

Ministry of
Long-Term Care

COVID-19: Long-term care preparedness

September 29, 2020



A message from Dr. Merrilee Fullerton, Minister of Long-Term Care:

Thank you to our heroic frontline healthcare workers who are providing essential care and support to our residents in long-term care during this difficult time.

We are grateful for the work long-term care home operators and staff across Ontario are doing each day to prevent, manage and contain COVID-19 outbreaks, and to protect and care for our most vulnerable. A heartfelt Thank You.

Dr. Merrilee Fullerton, Minister of Long-Term Care

COVID-19: Long-term care preparedness

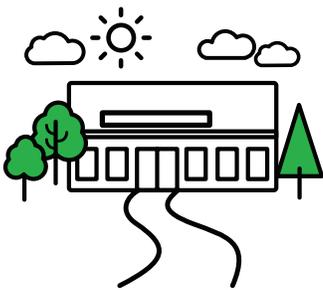
The Ontario government is committed to taking every step to protect long-term care residents, staff, and caregivers. These investments and actions are part of Ontario's COVID-19 fall preparedness plan, **Keeping Ontarians Safe: Preparing for Future Waves of COVID-19**.

The government is investing more than half a billion dollars in additional supports for long-term care to ensure the sector is prepared for future surges and waves of COVID-19 this fall.

The plan will ensure the province's most vulnerable seniors and those who care for them are protected during a second wave of COVID-19 by enabling necessary renovations and measures to improve infection prevention and control, shoring up personal protective equipment (PPE) stockpiles, and building a strong healthcare workforce.

The government is taking steps to modernize the long-term care sector and provide access to high quality, resident-centred, innovative and evidence-informed care for the most vulnerable when and where they need it.

Supporting long-term care homes

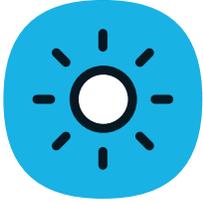


Ontario's COVID-19 fall preparedness plan includes new investments and actions to help long-term care homes with infection prevention and control, along with testing and surveillance measures to help protect residents, staff, and caregivers.

The province is making almost \$540 million in new investments to ramp up surveillance, improve infection control and isolation capacity, increase PPE supplies at long-term care homes across the province, and build a strong health care workforce.

Key investments include:

- \$405 million to help homes with operating pressures related to COVID-19, including prevention and containment measures, staffing supports, and purchasing additional supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE)



- \$61.4 million for minor capital repairs and renovations in homes to improve infection prevention and control. These repairs and renovations may include minor upgrades to support physical distancing, plumbing or water supply cleaning, updating HVAC systems, or repairing or replacing furniture and equipment that cannot be fully cleaned
- \$40 million to support homes that have been impacted by the changes in occupancy numbers due to COVID-19. As the sector has been directed to stop admissions of third and fourth residents to larger rooms, a key source of income for each operator will be impacted. This funding will help stabilize the homes through the transition to lower occupancy rooms
- providing all long-term care homes with up to eight weeks of PPE supplies. The province will also continue to top up supplies of PPE in emergency situations and fulfill priority requests for PPE within 24 hours
- delivering the largest flu immunization campaign in Ontario's history to reduce pressures on hospitals during flu season and preserve capacity. High-dose flu vaccines for seniors will be allocated and prioritized for early delivery and distribution at long-term care homes, among other care providers

Other important measures include:

- reconvened the Long-Term Care Incident Management System (IMS) structure in September. The Long-Term Care IMS table monitors the data and organizes efforts to make rapid decisions that support long-term care homes in need. This includes those struggling to control outbreaks, complete infection prevention and control assessments, ensuring appropriate staffing levels, access to personal protective equipment (PPE), and continuing ongoing testing of long-term care home residents and staff
- partnering with the Ministry of Health to develop local centres of infection prevention and control (IPAC) expertise that can be deployed to long-term care homes. Through a provincewide network, long-term care homes will be able to access IPAC expertise, collaborative assistance and just-in-time advice, guidance and one-on-one support on infection prevention and management practices

