

10 - Long-Term Care Facilities

KEY MESSAGES

- The Government of Canada is committed to taking the necessary action to continue to protect the health and safety of all Canadians during this pandemic.
- Residents of long-term care homes are at risk of COVID-19 infection due to shared living spaces, underlying chronic conditions and age.
- The Public Health Agency of Canada has provided infection prevention and control guidance to help prevent COVID-19 infections among residents in long-term care and assisted-living facilities.
- Following this guidance reduces the possibility of introducing COVID-19 into these facilities and helps protect workers and residents.
- To support the care of residents, the Government of Canada's Volunteer Recruitment Campaign provides an inventory that can be drawn upon to support staffing needs in facilities.
- The military continues to work closely with all levels of government in the fight against COVID-19, including the governments of Quebec and Ontario.

KEY FACTS AND FIGURES

- Long-term care facility residents are vulnerable to infection with COVID-19 due to behavioral factors, shared spaces, and transit between other healthcare facilities
- 81% of COVID-19 deaths are linked to Long-Term Care Facilities

IF PRESSED ON LONG-TERM CARE GUIDANCE

- The Public Health Agency of Canada's guidance on infection prevention and control in long-term care facilities is designed to limit the possibility of introducing COVID-19 into these facilities by recommending that only those who are essential to the care of residents enter the facility.
- Staff in long-term care facilities are encouraged to take steps to protect the residents by monitoring their health twice a day, following routine

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infection control practices and wearing a mask for the duration of their shifts.

- This guidance also recommends that staff restrict their work to only one facility in order to prevent transmitting COVID-19 between facilities.

IF PRESSED ON NATIONAL VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT CAMPAIGN

- The Government of Canada is supporting province and territories by facilitating an inventory for recruitment and mobilization of skilled Canadians to provide surge capacity in the following key areas:
 - Case tracking and contact tracing;
 - Health system surge capacity; and
 - Case data collection and reporting.
- When the recruitment campaign ended on April 24, there were 53,769 volunteers registered in the inventory from which provincial and territorial governments can draw upon as needed.

POSSIBLE Q&As

Q1. Why do you recommend that personal support workers and essential visitors and volunteers wear personal protective equipment when there is a shortage?

Personal support workers are an integral and important part of the health care system. Personal support workers provide close, direct care to patients. Every person entering a long-term care home, including essential visitors and volunteers, has a responsibility to prevent infections among residents of these facilities, who are at high risk of severe illness and death from COVID-19.

The Government of Canada is working to ensure health care workers have the personal protective equipment and medical supplies they need. We are doing this through collaborative bulk procurement with the provinces and territories, building domestic production capacity, and identifying potential alternatives and ways to extend product life.

Q2. Why are you telling workers to not to have multiple jobs when they may need to have multiple jobs to survive?

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We know that seniors are more at risk of developing severe complications from COVID-19 because of their underlying medical conditions and age.

For seniors living in long-term care homes or assisted-living facilities, there is an even greater risk of infection and transmission of the virus owing to proximity. The movement of workers from one facility to another increases the risk of spread of infection, which ultimately puts seniors more at risk of contracting the virus. We need to protect seniors in these challenging times.

Therefore, the guidelines recommend identifying staff who work in more than one location and ensuring efforts are made to prevent this where possible.

Q3. How would residents' needs be met if there is a further restriction on the availability of personal support workers?

The administration of long-term care is the responsibility of provincial and territorial governments. They have put in place a number of measures to support continued quality care to residents during this crisis. For example, actions undertaken have included introducing flexibility in staffing policies and approaches, and working with third-party providers to deliver short-term care support.

The Government of Canada is working with provincial and territorial governments to respond to COVID-19. A national recruitment campaign has been developed, seeking volunteers, including individuals with health care experience, to help conduct case tracking functions and support health system surge capacity. An inventory of volunteers is being maintained from which provincial and territorial governments can draw as needed.

More information is available at: <https://emploisfp-psjobs.cfp-psc.gc.ca/psrs-srfp/applicant/page1800?toggleLanguage=en&poster=1437722>

Q4. Is the Public Health Agency of Canada compiling data relating to COVID-19 outbreaks in long-term care facilities?

The Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) is monitoring the impact of COVID-19 on our most vulnerable populations, including residents in long-term care homes. Data collection occurs through daily contact among federal/provincial/territorial epidemiologists who work together to collect and share information. Case report data are collected from provinces and territories (PTs) via a reporting form that includes a field for indicating residence in a long-term care facility. We supplement this information with publicly available data sources.

Data on outbreaks in long-term care facilities are reported through local public health authorities to their PT public health counterparts, who synthesize this information, report publicly, and implement controls measures. Work is underway on a standardized

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dataset for long-term care facilities. PHAC also makes information about possible exposure to the virus in settings such as long-term care facilities publicly available on its website.

Q5. What is the Government of Canada doing to protect seniors' financial security?

The Government of Canada is taking measures to ensure that the Canada Pension Plan and Old Age Security benefits that seniors rely on will continue to be paid without delay, and that new applications for these benefits will be processed in a timely fashion. The Old Age Security pension is intended to provide a minimum income guarantee to all seniors. Therefore, the Old Age Security pension is based on age and residence and not on employment history or investment income, and it continues to be paid to seniors monthly.

The income-tested Guaranteed Income Supplement is provided to all low-income seniors. Old Age Security pensioners who experience a drop in income as a result of the pandemic may be eligible to receive this additional support.

To further protect seniors' financial security, we are introducing several new measures. For low- and modest-income Canadians, including seniors, starting April 9, 2020, the Government began providing a one-time special payment through the Goods and Services Tax (GST) credit. This will provide close to \$400 to low-income single individuals and close to \$600 to low-income couples.

We are also reducing required minimum withdrawals from Registered Retirement Income Funds (RRIFs) by 25% for 2020. This will provide flexibility to seniors and help preserve RRIF assets during a volatile market.

Further, we are extending the deadline to file your income taxes to June 1, 2020, and allowing any new balances due, or instalments, to be deferred until September 1, 2020, without incurring interest or penalties.

Q6. What is the Government doing to protect seniors' pensions?

Budget 2019 introduced new measures to enhance the security of workplace pensions in the event of corporate insolvency.

Measures to make insolvency proceedings fairer, more transparent and more accessible for pensioners and workers are now in force.

Higher expectations and better oversight have also been set for corporate behaviour:

- federally incorporated businesses are now explicitly permitted to consider pensioner and worker interests when acting in the best interests of the corporation; and

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- publicly traded, federally incorporated firms will be required to disclose their policies pertaining to workers and pensioners well-being and executive compensation, or explain why such policies are not in place.

Finally, measures protect Canadians' hard-earned benefits by clarifying in federal pension law that pension plan members are entitled to the same pension benefits when a plan is wound up as when it was ongoing.

Q7. What is the Government doing to protect seniors from elder abuse?

The Government of Canada is committed to protecting the safety and well-being of seniors in Canada and recognizes the devastating impact of elder abuse on seniors and their families.

We continue to provide information, resources and tools to help seniors, caregivers, service providers and the general public identify elder abuse and respond appropriately. We will continue to work collaboratively with provinces and territories, as well as community organizations, to implement measures to help improve the lives of seniors and their families.

Q8. What is the Government doing to protect seniors from COVID-19 related fraud and scams?

The Government of Canada is working to implement measures to help improve the lives of seniors and their families and is taking the issue of financial exploitation of seniors very seriously. Indeed, fraud and theft are offences under the Criminal Code.

Employment and Social Development Canada has been sharing anti-fraud content from other government departments in real time on its Seniors Facebook page, as well as other departmental channels.

In the longer term, the Government will move forward with a national definition of elder abuse, invest in better data collection and law enforcement, and establish new penalties in the Criminal Code relating to elder abuse.

This builds on work underway, such as the National Seniors Council's examination of the issue of financial abuse of seniors and funding under the New Horizons for Seniors Program to community groups to help reduce elder abuse.

Q9. Why did it take PHAC so much longer to release its guidelines for long-term care?

Protecting long-term care residents and staff is a priority and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) is working with provinces and territories on all aspects of their response to COVID-19 for this population. Developing the Infection Prevention and

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Control for COVID-19: Interim Guidance for Long Term Care Homes required consultation with jurisdictions and additional experts from across Canada to develop the information needed to protect residents and staff. The science on transmission of COVID-19 continues to evolve rapidly, and this guidance reflects the considered synthesis of the most recent findings on COVID-19 transmission.

This document reflects the carefully considered and evidence-based development needed to provide the greatest protection to residents and staff of long-term care facilities in Canada.

