Provision for Patients, Residents, Clients, and Staff Requiring Facial Visualization

**Background**
There are many instances where a patient, resident, client, or staff member requires facial visualization to receive safe and effective care. Individuals with hearing deficits, communication impairments and cognitive deficits rely heavily on multiple senses and modalities including vision, hearing, touch, gestures, facial expression, and use of items in their environment (holistic communication) to maximize their comprehension and expression. Solid face masks impose barriers to people with communication disorders. Face masks dampen sound, degrade speech intelligibility, and remove visual cues on which listeners depend (ASHA, 2020).

Populations who rely heavily on facial visualization during interactions include those with:
- Hearing Loss (they rely on seeing your mouth to assist with verbal comprehension)
- Language comprehension deficits (e.g. aphasia)
- Speech disorders, including verbal apraxia, dysarthria
- Social-emotional capacity and regulatory challenges
- Significant cognitive impairment

**Health Canada** has acknowledged that special considerations are required in providing health services for people with disabilities. Clear front masks are an alternative to ensure facial visualization.

Procedure masks with clear fronts are not intended for routine use. They should only be used in specific, clinically-indicated scenarios and must be approved for use by the Unit/Area Manager.

**Considerations for Patient/Resident/Client and Staff Populations Appropriate for Procedure Masks with a Clear Front**

1. **Determine Need for Facial Visualization**
   - Based on information gained through chart review, phone calls, previous visits, family, occupational health and other stakeholders, determine if facial visualization is required for patient/resident/client assessment, intervention and care or occupational accommodation for staff. If patient/resident/client or staff does not need facial visualization, continue to use regular PPE. Consider the following factors:
     - Hearing loss
     - Language comprehension deficits (e.g. aphasia)
     - Speech disorder – verbal apraxia, dysarthria
     - Social-emotional capacity and goal of interaction (i.e. children and adults benefiting from visualizing the caregiver’s affect)
     - Significant cognitive deficits impacting comprehension and attention
     - Type of tasks to be completed in the session (e.g. verbal imitation)
     - Care is significantly impacted by inability to see health care worker’s mouth

2. **Considerations of providing services/care using a procedure mask with a clear front:**
   - Close contact with a clear front mask should be limited to those procedures/tasks that require facial visualization and where the patient/resident/client or staff demonstrates a benefit (e.g. those who rely heavily on lip reading)
   - Suitable for tasks that require facial visualization
Safe Usage of Procedure Masks with a Clear Front
The approved procedure masks with a clear front are Level 3, medical grade masks. Once approved for specific use, they are to be utilized in the same way as a ‘regular’ procedure mask. These are extended use items that are to be disposed if soiled, wet, damaged, and at breaks. These procedure masks ARE NOT appropriate for situations requiring a N95 respirator. These procedure masks ARE NOT a substitute for eye/face protection.