



Guidebook for departments on easing of restrictions: Federal worksites

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Guidebook for departments on easing of restrictions: Federal worksites

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Preamble

The advent of COVID-19 has prompted the public service of Canada to adopt special measures that remain in place and will continue until different instructions are provided to Canadians by the Chief Public Health Officer of Canada, and communicated to the workforce by the Employer (Treasury Board for the Core Public Administration), the Head of the Public Service, or the Treasury Board Secretariat.

The COVID-19 crisis resulted in an abrupt, widespread shift to remote working arrangements for public servants in all jurisdictions, as Canadians made every effort to stay home and practice physical distancing. As a general rule, only essential front-line workers who could not work remotely have reported for duty in person, with a vast majority of federal public servants working remotely. Faced with this challenge, the public service responded quickly, both to implement unprecedented programs to support Canadians, and to support employees ¹ by extending key health benefits including increased access to mental health supports, extension of special leave measures, and relaxing requirements related to insurance benefits in order to support physical distancing.

As jurisdictions prepare for the easing of restrictions at worksites, including government worksites, the Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer (OCHRO) assembled representatives from departments and centres of expertise to develop a practical guidebook that could be adapted by Deputy Heads for a range of circumstances across the public service. Consultations to seek feedback and augment the proposed guidebook are on-going with Deputies, Bargaining Agents, Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada (APEX), Heads of HR and horizontal communities such as Regional Federal Councils and the National Managers' Community, in addition to securing applicable ministerial endorsements.

This work must adhere to the First Minister's Statement on Shared Public Health Approach to Support Restarting the Economy and its principles, with due

consideration for provincial and territorial decisions. We must plan for a gradual and sustainable easing of restrictions, based on public health guidance from the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) and applicable advisories, and prepare to manage a workforce that, in most cases, will be split between employees working onsite and working remotely. Additionally, we must take into consideration that there may be a second wave that could require the retightening of restrictions.

The working relationship with Bargaining Agents will be critical as departments build plans for the reopening of specific worksites. Consultations at the national level as well as at the departmental level will provide constructive feedback, expertise, and innovation as we all – Canadians and public servants alike – learn to live with COVID-19.

Potential impacts to and from provincial and municipal services must also be taken into consideration, including availability of social infrastructure (schools, public transit, etc.).

Due to the fluidity and complexity of the situation, this is an agile process; the guidebook will be iterative and responsive, and this document will be evergreen. Additionally, while this document is generally applicable to most worksites, its interpretation must consider that departments have different operational realities and have unique worksites which require unique considerations.

The decision to reopen any specific worksite will have implications for individual employees and their families. We are mindful in providing this Guidebook that such decisions are taken in the context of a legal framework, that includes, among other instruments, collective agreements and legislation (e.g. the *Canada Labour Code* among others).

In addition, this Guidebook, which is designed to assist in formulating plans for the reopening of worksites, must be read in the context of existing guidance. In the case of discrepancy, the most recent published authoritative and formal guidance will take precedence.

Objective and contents

This guide aims to support robust delivery of programs and services to Canadians during a gradual, safe and sustainable easing of COVID-19 restrictions related to federal public service worksites, while supporting the physical and mental health of federal public servants.

The guide summarizes roles and responsibilities of key parties, offers a planning toolbox, and points to available resources. It is meant for the Core Public Administration and separate employers alike, as applicable.

Principles

While organizations in the public service deliver a broad range of programs and services to a diverse population, to economic and social sectors, in a variety of worksites over a territory governed by multiple jurisdictions, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected various parts of the country differently. At the same time, the Employer has strived to ensure attentive and coherent support to its workforce, in full respect of the accountabilities of Ministers and Deputy Heads.

To this end, the following principles have informed the guidance to manage the work and the workforce as the pandemic evolved, and will guide the approach for the easing of restrictions:

- the health, safety, and wellness of public servants and Canadians are paramount;
- public health instructions to contain the spread of the coronavirus will be adhered to; and
- programs and services that the Government of Canada and Canadians rely on will be maintained.

Deputy Minister framework

Federal public servants have contributed significantly to preventing the spread of COVID-19, saving lives, and reducing pressure on Canada's health care system. As epidemiological conditions improve, Deputy Heads are being called upon to

determine, in keeping with the principles set out above, the extent to which employees ought to be asked to return to their usual worksites to support critical services, economic recovery or government priorities.

Every measure must be taken to protect our employees within safe and inclusive work environments. This includes physical and psychological health and safety, and all legislative requirements under the *Canada Labour Code*. In keeping with GBA+ and inclusion for all, individualized attention will be required, as needs and the ability to return to the worksite may vary significantly between employees and every effort made to ensure employees have the tools and resources in regard to mental health services and assistance. In addition, all reasonable efforts should be made to support employees who continue to work remotely.

