

April 14, 2022 via email

The Honourable Paul Calandra
Minister of Long-Term Care
6th Floor, 400 University Avenue
Toronto, ON M7A 1T7

Dear Minister Calandra,

Now is not the time to drop provincial vaccine requirements nor to contemplate unmasking in long-term care

Concerned Friends of Ontario Citizens in Care Facilities (Concerned Friends) is imploring the Ontario government to reinstate vaccine requirements and to continue and enhance mask mandates in long-term care homes (LTCHs). All persons entering LTCHs need to be masked and fully vaccinated to protect our most vulnerable Ontarians.

Concerned Friends is a charitable corporation established in 1980. We advocate for a system where all long-term care (LTC) residents have access to services that meet their diverse medical, mental health, social, and emotional needs. Residents must be safe and well cared for.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating effect on LTCH residents accounting for over forty percent of all Ontario COVID related deaths. To date, approximately 4,500 LTCH residents have died from COVID-19, not including those who died from neglect as a result of the staffing issues during the pandemic. And the devastation continues. A total of 10,200 confirmed COVID-19 cases were reported among Ontario's LTCH residents from September 1, 2021 to March 26, 2022, with an increase in numbers since the vaccine directive was dropped.¹

When on March 15, 2022, you revoked your prior directive to LTCHs requiring a mandatory vaccination policy,² you left LTCHs exposed to legal suit from continuing to require mandatory vaccination, especially in light of the Province easing this restriction. Moreover, without a provincial directive or law, there will be inconsistencies among LTCHs putting vulnerable residents at risk.

As you acknowledge in your Directive, residents in long-term care homes and retirement homes are older, and more medically complex than the general population, and therefore ... more susceptible to infection from COVID-19³. Public Health Ontario states in its Evidence Brief of April 8, 2022 that, "we can be confident that the underlying transmission of BA.2 in Ontario is increasing and that we are once

¹ https://www.publichealthontario.ca/-/media/documents/ncov/epi/covid-19-long-term-care-epi-summary.pdf?sc_lang=en, at page 1.

² https://www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-guidance-document-long-term-care-homes-ontario?_ga=2.30569021.327763001.1649697614-83449739.1647284990

³ COVID-19 Directive #3 for Long-Term Care Homes under the Long-Term Care Homes Act, 2007 Issued under Section 77.7 of the Health Protection and Promotion Act (HPPA), R.S.O. 1990, c. H.7

https://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/directives/LTCH_HPPA.pdf
at page 1.

again in the midst of a wave".⁴ On April 1, 2022, PHAC reported that despite cases and severe outcomes having declined since the peak of the Omicron wave, COVID-19 disease activity (e.g., cases, hospitalizations, ICU admissions) remains elevated and is increasing in some parts of the country.⁵

Vaccination against COVID-19 is the most effective means of reducing morbidity and mortality. Employers have a legal duty to create safe workplaces for staff and for the people served, in this case those living in LTCHs. Residents have a statutory right to safety, and have no choice as to who provides them with the quality care they need and deserve, nor do they have the option to live elsewhere. With the onslaught of the sixth wave in Ontario, and significant numbers of LTCHs in outbreak, Concerned Friends is calling for all persons entering LTCHs to continue to be fully vaccinated.

The Government of Ontario announced that on April 27, 2022, it plans to lift all remaining COVID-19 related restrictions in the province.⁶ We remain committed to the current masking requirements in LTC. According to Public Health Ontario:

To achieve the overarching pandemic response goals of minimizing morbidity and mortality ... responses could be augmented with interventions aimed at reducing SARS-CoV-2 transmission. For example, options include re-implementing universal indoor masking in public settings, and extending masking directives in high-risk settings (e.g., long-term care).⁷

How many more deaths will it take?

Now is not the time to drop provincial vaccine requirements nor to contemplate unmasking in long-term care

Sincerely,



Laurie Nicol
President of Concerned Friends

cc: Premier Doug Ford
Honourable Christine Elliot, Minister of Health
Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Andrea Horwath, Leader of the Official Opposition
Steven Del Duca, Leader of the Liberal Party
Mike Schreiner, Leader of the Green Party of Ontario

⁴ Public Health Ontario Evidence Brief – Covid-19 Omicron Variant Sub-lineage BA.2: Evidence and Risk Assessment, published April 8, 2022, at page 4 (PHO Brief).

⁵ PHO Brief, at page 5.

⁶ <https://www.thestar.com/politics/provincial/2022/03/09/ontario-to-lift-all-covid-19-restrictions-by-april-27-ending-indoor-masking-after-march-break.html>

⁷ PHO Brief, at page 10.