

## **ALBERTA'S VISITOR POLICY**

### **TELEPHONE TOWN HALL – BACKGROUNDER**

Thank you for taking the time to join us for this important conversation. We know that COVID-19 outbreaks in congregate care facilities can be deadly, and prevention of outbreaks is important. We also know that prevention from infection is only one part of the health of residents of these facilities. It is critical that we hear perspectives of residents of congregate care settings, their loved ones, and the operators of these settings as we seek to balance the needs of residents for human connection with loved ones with the needs of residents for prevention of exposure to COVID-19.

The information below gives a summary of the background and considerations in the visitor policy for congregate care. Please read through this, and think about what solutions you would like to suggest that will best meet both needs.

- The Visitor Policy has been updated three times to reflect the assessed risk of the COVID-19 pandemic on the residents living in congregate care settings, as well as the staff.
  - [Order 03-2020](#)
  - [Order 09-2020](#)
  - [Order 14-2020](#)
- The visitor policy and how operators have applied it has impacted each person differently, some with negative effects where the impact on mental health and wellbeing may be long lasting.
- An updated policy is not expected to fully resolve the impact that all people will feel, as restricted access to family members is deeply personal.
- We continue to hear concerns about the Visitor Policy, from those who have written or called government officials, their MLAs, and through media and other social platforms. Some people want doors to open and restrictions lifted, and others are nervous about what will happen if the sacrifices they have made are compromised.

- People aged 60+ and those with health conditions are the most at risk of severe outcomes if they contract COVID-19. Coupled with the setting (congregate where people live together, serviced by staff), residents in licensed supportive living and long-term care still need protective measures to lessen this risk.
- People can be infected with and spread COVID-19, even if they are feeling well. Because of this, limiting the number of people who can enter facilities is an important measure for preventing resident and staff exposure to COVID-19.
- On the other hand, human connection is critical to both physical and mental health and wellness for both residents and families/friends.
- Currently, designated essential visitors are permitted to enter facilities when there is an unmet care or quality of life related need that staff are unable to address. Also, visitors are permitted for end of life visits.
- In the current policy, all visits must be arranged with the operator and visitors must follow all requirements (for example, be screened at entry, frequent hand washing or use of sanitizer, wear a mask, not visit with other residents and only go to the resident room or care area where providing care (e.g. meal support)). In addition, temporary replacement of designated essential visitors is permitted where the designated essential visitor is unable to provide support for a period of time.
- Restrictions to visitors in these settings will have ongoing impacts that continue to need creative solutions. Operators have been going above and beyond to ensure residents remain connected to family and friends in other ways. This said, it is recognized that nothing can replace in-person support from key people.
- **We want to hear what matters most to you and what solutions you would propose, to inform the visitor policy for the summer months.**
- **Please consider what you would be willing to adjust or do differently to enable your desired type of visit.**