



Ontario Health

To: Health System Partners
From: Matthew Anderson, President and CEO, Ontario Health
SUBJECT: May 16, 2020 -- Update #4: Ontario Health COVID-19 Response

The Ontario Government, with Ontario Health and a multi-disciplinary committee of experts, has developed a framework outlining a measured approach to plan for gradually resuming scheduled hospital-based care for patients whose treatments have been postponed during the outbreak.

Resuming surgeries and procedures, and ensuring health and safety for patients, has been on all our minds since mid-March when hospitals were directed to reduce non-urgent and scheduled care to ensure we were prepared to manage COVID-19. Through our collective efforts to flatten the curve, the anticipated initial surge did not occur. Yet the overriding need remains to ensure Ontario hospitals can maintain capacity to be ready for any surge as COVID-19 evolves.

That is why the framework – [***A Measured Approach to Planning for Surgeries and Procedures During the COVID-19 Pandemic***](#) – sets the conditions hospitals need to meet *before* they can resume scheduled care. It outlines the targets to be hit locally – including a sustained decline in the rate of COVID-19 cases over the past 14 days and a critical supply of PPE – and requires sign-off from each hospital’s Regional COVID-19 Response Table before the hospital can proceed.

The framework has been shared with hospitals to support their planning. On May 14, the Ontario Government announced that certain health and medical services including scheduled surgeries could resume once Directive #2 issued on March 19th is amended and the pre-specified conditions outlined in the framework are met.

Key Aspects

A measured, equitable approach to manage the wait list of patients using a fair process to safely resume hospital-based care. The approach includes:

- Hospitals conducting a feasibility assessment of readiness, based on nine factors and reviewed weekly.
- Hospitals reserving 15% of acute care capacity, subject to any alternate agreement with their Regions for securing sufficient regional capacity.
- Hospitals and the Regions confirming timely post-discharge care is available/coordinated.
- Hospitals taking a gradual approach to increasing surgeries and procedures that is agile enough to quickly ramp down, if needed, and include contingency capacity for COVID-19 patients.

Here are other updates from our health system response effort.

Long-Term Care

The spread of COVID-19 continues to be a challenge for residents in long-term care and other group living facilities, despite some promising data that the pandemic curve overall is beginning to flatten.

This is why the Ministries of Health and Long-Term Care, Ontario Health and our many provincial, regional and local partners continue to intensify measures to halt the spread of COVID-19 among the frail and vulnerable living in group settings.

- To further support [Ontario's Action Plan for Long-Term Care](#), in each Ontario Health Region a dedicated long-term care lead is coordinating integrated response efforts.
- Our Regions are working with hospitals, Family Health Teams, the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO) and home and community care and other service providers in deploying staff and providing infection prevention and control, as well as other needed resources to long-term care homes. The RNAO is responding to many urgent requests for staffing including 5 multi-site submissions from the large operators for over 600 staff.
- Regions are now matching/hiring 1,374 health professionals who signed up on onhealthworkforcematching.ca portal and have been identified as candidates for redeployment where needed.
- In the Regions, work also includes ensuring critical supplies and personal protective equipment (PPE) are available and distributed wherever needed.
- Testing, monitoring and surveillance of all residents, staff and essential visitors continues, as does tracking homes at risk of outbreak.

Other Vulnerable Populations

- In addition, Ontario Health Regions are supporting Ontario's [COVID-19 Action Plan for Protecting Vulnerable People](#).
- For example, hospitals, community and municipal partners and Ontario Health (Toronto) have established a recovery site that can accommodate 200 homeless people who have tested positive for COVID-19 and need isolation but not hospitalization.
- The recovery site accepts clients from assessment centres and emergency rooms, and from on-site shelter testing, to ensure they have the proper health and community support to self-isolate.
- Plans are under way to open a second COVID-19 recovery site at a downtown Toronto hotel.

Testing

- Ontario has significantly increased testing and contact tracing capacity, allowing health experts to identify cases of COVID-19 and support efforts to stop the spread of the virus in the community, long-term care homes, and other congregate settings.
- By the end of the first week of May, we achieved over 19,000 tests in a day.

- Even though testing is being tracked and measured on a per day basis, the most important thing we are concerned with is that testing volumes are trending in the right direction.
- There will be dips along the way – and these can be attributed to a number of factors – however, we are seeing consistent week over week volume increases towards achieving our targets with Ontario now a leader in Canada in daily testing volumes per capita.
- We have consolidated COVID-19 lab capacity across Ontario through a province-wide testing network which includes over 20 organizations across Public Health Ontario, hospital and private laboratories.

Supply Chain: Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

- Ontario Health recommendations with the best evidence on [PPE use during COVID-19](#) have been updated and shared with hospitals and other health care organizations.
- Also updated recommendations with the best evidence for the [optimization of PPE](#), an important part of our PPE strategy.

Mental Health and Addictions

The Mental Health and Addictions Centre of Excellence is supporting the expansion of mental health services during COVID-19 via:

- Creating supports for [health care workers](#).
- Supporting access to [online therapy](#) via Ontario’s new internet-based Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (iCBT), to help people with anxiety and depression.
- Supporting other online supports – these and iCBT with support from [Ontario Health \(OTN\)](#).
- Chairing a table the province has established, the Mental Health and Addictions COVID-19 Response Table.
- Its members are representatives from the mental health and addictions sector. They identify concerns and implement quick solutions, support virtual care strategies, share best practices, and connect with other COVID-19 regional and provincial tables to ensure there is communication about issues impacting mental health and addictions organizations and services.

Virtual Care

- COVID-19 is changing virtual care access and delivery across the province.
- Since March 1, virtual direct-to-patients visits on the Ontario Telemedicine Network have increased tenfold to 350,000, and more than 16,000 health care providers have requested accounts.
- There are two projects ramping up to support long-term care.
 - A virtual care solution that is connected to point-of-care systems in place in most long-term care homes. This solution enables physicians and other care providers to participate in video assessments of residents, message the LTC staff and update residents’ charts.

- Hospital-based tele-rounding for internists and other specialists, enabling them to manage and treat residents through video visits, remote video assessments and secure messaging with long-term care staff.
- Access to palliative care specialists will also soon be available.

As COVID-19 continues trending in a direction that we all hope for, it is heartening to see how staying the course and following public health guidance is working. But we also still have work to do. I thank you all for staying focused on conquering COVID-19, with a special shout out to all Ontario nurses during Nursing Week, May 11-17, for their incredible professionalism, care and compassion for patients, families and colleagues during this unprecedented time.

Matthew Anderson