



MEMORANDUM

To: All Employees of OPTIONS NORTHWEST

From: Anna-Marie Eckensweiler, Executive Director

Date: March 13, 2020

CC: ONA, UNIFOR, Community Partners and Board of Directors

Re: Update on Coronavirus COVID 19

On Friday March 13th, 2020 I put out communication to our employees about what we are doing as an organization to address the Novel Coronavirus COVID 19. As you can appreciate, information is coming out frequently and daily on this virus and what we can do to contain it.

Because this communication is being copied to some other partners including our Union partners, I am going to re-iterate some information that was already shared and also provide NEW information. Back in February, we communicated to you via our Health and Safety Coordinator that we were reviewing all of our policies and procedures with respect to the prevention of infection, routine practices for residential settings and employee's responsibilities in the control of Infectious Diseases. Once COVID 19 was declared a Pandemic we started meeting weekly to review our Pandemic plan to remind everyone of the policies already in place to address these kinds of situations.

OPTIONS management employees have reviewed all correspondence that has come to our attention from the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services and we listened in today to the Public Health conference that was put on by the Thunder Bay District Health Unit.

OPTIONS management employees are now meeting daily to review any new announcements and directions to ensure we are keeping up to date with any recommendations to contain this virus.

Based on the Public health conference that was held today, Thunder Bay still has **0** cases of confirmed COVID 19. This continues to be good news for our community however we know that maintaining good hygiene practices is our best defense.

We wish to re-iterate the following.

- All community engagements should be canceled unless absolutely necessary. Stay away from crowded areas where close proximity to others may occur. Go for a walk or to a park but stay away from theatres, malls etc. Attend medical and/or dental appointments only if necessary. You will start to see that some dental clinics will be closing due to the virus precautions. If a medical situation occurs for someone supported, assess if a walk-in clinic or their regular physician can be used instead of using emergency services. We also have access to a Nurse Practitioner through Janzen's. Telehealth may also be an option although the wait times are lengthy right now. Medical care is absolute priority however we are asking that you stop and think before exposing yourselves and the individuals we support to high traffic areas. **Do not** hesitate to seek medical assistance for emergency situations.
- As employees, if you have fever, cough and difficulty breathing, seek medical care early and stay home if you are ill.
- **NEW**; The ministry has requested that we limit all non-essential visitors to the offices as well as to our other work environments. **Effective today, March 16th**, you are asked to post the attached notice at the homes to indicate that all non-essential visits to the homes are suspended until further notice. Our administrative offices already have these signs posted and screening will be done before entering. Please also follow the attached screening in the homes. We are recommending that families visit loved ones via a telephone call or other method. If a toilet needs repair, that would be essential to have done. Obviously if you don't have heat or water or you suspect an issue with the furnace, these are all essential services to carry on in the location. All other visitors to the homes should be **essential** services. We will message families of this as well. In locations where we may have individuals at end of life, speak to your supervisor about visitors in those locations. **Screening must be done in all situations and each time someone enters the home or office.**
- All training/conference attendance has been temporarily cancelled. The only training that will continue at this time will be essential training like NCI and First Aid. Those 2 may be adjusted based on size of the group attending. If you are scheduled for NCI or First Aid, you will be notified if something changes.
- The Administrative offices will remain open and all employees will continue to work to support the overall organization. Visitors as mentioned will now be limited. Face to face meetings are cancelled until further notice except for team meetings that we believe need to continue to keep employees informed of updates.
- We will continue to support individuals who are living within our SIL program, CPS, Home Share and Passport but limiting face to face contact is recommended and proper screening should be occurring at each visit.
- We have confirmed with our supplier of cleaning products for the homes, that these are adequate to sanitize at this time and we are recommending that employees remember to think of doorknobs, taps etc. when doing routine cleaning.
- The administrative offices will have extra cleaning done of high traffic areas, doorknobs, stairwells, meeting rooms etc. With limiting public access, this should be adequate to address any concerns.

The Ministry of Health has issued a reminder to all Ontarians that the **BEST** actions that they should be taking every day to protect their health NOT just during this time of COVID 19 concerns are the following.

- **WASH your hands often with soap and water or alcohol-based hand sanitizer**
- **Sneeze and cough into your sleeve**
- **Avoid touching your eyes, nose or mouth**
- **Avoid contact with people who are sick**

The Ministry of Health has also recommended that all non-essential travel outside of Canada be avoided. As a result of these recommendations and those of the Public Health Unit, we are initiating the following.

- Travel that is now planned effective this date forward (March 16th) outside of Canada will require employees to self-quarantine for 14 days upon arrival back to Thunder Bay. Employees will be encouraged to use vacation or other time for this purpose of self-quarantine as all recommendations out of the government at this time is to not travel. Employees will not be reimbursed for the 14 days should they choose to travel outside of Canada as of March 16th.
- For employees who travelled outside of Canada when the pandemic was declared, March 11, 2020 onward, upon the date of return to Thunder Bay, those employees will be required to self-quarantine for 14 days however will be paid for any shifts scheduled during that period of time.
- Additional information that was released today from the government is attached for further clarification on this matter.

Should you have any questions about these directions, please speak to your immediate supervisor. We are asking all employees to disclose any travel to their immediate supervisor to ensure we are aware of any potential risks to our employees and the people we support.

We will continue to update you as we learn of new information. We are appreciative of everyone's efforts during this time of concern. As mentioned last week, our continued practice of our policies should help to keep everyone healthy during this period of heightened awareness of the virus. Let's work together to keep everyone healthy.



Anna-Marie Eckensweiler