

CMA recommendations for:

# EMERGENCY FEDERAL MEASURES TO CARE FOR AND PROTECT CANADIANS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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MEDICAL  
ASSOCIATION

It is with a sense of urgency that the Canadian Medical Association (CMA) submits the recommendations herein for emergency federal measures that, taken together, will ensure Canadians receive appropriate care and that supportive measures are implemented for public health protection during the COVID-19 pandemic.

While Canada has made significant strides since SARS to establish and implement effective public health infrastructure, resources and mechanisms, the significant resource constraints across our health systems present a major challenge in our current response. Federal emergency measures must be developed in the context of the current state of health resources: hospitals across the country are already at overcapacity, millions of Canadians lack access to a regular family doctor, countless communities are grappling with health care shortages, virtual care is in its infancy, and so on.

Another core concern is the chronic underfunding and ongoing budget cuts of public health resources and programming. Public health capacity and leadership at all levels is fundamental to preparedness to respond to an infectious disease threat, particularly one of this magnitude.

It is in this context that the Canadian Medical Association recommends that the following emergency measures be implemented by the federal government to support the domestic response to the COVID-19 pandemic:

## 1) FEDERAL RECOMMENDATION AND SUPPORT FOR SOCIAL DISTANCING

In this time of crisis, Canadians look to the federal government for leadership and guidance. The single most important measure that can be implemented at this time is a consistent national policy calling for social distancing. This recommendation by the federal government must be paired with the resources necessary to ensure that no Canadian will be forced to choose between financial hardship — whether by losing employment or not being able to pay rent — and protecting their health.

The CMA strongly recommends that the federal government immediately communicate guidance to Canadians to implement social distancing measures. The CMA further recommends that the federal government deliver new financial support measures as well as employment protection measures to ensure that all Canadians may engage in social distancing.

## 2) NEW FEDERAL EMERGENCY FUNDING TO BOOST PROVINCIAL/ TERRITORIAL CAPACITY AND ENSURE CONSISTENCY

It is the federal government's role to ensure a coordinated and consistent national response across jurisdictions and regions. This is by far the most important role for the federal government in supporting an effective domestic response, that is, protecting the health and well-being of Canadians.

The CMA strongly recommends that the federal government deliver substantial emergency funding to the provinces and territories to ensure health systems have the capacity to respond to the pandemic.

Across the OECD, countries are rapidly stepping up investment in measures to respond to COVID-19, including significant investment targeting boosting health care capacity. In considering the appropriate level of federal emergency funding to boost capacity in our provincial/territorial systems, the CMA urges the federal government to recognize that our baseline is a position of deficit.

New emergency federal funding to boost capacity in provincial/territorial health systems should be targeted to:

- rapidly enabling the expansion and equitable delivery of virtual care;
- establishing a centralized 24-hour national information hotline for health care workers to obtain clear, timely and practical information on clinical guidelines, etc.;
- expanding the capacity of and resources for emergency departments and intensive care units;
- coordinating and disseminating information, monitoring and guidance within and across jurisdictions; and
- rapidly delivering income stabilization for individuals and families under quarantine.

Finally, the inconsistencies in the provision and implementation of guidance and adoption of public health measures across and within jurisdictions is highly concerning. The CMA strongly encourages the federal government enable consistent adoption of pan-Canadian guidance and measures to ensure the health and safety of all Canadians.

### 3) ENSURING AN ADEQUATE SUPPLY OF PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT FOR CANADIAN HEALTH CARE WORKERS AND ENSURING APPROPRIATE USAGE

The CMA is hearing significant concerns from front-line health care workers, including physicians, about the supply and appropriate usage of personal protective equipment. It is the CMA's understanding that pan-Canadian efforts are underway to coordinate supply; however, additional measures by the federal government to ensure adequate supply and appropriate usage are required. Canada is at the outset of this public health crisis — supply issues at this stage may be exacerbated as the situation progresses. As such, the CMA strongly recommends that the federal government take additional measures to support the acquisition and distribution throughout health systems of personal protective equipment, including taking a leadership role in ensuring our domestic supply via international supply chains.

### 4) ESTABLISH EMERGENCY PAN-CANADIAN LICENSURE FOR HEALTH CARE WORKERS

In this time of public health crisis, the federal government must ensure that regulatory barriers do not prevent health care providers from delivering care to patients when and where they need it. Many jurisdictions and regions in Canada are experiencing significant shortages in health care workers.

The CMA urges the federal government to support piloting a national licensure program so that health care providers can opt to practice in regions experiencing higher infection rates or where there is a shortage of providers. This can be accomplished by amending the Canadian Free Trade Agreement (CFTA) to facilitate mobility of health care workers.

Specifically, that the following language be added to Article 705(3) of the CFTA:

*(j) A regulatory authority of a Party\* shall waive for a period of up to 100 days any condition of certification found in 705(3)(a) - (f) for any regulated health care worker to work directly or indirectly to address the Covid-19 pandemic or any health care emergency. Any disciplinary matter emanating from work in any province shall be the responsibility of the regulatory authority of the jurisdiction where the work is performed. Each Party shall instruct its regulatory authorities to set-up a rapid check-in/check-out process for the worker.*

*\*Party refers to a signatory of the CFTA*

To further enable this measure, the CMA recommends that the federal government deliver targeted funding to the regulatory colleges to implement this emergency measure as well as targeted funding to support the provinces/territories in delivering expanded patient care.

## **5) ESTABLISH AN EMERGENCY NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT SERVICE FOR HEALTH PROVIDERS**

Health care providers may experience trauma and hardship in meeting the increasing health needs and concerns of Canadians in this time of crisis. The CMA strongly recommends that the federal government establish an emergency National Mental Health Support Services hotline for all health care providers who are at the front lines of patient care during the pandemic. This critical resource will ensure our health care providers have the help they may need as they care for patients, including helping them to deal with an increasing patient load.

## **6) IMPLEMENT A TARGETED TAX CREDIT FOR HEALTH PROVIDERS EXPERIENCING FINANCIAL LOSS DUE TO QUARANTINE**

In addition to supporting income stabilization measures for all Canadians who may benefit from support, the CMA recommends that the federal government establish a time-limited and targeted tax credit for health providers who may experience financial loss due to quarantine.

Many health care providers operate independently and may face significant fixed expenses as part of their care model. As health care providers may have an increased risk of contracting COVID-19, this may result in significant financial loss. A time-limited tax credit to ease this loss may help ensure the continued viability of their care model. Further, the CMA supports extending the federal tax filing timeline in recognition of the fact that health care workers and all Canadians are focused on emergency matters.

## **CLOSING**

The CMA's recommendations align with the OECD's call to action: "Governments need to ensure effective and well-resourced public health measures to prevent infection and contagion, and implement well-targeted policies to support health care systems and workers, and protect the incomes of vulnerable social groups and businesses during the virus outbreak."

Now is the time to ensure that appropriate leadership continues and that targeted investments are made to protect the health of Canadians.