

11 January 2022

The Honourable Adrian Dix, Minister of Health
Room 337 Parliament Buildings,
Victoria, B.C. V8V 1X4

Dr. Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer
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(Delivered via e-mail)

Dear Minister Dix and Dr. Henry,

British Columbia's business community remains a committed partner of the government in its ongoing response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We share the government's goal of prioritizing the health and safety of every community while ensuring the least disruption to peoples' lives, families, communities and business as possible. As more British Columbians each day are vaccinated, including with the important booster shots that are now rolling out, we believe that B.C. remains in a strong position to combat the current and future variants of concern. We all look forward to a time when restrictions may once again ease and individuals can return to the activities and gatherings that are important to them. Until that time, we are thankful that the government is taking action to protect people and communities.

As the Omicron variant surges across Canada and B.C., we are pleased to learn that the federal government will be distributing millions of rapid antigen tests for provinces to use to enable communities, businesses and our workforce to mitigate the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. Rapid tests are a critical tool that enable workers to feel safe in their workplace, businesses to remain open and communities to reduce transmission. They also enable everyone in B.C. to achieve an additional layer of protection in tandem with the capacity limits, masking and social distancing measures that government has promulgated in response to the variant of concern. It is critical that the government take steps to make a rapid testing program available to small- and medium- sized businesses across B.C. by working with the chamber network to deliver rapid tests to these employers.

As noted by public health, the Omicron variant has certainly made it more likely that transmission will occur than prior variants. Businesses have re-activated their COVID-19 safety plans in response to recent requirements. Our members are clear that they believe rapid screening can also play an important role in preventing transmission.

In the spring and summer of 2021, the Government of Ontario partnered with the Ontario Chamber of Commerce and the Canadian Chamber of Commerce to launch a COVID-19 Rapid Screening Initiative. Utilizing the networks of chambers of commerce and boards of trade

across Ontario, the government was able to provide free rapid tests for small- and medium-sized businesses in the province. The program has been replicated in other provinces since that time. One example of these partnerships in action are the efforts by the Toronto Region Board of Trade and the City of Toronto to [expand rapid testing access](#) for businesses with fewer than 150 employees. Across Canada, over 175 local chambers of commerce and boards of trade have been working diligently to help protect workers in local businesses. Most provinces have provided rapid tests through the chamber network free of charge. B.C. businesses and chambers have not been afforded the same opportunity.

Our chamber network in B.C. has been ready, willing, and able to replicate such a program in our province and has asked that the government work with us to enact it. Businesses are now facing new restrictions and the possibility of major workforce shortages due to the increasingly widespread transmission of COVID-19 driven by the Omicron variant. By enabling businesses to take a leading role in a point of care rapid screening program, the government can add an additional layer of protection for workers and costumers to ensure that our economy can continue to function, and our communities remain as safe as possible.

It is also critical that the rules for who and how the tests are utilized be sufficiently flexible to work in different types of workplace contexts. For example, many businesses have employees who leave from home and whose jobs require that they enter customers' homes. We believe there is a balance to be struck and that we can follow the example of other jurisdictions in Canada and across the world who have learned to make rapid tests easily available and their use accessible.

We believe it is time to enact a rapid screening program for through the Chambers to businesses across the province. B.C.'s chamber network already has the important tools, resources and staff ready to take the lead in connecting businesses to this important tool. We look forward to discussing this matter further at the earliest convenience.



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cc:

The Honourable Ravi Kahlon, Minister of Jobs, Economic Recovery and Innovation

Geoff Meggs, Chief of Staff to the Premier

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