



March 23, 2020

Dear Prime Minister and Premiers:

I am writing you today in my capacity as President and CEO of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, but also as a former Minister of National Health and Welfare and as the person who was responsible for replacing the War Measures Act with modern emergencies legislation.

First, I want to thank each of you for your leadership in responding to the most serious crisis of our lifetimes. You are faced with the responsibility of making decisions on which the lives and economic well-being of Canadians depend and you must do so with information that is incomplete in conditions that are changing at an accelerating pace.

The COVID-19 emergency continues to worsen, both around the world and here in Canada. We are fortunate that the disease came to Canada later than in other countries and that our governments have acted more quickly than many others. However, the evidence is clear: without bold, decisive measures that none of us would consider in ordinary times, the pandemic will overwhelm our health care system and cripple our economy.

Canadians were encouraged by the Prime Minister's announcement earlier today that you will confer this evening about the most effective measures that can be taken. I urge you to act in a way that is both daring and coordinated.

This afternoon both Quebec and Ontario announced major new measures to ensure public safety. Other jurisdictions, including Nova Scotia, have already taken significant measures, and no doubt every level of government in Canada is contemplating similar steps.

Whether you choose to invoke the federal Emergencies Act or to continue to employ provincial legislation, I urge that you consider the following elements, each of which is essential:

1. Governments must clearly define what types of businesses and services should continue to operate while others are shut down. We need to be able to ensure security of food supply, critical transportation, fuel, medical supplies, communication infrastructure, financial services and other businesses that provide services critical to public welfare. If warranted, governments should have the ability to suspend the restrictions at an earlier date than anticipated or to extend them, based on conditions in place at the time.



2. We must ensure that Canadians can meet their needs during this period of reduced economic activity. In addition, it is critical that governments significantly increase the support provided to businesses to continue to employ their workers. Without a substantial increase in that support, thousands of businesses will not reopen after the immediate crisis has subsided. Instead of forcing Canadians to rely on employment insurance or public assistance, both the psychological well-being of workers and the other supports provided by employee benefit plans require that they continue to have jobs.
3. Standards should be national in scope. It makes no sense to have regulations for the size of crowds or the types of businesses that should continue to operate that vary greatly from one jurisdiction to another. National standards are also important because of the nature of our supply chains, where an essential business in one province may rely on inputs from another. As conditions improve, it may be possible to start restoring services in some areas or sectors while maintaining them in others, but at this time there should be as much coherence as possible.

Let me assure you that, as we mobilise Canadian society, Canada's businesses are prepared to bring their ingenuity, their industrial strength and their resources to win this fight. Many companies in all parts of our country are already ensuring that Canadians have the food and medicine they need, that their homes are heated and that we can communicate with one another despite being physically isolated, and that our frontline medical workers have the protective equipment that will permit them to help all of us. Many other companies are retooling to produce medical equipment and other supplies that will be critical to our success. They are prepared to do whatever they can to support your efforts to ensure the physical and economic well-being of our citizens in every part of this country.

Sincerely,

Hon. Perrin Beatty, P.C., O.C.
President and Chief Executive Officer
Canadian Chamber of Commerce

c.c. *Hon. Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs*
Hon. Bill Morneau, Minister of Finance
Hon. Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health
Hon. Bill Blair, Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness