

September 17, 2020

via email

Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau
Prime Minister of Canada
Langevin Building
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

RE: Future pandemic closures and the potential impact to health professions and Canadians

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau,

On behalf of the Extended Healthcare Professionals Coalition (EHPC) – a coalition of 11 national professional health and social organizations - we are writing today to request that the regulated health care providers we represent be deemed essential and allowed to provide care to Canadians should future shut-downs be deemed necessary. Further, this care should not be restricted to only emergency or urgent care, as was the case in many jurisdictions during the initial COVID-19 closures.

Our members are primary healthcare providers, are regulated and have access to public health directives and infection control protocols to guide their practice and safely deliver necessary care; which the people of Canada will continue to need even as we manage a pandemic.

For many people in Canada, the pandemic has had a huge impact on their health, well beyond the effects of the virus itself. We know that many Canadians have had to delay, defer, or halt treatments for various conditions, whether acute or chronic, due to the mandatory measures enacted to slow the spread of COVID-19. As a result, the health of many Canadians has deteriorated, pain has persisted or increased, mental health has worsened and preventive or maintenance treatments have not been delivered. Lack of access to needed health care is a longstanding issue for vulnerable populations, those with complex chronic health conditions and those who live in rural and remote parts of our country, and the pandemic makes access worse still. Many Canadians will require more complex, costly care and spend more time recovering and out of the workforce should there be ongoing delays in accessing services due to future mandatory closures.

Further, the closure of those health services deemed non-essential has had significant economic impacts for the professions that we represent, with many having to lay off staff temporarily or permanently to survive a period of closure or urgent-only care provision. The closures have also resulted in additional costs to government, as laid-off staff and clinics with reduced operations have accessed the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, among other programs. In a recent survey conducted by the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, health sector small businesses expected the new normal to cost them anywhere from 0 percent to 50 percent per month, while only 1 percent said they do not expect any added expenses.

Recurrent outbreaks resulting in similar shut-down constraints would mean permanent closure for many of these health care providers who are also small businesses. Sixteen percent of

health sector small businesses are considering bankruptcy or winding down their business. The majority of health sector small businesses who are considering bankruptcy cited that their business was no longer viable (71 percent) as the top reason for considering closure.¹

The health care providers we represent play an essential role in maintaining the health of Canada's workforce by providing services which prevent and treat conditions in communities; the cost of which is not born by our health care systems but by Canadians themselves and their extended third-party health benefit plans. Without timely access to health care in communities, more people stand to become sicker, placing a larger burden on the publicly insured health system.

The EHPC would like to acknowledge the tremendous efforts undertaken by the Government of Canada, the provinces and the territories, in working to obtain secure supplies of personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical supplies, and the investments made to develop and distribute a COVID-19 vaccine once one becomes available. That said, our members have also worked tirelessly to source their own supplies of PPE (often at extremely high costs), as they were typically not able to access government stockpiles. This is an additional expense that is borne directly by the health care providers, rather than the publicly insured system.

In closing, the EHPC is asking the government to ensure that the health care providers that we represent be recognized as essential and can remain available to Canadians who require their services should future shut-downs become a reality. This will help to ensure that Canadians can safely access the services they need to maintain their health so that they can in turn support themselves, their families, and the communities of which they are a part.

EHPC members would appreciate an opportunity for further consultation on this matter of critical importance to Canadians, to the economy, and to Canada's healthcare professionals. A representative of the EHPC will follow-up with your office regarding this request. Please direct any responses to the current EHPC chair, Fred Phelps at fred.phelps@casw-acts.ca.

Sincerely, EHPC Members:



Fred Phelps
Executive Director
Canadian Association of Social Workers



¹ Canadian Federation of Independent Business, Checking up on Health Sector Small Business as they Reopen, July 2020

Ondina Love, CAE
Chief Executive Officer
The Canadian Dental Hygienists Association



THE CANADIAN DENTAL
HYGIENISTS ASSOCIATION
L'ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE
DES HYGIÉNISTES DENTAIRE

François Couillard
Chief Executive Officer/Chef de la direction
Canadian Association of Optometrists



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF OPTOMETRISTS
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES OPTOMÉTRISTES

Hélène Sabourin
Chief Executive Officer
Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists



CAOT · ACE

Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists
Association canadienne des ergothérapeutes

Alison Dantas, MA, CEC, C. Dir.
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Canadian Chiropractic Association

Association
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James Armstrong, BSc, MBA, DMD
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K.R. Cohen Ph.D., C. Psych.
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CANADIAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION



SOCIÉTÉ
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Dawn Wilson
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Speech-Language & Audiology Canada
Orthophonie et Audiologie Canada
Communicating care | La communication à coeur



Nathalie Savoie, MBA, RD/Dt.P.
Chief Executive Officer
Dietitians of Canada



Joelle Walker
Vice President, Public Affairs
Canadian Pharmacists Association



About the Extended Healthcare Professionals Coalition (EHPC)

EHPC aims to improve the health and welfare of all Canadians; promote excellence and innovation in health research and practice and promote the advancement, development, dissemination, and application of knowledge that advances health, social services and well-being for Canadians.

Our membership includes:

- Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists
- Canadian Association of Optometrists
- Canadian Association of Social Workers
- Canadian Chiropractic Association
- Canadian Dental Association
- Canadian Dental Hygienists Association
- Canadian Pharmacists Association
- Canadian Physiotherapy Association
- Canadian Psychological Association
- Dietitians of Canada
- Speech-Language & Audiology Canada

cc: Hon. Erin O'Toole, Leader of the Opposition
Hon. Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health
Hon. Michelle Rempel Garner, Critic for Health

Hon. Chrystia Freeland, Minister of Finance
Hon. Pierre Poilievre, Critic for Finance
Dr. Theresa Tam, Chief Public Health Officer