

Provincial government launches new commission into long-term care homes

Written By PAULA BROWN

Premier Doug Ford announced the launching of the Ontario government's independent commission into COVID-19 in long-term care homes on July 29.

The independent commission will consist of three commissioners who are tasked with investigating how COVID-19 spread within the long term care homes and whether the province did enough to prevent or contain the virus. The commission will also look into how residents, staff, and families were impact by the outbreak.

The commission will be led by Superior Court Justice Frank N. Marraocco. Angela Cock, who was a former senior executive of the Ontario Public Service and Dr. Jack Kitts, the President and CEO of The Ottawa Hospital from 2002 to 2020 will serve as the other commissioners.

“They will conduct as many interviews as necessary. They will require records to be produced and they will summon as many people as they need to until we get down to the bottom of this,” said Ford in a press conference. “No stone will be left unturned, because our seniors deserve nothing less.”

Ford announced back in late May that the government would be implementing an independent commission into the outbreak of COVID-19 in Ontario long term care homes. The decision came following a report from the Canadian Forces who were helping in the five highest hit homes that detailed the living conditions that included insect infestations, lack of wellness checks, and suspected abuse. The report also noted cases of allowing COVID-19 patients to wander as well as lack of hygiene of medical equipment used.

“As Premier, I made a commitment to our long-term care residents and their families that there would be accountability and justice in the broken system we inherited,” said Ford in the commission press release. “Today, we are delivering on that promise by moving forward with a transparent, independent review of our long-term care system.”

Both long-term care homes in Shelburne, Dufferin Oaks and Shelburne Residence Retirement, experienced outbreaks of COVID-19 among residents and staff workers.

Shelburne Residence Retirement and Nursing Home in May recorded 55 residences and 23 staff testing positive for the virus, and 15 deaths, in the facility that houses approximately 60 residents. Dufferin Oaks had confirmed four positives cases that resulted in 2 deaths.

Both long-term care homes told the Shelburne FreePress that they welcome the commission into the Ontario homes, and have not been requested by the commission to provide information.

“It's no secret that the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted serious gaps in the long-term care sector. Southbridge wasn't immune to these challenges. This commission is an excellent opportunity for everyone, including us, to come together and learn from the past several months with a focus on the care we provide and the redevelopment of homes to better provide that care,” said Candace Chartier, Chief Seniors' Advocate and Strategic Partnerships Officer at Southbridge.

The commission will take place over the next year, with the final report expected to be delivered in April 2021.