

March 16, 2020

Hon. Bill Morneau, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Finance
Finance Canada
bill.morneau@canada.ca

Re: Emergency federal measures to care for and protect Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic

Dear Minister Morneau:

It is with a sense of urgency and apprehension that I write to you with recommendations 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.

Firstly, let me acknowledge that the federal government has taken important and early measures to support our public health response. However, while I commend the actions to date of the federal government, along with provincial and territorial governments, the reality is that substantially more action is needed to protect the health and well-being of Canadians, including our health care providers at the front line of care.

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 to our current response. Federal emergency measures must be developed in the context of the current state of health resources: hospitals across the country are 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:

- A clear federal recommendation that Canadians uniformly implement social distancing, paired with supportive financial and economic measures
- Federal leadership to ensure the acquisition and of the domestic supply of personal protective equipment for health care providers, along with the dissemination of clear guidelines on appropriate usage, ensuring dissemination to community-based and primary care clinics

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- New federal emergency funding to boost capacity of our health care systems and social supports as well as ensure a consistent and coordinated response by provincial/territorial governments
- Establishment of emergency pan-Canadian licensure for health care workers
- Establishment of an emergency National Mental Health Support Service for health care workers
- Implementation of a targeted tax credit to alleviate the negative financial impacts experienced by health providers if they are quarantined following patient care

An overview of these recommendations, including their rationale, is provided in the attached brief.

These 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."

Once again, the CMA commends the federal government for its early action. Now is the time to ensure that appropriate leadership continues and that targeted investments are made to protect the health of Canadians. I welcome the opportunity to discuss these recommendations with you.

Sincerely,



Sandy Buchman, MD, CCFP(PC), FCFP
President

.cc Health Minister Patty Hajdu, P.C., M.P.

Attachment: CMA Recommendations for: Emergency federal measures to care for and protect Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic