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Human Services Confirms Fourth Covid-19 Death at Queen Louise; Staff Said to Mourn Loss; 8 Residents Still Positive

Coronavirus / **Published On August 26, 2020 10:15 AM /**

Staff Consortium **August 26, 2020**

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Queen Louise Home for the Aged in St. Thomas

The population of the Queen Louise Home for the Aged is down from 17 to 13 following the death of a fourth resident of the assisted living facility. The Department of Human Services on Thursday confirmed the fourth death, describing the fast-developing turn of events as a "stunning and painful" loss.

“While we are aware of the risks COVID- 19 poses to our most vulnerable population, seniors, especially those with underlying health issues, the loss of four precious residents in such a short period of time is stunning and painful for the team at Queen Louise Home and for all of the DHS

family,” said D.H.S. Commissioner Kimberley Causey-Gomez.

According to D.H.S., a little over two weeks ago, residents and staff of Queen Louise Home for the Aged (QLH) were tested for COVID-19 in a pro-active, planned and coordinated effort between the D.H.S. and the Department of Health (D.O.H.). D.H.S. leadership and staff, including the Queen Louise Home physician, D.O.H. and CDC physicians and staff and the Schneider Regional Medical Center met daily and partnered to put their best resources to addressing the unfolding reality of the coronavirus and its spread into the facility, according to the release.

Five residents who tested negative were moved to a separate non-congregate facility suited to their comfort and care and continue to receive care there, D.H.S. said. Re-testing of the staff and residents confirmed the five to still be negative and all nursing staff test results returned negative. Eight residents remain positive and are continuing to receive enhanced medical care and supervision at QLH after being thoroughly examined at Schneider Regional Medical Center, D.H.S. said.

The department said the residents were returned to QLH because they were, as of today, in "relatively good health."

“The nature of this virus and its effects on seniors is harsh and demands that we keep a constant and vigilant watch on them,” Ms. Causey-Gomez said. “Some have gone from nearly asymptomatic to critically ill in a matter of hours. While our minds and hands are busied with the tasks of quality care and mitigation, the hearts of the staff, who have been like family to our residents, are grieving the sudden loss of four of residents.”

D.H.S. Assistant Commissioner Michal Rhymer-Brown (whose responsibilities include oversight of the two Homes for the Aged), and Administrator Ernie Pennyfeather have been providing the extra support needed in a time like this, D.H.S. said. The department said Rhymer-Brown and Pennyfeather also shared that in addition to treating and monitoring all residents, they are speaking on the phone to them to ensure they are comforted and aware of the care they are being given.

Staff received additional mitigation training and best-practice tips from Schneider Regional Medical Center staff and physicians, and the QLH physician and the facility director, Virginia Raymond, remain in close contact with Dr. Tai Hunte-Ceasar and the Department of Health for enhanced support and resources, D.H.S. said.

“Unprecedented times, like the one we are living through, call for us all to lean on one another in new and different ways to effectively tackle the evolving nature of the pandemic. The Department of Health (DOH) has been and will continue to lend its full support for the good of the Queen Louise Home residents and staff and the Department of Human Services with the COVID-19 response,” said Commissioner of Health Justa Encarnacion. She went on to express her heartfelt condolences to the family and friends of the residents who passed away. “All of us at DOH share in the grief of the staff at the Queen Louise Home for the Aged who have lost someone that they too consider family.”

Re-testing not only occurred on St. Thomas, but also for all 22 residents at the Herbert Grigg Home for the Aged in St. Croix, where, to date, all residents have continued to test negative, according to the release.

Enhanced screening surveys and mandatory temperature checks were instituted and continue at all Department of Human Services facilities. Masks are required while in DHS facilities. Weekly assessments of available PPE are taken by all 12 divisions, according to the department. Regular

cleaning and sanitization of personal workspaces throughout the day is being aided through additional supplies. Additionally, staff at 24-hour facilities continue to have testing made available to them and all staff have been encouraged to get tested if they are experiencing symptoms of coronavirus or have any known exposure to someone who is positive for COVID-19, D.H.S. said.

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