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For Immediate Release

Attn: Assignment Editor

## **Ford Government's Failure to Release a Plan for COVID-19 Underscored by Alarming Spread of COVID-19 in Long-Term Care Homes in Ottawa, 11 Residents Have Died, Problems Apparent with Testing, Isolation, PPE: Ontario Health Coalition Calls for Province-Wide Protests**

In Ottawa, the alarming spread of COVID-19 in long-term care homes underscores the lack of a clear plan and action on the part of Ontario's Ford government to address the issues that have been raised repeatedly. More than 100 residents have contracted COVID-19 in Ottawa's long-term care homes in recent weeks. As of yesterday, eleven residents have died as a result of complications related to COVID-19 at the most seriously hit home, Extendicare's West End Villa. The outbreak in that home was declared on August 30. Since then, 92 residents and staff have contracted COVID-19. Twenty-four staff members from the home, that has been described by residents' families as understaffed even prior to COVID-19, are self-isolating at home after testing positive. According to an Ottawa Citizen report on Friday, another 60 tests among staff were still pending and testing was continuing among residents with 48 results pending. On Saturday, a CBC news story quoted a staff person, who spoke on the condition of anonymity for fear of losing their job, as reporting that staff working directly with residents who have COVID-19 do not have N95 masks, something that has been raised repeatedly as a problem with the provincial government and public health officials. On September 11 local public health officials told the Ottawa Citizen that things had changed since the first wave and that they had ensured that long-term care homes had enough PPE and the Ministry of Long-Term Care told the same newspaper that they had ensured that the home had enough staff and proper outbreak protocols in place. A [Postmedia report](#) published on September 20 quotes a family member who reports lapses in testing and isolation as follows:

"Lea Maurice, whose 76-year-old disabled grandmother lives in the home, says her grandmother was left in a room with a sick roommate for 24 hours after that roommate tested positive for COVID-19. The roommate had been showing signs of illness for several days before she was tested, they say. Even after the roommate tested positive, she was not immediately moved. Maurice says the home did so after family members complained. It took another eight hours, Maurice and other family members allege, before the room was sanitized, and even then it was done with her grandmother in the room. Maurice's grandmother, who is not being named to protect her privacy, has now tested positive for COVID. She had to be tested twice. Officials with the home told family members that the original test was inadvertently cancelled by the lab where it was sent for processing. Maurice said she can't understand why it took so long to move the roommate to protect her grandmother and two other residents with whom they shared a bathroom."

There are outbreaks in 11 Ottawa long-term care homes, the second most severe at Laurier Manor, also an Extendicare home, which has had 18 COVID-positive staff and residents in the current outbreak. According to Ontario Health Coalition research there are currently 35 active outbreaks in long-term care homes across Ontario.

The Ontario government said it would release its fall plan today. Instead of releasing a fall plan, it said that the plan was too complicated to release to the public and announced flu shots.

“The evidence in Ottawa is that testing and isolation are happening too slowly to protect residents and staff from contracting COVID-19,” said Natalie Mehra, executive director of the Ontario Health Coalition. “The Ford government has done nothing to drive a recruitment plan to get staff into severely understaffed long-term care homes, leaving them with less resilience to deal with a second wave that appears to be here. Yet Quebec has recruited tens of thousands of staff, increased wages, got training underway. B.C.’s government provided full-time work and improved wages more than 5 months ago. Ontario’s public has been treated to endless press conferences with empty promises to fix long-term care and yet no action has been taken to get staffing and therefore care levels up to safety. Staff still are rationing PPE and the reports from Ottawa underline the fact that the plan, if there is one, is inadequate. We are calling for fast track testing where there are outbreaks, outbreak protocols including immediate isolation and cohorting, a systemic approach to get staff into homes or residents out to where they can be safely cared for. What is happening in Ottawa is inexcusable. There is more than can and must be done.”

The Health Coalition released a post-first-wave staffing report in July calling for immediate action to deal with severe staffing shortages among nurses, PSWs, cleaning, dietary, laundry, rehab and other long-term care staff. This is the third of numerous reports the Coalition has issued documenting rising acuity and decreasing actual care levels. The Coalition has held multiple protests in recent months, issued an Open Letter to the Premier signed onto by more than 200 organizations representing more than a million Ontarians calling for immediate measures to prevent further spread and deaths of residents and staff, and is now calling for a province-wide day of action on October 8. The Coalition is appalled at the lack of concrete action by the provincial government.

Following public health guidelines about gatherings the protests will include motorcades and press conferences and a call for endorsement among as many groups as possible to put pressure on the Ford government to actually put the resources and policies into effect to improve staffing, institute minimum care standards and stop for-profit long-term care. These calls are in addition to infection control measures including testing, PPE, isolation and staffing that the Coalition has repeatedly called for throughout the first wave of the pandemic.