

Dear Carewest Residents and Clients,

March 23, 2020 Update: Effective immediately, **only one, single essential visitor** at a time may visit residents in Long-term Care, Supportive Living and other continuing care settings. An essential visitor, designated by the resident or guardian (or other alternate decision maker), may be a family member, friend or paid caregiver over 18 years of age. Essential visitors are defined as family, friends or paid companions providing care necessary for the well-being of the resident and visitors attending to a resident who is dying. Visits from pets and children are restricted, as children do not necessarily show symptoms of COVID-19 and pets may carry the virus. Each essential visitor must be verified and undergo a health screening prior to entering the facility. This may include a temperature check or a questionnaire.

Visits from family and friends are an important part of the lives of our continuing care residents. At the same time, COVID-19 has been demonstrated to be an extreme risk to older adults and those with heart or lung disease, or multiple chronic conditions. COVID-19 has been shown to lead to much more severe illness and higher rate of complications among these groups. Prevention of infection is the most important step we can take in protecting one of our most vulnerable populations – those living in our continuing care facilities. While fully appreciating the need to find the balance between visitor restriction and ensuring continued quality of life for residents and clients, visitor restriction is one of the most important tools we have available to us.

As you are likely aware, Alberta is moving forward with more aggressive measures to slow the spread of COVID-19. We recognize the need to balance safety with the quality of life for our residents, clients and their family members but we also recognize that we are working and living during an unprecedented and unpredictable worldwide pandemic. As we look to the examples set in Washington and Vancouver of long-term care centres who were ahead of us in this outbreak, we realize inaction will pose a great risk to those we are trying so hard to protect. To that end, we are asking our residents, clients and families support us in our very hard decision to restrict visitors into our care centres.

Effective today, all visitors including family members, independent care providers, volunteers, vendors and non-essential contractors will be asked not to visit the site. We can't predict how long these restrictions need to be in place but want to assure you that as soon as we are able to lift them, we will.

We will be exempting families from this restriction for those whose loved ones are palliative or end-of-life or other exceptional circumstances. **Updated definition: Visits from a designated essential visitor are limited to situations where:**

- **Direct care is being provided to the resident (i.e. feeding, constant observation for safety or participating in care when sites can't meet resident care needs), or;**
- **A resident is dying.**

Those visitors will be required to apply via e-mail to their Client Services Manager for approval for access and will be screened before entry is permitted. We will also be asking family members who employ Independent Care Providers (ICPs) to cancel those arrangements. ICPs who provide palliative, end-of-life care or essential care support can continue their arrangement but families will have to submit a request to their Client Service Manager for consideration by site leadership.

We know how much seeing family and friends leads to a better quality of life, and there are many ways you can stay connected. Talking to family and friends on the phone is one way to stay in touch. Those with access to a smartphone or computer can Facetime, Skype or e-mail with their loved ones. There are many websites that enable social connection like Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. And if you need any items within the community, there are many online shopping options you can frequent for many of your needs.

We are also asking our residents and clients for their patience and understanding while we implement new processes and procedures at your site. Access to smoking in and around the site will be changed to ensure the least amount of contact with the community and to ensure the proper social distancing. Smokers may be asked to limit their smoking to a certain area and to ensure only a certain number of people are accessing that area at a time. Please follow all the direction from your site.

There may be a different procedure for residents and clients who have family assisting with laundry. We may ask that laundry be looked after by the site or, that laundry collection and drop-off be done in a certain area at the site. Please follow all direction at the site.

Finally, we ask that you restrict your own movements within the community down to essential appointments only, and this will help limit the entrance of the virus into our care centres. No passes will be issued to leave the site unless absolutely necessary.

We anticipate many of you will feel anxious, concerned and have questions and we will do everything we can to answer those on carewest.ca and keep you informed as things develop.

Although our hearts say “let them visit”, our brains understand that due to the nature of this particular illness and the examples set in countries all over the world, we would never want to be in a position to say “we wish we did more”. We acknowledge how hard this will be for everyone but knowing the reality of this virus, we ask you to consider how critically important it is to do everything we can to keep you and our staff safe.

We know social distancing is perhaps the most important thing we can do to limit the spread of the virus. The less traffic we have coming into and out of our sites, the less the risk of the virus spreading within our care centres. Each person that refrains from visiting helps reduce that risk.

Your safety is our number one priority and during these challenging times, we want to be able to look back and say that we did everything we can to protect everyone’s health and safety.

Thank you all for your patience and understanding during this very difficult and unprecedented time.

Thank you,
Site Management