

## Working Towards In-Person Support Groups

As we move forward through COVID and in to the fall/winter seasons Parkinson Association of Alberta will be determining whether or not a **Support Group** will take place in-person or via ZOOM/call-in on a case by case basis. Determining factors include current COVID outbreaks, client registration for the Group, AHS/Alberta Government guidelines, and/or weather.

With COVID and weather the ability to adjust quickly is important to keeping our Support Groups running smoothly. To ensure that we can pivot when necessary AND keep you informed quickly we are now asking you to register for each and every Support Group you attend.

This will ensure that:

- participants are aware of **WHERE** (in-person or ZOOM/call-in) the Group will take place;
- we have the ability to contact registrants to let them know if a location changes;
- we do not exceed maximum capacity (we have spacing and capacity restrictions at many locations); and
- we have enough participants to run a Group.

The **required registration** will also help us in the event that COVID contact tracing needs to occur. For more information and to register, please contact your Regional Client Services Coordinator or call us toll-free at 1-800-561-1911.

**It is our sincere hope and desire to get back to AND be able to continue to run Support Groups in-person. To accomplish this we are going to need YOUR HELP!!**

When it comes to in person Support Groups you are going to notice some changes (in addition to required registration):

- Chairs will be spaced 6 feet apart to adhere to safety guidelines
- We will not be serving (or encourage sharing of) communal coffee/snacks – you will need to bring your own – for you and/or your loved one ONLY
- Your Support Group may be in a new location
- Your Support Group may be divided into smaller groups within the room to ensure everyone can hear and communicate with each other.
- You will be asked basic COVID-safety questions as you enter the facility
- You will be strongly encouraged to wear a mask (I know this is a hot topic, so please read on)

Wearing a mask has become a bit of a contentious issue these days, and finding a way forward in regards to this issue has led to a lot of research and healthy debate – amongst our staff and our clients. What we've come up with is that there is no, one right answer. Maybe wearing a mask is mandatory in your community and maybe it isn't. Maybe you think masks provide some protection or maybe you don't. It is OK to feel how you feel on the subject. I would however ask you to consider this...

Your Client Service Coordinators – Ashley, Brienne, Courtney, Declan, Emma, Kat and Sherry – serve over 2800 individuals and families across Alberta. They travel to many communities across their Regions; and come into contact (either via Support Groups or one-on-one support) with people who are both quite healthy/low risk and medically vulnerable/high risk. They follow all the necessary protocols to keep not only YOU and the rest of the Parkinson’s community across the province safe, but themselves and their families as well. As much as they are able (and when appropriate) they maintain social distance, wear a mask and frequently hand wash/sanitize.

With your help...we can keep this incredible, caring and committed team safe, so they can continue to keep you and the rest of the Parkinson’s community healthy and safe! So what does this mean for you?

We are strongly recommending that you wear a mask at in-person Support Groups. Many communities have mandatory mask policies so it is a given, but some communities do not. For those that do not, we are humbly asking if you would consider wearing a mask for your Support Group. If not the entire time, at least until you are seated. Of course if you have any medical concerns when it comes to mask wearing (including anxiety) please just let your Coordinator know when you register!

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact your Regional Client Services Coordinator, or give me a call (780-425-6400 or toll-free 1-800-561-1911).

Warmest Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Brandi La Bonte', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Brandi La Bonte,  
Operations Manager