



ARCH Bulletin on COVID-19: People Living in Developmental Services Group Homes Need Access to Essential Support Persons

People with Disabilities are Concerned about Group Home Visitation Bans

In Ontario, some people labelled with intellectual or developmental disabilities live in group homes or other congregate care residences. To control the spread of COVID-19, many developmental services agencies have put in place **temporary visitation bans**. These visitation bans prevent family and friends from visiting or entering group homes and other developmental services settings. In addition to visitation bans, some agencies are not allowing people labelled with intellectual or developmental disabilities to leave their group home or congregate care residence.

People labelled with intellectual or developmental disabilities and their families have reported to ARCH that they are concerned about visitation bans. Not being able to visit with family and friends is difficult for us all. But for some people with disabilities, visitation bans have a much more serious impact.

People labelled with intellectual or developmental disabilities who have high support needs may rely on family or friends to provide supports like assisting with dental hygiene, nail care, changing bed linens, tending to bed sores, or other basic needs. In some group homes there are not enough staff to attend to these basic needs in a timely way.

People who don't speak but use sounds and gestures to communicate may need a family member who knows them well to interpret their communication. In some group homes, staff cannot provide this communication support because they may be too busy, or a high rate of staff turn-over may mean that staff do not have enough time to learn the person's unique form of communication.

Using video technologies is not a solution for many people. Without support, some people labelled with intellectual or developmental disabilities cannot use video technology. It can also be very difficult to interpret some forms of communication over video technology.

Without in-person support, some people labelled with intellectual or developmental disabilities living in group homes are left with little or no communication. They have no way of letting staff, family and friends know whether their basic care needs are being met, no way of making day-to-day decisions, and no way of reporting abuse or neglect.

The Need for Exceptions to Group Home Visitation Bans

In other sectors, such as hospitals and long-term care, visitors are generally not allowed but narrow exceptions are being made. For example, many hospitals allow one family care giver or visitor for people with disabilities, children, and women giving birth. Many long-term care homes allow one family member or visitor in to provide essential health care supports to seniors who need it. In these settings, some health and long-term care providers have recognized that family and friends are essential partners in care.

It remains extremely important to limit the number of people entering developmental services group homes and other congregate care settings to control the spread of COVID-19. However, the basic needs of people labelled with intellectual or developmental disabilities who have significant communication disabilities or high support needs must continue to be met. This can be done in a safe way, as in health and long-term care settings. Any exemption to allow essential support persons into group homes would likely apply to a small number of residents who need support or care that cannot otherwise be provided.

ARCH wants to continue working with people labelled with intellectual or developmental disabilities to address visitation bans in group homes. If you are a person with a disability living in Ontario and your agency has a visitation ban, you can call ARCH for help.

Persons with disabilities who live in Ontario can call ARCH for free, confidential legal information and summary advice. To find out about the kind of legal advice ARCH provides and how to book an appointment, please use the following link: <http://archdisabilitylaw.ca/services/>