. I would ask that you please share this letter with operators as soon as possible. A Q&A document is also attached to support health authorities and operators navigate implementation of these changes.

The Ministry, in collaboration with the PHO, regional health authorities and key stakeholders, will continue to evaluate and adapt the visitor policies and other COVID-19 response measures based on the evolving trends of community transmission, impact of COVID-19 variants, and progress of BC's Immunization Plan. I continue to commend your hard work to put necessary safety measures in place. Your thoughtful planning will help residents, staff, and visitors stay safe.

Sincerely,

obo *Danielle Purpich*

Teri Collins
Assistant Deputy Minister
Health Services Division

PCC: HCC Leads