

Board to Board Report

A report from the Alliance Board of Directors to the
Boards of Directors of member organizations

May 2020



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Message from the Chair

Dear members,

It has been over a month of living in our new circumstances. We know that your work as governors has been impacted by the crisis. This issue of Board to Board brings you the latest COVID-19 related updates and resources to help you support your staff, clients and communities you serve.

I first want to acknowledge the isolation and many losses that have become part of our daily lives. It is hard to reconcile these feelings with the season typically associated with renewal and hope. The signs of spring are now everywhere. We have just marked Easter and Passover as well as the start of Ramadan. My warmest wishes to everyone celebrating these holidays. I hope you have been able to enjoy some much needed rest and connected with your family and friends through whatever means possible.

I also want to recognize the incredible work of Alliance members across the province in response to the pandemic. A commitment to health equity continues to guide your work during these difficult times and I am continuously inspired by stories of Alliance members coming up with new ways to provide the necessary services to clients and communities. A recently conducted survey of Alliance members demonstrated the many different ways you have adapted to the context of COVID-19. From virtual appointments and outreach initiatives, to meeting the needs of isolated clients and those facing new barriers, to finding ways to continue vital programming while physically distancing, we know you are going above and beyond to serve your communities when they need it most.

As organizations are adapting the way they deliver programs and services, your work as governors has changed as well. In the current circumstances it's no longer "business as usual,"

and I am sure a lot of you are dealing with redefining your Board priorities and identifying which parts of your work can be deferred till later. To support you through these challenging times, please see the excellent *Governance Advice during COVID-19*

resources developed by the BLG law firm. These resources aim to help non-profit and hospital Boards determine how they can support their organizations through the COVID-19 response while keeping an eye on long-term success and sustainability. The resources help answer some of the questions that must be on your mind right now: redefining your priorities, conducting Board and committee meetings, decision-making, continuity and communications, and so on. For more details and links, please see the "Governance Resources" section on page 4. The section also has resources on holding virtual AGMs.

We, at the Alliance, continue supporting member organizations with the necessary information and resources to enable your work on the ground. From daily situation reports, weekly bulletins, regularly updated resources on the portal, and webinars delivered twice a week, we aim to bring you the latest updates related to COVID-19 and government response.

We have also been leading and engaging in numerous advocacy initiatives calling for adequate resources and supports for Alliance members and the communities you serve. We continue bringing members' questions and concerns to numerous provincial tables. We also know that people that have traditionally



Claudia den Boer

faced barriers are now more heavily impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. The virus does not flatten the disparities; it amplifies them. That is why we have been focusing on ensuring the government's COVID-19 response is rooted in health equity and includes socio-demographic and race-based data collection.

Over the past few weeks, we have seen positive developments, like expansion of OHIP, financial supports for those who have lost their incomes due to COVID-19, additional resources for mental health supports and social services. A lot more needs to be done, however, so we will continue to advocate for those facing barriers, including seniors and people with medical complexities, people experiencing homelessness and precarious housing, Indigenous, Black and racialized communities, people who use drugs, temporary farm workers, people living in poverty and those who are isolated in both urban and rural communities.

In this issue of Board to Board, you will find the most recent updates on these and other advocacy issues, resources and stories from Alliance members across the province. Follow our social media accounts, join the portal and subscribe to our weekly bulletin to stay up to date in the future. For more details, see the "Keeping Alliance members connected" section.

These past few weeks have been overwhelming and it looks like there are a lot more to come. This is the time to come closer together, even as we have to stay physically apart. The Alliance will continue to support you in every way we can. I am confident that our long history of building connections, forging strong partnerships, and leading the way on innovation will get us through these challenging times.

Stay healthy and safe and let's keep connected because we are stronger together.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Claudia den Boer", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Claudia den Boer
Board Chair, Alliance for Health Communities

Governance Resources

The COVID-19 pandemic has impacted your work as governors. A lot of the Board work that is not related to supporting your organization through the crisis or essential to the organization's success and sustainability can be deferred. To help Board directors determine what they should be doing right now, the BLG law firm has developed the two resources below. The first one is more broad and intended for non-profits and charities in general. The second one draws on a lot of the same information but is more specifically tailored for hospital Boards. The resources help answer the following questions:

- How to redefine Board priorities during the COVID-19 crisis?
- How often should the Board and committees meet, if at all?
- Which matters require Board decisions right now and how to make those critical decisions in the absence of in-person meetings?
- How to ensure Board members' availability for critical decision making?
- How to manage information flow between the Board and management?
- How can Boards support stakeholder relationships, i.e. staff and volunteer appreciation?
- Practical advice on annual audit, annual meeting planning, Board stability, Board availability, succession planning, etc.

