

## **Triage Protocol Continues to Threaten Disability Community**

**By Brian Dunne, President and Chief Executive Officer at PHSS, and Ron Cristine, Executive Director at Community Living Chatham-Kent**

As advocates for Ontario's disability community, we continue to be dismayed at the priority the Ontario government appears to be placing on the lives of the 1.85 million Ontarians with disabilities. While we, and other organizations, have been asking for transparency on the critical care triage protocol, the updates received come from the media, not our provincial government.

Our government remains silent on the triage protocol that will be used by hospitals in the event resources are overwhelmed due to an influx of patients with COVID-19.

The recent news that an online calculator could disqualify adults with disabilities from receiving critical medical care is particularly concerning. Imagine having a loved one contract COVID-19, then learning they will be denied access to a ventilator based upon a score given by an online "short-term mortality risk" calculator. Sure, they may have challenges getting dressed or bathing on their own, but that does not mean they ought to be denied priority for ICU spots.

### **Community approach needed**

Despite being one year into COVID-19, the Ontario government continues to be secretive in its decision making around the critical care triage protocol as well as the vaccination rollout. They have had minimal consultation with the communities most impacted by their decisions, despite many efforts by these communities and organizations to collaborate and share expertise.

The Ontario Hospital Association is now sounding the alarm that critical care units are reaching a "saturation point" and "hospitals will be under extraordinary pressure to try and ensure equitable access to lifesaving critical care."

With COVID-19 cases rising rapidly, the lack of information regarding critical care triage is troubling for individuals who have disabilities, as medical staff may determine who receives life-saving critical care based a score generated by a calculator.

### **Valuing human life**

As organizations that value and recognize the contributions of individuals who have disabilities, we are asking the government to be transparent in how patients will be triaged to receive critical care.

We join the Ontario Human Rights Commission and other disability rights organizations, in demanding that our government publicly release the critical care triage protocols. We are also asking the government to ensure that individuals with disabilities receive the critical care they need if they become seriously ill.

We know that every human life is as valuable as the next. We hope that our provincial government will also see the value of all Ontarians – regardless of their ability.