

Briefing Note

To: Hon. Patty Hajdu - Minister of Health
From: Tahiya Bakht
Date: August 10, 2020
Re: Call with Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada

The purpose of this note is to provide you with background information in preparation for your call with members of the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (Royal College)

Timeline/Deadlines

The call is scheduled for Tuesday August 11th at 1pm

Summary

The Royal College is the regulatory college that oversees the medical education of specialists in Canada. It sets national standards for medical education and continued professional development for a variety of medical specialties. The college does not issue licenses or serve as a disciplinary body and instead serves as the regulatory authority that ensures that the training and evaluation of medical and surgical specialists maintain certain standards of quality.

The Royal College has submitted recommendations to the federal government for additional investments in the health care system. Below are the Royal College's three areas of focus:

- 1. Create an emergency fund to build surge capacity of provincial/territorial health care systems. As you know, more than 300,000 surgeries have been postponed due to the pandemic, as well as countless diagnostic tests and other forms of care.**

What the government has done so far:

- In early spring 2020, we transferred \$500M to PTs for health care system preparedness and mitigation
- In mid-July, the PM announced the Safe Restart Agreement, which provides \$19B over the next 6-8 months to support PTs for a potential resurgence. This includes:
 - o \$700M to support health care system capacity
 - o \$500M to support Canadians who have challenges with mental health or substance use
 - o \$740M to support vulnerable Canadians, including those living in long term care
 - o \$7.5B for PPE for health and non-health essential workers

- 2. Accelerating the implementation of virtual care.**

What the government has done so far:

- In May, the PM announced \$250.5M to support virtual care and digital tools for Canadians.
 - Of the funding, \$150M will flow to PTs to focus on secure messaging, file transfer, secure videoconferencing, remote patient monitoring, patient online access to test results and more.
 - Canada Health Infoway will receive \$50M to support PTs as they implement these new initiatives
 - In June 2020, the government announced the Universal Broadband Fund to help bring high speed internet to rural and remote areas
- 3. Supporting health care providers through paid leave for workers who don't have access to benefits, given the increased stress and burden placed on healthcare professionals**

What the government has done so far:

- \$3B to PTs to increase the wages of low-income essential workers
- As part of the \$700M under the Safe Restart Agreement, PTs can choose to use funds to cover additional staff
- The Safe Restart Agreement also includes a data pillar to better understand the impact of COVID-19 on healthcare workers

Considerations

- The Royal College has had to respond to criticisms from residents across the country after it made the decision to defer exams for medical residents because of COVID-19. The exams were deferred to the Fall and graduating residents were able to continue working in hospitals after seeking a temporary license from their province. Over 2000 residents signed an open-letter calling for a one-time process whereby residents are either certified based on assessments of their training or through exams delivered in an alternative format
 - o Alternative formats are not always the answer - 4th year medical students in Canada who must take a qualifying exam administered by the Medical Council of Canada are now taking an online test – but there have been a series of system failures during the first month of exams
- Given the high pass rate of the Royal College's exams for residents, many residents are of the opinion that the exams are an unnecessary expense and are essentially obsolete.

Points to Register

- I want to acknowledge the efforts and contributions made by the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada during the pandemic.
- I appreciate the organization's commitment to its members and their service to the health and well-being of all Canadians. Not only in times such as this pandemic, but for all the work that the Royal College does, and the important role it plays.
- Surge Capacity:
 - o In March 2020, we transferred \$500 million to provinces and territories for critical health care system needs preparedness and mitigation efforts and to ensure that financial considerations do not become an obstacle to hospitals and health systems making the necessary preparations. This included access to testing, acquisition of equipment, and enhanced surveillance and monitoring.

- On July 19, the Prime Minister announced that we had reached a Safe Restart Agreement with provinces/territories – \$19 billion in federal investments, to help provinces and territories restart the economy over the next six to eight months, while making Canada more resilient to possible future waves of the virus.
- This includes:
 - \$700 million to support health care system capacity to prepare for potential resurgence of COVID-19, including surge capacity, field hospitals and additional staff; and to reduce the backlog of non COVID cases;
 - \$500 million to provinces and territories to address immediate needs and gaps in the support and protection of people experiencing challenges related to mental health or substance use; and
 - \$740 million to support one-time costs over the next six to eight months for measures to prepare for a potential resurgence and to prevent and control infections in long-term care, home care and palliative care, along with support for other vulnerable populations.
- Virtual Care
 - We are learning much from the current COVID-19 pandemic, and I am impressed by the resiliency of the health care system and its ability to adapt.
 - This government recognizes the importance of virtual care. That is why we are working closely with provincial and territorial governments to support them in their efforts to rapidly adopt and implement virtual care within their health care systems.
 - That included \$230M we committed to helping Canadian health systems meet health care needs through virtual approaches and digital tools. The majority of this funding will support provincial and territorial efforts to strengthen their capacity to provide virtual access to needed services, including through telephone, text and/or video-conferencing.
 - We know that reaping the potential of virtual care tools for all Canadians means that all Canadians must also have improved access to high-speed internet. The Government has made increasing connectivity a key priority.
- Helping health care providers
 - We are working to ensure health care workers have the personal protective equipment they need. We are doing this through collaborative bulk procurement with the provinces and territories, building domestic production capacity, and identifying potential alternatives and ways to extend product life.
 - We can all agree that there has been an unprecedented rise in mental distress due to the COVID-19 pandemic. It is fundamental to have support systems in place.
 - As you know, we launched the Wellness Together Canada portal to connect Canadians to different levels of support depending on what they need and we're looking at ways this portal can be expanded to specifically address the needs of health care workers.