

NIA Releases Guidance to Support the Safe Re-opening of Canada's Long-term Care Homes

TORONTO, June 24, 2021 — During the COVID-19 pandemic's first and second waves, restrictions were implemented in long-term care (LTC) homes to protect residents and staff. Today, however, the landscape has changed. Comprehensive vaccination coverage has been achieved in the LTC sector and it is time to reassess restrictions. To support the safe re-opening of LTC homes across Canada, the National Institute on Ageing has released a new guidance document — [After the Shot: Guidance Supporting the Re-opening of Canada's LTC Homes Following COVID-19.](#)

With 96.7% of residents and between 62%–91% of LTC staff being partially or fully immunized against COVID-19 as of early April, appropriately loosening restrictions must now be a top priority. Reestablishing balance and normalcy into the lives of LTC residents is a critical step to improving their health and well-being.

"Prolonged public health measures, restrictions, and staffing shortages during the COVID-19 pandemic have had negative impacts on the physical and mental health, cognition and overall well-being of many LTC home residents," says Dr. Samir Sinha, Director of Health Policy Research at the National Institute on Ageing, lead author of the report and Chair of the HSO Long-term Care Services Standard Technical Committee, which is currently developing Canada's new national LTC services standard. "For residents and their loved ones, the benefits of safely re-opening LTC homes are significant for health and well-being. And it is possible for homes to safely reduce restrictions and improve the quality of life of residents, in accordance with current public health guidelines."

The NIA's new guidance report documents a patchwork of approaches to reducing restrictions in LTC homes across Canada and internationally. It also shows that the sector is taking the much-needed step of relaxing visitor restrictions, supporting the resumption of communal activities, and permitting resident outings and absences, but needs better access to guidance that is both clear and evidence-based.

To support homes to re-open safely, the guidance document outlines re-opening policy guidance recommendations across seven areas:

1. General Visitor Policies
2. Essential Family Caregiver Policies
3. Allowable Frequency and Length of Time for Visits with Family and Friends
4. Allowable Access to Residents During a COVID-19 Outbreak
5. Screening and Testing Requirements
6. Infection Protection and Control (IPAC) and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) Requirements
7. Communal Dining

“The LTC sector is incredibly diverse and homes in different regions and communities will need to develop re-opening strategies that are tailored to the needs of residents, staff, family members and caregivers,” says NIA Associate Fellow, Dr. Nathan Stall. “Our guidance document can support LTC homes to develop plans and policies that maintain safety as a top priority while also improving the quality of life and the health and well-being of residents and their families.”

The NIA has long advocated for a National Seniors Strategy, to provide federal leadership and promote greater equity for older adults in communities across Canada. The re-opening of LTC homes provides a powerful example of the role a comprehensive National Seniors Strategy could play in meeting the needs of older adults from coast-to-coast-to-coast. Learn more: nationalseniorsstrategy.ca.

The National Institute on Ageing is a Ryerson University think tank focused on the realities of Canada's ageing population. Follow us on Twitter @RyersonNIA and support our call for a National Seniors Strategy @NSS Now.