



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NEWS RELEASE

January 6, 2022

“Every Resident in Long-Term Care is Entitled to a Designated Visitor”

Victoria, B.C.— B.C. Seniors Advocate, Isobel Mackenzie is asking the Province to declare that every resident in long term care is entitled to designate at least one person as their essential visitor.

“While we can all understand the need to limit the number of visitors to long-term care during this latest wave of COVID-19, returning to essential visitors without declaring that every resident is entitled to at least one essential visitor has effectively left the majority of long-term care residents without visits from loved ones,” said Mackenzie.

In November 2020, the Office of the Seniors Advocate (OSA) issued the report [*Staying Apart to Stay Safe: The Impact of Visit Restrictions on Long-Term Care and Assisted Living Survey*](#), which highlighted the impact of visitor restrictions on residents and their family members. In this report, OSA identified that 52% of requests made by residents to designate an essential visitor were denied. The Seniors Advocate issued the recommendation in this report that all residents be provided the opportunity to designate an essential visitor.

To date, no changes have been made to the process for determining if a resident meets the criteria to be designated an essential visitor. The determination is made by the administrator of the care facility on a case-by-case basis. Essential visits can include, but are not limited to:

- Visits for compassionate care, including critical illness, palliative care, hospice care, end of life, and Medical Assistance in Dying
- Visits paramount to the patient/client’s physical care and mental well-being, including assistance with feeding, mobility, and personal care
- Communication assistance for persons with hearing, visual, speech, cognitive, intellectual or memory impairments
- Assistance by designated representatives for persons with disabilities
- Visits for supported decision making

“My office is receiving phone calls and emails from family members, including spouses, who were advised they could no longer visit their loved one, even though they offer vital support and care. They help to feed their loved one, get them dressed, take them for walks, and keep them engaged. For many residents, these visitors are the only people who can motivate them to engage in any activities, and yet they are not formally recognized as essential,” stated Mackenzie.

Current public health orders allow essential visitors to continue to visit if an outbreak is declared at a facility while social visitors’ access is suspended for the duration of the outbreak. Prior to visiting, all visitors to long-term care facility must be fully vaccinated and rapid antigen tests are administered.

“Care home operators are significantly over-burdened. They need the clarity from the province that every resident is entitled to an essential visitor and be relieved of the staff resources required to

manage the essential visitor designation process. As B.C. faces its most prolific wave of this pandemic, care homes need to plan for staff absences of up to 30%, and we know that the care provided to residents by essential visitors can help manage an overburdened care home. I urge the province to empower residents in long-term care to choose a designated essential visitor, as it is only the resident and their families who truly know who is essential to their health and well-being,” concluded Mackenzie

Media Contact:

OSA Communications

P: 250-213-2024

E: osa.comms@gov.bc.ca