

Daily Briefing to Parliamentarians Call Summary: March 25, 2020

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Hi all,

Today's briefing to Parliamentarians on COVID-19 was conducted by Rhonda Kropp, along with other officials from Finance, GAC, PS, CRA, AgCan CBSA, ISC, SC, ISED, IRCC, PSPC and ESDC. Ms. Kropp began by giving a brief update from the public health perspective. Globally, there are 420,000 cases as of today in 190 countries. As of today there are 3197 cases in Canada and 27 deaths. 125,000 people have been tested. 1013 cases in Quebec have been reported, a significant increase due to changes in their methodology. About 10,000 tests per day are being conducted in Canada.

Final number of call participants: 181

Number of questions unanswered: 6

Questions asked by Parliamentarians include;

- Senator Mary Jane McCallum (ISG): There are still workers travelling to northern work camps, where transmission and infection is a very real possibility. These work camps are often close to vulnerable indigenous communities. How will the departments work to reduce or close these work camps which represent a viable means of transmission.
 - o Ms. Kropp: We are working with PTs to create evidence based guide lines that will create guidance to reduce the spread of the virus. FPTs are meeting every week to discuss all evidence and decision making, and are working to apply general infection control guidelines to all settings, including to these work camps ideally.
- MP Rachel Harder(CPC; Lethbridge): As of right now, funeral service providers are not considered essential workers. Why is this, given death is part of the natural cycle of life?
 - o PS: The government of Canada has strategy for protecting critical infrastructure. The Government of Canada does not determine all essential services, provincial authorities have the flexibility to determine what is deemed essential in their respective jurisdictions.
- MP Dave Epp (CPC; Chatham – Kent – Leamington): Has Health Canada rolled out protocols for isolating incoming seasonal workers or a framework for this?
 - o Ms. Kropp: Guidance is forthcoming but its an important issue for the government.
- MP Cathy McLeod (CPC; Kamloops – Thompson – Cariboo): Is there an update on how people can more easily create a CRA MyAccount?
 - o CRA: People can apply for new benefits through the MyAccount portal, or an automated IBR. You can accesses CRA account via your MyService Canada account as

well. In signing up for it, you're asking a number of ID questions beforehand. The process is relatively straightforward, and Canadians should be used to it. You can call a CRA agent to get a security code, but you don't need to wait for the code to apply for the new benefit.

- MP Laurel Collins (NDP; Victoria): In regards to people who are now looking for jobs but weren't employed last year, will they be eligible for the new benefits being announced.

o ESDC: One must be affected somehow by COVID-19 and must have made 5,000 in the last year. We tried to make it a pretty low bar, but these people wouldn't qualify.

- MP David Sweet (CPC; Flamborough - Glanbrook): Jurisdictions who have been able to flatten the curve are the ones who have been able to test repeatedly. What are the updates on improving our testing capabilities.

o Ms. Kropp: We want to reduce the amount of infections, including through isolation between those who are sick from those who are susceptible and vulnerable, as well as finding a vaccine. Testing features prominently in FP/T conversations, we need to actively understand the national testing situation, and look into bulk producing more. The NML has been working to produce more low supplies of reagents. We need to prioritize and make sure tests are used judiciously via triaging and using them on those who really need it. Must have a set of consistent principles with testing, and were ensuring that we have an adequate supply that's being used appropriately.

- MP Paul Manly (NDP; Nanaimo – Ladysmith): People who are being laid off also are losing medical benefit, this an issue. Also, when will we get an agreement to assist homeless populations who have lost space, and for non-profits who have lost staff.

o Ms. Kropp: Homeless populations have figured in prominently in FPT space, and it's a group that's needs attention for sure. The question is really related to provincial and territorial mandates.

o ESDC: There is \$150 million for homeless via the Reaching Home Program, we are working on implementation as quickly as we can, and we are trying our best to expedite the money going to shelters and non-profits.

- MP Carol Hughes (NDP; Algoma – Manitoulin – Kapuskasing): Can we get a briefing for our staff for employment insurance changes? Also, how is mandatory self isolation going to be rolled out, as it's a big problem. How will enforcement work, and will there be a hotline to report those who aren't following it.

o Ms. Kropp: The legislation came into effect today, which does require travelers to self-isolate, and those who are symptomatic to isolate, either at their home or a federal facility. Enforcement is a concern, but the legislation makes this possible. The general population is recommend to still self isolate in general, and provinces will enforce other measures. This new legislation is dedicated towards returning passengers.

- MP Elizabeth May (GPC: Saanich – Gulf Islands): Will foreign students be able to access relief funds to pay their rent and expenses?

o ESDC: We don't have much to say, we're not aware of anything taking place that targets international students now specifically, but the current measure has the bar set low with the \$5k benchmark. We are looking to help those who fall in the cracks.

- Senator Mary Coyle (ISG): When will a national testing strategy be in place. Where do we stand in the availability of testing materials, and how many do we have?

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- Ms. Kropp: Strategy will be put into place with FP/Ts, but its already being played out. We have already begun triaging testing with those who are vulnerable and these high priority people. Going forward, we are looing to forecast what we will have in the future. Stock taking is being done to prepare for the worst case scenario. One way to ensure we will have materials, is to ensure that were doing our best to ensure that Canadian industry is supported and that we know how to best use the supply chain.
 - ISED: One of the priorities in working with the private sector is to support the building of capacity to produce medical supplies, as well as vaccines and various therapies. Looking to partner with those in the automotive sector as an example to prepare things such as PPE.
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- MP Gord Johns (Courtenay-Alberni): Will there be federal guidance on people knowing what their rights are regarding when they should or shouldn't work or if they feel unsafe. Also, if local hospitals don't have access to the number of tests available, it affects their ability to respond to the virus.
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- Ms. Kropp: Will relay the second message in the next PT meeting. We have heard the ask for clear guidance for workers in their environments. Current infection prevention guidelines apply, but we're looking at applying new guidelines to arm them with information to take the public health action the need to protect themselves, but not necessarily their rights which is a provincial authority.
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- MP Greg Mclean (CPC; Calgary Centre): There have been mixed messages on flights to Cusco, where 100s of Canadians are. Can we speak to foreign affairs for an update on this?
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- GAC: We've had 2 flights out of Lima, with more flights scheduled for Friday. Connecting flights to Lima will happen as well to get people on flights back home. The situation has been complicated as the country is under martial law, but we have more flights on the way and communications are going out to people there.
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Please note that this report is a working draft and is for internal PHAC use only. If you have any questions/comments, please let me know.

Best,

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