

February 2, 2021

The Honourable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Room 281, Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, ON, M7A 1A1

RE: Chamber Network calls for coordinated approach to reopening Ontario's economy

Dear Premier Ford,

Thank you for your continued leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic. As the situation evolves, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) is receiving concerns from the business community and communicating them to all levels of government.

In the middle of a once-in-a-century pandemic, it is difficult to think beyond confronting the immediate demands of COVID-19. Vaccine deployment and distribution are certainly top of mind for all Canadians. However, even as we continue supporting each other today, we must also begin looking over the horizon to ensure businesses are prepared for the province's reopening and recovery. It is never too early to start planning how our province and economy can emerge stronger while doing everything necessary to avoid further lockdowns.

While we recognize that the Chief Medical Officer of Health has stated that virus rates must fall below 1000 daily cases for the province to consider reopening, it will be important for the business community to be ready when the time comes.

Each region's experience differs significantly across the province when it comes to transmission rates, tracking and tracing capacity, and other variables. However, when the time comes businesses of all sizes need a predictable and coordinated effort to ensure society reopens in a harmonized fashion that prioritizes individual safety as well as economic stability. There are several critical elements:

- **A readiness plan with a focus on sectors and regions hardest hit.** It is critical that Ontario's employers are aware of how reopening will take place step-by-step so they can properly prepare.
- **Advanced notice.** Businesses and their employees need sufficient time to prepare to get back to work.
- **Clear guidelines.** Businesses need to clearly understand the rules and how they will be enforced. Inconsistent and unclear public health guidelines cause confusion among businesses, employees, and consumers alike, and make it difficult for individuals to take appropriate action to protect themselves and their communities.
- **Fulsome communication.** Educational training via virtual workshops in advance of reopening would equip employers with practical information to help them keep staff and customers safe.

- **Workforce management systems.** Employers in Ontario should adopt a scalable digital software tool for routine self-screening and assessment by employees, as part of a comprehensive workforce management system.
- **Rapid testing.** Sufficient and timely testing and tracing gets employees back to work quickly, ensuring continued productivity and reduced strain on families.
- **Evidence-based decision making.** A strong testing and tracing apparatus ensures the province can accurately assess where and how the virus is spreading, so that efforts to target restrictions can be confidently based on solid data.
- **Continued supports for those who need it most.** Finally, continued timely and accessible supports for business will prevent further layoffs, closures, and bankruptcies.
- **Leveraging private sector to support vaccine distribution and deployment.** Businesses will be critical in supporting public awareness, logistical capabilities, and best practices.

We deeply appreciate your government's efforts thus far to collaborate with stakeholders and other governments on many of these elements, and we appreciate your ongoing work to advance a safe and efficient reopening of the province.

As the government explores options to safely re-open the economy, it is worth noting that businesses already adhere to a number of existing health and safety protocols and will do their part to support a safe re-opening. The business community will continue to prove their commitment to safety protocols to protect their worker and customers to keep their doors open.

Public health and safety are priorities for all Ontario businesses. We will continue to monitor and assess new developments pertaining to COVID-19 closely and work with our members, partners, and government to support Ontario business.

Sincerely,



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