

March 3, 2021

The Honourable Christine Elliott
Minister of Health
Ministry of Health
5th Floor, 777 Bay St.
Toronto, ON
M7A 2J3

Re: Vaccine Roll-out and Distribution in Ontario

Dear Minister Elliott,

As you know, the Ontario Chamber of Commerce (OCC) launched the Health Policy Council (HPC) in April 2020. Composed of a diverse cross-section of OCC members, the Council has been meeting regularly to exchange ideas, inform OCC priorities, and provide government with timely recommendations as it pertains to health policy in Ontario.

We appreciate the recent discussions that the Chamber has had with you and your colleagues in government as we actively work to fight COVID-19. Now more than ever, we know that our members' insights will be critical to supporting the health care system today and leading future recovery efforts.

As your government works to distribute the vaccine to every corner of the province, we wanted to reiterate some of the recommendations informed by our HPC:

1. Prioritize communications.

Ontarians have many questions about the vaccine. The public wants to know when they will receive the vaccine and who will administer it (i.e., doctors, hospitals, pharmacists, and/or Public Health Units or PHUs). With all these unknowns, some Ontarians are getting anxious and are calling their physician in search of information. If not addressed, this situation could overwhelm our primary care providers and regulated health professionals at a time when the system is facing numerous pressures. To ease the public's confusion and anxiety, as well as build public trust, the province's communications to the public should:

- Use clear and plain language and avoid jargon and acronyms, given the diversity of Ontarians who are receiving these communications (i.e., newcomers, seniors, etc.);
- Provide relevant details;
- Provide realistic timelines and communicate in a transparent way; and
- Ensure messaging is communicated in multiple formats and mediums, so that it reaches as many Ontarians as possible and does not inadvertently exclude certain demographics who may not have access to certain technologies or platforms.

In addition, the province should invest in continued public education that educates those who have been vaccinated on the importance of continuing to wear masks, physically distancing, and observing hand hygiene to protect Ontarians who have not yet been vaccinated. Continuing to observe these public health measures will remain important – even after Ontarians receive the COVID-19 vaccine.

Further, when it comes to sharing information about the vaccine and COVID-19 more generally, the province should develop communications that are specifically tailored to employers and employees, and include content in these communications pieces that are relevant to this particular audience.

Finally, the province should engage relevant and respected stakeholders, such as professional associations and non-governmental organizations, to disseminate COVID-19 information to build public trust in the vaccine.

Recognizing the importance of communications during the pandemic, the OCC's recently launched Ontario Vaccination Support Council (OVSC) – whom you met with in mid-February. A major focus of the Council will be around communications and public awareness. As you know, the group is comprised of over 150 stakeholders, including businesses, chambers of commerce, boards of trade, non-profit organizations, unions, and post-secondary institutions. The OVSC looks forward to bolstering the province's public education campaigns and disseminating tailored communications to the business community.

2. Address vaccine hesitancy and build vaccine literacy.

As the province continues its vaccination efforts, it must tackle vaccine hesitancy and build Ontarians' vaccine literacy. In January, the Ontario Medical Association (OMA) in partnership with Advanced Symbolic Inc. [found](#) that misinformation about COVID-19 vaccines is spreading among all age groups on social media, specifically those:

- Under the age of 25 had strong doubts about the vaccine and believe it is dangerous, untested, and largely experimental;
- Aged 25 to 34 held various conspiracy theories about the vaccine; and
- Aged 35 to 44 were more supportive of a vaccine and less likely to circulate misinformation online.

To address this, the province should develop public awareness campaigns that build vaccine literacy and trust in the vaccine. This includes providing information on the potential, temporary side effects reported during COVID-19 vaccine trials. Targeted campaigns for populations who are at higher risk for contracting the virus (i.e., demographics with a low-income), are vaccine hesitant, or have distrust towards the health care system due to historic incidents of abuse, should also be developed. Campaigns and communications materials about the vaccine should also be culturally sensitive to ensure they resonate with diverse demographics in Ontario.

To develop campaigns that build vaccine literacy and address vaccine hesitancy, the province should work with relevant stakeholders, such as the OMA and Canadian Medical Association. Developing these materials alongside trusted public health stakeholders will help build public trust and confidence in the vaccine. The province should also regularly monitor vaccine confidence levels in Ontario and disseminate this information to vaccine administrators to guide their decision-making.

3. Leverage the private sector.

While the first phase of the pandemic saw the province leverage the private sector to gather personal protective equipment (PPE) and other supplies, the province should now leverage the private sector to aid in the deployment and distribution of vaccines. The province should explore all the available channels to expedite this process as delays have real economic and public health consequences for Ontarians. Innovative collaboration with the private sector and other stakeholders will be key to the province's historic vaccination efforts.

To this end, the OVSC is in the process of developing a directory of volunteer resources, services, and capabilities within the Ontario Chamber Network that could be used by governments, hospitals, and PHUs to support vaccination efforts. The OVSC looks forward to continuing to work with the province as it leverages the private sector's expertise to speed up vaccinations across Ontario.

4. Ensure physicians are integrated into the vaccine roll-out plan.

For Ontario's vaccine rollout to be successful, it is crucial that physicians be consulted and integrated into all phases of the planning process. For example, physicians need to be informed about when they and their staff will be vaccinated, as well as how they will be ordering vaccines, how vaccines will be distributed, what the prioritization framework will be, and what they should be telling their patients. Ontario doctors will play an important role in the vaccination process, so their ongoing engagement will be critical.

5. Be proactive, where possible.

While the province has made progress on several issues, there remains uncertainty when it comes to how travel will resume in Ontario, whether vaccine passports will be developed, if those passports will determine who can travel internationally or inter-provincially, or if those passports will include all vaccinations, not just the COVID-19 vaccine. Accordingly, the province should take a proactive approach by determining the feasibility, as well as legal and ethical considerations, around vaccine passports. The province should also begin planning how it will go about vaccinating children when an approved vaccine for kids under the age of 16 becomes available.

While many challenges lie ahead, Ontario's business community stands ready to support the province's vaccination efforts. We appreciate the opportunity to reiterate the feedback we received from our HPC. We will continue to monitor and assess new developments pertaining to COVID-19 closely and work with our members, partners, and all levels of government to provide support to Ontario business.

Sincerely,



Rocco Rossi
President and CEO
Ontario Chamber of Commerce