

April 20, 2020

Hon. Merrilee Fullerton
Ministry of Long-Term Care
Via email: merrilee.fullerton@pc.ola.org, Merrilee.fullerton@ontario.ca

Dear Minister:

Therapeutic Recreation Ontario (TRO) welcomes the emergency order limiting the number of long-term care (LTC) homes in which staff may work to only one facility. The health and safety of residents and staff is paramount and all possible steps to limit the spread of COVID-19 must be taken.

As planning for post-COVID-19 gets underway, we urge the provincial government to address the reasons why staff have to work in more than one facility. The chronic underfunding of long-term care has resulted in low wages, limited hours and precarious working conditions for staff in these facilities, including recreation staff.

The profession, Therapeutic Recreation (TR), is one of the most misunderstood and least understood health care professions. People think it is about bingo, birthday parties and bible study – not true. It is about bringing joy and meaning and quality of living to the people who live in a long-term care home. In the current COVID-19 environment, it is about ensuring connections between residents and their families, bringing calm and reassurance. It is about using assessments, tools and resources to create meaningful experiences. It's about being part of an inter-collaborative team that looks at the whole person. We recognize the priority of nursing and personal support worker care, but once a person is up, dressed and has received their medications, then what do they do with the rest of their day? That's where Therapeutic Recreation professionals play an important role. Whether it is supporting seniors to overcome the three scourges of LTC – boredom, loneliness and frustration – or developing strategies to support personal expressions, Therapeutic Recreation is integral to the lived experience of seniors within long-term care. It's not about keeping people busy – it's about giving them a sense of personhood and value.

Unfortunately, we are seeing far too many people, particularly young people, leave the profession as they cannot find full-time work that pays a living wage. Casual and/or part-time work, low pay and no access to benefits are driving people away from the LTC sector.

.../2

.../2

TR professionals know the value that Therapeutic Recreation can bring to a resident's quality of life, but when they are responsible for providing care at a staff ratio of 1 TR to 60 residents, they also know they are limited in their ability to make a difference. This is particularly evident as the population within long-term care evolves to include people with more complex conditions. More staff with specialized training in Therapeutic Recreation are needed to provide individualized care and smaller and more creative group programs.

TRO welcomes the opportunity to work with you and your team to address the challenges in long-term care and to advance a shared vision of a long-term care system that works for Ontario's seniors.

Sincerely,



Sue Verrilli, R/TRO
President



Rozalyn Werner-Arcé, CAE
Executive Director

Copy to:

Hon. Effie Triantafilopoulos, Parliamentary Assistant, Effie.triantafilopoulos@ontario.ca

David Lancaster, Legislative Assistant, David.Lancaster@pc.ola.org

Mason Saunders, Director of Stakeholder Relations, mason.saunders@ontario.ca

Alexandra Valcour, Senior Policy Advisor, Alexandra.Valcour@ontario.ca

Richard Steele, Deputy Minister, Richard.Steele@ontario.ca

Brian Pollard, Assistant Deputy Minister, brian.pollard@ontario.ca

Michael Hillmer, Assistant Deputy Minister, michael.hillmer@ontario.ca

Janet Hope, Assistant Deputy Minister, janet.hope@ontario.ca

Teresa Armstrong, Home Care and LTC Critic, tarmstrong-gp@ndp.on.ca

John Fraser, Health and LTC Critic, jfraser.mpp.co@liberal.ola.org

About TRO:

Established in 1999, Therapeutic Recreation Ontario (TRO) is the professional association that represents Therapeutic Recreation practitioners in the province. Our membership of more than 1800 includes practitioners, educators and students. Our mission is to lead the TR profession through growth, advocacy and innovation. We do this by offering quality membership services including professional development, information, networking, advocacy, and evidence-based research and best practices. We set the standard for excellence in the profession through our registration designations (R/TRO and R/TRO DIP).