MEMO
COVID-19, Visitation and Long-Term Care Communities
March 20, 2020

The COVID-19 virus and the resulting public health emergency has all of us needing to modify almost every aspect of our daily lives, regardless of where we live.

In order to try to stop or slow the spread of COVID-19 we are urging the full cooperation of all residents of long-term care settings, their families and friends. People who live in our nursing homes, assisted living communities and the staff and caregivers are at highest risk. When a COVID-19 case occurs in a long-term care setting, the potential for rapid spread can be extremely high and life-threatening.

Given the public health emergency, we are asking for the following, effective immediately:

- Please do not visit anyone face to face, either in a long-term care setting or outside in the community.
- If you are a resident, please stay where you are. When you go into the community you run the risk of bringing COVID-19 back into your long-term care home with you, potentially infecting other vulnerable residents and staff.

Here are some suggestions to help us get through this safely and in the healthiest way possible, while still trying to visit in some format:

- If your family member living in a long-term care setting is at end-of-life, you <u>may</u> be able to visit by exception. You will be asked to work with the nursing home or assisted living home to call ahead and ask to visit, you will be screened to make sure visitors do not have symptoms (runny nose, fever, cough, shortness of breath, sore throat, exposure to a COVID-19 case). You will be escorted to your family member's room or other location designated by the home. You are asked to not go anywhere else in the building or visit with any other resident or staff. You are also asked to be extra careful about washing your hands or using hand sanitizer and limiting surfaces touched when you enter the resident's room and when you leave.

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Some alternatives to a face to face visit might include:

- Use Facetime, Skype or other mobile media, if your resident has access to a device, or as arranged by the home.
- Send extra cards, notes, postcards, being sure to keep your message short and positive.
- If trying to visit through a resident's window, or holding up signs outside of windows, please be courteous to other residents, and avoid situations, such as visiting at night, that could scare residents, especially those who have dementia.

These changes are necessary and critical to not only keep our residents of Wisconsin nursing homes and assisted living communities protected from the COVID-19 virus, but also the staff and caregivers who work in those settings. In these days where many long-term care settings are already working with fewer staff than they would like, they cannot afford to lose even one to this virus for any length of time.

Residents still have the right to access the Ombudsman Program with the Board on Aging and Long Term Care. Do not hesitate to contact us with questions or concerns. We can be reached by phone at 1-800-815-0015, via e-mail at BOALTC@wisconsin.gov or online at http://longtermcare.wi.gov/

For more information please visit:

Department of Health Services Division of Public Health Memo 2020-16
https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/dph/memos/communicable-diseases/2020-16.pdf

Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services Memo QSO-20-14-NH (revised)
https://www.cms.gov/files/document/3-13-2020-nursing-home-guidance-covid-19.pdf

Centers for Disease Control
https://www.cdc.gov/

Wisconsin Department of Health Services
https://www.dhs.wisconsin.gov/