

Daily Briefing to Parliamentarians Call Summary: March 19, 2020

From : "Brickles, Spencer (PHAC/ASPC)" <spencer.brickles@canada.ca>

To: "Cluney, Craig (PHAC/ASPC)" <craig.cluney@canada.ca>, "StJames, Louise (PHAC/ASPC)" <louise.stjames@canada.ca>, "Lavoie, Marlene (PHAC/ASPC)" <marlene.lavoie@canada.ca>, "Gargum, Taha (PHAC/ASPC)" <taha.gargum@canada.ca>, "Frost, Evan (PHAC/ASPC)" <evan.frost@canada.ca>

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Hi all,

Today's briefing to Parliamentarians on COVID-19 was conducted by Dr. Njoo, along with other officials from Finance, ESDC, PS, CBSA and ISC. Dr. Njoo began by giving a brief update from the public health perspective. As of 2pm, 801 cases and 10 deaths. 10 cases at CFB Trenton are related to the repatriation of the Grand Princess. Over 55, 000 COVID-19 tests have been conducted across the country.

Questions asked by Parliamentarians include;

- Senator Mary Jane McCallum (ISG): There is very little communication from the AFN to regional indigenous communities in Manitoba. There is also a general lack of resources and issues with private vehicles for isolated communities. How will ISC coordinate to ensure that correct action is taken with vulnerable indigenous communities.
 - o *ISC: Daily calls are happening with certain indigenous leaders, the Red Cross is looking to evaluate indigenous communities for what supplies are needed, and looking at providing more infrastructure. ISC will follow up on an apparent lack of medical supplies, but indigenous communities in Manitoba have received a recent shipment of PPE.*
- Senator Frances Lankin (ISG): What is being done to add more telephones lines and IT capacity to provide info to Canadians? How is the government getting information out to people who don't speak an official language, and to those younger households who don't have televisions and radio.
 - o *ESDC: Accessibility is important. Volume of applications has placed strain on capacity, and the department is adding everything it can to shift resources to tackle this surge. The CRA will deliver EI services and other proposed solutions as well in a timely manner to Canadians.*
 - o *ISC: ISC is in touch with the association of friendship centres , and is being advised when they are shutting down, and ISC is offering support in forms of finances and other assistance to them as well to avoid this.*
- Senator Paula Simons (ISG): Will there be economic measures taken to protect those who are self isolating, and if the government is working to shut down work camps in northern Alberta in which plane traffic doesn't go through traditional airport screenings.

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- *ESDC: If you have been directed to isolate you will be able to access EI benefits. There is no expectation to check with medical authority, just someone in a general position of authority (employer, etc.). Other measures will cover those with no access to EI.*
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- Senator Colin Deacon (ISG): Often frontline workers in pharmacies, and those who work at cashiers and tellers can transmit the virus easily through the handling of cash. Will they get additional training and PPE to prevent this? Will the government encourage call centres to work from home to provide their essential services?
 - *Dr. Njoo: Frontline healthcare workers need PPE the most; cashiers not as much. For those working cashiers, frequent hand washing, not touching ones face, and social distancing if sick are the most important measures for those types of workers and for the general public.*
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- MP Scott Davidson (CPC; York – Simcoe): Have Amish communities been reached out to in order to provide support to them, and if municipalities declare states of emergencies, will they get access to more federal resources. How is the government helping support struggling businesses.
 - *Dr. Njoo: Federal government is working with senior public health officials in the SAC, risk communication to communities is key. High level messages need to be adapted to local use, which needs to be done by provincial officials for specific groups in their provinces (i.e. Amish communities).*
 - *Various provinces have enacted their own emergencies act to give themselves more flexibility to mobilize resources. Municipalities fit within the provincial context, and they should speak with senior provincial officials to address additional emergency resources.*
 - *ESDC: Lots of effort into allocating capacity to getting business protected and communicated to.*
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- MP Carol Hughes (NDP; Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing): Is there a list of departmental contacts to ask specific questions to beyond the daily call. And can there be a briefing on new EI measures, as well as on exact definitions of self isolation to clarify those who should or shouldn't go to work. What is the government doing to help businesses close to bankruptcy, and can the government force TV providers to broadcast a channel dedicated to COVID updates.
 - *ESDC: Critical to give people the right information and services and the department is working quickly to do that*
 - *Finance: Government is enacting a temporary wage subsidy for three months, which will cover 10% of an employees wages, along with other new policies aimed at keeping Canadians business resilient and strong . Lowering the requirement to access RRSPs.*
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- Senator Stan Kutcher (ISG): Government wording around certain mental health related terminology is problematic, will the government pay closer attention to the use of these messages going forward.
 - *Dr. Njoo: PHAC is appointing an official to make sure that mental health messaging and Mental Health overall is prioritized. There is a need to create a sense of urgency, but not to the point of creating paralyzing anxiety.*
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If you have any questions/comments, please let me know.

Best,

Spencer Brickles
Parliamentary Affairs, Office of Strategic Policy and Planning
Public Health Agency of Canada / Government of Canada
spencer.brickles@canada.ca / Tel: 343-543-3102

Affaires parlementaire, Bureau des politiques et de la planification stratégiques
Agence de la santé publique du Canada / Gouvernement du Canada
spencer.brickles@canada.ca /Tél: 343-543-3102