

Premier Dwight Ball
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Pandemic Response

Dear Premier Ball,

On behalf of the people of Newfoundland & Labrador we would like to thank you, Premier Ball. Along with Minister Haggie and Dr. Fitzgerald, your leadership and direction has proven that by working together, Newfoundlanders and Labradorians cannot just flatten but essentially extinguish the curve, so we can now safely move to the long-term strategy. The fact that we are down to so few active cases is a testament to the social licence you earned from the people of this province.

This social licence was granted by the people because it was communicated to us that these measures were necessary to ensure the healthcare system was not overwhelmed. Recently in Newfoundland and Labrador, it appears our political leaders, working with the Province's Chief Medical Officer have chosen a new policy, one of zero cases. But at what cost? We have all been reminded repeatedly of the dangers associated with an outbreak. We have received no information on the costs of this strategy nor the ramifications of pursuing a different course of action.

The social license the people of our Province have granted our government is an unbelievable asset. It will be vital should there be subsequent, and potentially more aggressive waves of infection. In the face of a growing perception that the measures are too restrictive, the timeline too slow, the price way too high and lacking a plan to "Live with Covid", the willing compliance of the public will not be an available asset to fight when most needed. We cannot afford to squander this tool of defense.

In the absence of a clear communication of the provincial recovery plan, one is left to assume it is to target zero cases, enforce a strict lockdown to maintain this status and wait for new drug treatments and ultimately a vaccine before reopening our society.

The full price of this policy should be openly communicated to the public to allow a debate over its costs and benefits. The benefits have been communicated to the people daily. The costs have not.

The list of the costs of the highly restrictive, mandated health measures is long and sobering.

Public Health

- The mental health impacts are far-reaching, and these impacts will be felt on our healthcare system for years to come. The stresses of isolation, supply shortages, elder care, childcare, economic uncertainty, and lack of routine are all contributing factors to diminishing our mental health and wellbeing.
- Domestic violence is a serious societal concern and many people are trapped in homes right now (with limited supports) that exacerbate violence at home. Experts in the field are ringing the alarm bells.
- There are reports that at-risk youth are not receiving the help they desperately need while they deal with the stresses of lockdown. This at a time when they are most at risk as the likelihood of abuse has dramatically increased.
- Many children only receive vital nutrition from school programs. These children have fallen through the cracks.
- The uncounted and unaccounted for deaths and diagnoses caused by locking down the non COVID parts of our healthcare system have devastating consequences. People are not getting the care they need and for many, unfortunately, it is already too late.
- We are waging an experiment of unknown risks by keeping a generation of youth from learning social skills and coping mechanisms necessary for their mental and physical development.

Economic

- Newfoundland and Labrador is on the precipice of a wave of irreparable economic disaster. The long-term impacts to our economic capacity will be irreversible if we do not take immediate action. Businesses in every sector and of every size are impacted.
- The measures are particularly punitive to certain sectors of our economy such as main street businesses, real estate, retail, tourism, hospitality, and food service. These local businesses desperately need a plan to help them survive.
- With an unemployment rate that is closing in on 20% and many local businesses already announcing closures or operational scale-backs, we can likely expect this rate to remain steady for quite some time. Sadly, we may see it increase further.
- Childcare and K-12 education is critical to our economy. Parents cannot work from home with children underfoot. Many will be forced to leave the workforce if not provided with childcare support.

All of us have made changes to our behavior to ensure proper physical distancing and practicing good hand hygiene to ensure the safety of our fellow citizens. While we appreciate a cautious approach of waiting 28 days between levels and understand it is perceived to be the surest way to protect against the risk of further outbreaks of COVID-19, we believe the detrimental effects to the health of our people and the wellbeing of our economy far outweighs this risk. The current situation does not afford the luxury of time.

Premier, as stated at the beginning, your leadership and direction through this pandemic has earned you the social license of the people of our great province. A clear and well communicated provincial recovery plan which prepares the people to live with Covid is now urgently needed to see our Province return to a solid footing.

Specifically, we are asking for an immediate end to the State of Medical Emergency and a return of the governance of the province to our elected officials.

Choosing a path forward that carefully measures the value of our health and our economy is essential and urgently required. We are calling on your government to prepare the people to live with the virus in a manner that balances all costs to society. That is why Level 2 should be eliminated and the Province should move directly to Level 1 on July 6th.

We also stand by with an offer of assistance in whatever way we can to help our Province face these unprecedented times.

Respectfully,

Dale Abbott
Ruth Bell
Ed Brenton
Moya Cahill
Zita Cobb
Jill Curran
Mark Dobbin
Clarah Germain
Kevin Heffernan
Bert Hickman
Dermot Kearney
Emir Mahic
Dallas Mercer
Sandra Petterson
Gina Pecore
Derrick Rowe
Jeff Sharpe
Karl Smith
Matthew Swift

Diedre Ayre
Jeremy Bonia
Kevin Casey
Doug Chafe
Frank Coleman
Paul Currie
Susan Drover
Scott Giannou
Tom Hickey
Sharon Horan
Jamie King
John Mahoney
Wayne Myles
Todd Perrin
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Gary Reardon
Eric Schibler
Rob Simms
Bill Stoyles