



Health  
Canada

Santé  
Canada

Deputy Minister

Sous-ministre

Ottawa, Canada  
K1A 0K9

November 27, 2020

Mr. Yves Giroux  
Parliamentary Budget Officer  
Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer  
99 Bank Street, 9<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A9

Dear ~~Mr.~~ <sup>Yves</sup> Giroux:

This is further to your correspondence of November 13, 2020, addressed to the Honourable Patty Hajdu, Minister of Health, regarding Information Request IR0551, concerning the data regarding existing and future measures taken in response to the 2019 novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, including details on the use of funds requested for transfer payments.

**Funding to Health Canada under the Safe Restart Agreement**

**Transfer payment to the Canadian Institute for Health Information: Up to \$3.5 million**

Health Canada is allocating up to \$3.5 million in contribution agreement funding to the Canadian Institute of Health Information (CIHI) in fiscal year 2020-2021 to enhance the integration hospital data and long-term care data. It is expected that CIHI will use the funds to:

- Close priority data gaps on COVID-19 and non-COVID-19 use of critical health care capacity such as acute care beds and ventilators;
- Work toward developing an automated hospital capacity dashboard, real-time reporting on COVID-19 admissions and improved tracking and costing for such patients; and
- Improve the reporting on long-term care (e.g. facility characteristics, COVID-19 infection tracking tools) and provide more timely information on hospital capacity over the course of the COVID-19 pandemic as public health and economic restart measures evolve.

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### **Additional funding for virtual care and mental health tools for Canadians**

#### **Transfer payments to all provinces and territories for virtual care: \$150 million**

Health Canada is negotiating bilateral agreements with provinces and territories to flow \$150 million in fiscal year 2020-2021 to help them accelerate their work on virtual care in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Federal funding will support provincial and territorial initiatives in virtual care, based on five priority areas agreed to by federal, provincial and territorial Deputy Ministers of Health in May 2020:

- Secure messaging and information-sharing platforms or supports for end-to-end messaging;
- Secure video-conferencing technology;
- Remote patient monitoring tools;
- Patient access to COVID-19 and other lab results; and
- Back-end supports for the integration and alignment of new platforms, tools or approaches into existing digital health systems.

#### **Transfer payment to Canada Health Infoway: Up to \$50 million**

Health Canada is working with Infoway to amend its contribution agreement to allow for an additional federal investment of up to \$50 million. This funding will enable Infoway to develop pan-Canadian standards for virtual care tools and to support provinces and territories to implement their initiatives under the bilateral agreements.

### **Digital Tools and Supports**

#### **Wellness Together Canada**

With the launch of this national portal on April 15, 2020, Canadians are now able to access digital tools and resources to monitor and manage their mental health and substance use needs, as well as counselling and other supports, if needed. Three broad types of supports are available:

- Triage and self-monitoring tools: These self-directed tools guide and connect users to promotion and prevention resources. They help with determining level of need as well as self-managing mental health and substance use issues;

- Mental health promotion resources: These resources promote mental health and prevent poor mental health, mental illness and problematic substance use. They focus on enhancing protective factors (e.g. resilience, coping, social support and social networks) and addressing risk factors (e.g. substance use, social isolation, discrimination and stigma); and
- Triage and psychosocial supports: The portal also provides confidential triage support, chat sessions, phone calls and online counselling with peer support workers, social workers, psychologists and other professionals.

As of November 24, 2020, more than 640,000 Canadians have accessed the Wellness Together Canada portal. This includes access to self-guided therapy, moderated peer-to-peer support and coached therapy, and one-to-one counseling by phone or text.

As of October 14, 2020, 54,390 clients have registered on the site, with 94 per cent completing a self-assessment. This conversion rate is higher than is typical for similar initiatives.

The primary reasons for accessing phone and text counselling services include anxiety, depression, stress and relationships. The consortium responsible for the portal reports that all counselling services via call and text meet the established service standards for wait times and that less than 0.5 per cent of calls are lost.

#### COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool

The COVID-19 self-assessment tool launched as a contracted service to Health Canada on March 21, 2020. It empowers Canadians to understand COVID-19 symptoms and receive interactive public health guidance on when to access health care services. Since its release, Canadians have accessed this tool over 8.5 million times. It is available through the Canada.ca website or the Canada COVID-19 app.

#### Canada COVID-19 app

The Canada COVID-19 app launched as a contracted service to Health Canada on March 31, 2020. It provides Canadians with a mobile and web accessible platform to access trusted information, resources and supports on COVID-19. It also provides convenient access to the COVID-19 self-assessment tool and an in-app symptom tracker for Canadians to take an active role in monitoring their health. Since its release, about 1 million Canadians have accessed the app and 240,000 people have used the in-app symptom tracker nearly 1.7 million times. The data analytics, based on anonymous information from users of the app, are available to federal, provincial and territorial health and public health officials.

BlueDot Inc.

In March 2020, Health Canada procured the services of BlueDot Incorporated, a Canadian company and leader in infectious disease risk, to support the health portfolio's interventions on COVID-19. The Public Health Agency of Canada is leveraging BlueDot's expertise and capacity to access and analyze the anonymous, near-real time, worldwide movements of 375 million mobile devices, to inform the forecasting of COVID-19 in Canada.

Combat COVID

In April 2020, Health Canada procured the services of PUG Interactive Incorporated, a Canadian software company, to develop and deliver a self-learning digital game (Combat COVID) to provide age-appropriate information about COVID-19 to children (ages 7-12). This tool will be available at no cost to the public and will help children stay safe and healthy. Public release of this tool is pending Health Canada's approval.

Yours sincerely,



Stephen Lucas, Ph.D.

Enclosures

**Table 1**

	Allocation	Spending as of March 31, 2020	Spending to Date 2020-21*	Total Spending to Date
<b>Digital Tools</b>	<b>\$40.5 M</b>	<b>\$2.5M</b>	<b>\$29.5M</b>	<b>\$32.0M</b>
Wellness Together Canada		-	\$25.0M	\$25.0M
COVID-19 Self-Assessment Tool		\$0.5M	-	\$0.5M
Canada COVID-19 App		\$2.0M	\$2.2M	\$4.2M
BlueDot Inc.		-	\$2.1M	\$2.1M
Combat COVID (tool to support children)		-	\$0.2M	\$0.2M
<b>Transfer payments to provinces and territories in support of Virtual Care</b>	<b>\$150M</b>	-	-	-
<b>Transfer payment to Canada Health Infoway in support of Virtual Care</b>	<b>\$50 M</b>	-	-	-
<b>Transfer payment to the Canadian Institute for Health Information (Safe Restart Agreement)</b>	<b>\$3.5M</b>	-	-	-

\*The spending to date is as of November 25, 2020.