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Privately-run Caledon care home providing pandemic pay to employees

Written By ALYSSA PARKHILL

The Ontario government has mandated pandemic pay for frontline workers who risk their health on a daily basis to do their jobs - but only for those funded by the Province.

Back on April 25, Premier Doug Ford announced a temporary pandemic pay for frontline workers that would see them receive an increase of $4 an hour on top of their regular wage while working shifts during the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to the increase in pay, a monthly sum of $250 for eligible workers will be provided over the span of the four months.

Those eligible for the increase of pay include healthcare and long-term care workers employed by hospitals, retirement homes, social services and correction facilities. The increase is spread across a variety of positions including nurses, caretakers, administrative staff, food service workers, support workers, officers.

?During these dark days, the Ontario spirit continues to shine through with everyday acts of heroism, courage, and compassion by our frontline workers,? said Premier Ford in a recent news release. ?These people put themselves in harm's way to care for our sick and vulnerable citizens. I am truly grateful, as are the people of Ontario, for their service and it's time we give something back to those who sacrifice so much day in and out.?

But what it doesn't inform the public, is to be eligible to qualify for the pandemic pay, clients must be funded through government agencies or programs. This means that individuals that work at private facilities or institutions do not qualify for the new ?pandemic pay'.

Right at Home Canada provides a variety of services, from physical, mental to other impairments at various hospitals and community homes across the country. With 550 offices internationally and 32 here in Ontario, they work alongside government care officials to assist, not replace the physical and mental services.

In saying that, Right at Home caregivers have been told by the Province that they will not receive the pandemic pay due to not having government funded patients in their care.

?There is a comprehensive list on the government website and the spirit of it, was to top off the pay for true frontliners. So, people who are working with other humans and exposing themselves to situations that are riskier than typical,? explained CEO of Right at Home Canada, Dani DePetrillo. ?All of this is very well-intended, and a great initiative. But the challenge arose when Mr. Ford decided to divide and separate personal support workers (PSW).?

DePetrillo claims that Right at Home caregivers carry out much of the same work and hold similar responsibilities to individuals working for publicly funded facilities.

?Ford put two PSW's side-by-side and said, ?you are going to get it, and you're not'. They do the exact same care scenarios; they do everything the exact same. It's just because the funding for that family's hour of care was not coming from the government. Mr. Ford excluded the workers who were doing that kind of work,? she explained. ?It really is taking two identical workers and saying one's good enough, but the other isn't.?

When DePetrillo became aware that the Right at Home caregivers were excluded, a decision had to be made.

The caregivers at Right at Home are to receive the exact same compensation that government-funded personal support workers receive, dating to the exact same timeline, and amount. The pay will come from Right at Home, without reimbursement from the government. According to their news release, ?this additional temporary top-up reward will start on this pay cheque and continue

every paycheque that you work your regular hours with us through August 13. Just like the top-up increases the government is providing other PSW's.?

?Our decision was really based on equality and fairness. We felt that, if Mr. Ford isn't going to give it to our caregivers, we have to. We want to,? expressed DePetrillo. ?It's important for them to be recognized and not be disheartened and realize that even though Mr. Ford may not feel that they're worthwhile, we feel that they are very worthwhile.?

A total of 1,000 caregivers within Right at Home in Ontario will be receiving the pandemic pay, which includes the increase of $4 per hour until August 13. They are being reimbursed for the time lost from April 24, when the pandemic pay was put into place.

Right at Home Canada only provides family-funded care.

?The reason why family-funded care exists is because the government actually doesn't have the means to provide the care to most people, the full amount, that they need. There's often a gap between what a family needs and wants for someone and what the government is providing,? said DePetrillo.

She added, ?Excluding the family-funded care is almost a double whammy because the government's not providing as much service as the person needs, so the family is purchasing it out of necessity.?

DePetrillo and Right at Home Canada are happy to be able to provide that support and encouragement for their caregivers that are greatly needed, especially during these times, and hope that the recognition will be seen in the future.

?We want to let our caregivers know how much we appreciate what they do. If we turned to them and told them the government's not paying us, so we're not paying you, that would be sending the exact polar opposite message of what we want to send to our caregivers,? she remarked.

For more information about Right at Home Canada, please visit rightathomecanada.com.