- continuing to facilitate temporary management partnerships between Ontario hospitals and long-term care homes to help the homes manage resident care in response to COVID-19 outbreaks. 13 partnerships have been facilitated since May
- ensuring long-term care homes continue to implement the provincial testing strategy for residents and staff. To date, 92% of long-term care residents have been tested and 97% of staff
- updating guidance for clinical care in homes and implementing best practices to support medical directors to improve the quality and consistency of care for residents
- using a performance and surveillance system, supported by sustained data collection, to monitor and detect cases, as well as prevent and manage outbreaks. This is enabled by:
 - regular risk assessment, monitoring and early warning processes to help prioritize action at the community level
 - leveraging relationships with key partners, such as Ontario Health, hospitals and public health
 - escalation structure to provide rapid advice, direction and action to support the resolution of incidents in the long-term care sector
 - continuing to look at innovative solutions to provide more care where and when people need it. Through the skills of community paramedics and working with municipal partners, the government will be making an investment to help people on the long-term care waitlist stay in their own homes longer

Measures of success include:

- fewer and less severe outbreaks in long-term care homes
- rapid containment of outbreaks
- adequate PPE supplies and timely delivery of those supplies
- higher number of flu vaccine doses distributed at long-term care homes this year in comparison with the 2019-2020 season

Strengthening the workforce



The government continues to take action to increase staffing in long-term care homes and reunite families by recognizing and supporting the important role of caregivers in the physical and mental well-being of residents.

Key investments include:

- \$30 million in infection prevention and control staffing, including \$20 million for additional personnel and \$10 million to fund training for new and existing staff
- \$2.8 million to extend the High Wage Transition Fund. In September 2019, the fund was extended while our government developed new programs to improve how long-term care is delivered in Ontario. The original end date of the fund was December 31, 2020. Due to the impact of COVID-19, the High Wage Transition Fund will be extended until March 31, 2021. This will ensure that gaps in long-term care staffing can continue to be addressed during the pandemic
- partnering with the Ministry of Health to expand the pool of available personal support workers (PSWs) and registered clinical staff, through these programs:
 - the PSW Return of Service Program will recruit and place up to 1,000 new PSWs in long-term care homes by offering them a \$5,000 incentive for committing to work in a long-term care home for at least six months
 - PSW Fast-Track will fast-track 220 students with prior health care experience in a condensed PSW program
 - the PSW Fast-Track program will fast-track 220 students with prior health care experience to complete a certificate PSW program. These graduates will be available to join the workforce sooner than students in conventional programs. The lead for this program will be Confederation College

- the PSW Supportive Care program, delivered by Conestoga College in partnership with employers, will train 160 new supportive care workers. This ten-week, intensive training focuses on the skills and competencies needed to prepare individuals to provide care in a long-term care home or a home or community setting
- the province is making an \$18 million investment in the Nursing Graduate Guarantee, which provides full-time salaries and benefits to over 600 nurses, with a focus on recruiting in areas of need, such as long-term care homes
- the Attending Nurse Practitioner program provides funding to support the hiring of 15 additional nurse practitioners in long-term care homes



Other important measures include:

- extending staffing flexibility in long-term care through the extension of emergency orders in the [Reopening Ontario Act, 2020](#)
- partnering with the Ministry of Health on enhancements to the [Health Workforce Matching Portal](#), which provides staffing support to long-term care homes and across the health system. To date, the portal has assisted with 650 matches for long-term care homes
- supporting family members who provide essential care to long-term care residents by identifying them as essential caregivers and permitting them to continue visits even with new visitor restrictions in place effective Monday, October 5th, 2020
- released a [policy](#) on September 2, 2020 that provides guidance to long-term care homes to connect caregivers with training, education and resources on Protective Personal Equipment and Infection Prevention and Control, so caregivers can care safely for their loved ones
- making testing more timely and convenient for essential caregivers by expanding testing locations to pharmacies in the province

Measures of success include:

- staffing levels and retention
- fewer and less severe outbreaks in long-term care homes
- reduction in health care worker preventable injuries and illnesses
- caregiver engagement



The government is committed to applying the lessons learned during the first wave of COVID-19 to build and strengthen a long-term care system that works in the best interest of long-term care home residents and the people who work so hard to keep them safe.

Ontario has launched an independent commission to investigate the spread within long-term care homes during the first wave of COVID-19, how residents, staff and families were impacted and the adequacy of measures taken by the province and other parties to prevent, isolate and contain the spread. The commission will also provide the government with guidance on how to better protect long-term care home residents and staff from any future surges or waves.

As the province enters the second wave of COVID-19, the government continues to consult with and act on the advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health and health experts. Every option is on the table when it comes to protecting the province's most vulnerable citizens and the staff that care for them. Additional measures will be taken as required to quickly respond, always informed by the best medical advice and scientific evidence available.