



SEMAIHM  
HOUSE  
SOCIETY

PENINSULA  
ESTATES HOUSING  
SOCIETY

THE  
SEMAIHM  
FOUNDATION

March 19, 2020

Re: COVID-19 Pandemic

Dear Semiahmoo House Society Community,

I am addressing this letter to the whole Semiahmoo House Society community: people we support, the families of people we support, home share providers, and all our staff members. I am addressing this letter to all of you because the time to have artificial separations between programs and services ends today for the next six weeks as we respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. SHS will be adapting our services to address the crisis as one community, with all our resources combining to support the people who will be most in need. This letter takes precedence over every and all communications I have had with you over the past three weeks.

First, let me say how grateful I am to be connected with all of you. The home share providers who no longer have day services they can access and who are supporting people in their homes 24/7 with love, care and compassion. SHS staff members who have put in long hours and have stepped up and volunteered to fill the gaps as we have shifted our services to address this crisis. People we support who have adjusted to the changes in our services and are understanding with us as we have done so. And, finally, the family members who have had to sacrifice their usual routines in drastic ways to support their loved one from home. I thank you all and I need to tell you something that will likely be hard to hear: It is going to get more difficult over the next six weeks as the COVID-19 pandemic does what it will inevitably do in our community. I am making the difficult decisions that I will describe below today because I know what our situation will be in two weeks' time, having seen what COVID-19 is doing in Italy and what is happening in the USA (which is only a few days ahead of Canada with the crisis) right now. What I am going to ask you to do will be difficult for a time, but it will save lives, and we will come out at the other end of this crisis stronger because of it.

The novel coronavirus spreads faster when people move frequently between different groups of people. We need to keep groups of people isolated from each other in order for the virus to stop spreading. Let's call these groups "families." A family could be a group home. A family could be a home share provider and the person they support. A family could be a tenant living in Chorus and their close relations and support staff. A family could be a biological family. What is important now is that these families are supported to have as few contacts as possible with other people in the community so that when COVID-19 hits hard, which it will, fewer people we support and their families will be impacted. This will mean that we will have the staff and resources to support those who are impacted by COVID-19.

### **Here is how we will be adapting our adult services**

**Creatively limit the number of different staff members who work within each group home.** This does not mean limiting the number of staff working in each home, rather it means ensuring that those staff members only work in **one** home. The spread of COVID-19 in North Vancouver was expedited by a staff member working at two different long term care facilities. We will be working within SHS and with other service providers to try to make this happen.

**Community Support Workers will only support people in the same physical space in urgent or crisis situations.** We either have or will be communicating with Home Share providers, people we support, and families to find out what the most critical needs are. Our goal is to have as little physical contact (being in the same physical space) with people we support as possible.

**Support “family” units to limit contact with other people in the community.** We will be adjusting support to do it remotely, using a variety of technology (primarily the phone). We will be adjusting support to make it more about supporting the “family” unit to limit contacts with other people in the community. This will include things such as picking up groceries and running errands to having a licensed counsellor dedicated to working with people who need support during the crisis (by phone or video conferencing). This type of support will be offered to both our home share contractors and to families with a loved one who SHS supports.

**When direct Community Inclusion support of people is necessary, we will limit the number of different staff doing that support.** This means that one or two staff only will support people who will need direct Community Inclusion support during the next six weeks and that this support will happen in a limited number of places, including the person’s home and the staff member’s home.

**Peninsula Child Care will remain open at present.** The Child Care will remain open as a possible option for the children of staff members and health care workers during the next six weeks. It is possible that we will close the Child Care to everyone except children of staff members or health care professionals on Monday, March 22.

### **What this all means to you.**

Many, if not all, of you will receive support that looks very different from the support that you usually receive. This support will be focused and directed at the people who urgently need it, which means that some of you will be supporting yourselves for the next six weeks (many of you who we have called told us that is what you wanted to do—thank you for that). We will still be checking in with everyone to see if anything changes and will adjust our supports accordingly.

We are asking that you to act as if it is two weeks from now (think of what Italy is like today). It’s likely that the Canadian government will put in restrictions that parallel some of SHS’s actions shortly. If we act like this now, we will be in a far better place two weeks from now, individually, as families, and as a community. I realize I am asking a lot, and some of you will question whether I am overreacting. All I can say is that I hope I am proven wrong and will take the consequences if that happens. Right now SHS is dealing with this crisis as a whole, and not worrying about funding barriers, different programs, etc. We will do what we need to do to address the crisis now and I will deal with the ramifications later. Please understand we are doing this with your best health and safety in mind.

The strategies and shifts in services described in this email will give us the best chance to be able to deal with a crisis that will be in full swing in two weeks’ time. Our staff members, having had limited contact with people by working from home, and remotely with people they support, will be healthy and ready to step in where they are most needed. Fewer SHS group homes, home share homes, and family homes will be affected by the virus because we have supported them to be in “family” units with fewer contacts with different people. This will allow us to be able to react quickly when people are in distress and support them thoroughly.

We are in for some difficult times and I want you to know that I care deeply about all of you and will do my utmost to ensure that you are healthy and safe as we make our way through the next six weeks.

If you have any questions, please address them with either Lise Boughen or Brianna Hopaluk below:

Lise Boughen Director of Inclusive Living <a href="mailto:l.boughen@shsbc.ca">l.boughen@shsbc.ca</a> 604 536 1242 ext. 227	Staffed Residential (Group Homes) Community Support Network (Home Share) Chorus Apartment Supports
Brianna Hopaluk Community Services Manager <a href="mailto:b.hopaluk@shsbc.ca">b.hopaluk@shsbc.ca</a> 604 536 1242 ext. 232 (until the return of Liz Deschenes)	Personal Development Services Acquired Brain Injury Services Personal Development Services Transitions Focus Group

Sincerely,



Doug Tennant  
CEO, Semiahmoo House Society

## Resources

While there is much media coverage of the COVID-19 virus it is important to be sure the information is reputable and up to date. Here are five sites that will keep you informed (google the name if this is not an electronic letter):

- [Public Health Authority of Canada](#)
- [BC Centre for Disease Control](#)
- [BC Ministry of Health](#)
- [Government of Canada Travel Advisories](#)
- [World Health Organization \(WHO\)](#)

SHS's communications about COVID-19 and our response can be found here:

[www.uniti4all.com/coronavirus-communications/](http://www.uniti4all.com/coronavirus-communications/)