

WHAT IS AN ESSENTIAL CARE PARTNER?

An Essential Care Partner is **one** member of a patient's family, community, support circle **or** a friend who will be able to visit the patient while they are staying with us or accompany the patient to an appointment. Essential Care Partners will help the patient with basic care needs, mental health and emotional support, and help us to organize the best quality patient safety and care.

Please note that our phases are not tied to the province's reopening phases and will look different since they are aligned with internal hospital activities. As of August 17, 2020, we are in Phase Two of welcoming back Essential Care Partners.

In the second phase of our visitor reintegration at Unity Health, at a minimum every patient who has been in our hospital for longer than three days can have one weekly Essential Care Partner visit if they are pre-approved by the clinical care team. Patients in the specific scenarios outlined below may have additional Essential Care Partner visits or attend an appointment with them if they are pre-approved:

- **Patients who are experiencing a life-altering event** (for example: a patient who is at the end of their life, who is giving birth, undergoing major surgery, or who is experiencing a mental health crisis)
- **Patients for whom a caregiver is the main advocate in their care** (for example: a child under the age of 18, or an individual who cannot effectively communicate their needs)
- **Patients whose Essential Care Partners are required to support care procedures and appointments** (for example: a patient who cannot get to an appointment on their own, or for whom the absence of their Essential Care Partner may pose a serious safety risk to other patients)
- **Patients who require a visitor to support hospital work** (for example: patients who require support at major transition times, like when they are being discharged)

If you are a caregiver and feel you fit the definition of an Essential Care Partner based on the information above, [please use this list to contact the area or clinic](#) where the patient is staying or where they will have their appointment in order to determine whether you qualify to visit.

We are working every day to align our procedures based on the spread of COVID-19 in our communities and guidelines from Toronto Public Health and the Ministry of Health. Depending on the virus' spread, we might need to scale back the amount of visitors, or we may be able to increase the amount of visitors by expanding our criteria for Essential Care Partner visits. Any updates to our procedures will be posted to [this webpage](#).

How does a patient choose someone to be their Essential Care Partner?

The patient decides who they would like to request as their Essential Care Partner. This may be a family member, friend, paid caregiver, community support worker or other individual as identified by the patient.

If the patient is unable to identify their own Essential Care Partner, their Substitute Decision Maker (define) can do so for them.

How many Essential Care Partners can a patient have?

Every patient may have one Essential Care Partner and one Designated Alternate. A Designated Alternate is someone who the patient designates as their alternative Essential Care Partner. Depending on the patient's condition, they may be allowed more than one visitor at a time.