

Correspondence regarding City Council motion MM28.14
For consideration at Council, February 2 2021
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February 2, 2021

Members of Council and City Staff,

The ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has exposed longstanding failures in our health and long-term care systems, and tragically it has been people—seniors especially—living with dementia who have suffered the greatest harm from these failures.

In the first wave, long-term care deaths as a proportion of overall COVID-19 fatalities were higher in Canada than any other comparable nation—nearly double the OECD average, and triple that of the United Kingdom¹. Rapid, reliable rollout of COVID-19 vaccines to all residents, staff, and care partners in long-term care homes is critical for the safety and wellbeing of our most vulnerable friends and neighbours.

As vaccine supply stabilises and Ontario begins to look ahead to phase two of its distribution strategy, seniors living in the community and their care partners must be provided with priority access in line with their elevated risk of complications from COVID-19. Seniors living with dementia are at even greater risk, and should be explicitly identified as a priority population in the province's vaccine rollout plan. Attached to this correspondence is a statement from the Alzheimer Society of Ontario with further information.

Prior to the pandemic Ontario's long-term care homes were operating at or above 98% capacity in any given month, with most hospitals similarly at the limit of their intended occupancy. With so few surplus beds, every effort must be made to keep individuals out of hospitals and long-term care unless and until they require the intensive support offered by these institutions. This is not currently the case: 23% of long-term care residents in Ontario do not need to be there², and roughly half of all alternate level of care (ALC) days across Canada are attributed to a senior living with dementia whose only reason for being in hospital is having nowhere else to go³.

In Ontario, dementia is long-term care. Dementia is hallway medicine. Every effort must be made to keep people living with dementia where they want to be: in their own home, surrounded by friends and family.

¹ Canadian Institute for Health Information. "New analysis paints international picture of COVID-19's long-term care impacts", June 2020.

² Ontario Community Support Association. "Leveraging Ontario's Home and Community Care Sector to End Hallway Health Care", October 2018.

³ Canadian Institute for Health Information. "Dementia in Canada", June 2018.

Société Alzheimer Society

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The Alzheimer Societies of Toronto and Ontario express our support for Toronto City Council motion MM28.14, and urge its careful consideration by all Councillors. Further, the Alzheimer Society is a willing partner in any initiatives undertaken by the City of Toronto to make local services more accessible to residents living with dementia and their care partners.

Yours,



Cathy Barrick
Chief Executive Officer
Alzheimer Society of Ontario



Scott Russell
Chief Executive Officer
Alzheimer Society of Toronto

Protecting Our Most Vulnerable

Prioritise access to Covid-19 vaccination for seniors with dementia living in the community, and their care partners.

January 27, 2021

Ontario has pulled together in the year since Covid-19 first arrived in our communities. A year of sacrifices is now giving way to hope: widespread access to safe, effective vaccines is the light at the end of a long tunnel. This hope is tempered by recent news that expected vaccine shipments have been cancelled or delayed, a stark reminder that even with vaccines approved, it will be months before supply exceeds demand. Until such a time, access is being prioritised according to risk.

Seniors with dementia who live in the community, outside of long-term care or retirement homes, must receive early access to approved Covid-19 vaccines in line with the elevated risk facing this population.

Age and underlying health conditions are both among the greatest factors associated with increased risk of complications from Covid-19¹. The majority of people living with dementia experience these risk factors: age is the greatest risk factor for dementia, with one in four Canadians above the age of 85 living with dementia. Ninety per cent of Canadians living with dementia have at least one other chronic condition, and 20% have five or more². Being closely associated with age and multiple comorbidities, Alzheimer's disease and other dementias were identified as the most common underlying health condition reported among Covid-19 fatalities in Canadians aged 65 and older—and for those 85 and older, Alzheimer's disease and dementia was listed as an underlying health condition in 46% of reported deaths during the first wave³.

Amplifying the already elevated risk among seniors living with dementia is the difficulty this population can experience following public health guidelines. Seniors living with dementia may wander and/or exit-seek, not understanding the need to maintain physical distancing and, in some locations, follow directional arrows. Mask-wearing is also a barrier for people living with dementia: in the mid- and late-stages of the disease, individuals can struggle to recognise their family and friends, more so when their faces are obstructed. People living with dementia may not always understand the importance of wearing a face covering themselves, and remembering to wash their hands regularly—and properly—can be challenging.

Care partners to a senior living with dementia have made tremendous sacrifices throughout this pandemic, often isolating at home alongside their family member or friend to ensure they do not leave the house, or do so with proper precautions. Care partners to a senior living with

¹ "Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) advice for the public". World Health Organization, November 23 2020.

² "A Dementia Strategy for Canada: 2020 Annual Report". Public Health Agency of Canada, June 2020.

³ "COVID-19 death comorbidities in Canada". Statistics Canada, November 16 2020.

dementia report higher levels of distress than other care partners, and are particularly vulnerable to the loneliness and isolation that arise when staying at home for extended periods of time⁴. Priority access to Covid-19 vaccines would benefit not only the senior living with dementia, but also their care partner(s).

The Government of Ontario has committed to vaccinating “individuals with high-risk chronic conditions and their caregivers”⁵ in phase two of the vaccine rollout strategy. **The Alzheimer Society calls for seniors living with dementia to be explicitly included as a priority population for vaccination during phase two**, inclusive of care partners to these individuals.

For further information

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⁴ “Dementia in Canada”. Canadian Institute for Health Information, June 26 2018.

⁵ “Ontario to Vaccinate up to 8.5 Million People in Phase Two”. Government of Ontario, January 13 2021.