

For Immediate Release

BC's COVID – 19 Vaccine Plan Needs to Treat All BC Seniors Equally

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Vancouver, BC – Yesterday, BC Seniors Living Association (BCSLA) called on the Provincial Government and the BC Centre for Disease Control (BCCDC) to ensure that all BC's seniors are treated equally when it comes to determining the Province's roll out plans for the COVID-19 vaccine and while defining the priority eligibility for seniors.

BCSLA recognizes that the immediate priority ought to be those residents in Memory Care or Long-Term Care (LTC) communities whether they are publicly funded or privately operated. However, as Health Authorities start to collect data for LTC residents and corresponding staff, as it appears has begun, there is concern that other areas of the seniors living continuum will be overlooked.

"There is no question that when it comes to providing the vaccine for seniors, that the most vulnerable need to be the priority," said Lee Coonfer, BCSLA CEO. "However, there needs to be the assurance and certainty for the remainder of the seniors population in BC that they will be treated equally in that those seniors in a congregative living environment where staff come on site to provide care or services be treated the same and with the same priority, whether it is an assisted living or independent living community", he said.

BCSLA has been actively engaged with the government, collectively working towards solutions to the many challenges that the seniors population and seniors community operators have faced as a result of COVID-19. This constructive and engaging approach has resulted in some very proactive and innovative programs and directives that help keep the seniors community safe during the pandemic. However, it hasn't always meant that seniors living operators are all treated the same. Compensation for personal protective equipment (PPE), pandemic pay and support to accommodate visitation restrictions have not always been made available to private operators of assisted living and long term care communities. In most cases, independent living (IL) sites are overlooked altogether.

For the purposes of the vaccine, it is imperative for the government to acknowledge that Independent Living (IL) operators represent seniors living in a congregative setting just as LTC and Assisted Living (AL) sites are. The resident of IL sites may not be considered as physically vulnerable as those in LTC but they do live in very similar settings where there is a critical mass of residents at one site with communal areas. In addition, much like an LTC community, there are staff providing services at IL communities who are coming on-site from off premises thereby heightening the exposure risk. Placing all seniors living in a congregative setting into one category, whether publicly funded or private, an AL site or an IL site, treats seniors equally. It appears to be the approach that the Province of Ontario is taking and one BCSLA strongly supports and recommends.

