

Intelligence MEMOS



From: Daniel Schwanen and William B.P. Robson

To: Canadians Concerned about Re-opening the Economy

Date: May 27, 2020

Re: **ONTARIO NEEDS MORE CLARITY ON ITS RE-OPENING PROCESS**

Re-opening locked-down economies is not easy. Because governments did the locking down, governments are key to the re-opening. How Ontario's government manages it, given the province's demographic and economic weight, will have consequences across the country.

Ontarians and Canadians could do better if the province followed the example of other jurisdictions and published a clearer and more comprehensive re-opening plan.

Where can Ontario look for ideas? Its immediate Canadian neighbours, Manitoba and Quebec, are not very helpful examples. Manitoba re-opened earlier but never had a per capita caseload anything like Ontario's. Quebec still has a worse caseload and had to backtrack on relatively aggressive early re-opening plans when its numbers refused to improve.

More relevant examples for Ontario are New York state, Alberta and France. All have had alarming numbers. All have phased plans for re-opening. But they are moving more decisively than Ontario, including dealing with such fraught issues as regional differentiation, testing and contact tracing.

Like Ontario, New York has a phased plan, but it is clearer both about what happens in each phase and what criteria allow a move to the next phase. Five regions of the state met the criteria and went to phase 1 on May 15; two more regions just followed.

Along with criteria such as a declining number of new cases and hospital capacity, New York's conditions for re-opening include requirements both for the availability of tests and for having sufficient contact tracing teams up and running within a region. The state stepped up testing weeks ago – including antibody testing, which is only just getting underway in Canada. So far it has conducted more than twice as many tests per capita as Ontario.

On May 14, following plans announced two weeks earlier, Alberta re-opened everywhere for dentists, other medical professionals, some retail stores, museums, art galleries and daycares. Bars and restaurants (table service only), hair salons and barbershops could also re-open as of that date, except in Calgary and Brooks, where they remained closed until this week. Alberta has not announced a date for its second or third phases of re-opening but it has specified a number of businesses that will be allowed to re-open when these take effect.

With a slightly lower per capita caseload than Ontario's, Alberta has conducted 20 percent more tests per person. On May 1, it made an encrypted tracing app available and recommended that people download it to their phones and use it when in public. Teams of contact tracers will get back to those who test positive and, if they consent, to anyone they have had contact with.

COVID-19 hit France much harder than Ontario. But with France's per capita rate of new cases now a quarter of Ontario's, it has been lifting its lockdown. On May 11, shops, parks, small museums and libraries and some schools re-opened in many parts of the country. Markets and malls could also re-open, subject to local authorities' approval. France has also announced which businesses and activities can operate in subsequent phases and when that's likely to be – cinemas and theatres on June 2, restaurants and bars on June 15.

France is re-opening more slowly in regions where risk of resurgence is higher, as defined by the number of new cases, the capacity of the health system and the ability to meet testing targets. This multi-speed approach is possible because travel across departmental lines will be restricted to a 100-kilometre radius. France has an aggressive testing strategy with the goal of testing just over one per cent of its population – 700,000 people – every week. Tracing “brigades” will hone in on the previous contacts of any new case.

Ontarians in general, and Ontario businesses in particular, would be better able to plan if – like New York, Alberta and France – the province published a clear list of activities and dates for the next phases of re-opening, along with a more precise idea of what will guide it in allowing each next step. Such information would make everyone's stake in keeping the relevant numbers low more obvious.

Robust testing and tracing let governments offer such clarity, especially for regionally differentiated re-opening. Ontario has accelerated its testing this month but remains noticeably behind Canadian leaders Alberta and Quebec on that score. And we don't yet know the details of a tracing plan.

We are all in this together. Ontario can help both itself and the rest of Canada by being more specific about the phases of, and conditions for, its re-opening.

Daniel Schwanen is vice-president, research, and William B.P. Robson is president and chief executive officer, at the C.D. Howe Institute.

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