



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

of BRITISH COLUMBIA

Honourable John Horgan
Premier of British Columbia
West Annex
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, B.C. V1V 1X4

January 13, 2021

Dear Premier,

On behalf of the Official Opposition, I am writing to you out of concern over your government's failure to use its stockpile of COVID-19 rapid tests to provide an additional level of protection for those living and working at long-term care (LTC) and assisted living facilities.

As we enter year two of the COVID-19 pandemic, the virus continues to spread at a concerning rate and sadly, it is seniors in LTC facilities who continue to disproportionately lose their lives to this deadly disease. As of January 11, there were 50 active COVID-19 outbreaks in LTC and assisted living facilities across B.C., with 1,364 residents and 669 staff infected with the virus.

In recent days, we have heard reports of delayed vaccine delivery to the province, new cases in LTC homes where elderly populations have already received the vaccine, as well as some LTC staff choosing not to receive the vaccination. Each of these instances serves to further highlight the dire situation in British Columbia's LTC facilities and the need for urgent action.

One action your government could immediately take to prevent further outbreaks would be the deployment of a broad-based rapid testing program for asymptomatic LTC staff. Last November, British Columbia received a large stockpile of COVID-19 rapid tests that were purchased and provided to the province by the federal government — and more of these tests have been promised to be delivered in the weeks ahead. Although these Health Canada-approved rapid tests are currently being used in LTC facilities when a new outbreak is confirmed, they are not presently being used to screen and test asymptomatic LTC staff.

These tests can be easily administered by care-home staff such as LPNs, and can also be self-administered, with an observer present. Results are produced in under 15 minutes and a negative result would allow a worker to continue with their day, while a positive test would prevent their admission to the facility until a second, lab-based test can be performed.

BC Liberal Official Opposition
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4
T: 250-356-6171



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

of BRITISH COLUMBIA

Although these rapid tests are no replacement for lab-based PCR tests, there is no question that they can be used, in combination with lab-based tests, as an additional level of protection as is being done in other provinces. Currently, Providence Health Care is leading a rapid test pilot program here in B.C., which earlier this month, detected the first positive case from an asymptomatic LTC care worker using this rapid testing technology.

Dr. Henry has acknowledged that the execution of a broad-based LTC rapid testing program is currently being prevented because of the province's limited resources — despite acknowledging that increased asymptomatic testing would help ease the burden on LTC homes.

We have heard from LTC advocates that B.C. care home operators are eager for rapid testing to be expanded broadly across all B.C. care homes, and are willing to work with the province to provide the resources necessary to facilitate this program. Additionally, this week the B.C. Seniors' Advocate, Isobel Mackenzie, also renewed her call for your government to deploy rapid tests in LTC facilities as soon as possible.

We are now calling on you to act.

If your government's reluctance to use rapid testing is, in fact, due to a lack of resources and the capacity of health care workers to perform these tests, your government must work to find the necessary resources to fix this situation and ensure this additional layer of protection is in place for our most vulnerable British Columbians.

I look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Shirley Bond
MLA, Prince George-Valemount
Leader of the Official Opposition