

April 10, 2020

The Hon. Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 1A1

Re: Urgent Efforts Needed to Prevent Unnecessary Loss of Life in Long- Term Care

Dear Premier:

The Ontario Hospital Association (OHA) supports and appreciates government's efforts these past several weeks to ensure acute care hospitals are as prepared as possible for a surge in patients requiring hospitalization as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The purpose of this letter is to submit to you the hospital sector's call that efforts be implemented immediately to prevent the unnecessary loss of life in long-term care and other congregate settings for seniors.

The OHA appreciates the government's efforts to date to limit the spread of COVID-19 in long-term care homes, especially enhancing Directive #3 on April 7th to strengthen screening, testing and outbreak management in long-term care homes.

Unfortunately, over the past two weeks long-term care homes have experienced rampant spread of COVID-19, with devastating impacts. The government needs to act now and open another front in the war against COVID-19 to protect the most vulnerable Ontarians.

As you know, the resident community in long-term care homes is likely to be older, frailer and have complex conditions. This combined with congregate living environments where respiratory infections can be readily transmitted, places residents and staff at an elevated risk of COVID-19 exposure.

The draft Clinical Triage Protocol for Surge (Protocol), released by Ontario Health on March 28th, suggests that at a certain point during surge, long-term care residents with COVID-19 that meet specific criteria will not be transferred to acute care. Given the draft Protocol, and the fact that there is a rapidly growing number of cases in long-term care and other similar settings, the Government of Ontario risks a potential calamity.

We know that you and your government care deeply about Ontario's seniors and that failure is the last thing you and your Cabinet want or intend. We ask therefore that you take further steps to strengthen the "iron ring" of protection for seniors that you described on March 30th. We ask that you mobilize a provincial strategy to protect this highly vulnerable population and limit the unnecessary loss of life.

Health Care Worker Mobility and Infection Prevention and Control

As Ontario prepares for a surge in COVID-19 cases, health organizations are likely going to be required to limit the number of locations where employees work in order to reduce the risk of infecting patients and other workers. A decision on this matter is needed urgently as workers moving from employer to employer is likely a significant risk factor in the growing number of outbreaks in long-term care and similar settings.

A Directive issued by the Chief Medical Officer of Health will be imperative to ensure a clear and consistent practice. Advance notice is needed to ensure that plans are in place and personnel are available for different parts of the system, especially long-term care. Time is of the essence.

Redeployment Across Providers and Supporting Compensation Strategy

Long-term care is struggling to stabilize its workforce in the face of the pandemic. Many staff work part-time at more than one employer. Staff are refusing to work in some facilities during an outbreak of COVID-19 because of fear. This dynamic must be addressed.

The ability of healthcare organizations to deploy workers to the areas where they are most needed, such as long-term care, is essential. The government's temporary orders to facilitate redeployment activities within individual hospitals and long-term care providers does provide some flexibility, but this is not enough. Additional flexibility is needed to allow for workers to be deployed across hospitals, home care, long-term care and other parts of the system.

The expansion of redeployment requires a government-funded compensation strategy for the duration of the emergency. There are significant wage differences between people working in hospitals, long-term care and home care. These wage differentials incent people to leave work environments such as long-term care where pay is lower. Addressing this issue will eliminate barriers for the necessary mobility of reinforcements required in this unprecedented time and ensure that long-term care workers will be more likely to remain with organizations that are in desperate need of their services.

These measures should be supported by a regional infrastructure to ensure that deployments are made to priority areas on a proactive basis. This will help strengthen long-term care and its capability to fight back against the further spread of COVID-19.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

As you know, there is a limited supply of PPE within Ontario's health care system. The OHA supports provincial efforts to replenish supply and carefully manage existing resources. In addition to acute care, it is essential to ensure that workers in long-term care and other similar settings have appropriate access to PPE supplies. Regional and local management of supply across multiple organizations is essential.

To further bolster our collective response to COVID-19, the OHA is actively encouraging Ontario hospitals, if they are in the position to do so, to support long-term care providers in their community by sharing access to hospital-based infection prevention and control expertise. This is a way to build capacity in long-term care and reduce the spread of COVID-19 among residents.

Premier, we believe that the measures outlined above are needed to help safeguard the health and well-being of seniors in the province of Ontario. Please do not hesitate to contact us at any time for additional information. Thank you for your leadership during this unprecedented emergency.

Sincerely yours,



Altaf Stationwala
Board Chair



Anthony Dale
President and CEO

CC: Ontario Cabinet Ministers
Steven Davidson, Secretary of the Cabinet
James Wallace, Chief of Staff to the Premier
Mark Lawson, Deputy Chief of Staff to the Premier
Richard Steele, Deputy Minister of Long-Term Care
Blair Hains, Chief of Staff to the Minister of Long-Term Care
Helen Angus, Deputy Minister of Health
Heather Watt, Chief of Staff to the Minister of Health
Laurel Brazill, Director of Stakeholder Relations to the Minister of Health
Matthew Anderson, President and CEO, Ontario Health
Donna Duncan, Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Long Term Care Association
Lisa Levin, Chief Executive Officer, AdvantAge Ontario
Ontario Hospital CEOs