



May 12, 2020

Ms. Helen Angus,
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Health

Mr. Matthew Anderson,
President and CEO, Ontario Health
Ministry of Health

Dr. David Williams,
Chief Medical Officer of Health
Ministry of Health

Via email

RE: Essential Physiotherapy Services in the Community

Dear Deputy Minister Angus, Mr. Anderson and Dr. Williams;

Physiotherapists are providing essential services across all sectors of the health care system during the pandemic including hospitals, rehabilitation centres, long-term care homes, home care and community care, primary health care organizations and in private clinics. In the community, where appropriate, virtual services have ensured access to care for some patients however in-person physiotherapy services have been limited by emergency order to urgent or emergency cases. I am writing you today, in your capacity as Co-Chairs of the Emergency Operations Command Table, to ask you to ensure that the thousands of patients across Ontario who have had their physiotherapy care postponed or modified and those who are, or will be, in need of care as elective surgeries and other procedures restart in our hospitals have access to care they need, including in-person care provided in the community, as soon as possible.

Patients and the physiotherapy profession completely understand that the limitations placed on in-person care have been necessary. Nevertheless, reinstating access to the full range of physiotherapy services in the community through physiotherapy clinics, out-patient services and home and community physiotherapy services is critical in addressing the health care needs of Ontarians. In many cases, the absence of those in-person services during the emergency period has led to a deterioration in patients' health conditions, increasing the risk of negative health

outcomes and significant limitations to patients' ability to recover from surgery, return to work, or to perform their activities of daily living.

Though the expansion of virtual care has allowed some services to continue, telerehabilitation has limitations. Ontario needs physiotherapists, who operate or work in community clinics and in other venues and who are currently limited by the emergency order for essential services, to return to in-person practice to address patient needs in areas such as;

- Bundled care programs or other surgeries or procedures, so that the full continuum of care they require is available.
- Those with debilitating pain and mobility issues whose conditions inevitably worsen with delays in obtaining care in the community and who will face long-term limitations if they are unable to obtain timely care.
- Programs and treatments for WSIB claimants that require in-person services, so they can return to work, or to their full workplace duties.
- Those with injuries after a motor vehicle accident whose treatments have been limited or have been inaccessible due to insurer-imposed limitations on virtual care.

In addition in both the May 8th memorandum from the Command Table and in Ontario Health's presentation deck, *A Measured Approach to Planning Surgeries and Procedures during the COVID-19 Pandemic*, the need for stability in the home and community care sector is highlighted. Specifically in the presentation deck the availability of 'post-acute care outside the hospital that would be required to support patients after discharge (e.g. home care, primary care, rehabilitation)' is included in the decision criteria for determining the feasibility of re-opening for elective and other surgeries and procedures. For the reopening of services to be successful physiotherapists must be engaged early in the process of system planning so that patients experience no barriers to, or delays in, receiving needed care post operation and/or procedure.

The essentiality of physiotherapy is demonstrated by the fact that governments of British Columbia, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Québec included physiotherapy in the first wave of professions those governments allowed to return to in-person practice. The same should apply in Ontario.

As front-line health care professionals, physiotherapists know how to deliver care responsibly and safety in pandemic conditions. We bring knowledge and information about the needed elements that must be incorporated in system planning for physiotherapy services, including identifying any current challenges to accessing the appropriate PPE in the community, and we are ready to work with the government to safely open access to in-person services to meet the needs of patients and the health system. The Ontario Physiotherapy Association (OPA) is also engaged in discussions with the College of Physiotherapists of Ontario to ensure that guidance provided to physiotherapists in this area builds on the knowledge gained from other jurisdictions and fulfils the recommendations of Public Health Ontario and the Directives of the Emergency Operations Committee.



OPA is eager to work with the government to implement a system approach for full access to essential health care by Ontarians as we re-open services that includes physiotherapy at the earliest opportunity. Doing so will remove barriers to post-surgical and procedural care, return workers to their jobs and reduce the need for emergency services in acute care.

We would be pleased to meet at your earliest convenience to discuss how we can help with this work and the role that physiotherapy can play in re-opening health care services in Ontario.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "D. Sauvé". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "D" and a long, sweeping tail.

Dorianne Sauvé, BSc PT, MPA
Chief Executive Officer