

## ALBERTA'S CONTINUING CARE COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

### TELEPHONE TOWN HALL – BACKGROUNDER

For 15 months now, residents, staff, families and operators have adapted to public health requirements to protect against the severe impacts of COVID-19. We have made great strides in our fight against COVID-19 and now need your feedback on the planned approach to lifting the public health restrictions in continuing care.

*Note: Alberta's move to Stage 3 of the [Open for Summer Plan](#) on July 1 does not change requirements in the existing Chief Medical Officer of Health (CMOH) Orders specific to licensed supportive living, long-term care and hospice settings that operators must adhere to. Stage 3 will impact activities off-site, but existing on-site restrictions will remain in place until the planned approach for lifting of these sector specific restrictions is approved and rolled out.*

Current continuing care related CMOH COVID-19 Orders supplemented **already existing** [expectations](#) for this sector (licensed supportive living, long-term care and hospice settings). Current CMOH orders include:

- [Order 10-2020- Single Site Staffing Requirements](#)
- [Order 16-2021- Visiting Policy](#)
- [Order 32-2021- Operational and Outbreak Standards](#)

Through existing legislation<sup>1</sup> and/or contracts with Alberta Health Services (AHS)<sup>2</sup>, operators are expected to abide by several sets of standards for the delivery of quality accommodation and publicly funded health care services to residents, in settings that are safe and hazard free. Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services oversee compliance with these expectations.

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<sup>1</sup> Including Accommodation Standards, Continuing Care Health Service Standards, Resident and Family Councils Act

<sup>2</sup> AHS acts both as a funding partner for contracted facilities and also the provincial health authority for guidance (e.g. outbreak manuals)

Lifting of CMOH Orders in phases over time will recognize that these existing requirements no longer need to be supplemented with additional precautions and safeguards now that the public health threat has been mitigated through vaccine uptake. This means that we can eventually move back to as close to 'regular business' as possible, including a reactive approach to managing outbreaks rather than a proactive, blanket restrictive approach for all operators regardless of outbreak status. We will be moving from managing COVID-19 as a pandemic to managing it as an endemic<sup>3</sup>.

In May 2021, significant steps were taken towards easing of restrictions, notably visiting restrictions, quarantine/isolation requirements, and removing content from the Orders that is no longer necessary (e.g. specifics on students and volunteers).

Vaccinations are an added layer of protection against severe illness for those who are exposed to COVID-19. Like all Albertans aged 12+, all residents and staff members of continuing care are eligible for vaccination. If a resident or staff member has not yet been immunized or made an appointment to be immunized, please reach out to the site operator or visit [www.alberta.ca](http://www.alberta.ca) for more information. It is never too late to reconsider your choice if you previously decided against the vaccine – *once you are eligible, you stay eligible.*

Vaccinations have made a difference. Compared to December 2020, there is a 99% decrease in number of active cases of COVID-19 (staff and residents) in these settings. As of June 18, there are a total of 6 active cases across all licensed supportive living, long-term care and hospice settings in all of Alberta!

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<sup>3</sup> An infection within that is existing perpetually

## Path Ahead

It is critical that we hear the perspectives of residents, family members, friends, and the operators and staff of these settings as we do our planning to lift restrictions. In past telephone town halls, Albertans provided very important input on how we weigh the need for connection/relationships with the need for protection/safety. **We are coming back to you for feedback on the planned approach and proposed timing of lifting public health requirements completely. We also want to hear what matters most to you as we move into the next phase of the pandemic response.**

The planned approach categorizes the restrictions as low/medium and high impact for limiting the spread of COVID-19. The first planned step is to lift low/medium impact restrictions completely (e.g., visiting restrictions, limits to dining and recreation activities, resident health screening, etc.) followed by high impact restrictions later (e.g., masking, health screening at entry, and management of cases).

The information below provides considerations in preparation for discussion. Please read this, and the attached **Approach Overview**, and think about what you are most concerned about, what timeline you would suggest, and additional considerations you think should be made (e.g., rural versus urban, differences in the types of settings, etc.).

- Any change is not expected to be able to fully address the desires of all people, as some restrictions will be necessary to maintain into the near future.
  - Outbreaks will still happen. People may still be able to be infected with and spread COVID-19, even if they are feeling well and are vaccinated, although risks are vastly reduced.
  - Vaccinations are not mandatory. Like all Albertans, vaccinations in continuing care are an individual choice. This means that residents and/or staff who choose not to, or cannot be vaccinated, will continue to be more vulnerable to COVID-19.

- Measures to prevent introduction of COVID-19 (e.g., screening at entry) and spread if it were to enter (e.g., use of masks for staff and visiting persons, outbreak management, and hand hygiene) will still be imperative into the near future at least until all Albertans have had the opportunity to receive both doses of a full vaccine series.

**We want to hear what matters most to you and any concerns with moving ahead with the planned approach.**

Thank you for taking the time to join us for another important conversation.