Access the resources below:

- [Governance advice during COVID-19 – for non-profits and charities](#)
- [Governance advice during COVID-19 – for hospitals](#)

Annual General Meeting

We have been getting questions regarding the annual general meetings (AGMs). According to BLG, the minimum requirements for AGM include presenting financial statements to members and appointing auditors. Other business, i.e. election of the directors, can be deferred to a later date.

If you are considering moving your annual general meeting online, check out these resources from the Ontario Nonprofit Network for virtual AGMs:

- [Virtual AGM Facilitation Guide](#)
- [Virtual AGM Template Script](#)
- [Virtual AGM Template Critical Path](#)

Advocating for a health equity approach in the COVID-19 response

Health equity continues to remain the foundation of our work during these challenging times. Systemic and structural inequities impact the health and wellbeing of many marginalized groups in Ontario and make them more vulnerable to the current crisis. Over the past few weeks, we have been involved in a number of advocacy campaigns to ensure a health equity approach in the COVID-19 response.

Race-based and socio-demographic data collection

Recently, the Chief Medical Officer of Health of Ontario made an alarming statement that there was no need to collect race-based and socio-demographic data in relation to COVID-19. In response, we released an [open letter](#) calling on the province to implement a health equity approach in its pandemic response that includes mandating the collection and use of socio-demographic and race-based data in health and social services now as it relates to COVID-19. In a few days, the letter was endorsed by 190 organizations and 1,612 individuals.

A coalition of Black Health leaders also issued a [letter to Minister Elliott and Dr. Williams](#) calling on the province to collect data that tracks race and socio-demographic information. The letter follows their [statement](#) on COVID-19's impact on Black communities. In addition, together with our Community Health Ontario (CHO) partners we further [called on the Minister of Health Elliott](#) to bring a health equity lens to new COVID-19 test technologies and data tools.

The issue got traction in the [media](#), with general public and Ontario government and we continue working on making race-based and socio-demographic data collection part of the COVID-19 response.



We need #COVID19 responses that put #HumanRights first

OHIP Coverage Extended

Last month, marked an important victory, thanks to the advocacy work of [OHIP For All](#). Ontario Government [waived the three-month OHIP waiting period](#) for new immigrants and returning residents, and expanded the coverage for all medically necessary services for uninsured people who do not meet the OHIP criteria. This is a critical step in ensuring that anyone in need of care during the COVID-19 crisis can access it.

Supports for people experiencing homelessness

According to the United Nations, "housing is the front line defense against the COVID-19 outbreak." With no access to housing, people who are experiencing homelessness and those who are precariously housed are particularly vulnerable during the COVID-19 crisis. A couple of weeks ago, we sent a [letter](#) to the Minister of Health and Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing calling for urgent action to support people experiencing homelessness and precariously housed populations. These recommendations have been shared with CEO of Ontario Health, Matt Anderson, and Ontario Health team. We will also be bringing the letter to the Association of Municipalities Ontario and regional health units.

Opioid Crisis and COVID-19

The ongoing opioid crisis has worsened since the onset of COVID-19 with a spike in overdose

deaths. The Alliance has been working with members and partners to [advocate for adequate resources](#), including personal protective equipment, for consumption and treatment services and overdose prevention sites to ensure they remain open. Earlier this month, we also issued an open letter calling on Ontario government to follow the example of British Columbia and make access to safe supply for illicit drugs available in Ontario. The open letter collected over 800 signatures in two days. We want to thank everyone who added their voice and we will continue to advocate for adequate supports for people who use drugs.



Supports for seasonal farm workers

With seasonal farm workers arriving in Ontario right now, and some already here, there is an urgent need for an adequate response to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. Last month, the Alliance sent a [letter](#) to Ontario's Ministers of Health and Labour followed by more specific recommendations outlined in a letter to the Ministry of Health and Ontario Health. The Alliance continues to work with members and partners to address gaps and concerns and ensure workers and providers have the necessary supports to keep them safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Supporting isolated seniors

Seniors are among the groups most vulnerable both to the virus itself and other COVID-19 related issues, such as isolation. The Alliance is in active conversations with Ministry of Health (Public Health branch) and Ministry for Seniors and Accessibility to support isolated seniors, those living on low income, and those facing complex barriers.