Q10: What more is the federal government doing to protect long-term care residents?

Long-term facilities-based care is not publicly insured under the Canada Health Act. It is governed by provincial and territorial legislation. Across the country, jurisdictions offer a different range of services and cost coverage. On April 8, 2020 the Federal Government posted: Infection Prevention and Control for COVID-19: Interim Guidance for Long Term Care Homes. The Agency's guidance on Infection Prevention and Control (IPC) in long term care facilities is designed to limit the possibility of introducing COVID-19 into these facilities by recommending that only those who are essential to the care of residents can enter the facility. Staff in long term care facilities have been empowered by this guidance to take their own steps to protect the residents by monitoring their health twice a day, following routine infection control practices and wearing a mask for the duration of their shifts.

Recognizing the sacrifice that some long term care facility staff may have to take in order to protect this most vulnerable population, the guidance also recommends that staff restrict their work to only one facility in order to prevent transmitting COVID-19 between facilities.

BACKGROUND

All Canadians have a role to play in helping to protect seniors and medically vulnerable people, who are at greatest risk of severe health complications from COVID-19. Many long-term care homes in Canada have been experiencing outbreaks of COVID-19 resulting in numerous deaths. The Public Health Agency of Canada has provided evidence-informed guidelines to help residents, seniors and health care workers in long-term care homes remain safe and healthy. These recommendations complement provincial and territorial public health efforts to prevent and control healthcare associated infections.

The Government of Canada is working to ensure healthcare workers have the personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical supplies they need. We are doing this through collaborative bulk procurement with the provinces and territories, building domestic

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production capacity, and identifying potential alternatives and ways to extend product life.

For seniors living in long-term care homes or assisted-living facilities, there is an even greater risk of infection and transmission of the virus owing to proximity. The movement of workers from one facility to another increases the risk of spread of infection, which ultimately puts seniors more at risk of contracting the virus. Therefore, the guidelines recommend identifying staff who work in more than one location and ensuring efforts are made to mitigate this where possible.

Volunteer Recruitment

As part of the comprehensive federal, provincial and territorial response to COVID-19, the Government of Canada is supporting provinces and territories by facilitating an inventory for recruitment and mobilization of skilled Canadians to provide surge capacity in key areas.

To assist provinces and territories, the Government of Canada is working with them to identify their needs. They have identified contact tracing and case recording as areas where they require assistance. Therefore, the skills required include case management, data collection and management, public outreach and telephone interview skills. Referrals from the inventory have also been shared with a number of jurisdictions for help in long-term care facilities. Other call-outs may be issued as jurisdictions identify new areas requiring assistance. As needs evolve, support in other areas requiring assistance will be provided.

The Government of Canada is reaching out in stages. The first stage was to enlist qualified federal public servants who are currently not in roles essential to ongoing federal work to assist in those jurisdictions feeling the most pressure. The second stage includes leveraging the inventory established as part of a COVID-19 Volunteer Recruitment campaign, and reaching out to faculties of health, public health and science across the country to disseminate a call for interested individuals to register in the inventory. A third stage will involve reaching out to all health professional and health science associations for retirees or individuals currently not engaged in the COVID-19 response.

At the end of the recruitment campaign on April 24, there were more than 53,769 volunteers registered in the inventory. To date, referrals from the inventory have been shared with a number of jurisdictions, mostly to support long term care needs:

- 919 volunteers referred to Nova Scotia
- 1,118 volunteers referred to Quebec
- 24 volunteers referred to Northwest Territories
- Saskatchewan and Ontario are also in the process of seeking referrals

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PARLIAMENTARY ANALYSIS:

- All parties have expressed concern with the work conditions and the need for more PPE in LTCH.

Liberal Party of Canada (LPC)

- LPC members have made no additional statements of note.

Conservative Party of Canada (CPC)

- CPC members have criticized the Government for not providing adequate supplies of PPE, keeping families in the dark about the conditions of these facilities and allowing these homes to be understaffed.

Bloc Quebecois (BQ), New Democratic Party (NDP), Green Party (GPC)

- The NDP has said LTCH need to be better maintained and staffed, and national standards should be established for long-term care homes. They suggested federal transfers to PTs should be contingent on high quality standards and wages in these facilities.
- GPC members also feel long-term care workers should not be stretched so thin.