



To: Health System Partners
From: Matthew Anderson, President and CEO, Ontario Health
SUBJECT: July 9, 2020 -- Update #6: Health System COVID-19 Pandemic Response

As we enjoy the summer, there are encouraging indications that the pandemic curve across the province is steadily flattening. Despite this welcome news, we will continue our efforts unabated working with the Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Long-Term Care and other partners to address outbreaks and ensure lasting progress as many Regions continue with their re-opening. We are also actively planning for an anticipated second wave of the pandemic that could occur later this year, and potentially during flu season, too.

We recently shared a qualitative survey with 1,000+ health system stakeholders to gather lessons learned about Ontario Health's COVID-19 response to-date, and to inform future planning. More than 430 people responded with a thumbs-up on Ontario Health's regional and cross-sector collaboration. Clarity about Ontario Health's and health system partners' roles and responsibilities were identified as areas for improvement. Plus, they identified work to sustain including continuing to leverage Ontario Health's field logistics, reach, analysis, and data; and Ontario Health decision-making driven by real-time data and on-the-ground clinical input.

Working with the Ministry of Health, we are now planning focus group sessions to further inform the government's integrated plan for COVID-19 and the flu.

Meanwhile, with this initial feedback in mind, this update below focuses on key areas integral to stabilizing and sustaining a province-wide pandemic response.

Stabilizing Care and Planning for a Second Pandemic Wave

Much work is under way as organizational, regional and provincial response to COVID-19 continues to evolve to ensure health system stability.

Here are highlights:

Critical Care

Responding to real-time needs for COVID critical care capacity will continue to be paramount. To achieve it, in late March we created the Ontario Critical Care COVID Command Centre, led by Dr. Andrew Baker of St. Michael's Hospital, Unity Health. This Command Centre will continue indefinitely, coordinating with delegated Regional Command Centres to determine and implement province-wide decisions to:

- Monitor critical care capacity needs in real-time.
- Respond promptly to predicted/unpredicted surges in demand.
- Facilitate moving patients, equipment/supplies within/across regional boundaries.

Scheduled Care

- As the health care system gradually opens to resume more scheduled care and services, operational requirements to restart continue to be carefully monitored and adapted to regional and local circumstances.

Long-Term Care

Ontario Health Regions continue to work with the Ministry of Long-Term Care, the Ministry of Health and other partners such as Public Health Ontario and local public health units across the province to provide comprehensive support to long-term care homes to reduce the spread of COVID-19 and stabilize care for residents by:

- Identifying hospital partners for long-term care homes.
- Supporting critical staffing to help care for residents, including deploying Ontario Health / LHIN staff while seeking other staffing arrangements.
- Providing infection prevention and control through:
 - Assessment,
 - Training, including PPE procedures, and
 - Environmental cleaning support.

Home and Community Care

- Ontario Health continues to collaborate with the Ministry of Health, local health integration networks and home and community care partners to increase service levels and ensure continuity of care during the COVID-19 pandemic response.
- This work supports the sector's role in a coordinated COVID-19 system response, ensuring that continued capacity exists in hospitals and long-term care facilities as more people receive care in home and community settings.

Virtual Care

Additional options to access virtual care are available to health care providers and patients and families. These include:

- Local [virtual access to emergency services](#) to support patient-initiated requests for virtual clinical assessment/triage to determine next steps and/or if an in-person visit is recommended.
- Access to more [online resources for mental health and addictions](#), supported by Ontario Health (OTN). Patients have direct access to free resources as well as options that require a provider referral.

Patient and Family Engagement

- We continue to meet twice a month with a group of patient and family advisors about COVID-19.
- Recently, they have reflected on the role of caregivers during COVID-19, mental health needs and supports, and how to enhance the experience of virtual health care services across the province.

Testing, Surveillance and Outbreak Management

- Working with the Ministry of Health, ramped up testing of farm workers continues in collaboration with local hospitals, public health units, and the Ontario Ministry of

Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs. Mobile onsite units have been deployed so workers can bring more testing to target communities and priority populations.

- Plus, surveillance testing continues in long-term care homes, retirement homes, congregate settings, etc. with partners including community agencies.
- The integrated lab system network now has 50+ Public Health Ontario, hospital and community labs.
- A strategy for assessment centres is being worked on for the next potential wave of the virus.
- A new voluntary online service called *Contact+* allows people with a positive COVID-19 test result who have accessed their results via the [COVID-19 Test Result Viewer](#), to self-report demographic and other data to public health units, enabling contact tracing and case investigation to get started more quickly. Ontario Health supports *Contact+* through our maintenance of the COVID-19 Test Results Viewer which is connected to the Ontario Laboratories Information System database. For more information on this service and how you can promote it to your patients, clients, residents and families, please contact Karen.McKibbin@ontario.ca.

We expect that we are going to be living with the impacts of COVID for some time. Let's all keep on keeping on! Thanks for all that you are doing.

I also wanted to share that we conducted a special session at our last Ontario Health all-team town hall in recognition of National Indigenous History Month and National Indigenous Peoples Day, which were both in June. Thanks to our wonderful Indigenous colleagues and a patient from Nipissing First Nation, who is also the co-chair of our COVID-19 Patient Family Advisors Council, we learned more about the significance of both events and what we can do as an organization to improve our understanding of the history and current experiences of First Nations, Inuit, Métis and urban Indigenous Peoples. We are committed to learning much more about the experiences of Indigenous peoples in the health care system and working with Indigenous partners to help improve health equity and health outcomes.

Matthew Anderson