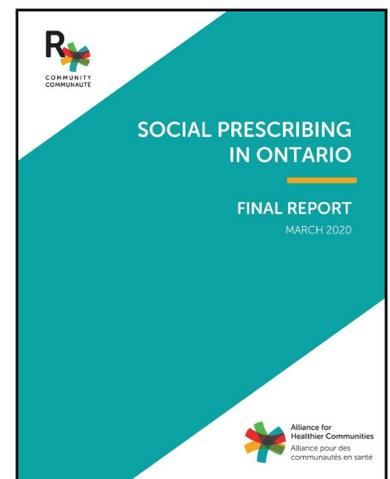
Our recommendations are focused on:

- Supporting both health and social needs in an integrated way
- Proactive outreach via check-in calls
- Connection to virtual activities and programming
- Development of a consolidated list of available resources across Ontario

Rx Community – Social Prescribing final report

In March, the Alliance wrapped up its *Rx: Community - Social Prescribing* pilot project with the [final report](#). Social and community supports are essential in times of physical distancing, self-isolation and quarantines, and in the aftermath of emergencies. As we continue to respond to COVID-19, social prescribing can offer a map to integrating health and social care and building local support networks.

(The Executive Summary and spotlight on a Francophone site in Temiskaming are available in [French](#), full translation will be available in the coming weeks.)



Alliance members demonstrate innovation and commitment to support clients and communities

Over the past few weeks, Alliance members have been finding new ways to continue delivering programs and services in the context of physical distancing and to address the new barriers that have emerged during the COVID-19 crisis. The stories we've heard during the interviews with members, as well as the stories shared in media, on Facebook and Twitter, demonstrate your endless capacity for innovation and unwavering commitment to supporting your clients and communities.

Here are some of the highlights:

- **68% of Alliance members are continuing to address food insecurity** in their communities, and many have ramped up these efforts: providing grocery gift cards, delivering food hampers, and replacing congregate dining programs with hot meal delivery.
- **54% of members see homelessness as an urgent concern.** Some are finding ways to leave centre doors open for access to washrooms; others are visiting people in shelters, doing street outreach, handing out tents, prepaid phones, and other supplies.
- **Harm reduction work continues, often with increased urgency.** Street outreach is a big part of it. Some centres are delivering harm reduction supplies to clients' homes.
- **Helping people stay connected is more essential than ever.** Many Alliance member centres are taking steps to identify their clients who are at risk. This includes seniors at risk of feeling isolated, other people who live alone, vulnerable families, people with mental health issues and those with complex health conditions. Clinicians, system navigators, health promoters, other staff and volunteers are making regular social check-in calls



Staff at Scarborough Centre for Healthy Communities worked with community partners and parent volunteers to distribute puzzles, games, books and activities for families to do together to approximately 85 families and over 150 children.

to these clients at high risk of becoming isolated and referring them, where possible, to appropriate supports offered by the centre or its local partners.

- **Health promotion and community programs have moved to virtual formats,** including seniors wrap-around programs, Pathways to Education, newcomer clinics, yoga classes, kids drop-in, and physiotherapy education sessions. Other online offerings include cooking classes hosted by a centre dietitian; Facebook groups moderated by peers and staff; virtual platforms for social support groups; and phone-based counselling. Some centres are posting tip sheets to help clients with ideas to stay healthy and connected.
- **Primary care, especially for chronic and complex health needs, remains essential.** Much of it is now taking place virtually or by phone. Where needed, clinical staff are also doing home visits and keeping doors open for urgent and time-sensitive needs like perinatal health, wound care, and insulin starts.

We've also heard your concerns and challenges. Access to personal protective equipment (PPE) remains an urgent need. Other pressing issues include:

- Access to assessment and testing for people who can't easily get to urban centres.
- Equity concerns for clients who don't have devices or data for virtual visits.
- Concern for the mental wellness and financial security of staff.

The Alliance will continue to support and champion members through this challenging time, as you continue to support and champion your clients and communities. We are planning knowledge-sharing webinars, continued advocacy efforts, and another round of phone surveys starting in a few weeks. Also make sure to check out our [blog](#) for regularly updated stories from across the province. If you have a story to share, please send it to communications@allianceON.org.

