

ALBERTA'S CONTINUING CARE COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS

TELEPHONE TOWN HALL – BACKGROUNDER

For over one year now, residents, staff, and families have adapted to the public health requirements that have been implemented by operators to protect against the severe impacts of COVID-19. We are making progress in our fight against COVID-19 and now that vaccinations are reaching continuing care settings, we need to reassess the threat of COVID-19 and understand how we balance the need to continue to protect against poor outcomes and your readiness for change.

Vaccinations are now an added layer of protection against severe illness for those who are exposed to COVID-19. All residents of continuing care are eligible for vaccination. If a resident has not yet been immunized or made an appointment to be immunized, please reach out to the site operator or visit 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*. By the end of June, we anticipate that all Albertans age 16 and over will be eligible for vaccination.

At the moment, we still do not know a lot about the ability of the vaccine to **prevent transmission** of COVID-19. Some outbreaks will likely still happen. We also do not yet understand the level of protection vaccines offer against all different **variants of concern**, which are new variant strains of COVID-19. These strains appear to spread more easily than other COVID-19 strains.

Planning Ahead

It is critical that we hear perspectives of residents, family members, friends, and the operators and staff of these settings as we consider easing restrictions. In past telephone town halls you provided very important input on how you weigh the need for connection with the need for protection. **We are coming back to you to understand how you now weigh the need**

to protect against poor outcomes with your readiness for change. We also want to hear what matters most to you as we move into the next phase of the pandemic response.

The information below provides considerations in preparation for discussion. Please read this, and think about what the path forward might look like and how you would suggest striking a balance.

- Any change is not expected to fully address the desires of all people, as some restrictions will be necessary until we know more about the impact of vaccinations and variants in these settings.
 - 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 likely 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 to not 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, physical distancing, hand hygiene) are still imperative.
- Adjusted measures to support safe and supportive experiences in congregate living may enable more people on site, more activities and services, and overall improved quality of life.
- To date, local, site based approaches, based on individual and collective risk tolerance, have been permitted for certain amenities offered at some settings (e.g., day programs, pre-schools, etc.) and personal choice services (e.g., hair salon and massage therapy, etc.) while other activities have been fixed (e.g., quarantine requirements, use of personal protective equipment, staffing arrangements).

We want to hear what matters most to you and what path you would propose, to inform easing of restrictions into the coming months.

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