

Changes to LTC offer more freedom for residents

Written By **Jessica Laurenza**

Some provincial restrictions on long-term care homes are being lifted following high vaccination percentages in the homes and overall public health improvement across the province.

As of May 30, it is estimated that 97 per cent of long-term residents in Ontario are fully immunized and more than 89 per cent of staff have received their first dose, while 66 per cent of staff are fully vaccinated, according to the Ministry of Long-Term Care.

Stacey Rooyakkers, Executive Director at Shelburne's Long Term Care Home and Retirement Community, said residents and staff alike are extremely excited to welcome families back, as the loosening of restrictions took place on June 9 and 96 per cent of their residents have been fully vaccinated.

One-third of residents reside in the retirement home while two-thirds reside in long-term care but residents of either side of the home will soon be able to welcome visitors back into their lives.

The Ministry of Long-Term Care has updated their visitor policies to set out the following: residents who have been fully immunized can leave their homes for the day or overnight; residents with mobility limitations or extensive health conditions which make outdoor activity difficult, can have one visitor at a time within the home; brief hugs may now take place regardless of resident or visitor vaccination status. Full vaccination among residents and visitors permits prolonged, close physical contact.

‘As a small [home], we take pride in creating a close-knit, supportive environment for our residents that feels like home,’ explains Rooyakkers.

Shelburne's Long-Term Care and Retirement Community has begun expanding their social activities to include faith-based programming, musical activities and games. A Music Therapist has been reintroduced and outdoor activities, such as gardening, have resumed.

‘These activities have been introduced using a slow, methodical approach that places residents' health and safety at the heart of our efforts, and residents have greatly enjoyed them,’ says Rooyakkers.

Residents of these homes have faced some of the most serious restrictions throughout COVID-19 because of their vulnerabilities so this change will help increase their quality of life.

‘Our government puts the safety and well-being of long-term care residents at the heart of everything we do,’ says Dr. Merrilee Fullerton, Minister of Long-Term Care. ‘Thanks to high immunization levels, residents and their families can resume more of the activities that contribute to their quality of life.’