Member Support

Member support continues to be our priority through the COVID-19 crisis. We have been focusing on ensuring Alliance members have access to the necessary information and timely resources.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

We know many Alliance members are concerned about the shortages of PPE. At daily COVID situation table teleconferences, Alliance CEO, Adrianna Tetley, raises PPE for primary health care as a priority issue. In addition, we have been working with industry/trade groups to advocate for PPE donations to our members. It has already resulted in a 3,400 mask donation to Vibrant Healthcare Alliance from the Ontario Sewer and Watermain Construction Association. If you are considering approaching local agencies and businesses for PPE donations, we have developed [template letter](#) that you can use.

Operational issues

Quality Improvement Plans (QIPS) have been paused. Further deadlines will be reassessed in the near future and we will provide additional information by the end of June. If you wish to submit your QIP, the QIP Navigator will continue to accept them.

Multi-Sector Service Accountability Agreement (MSAA): The current MSAs are scheduled to expire July 1, 2020. We have received a verbal confirmation from Ontario Health that it will be extended past that date with more details to come. We've been in conversations with Ontario Health to get clarification on the following questions:

- Given COVID-19, will there be flexibility to reallocate resources within budgets including HR?
- Will the timeline for year-end reporting be extended?
- Will the reduction and changes in services for Q4 (2019/20) and Q1 (2020/21) be taken into consideration?



Vibrant Registered Nurse Linda Ta is pictured here with the donated PPE.

Digital supports

The Alliance's Performance Management and Information Management team has been working to support members' digital needs during the COVID-19 crisis. The goal is to promote confidence in the relationship between clients and providers and continue to reduce barriers – whether financial, geographic or knowledge-based – to health and wellbeing. Here are some of the highlights:

- The Alliance has mobilized its expertise in Digital Health to help members support effective and efficient virtual visits. We have deployed new service codes in the EMRs to capture COVID-19 related work and tell a cross-member story through the Business Intelligence Reporting Tool that collects EMR data from all participating members.
- The Alliance developed over nine business cases for funding support for these services. Although the funding was abruptly cancelled, the Alliance continues to refine the top three recommendations to meet the needs of members and clients. The recommendations are aligned with the province's Digital First for Health Strategy and the refreshed Alliance Information Management Strategy. Using a Quadruple Aim evaluation framework, these solutions promote both client/family and staff use.
- Digital equity is a growing area of advocacy. Not all clients or Alliance members can afford the equipment, broadband Internet service and specific IT expertise to support this new way of working. The Alliance was successful in working with TELUS to secure smartphones and SIM cards with pre-paid Internet plans to allow clients dealing with financial challenges receive service by phone or via a video visit.
- Making digital work safe, secure and reliable requires new skills. The Alliance has organized and supported multiple Professional Learning Events, virtual Communities of Practice around privacy and security with over 1000 attendees in the last year alone. On-site training for staff has evolved into a virtual delivery model. On-line tests, training and resources are all available through the Members Portal.

Keeping Alliance members connected

Log into the members portal

We have created a [group for COVID-19](#) resources. The information is updated regularly. Those who have an account on the portal have been added to the group automatically. If you don't have access to the portal, please contact Gabriela Panciu at gabriela.panciu@allianceON.org and she will send you the log-in information.

Sign up for our weekly bulletin

The bulletin is issued every Thursday and includes the most recent COVID-19 updates, media stories and stories from members.

Follow us on Twitter and Facebook

For any questions, please email communications@allianceON.org.

Upcoming events

Changes in the Health System Webinar, May 20 | 5:30 - 7:30 p.m. – will proceed as scheduled. During the webinar, we will provide the latest updates related to COVID-19. Register: <https://register.gotowebinar.com/register/7895870480660999949>

Annual General Meeting on June 9 will be a **virtual meeting** focusing on essential business, including Board elections, appointing an auditor and reviewing financial statements. Resolutions and other business will be postponed until the fall. We will share more details about the virtual AGM in the upcoming weeks.

Annual conference: Status under consideration

Member Complaint Process

Every member of the Alliance has the right to bring forward any complaints they may have about the Alliance.

When a complaint is brought to the Alliance through a board or staff member, the complaint is referred to the Board Chair and Chief Executive Officer. The Board Chair and Chief Executive Officer will determine if it is a policy matter or operations related complaint, and will follow the appropriate process outlined in the Alliance's Governance Policy #2C – Board Members' Code of Conduct.

The full process is available on our [website](#). If you have any questions or concerns please contact oleksandra.bunda@allianceON.org.