

The Globe and Mail article of Aug. 31st “Ontario government does not guarantee the health or safety of residents in long-term care homes...” on the proposed class-action lawsuit filed against the Government of Ontario on behalf of long-term care residents who contracted COVID-19 and their families contains a startling claim: “The Statement of Defence filed by the province denies that anyone in the proposed class-action, including families, ‘suffered any loss or damages.’ And if they did, long-term care operators are responsible”.

Medical experts are advising that the second wave of Covid-19 is a matter of when not if, and the current rising rates all across Canada bear this out. Ontario has learned from bitter experience, along with the entire world, that this virus can easily be described as “tailor made” to take the frail elderly residing in long-term care (LTC). The evidence was clear during the first wave of Covid-19 that this pernicious virus is exceedingly difficult to contain when it gets into our older, antiquated LTC infrastructure. The resulting morbidity and mortality rates in those facilities since March are beyond shocking.

The simple fact of the matter is that infrastructure deficiencies within many LTC facilities cannot be remediated in time to deal with the second or subsequent waves of Covid-19. The resulting imperative requires us to do everything possible to ensure that this virus is kept out of LTC facilities.

The following actions are essential to realizing that goal:

- Ensure that screening, including nasopharyngeal testing remain mandatory for everyone entering an LTC facility, including visitors and staff, (with emergency services exemption) until this pandemic resolves.
- All visitors and staff tested before entering an LTC facility will have their tests linked to their unique INV number.
- Mandating a faster turnaround time for COVID-19 testing is essential.
- Ensure that all laboratories feed test results into the existing database established by the province through its website, assigning unique INV numbers for individuals entering every LTC home.

- Laboratories that do not have this access should be excluded from testing people with INV numbers linking them to a particular LTC facility.

These initiatives can be established immediately and will have the dramatic result of mitigating the entry of Covid-19 into LTC facilities and saving lives. Ensuring the health and safety of citizens is the primary responsibility of government and is central to the mandate entrusted to it by society. Abdicating responsibility for community safety is simply not the answer. The government must provide the legislative and regulatory tools that will enable the long term care sector to protect their residents, staff and ultimately, the entire community.

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