TEMPLATE LETTER: Medical Health Officers and Hospitals

**Health Care and People with Disabilities**

Providing health care during a pandemic presents many complex challenges, including balancing public health and safety with rights to equitable access for people with disabilities. Ensuring accessible hospital services for people with disabilities may require special accommodations from hospitals or external support persons to facilitate communication, decision making and personal care.

As partners in care in our community, we want you to know that we are here to support your staff to ensure equitable access for patients with intellectual disabilities while protecting public health and safety needs for all. We also encourage you to review and implement the following updated policy toolkits widely within your organization.

1. **BC’s revised hospital Essential Visitor policy to accommodate essential supports for patients with disabilities.**

Health Minister Adrian Dix this week announced BC’s revised policy recognizing the essential role of family members and support staff in providing specialized accommodations critical to overcoming barriers linked to disability and ensuring equitable access to care in hospitals.

It outlines 3 situations where a support person is essential for patients with disabilities:

* + Assistance by designated representatives for persons with disabilities, including provision of emotional support
  + Visits for supported decision making
  + Communication Assistance for persons with hearing, visual, speech, cognitive, intellectual or memory impairments

Please read the revised policy [Infection Prevention and Control for Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19),](https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/about-bc-s-health-care-system/office-of-the-provincial-health-officer/reports-publications/covid-19-infection-prevention-control.pdf) which was updated on May 19, 2020.

Please contact us if we can assist with implementation. We are also promoting helpful tips so the individuals and families we support can do their part by taking proactive steps to avoid problems.

See: [Revised “Essential Visits” policy now supports people with disabilities during hospital visits](https://inclusionbc.org/revised-essential-visits-policy-now-supports-patients-with-disabilities/)

1. **Public Health Canada guide on protecting rights & safety of people with disabilities in #COVID19.**

This comprehensive new guide was developed with input from Minister Carla Qualtrough’s new federal COVID Disability Advisory Committee and offers important insight on accommodating the unique needs and rights of people with disabilities during the pandemic.

See: [COVID-19 and people with disabilities in Canada](https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/diseases/2019-novel-coronavirus-infection/guidance-documents/people-with-disabilities.html)

Thank you for your vital work to keep our community safe. Please don’t hesitate to contact us if we can further support your efforts to ensure inclusion and accessibility for all in your service delivery.