Whether Business Continuity Plans have been activated or not, as conditions improve Deputy Heads will normalize programs and services incrementally, in a way that protects both Canadians and employees. In most cases this will require maximizing the use of remote work to the extent possible, while recognizing that some onsite presence may be required.

It is assumed that critical services and other high priority work is underway. Integrated business plans designed to align with government priorities should be reviewed for relevance and coherence with the new context. This review should include identification of deliverables that might be suspended or delayed, and propose mitigation measures.

Decisions by the Government, as Canada's largest employer, regarding federal worksites can have impacts on the Canadian economy and local services ranging from public transport to childcare, and so on. Large federal worksites also support local businesses. As plans are developed, the interdependencies with local partners should be considered.

It is important that plans be developed and decisions be taken in accordance with the following considerations:

- Adherence to the Chief Public Health Officer's advice and direction on public health measures and local public health officer's advice across the country;
- Protection of the physical and psychological health and safety of federal employees (including all legislative requirements under Part II of the *Canada Labour Code*), recognizing that COVID-19 has resulted in unique challenges related to both physical and psychological well-being;
- Incorporating wellness, accessibility, inclusion, and diversity (such as by using Gender-Based Analysis +), to identify employees' experiences based on their various identity factors (age, ethnicity, gender, race, ability, sexual orientation, etc.);
- Leading with empathy and communicating with care, compassion and support;
- Continuously adapting to "living with COVID-19" in Canada as long as it is needed;
- Compliance with applicable legislation, collective agreement provisions and terms and conditions (as may be negotiated, where applicable);
- Optimizing operational capacity and flexibility, and allocating resources in accordance with criticality of services;
- Recognizing that not all work can be accomplished remotely, Deputy Heads will have to determine how and when – particularly in highly operational settings – the use of physical distancing and other protective measures will need to be emphasized to protect the health of employees and Canadians;
- Continuing to build the resilience and sustainability of our organizations and workforce, by strengthening digital and general skill acquisition for public servants, and leveraging digital infrastructure investments;
- Planning for a reduced use of facilities, as most density at worksites will significantly decreased for the foreseeable future;
- Ensuring equivalent support for workers who are "on-site" and working remotely, to support the ability of every public servant to make a full contribution as applicable (including any workplace accommodation tools or supports to enable employee success);
- Fostering trust, safety and security of the public and the workforce, and communicating in both official languages and in accessible formats;

- Assessing the privacy impacts of the measures that are considered and taking appropriate steps to protect privacy rights; and
- Implementing robust change management methods and best practices to support employees in successfully adopting the changes/new measures being implemented including effective communications, employee engagement, change leadership and learning strategies.

Consultations

The Employer will continue to ensure that guidance related to the reopening of worksites is based on the guidance from public health authorities. Bargaining Agents are being engaged at a national level, including through the National Joint Council and the Service-Wide Occupational Health and Safety Committee. These efforts at a national level are complementary to the consultations that will be undertaken by each department.

Deputy Heads should initiate the required consultations with bargaining agents as early as possible through their occupational health and safety committees regarding their departmental plans for re-opening worksites. The Employer has the authority to establish schedules to address operational requirements in accordance with collective agreements and to ensure the continuity of business. This said, the current situation is unprecedented. On-going consultation with Bargaining Agents will be important as we strive to protect the wellbeing of employees while providing services to Canadians.

Roles and responsibilities

▼ In this section

- [Public Health Agency of Canada \(PHAC\)](#)
- [Health Canada \(HC\)](#)
- [Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat \(TBS\)](#)
- [Public Services and Procurement Canada \(PSPC\)](#)

- [Real Property Custodian Departments](#)
- [Shared Services Canada \(SSC\)](#)
- [Deputy Heads](#)
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The following roles and responsibilities specific to this guidebook:

Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC)

- Provide evidence-based public health guidance and tools upon which the federal public service can base decisions (e.g., occupational health and use of PPE, use of non-medical masks/face coverings by public service employees and/or clients, policy decisions such as testing public servants for COVID-19, environmental cleaning standards, use of and standards for physical barriers such as Plexiglas in federal worksites, etc.).
- Monitor evidence on, and epidemiology of, COVID-19 nationally and internationally and adjust public health advice, guidance and tools accordingly.
- Undertake public health measures at the border, including quarantine and isolation as appropriate for international travellers.
- Support key departments with federal populations, such as Correctional Service Canada, with infection prevention, coordination with local public health authorities, and provide surge support for outbreak investigation and surveillance through the Canadian Field Epidemiology Program.
- Work with PSPC to validate the PPE procurement requests from departments.

Health Canada (HC)

Public Service Occupational Health Program

- Provide occupational health advice and guidance to federal organizations in Schedules I and IV of the *Financial Administration Act*. Departments and agencies determine what advice applies to their occupational health needs.
- Offer the following services to departments and agencies:

- Pre-placement and periodic health evaluations
- Immunization and communicable disease screening services, as well as education on disease prevention, including COVID-19
- Advice to Heads of Missions overseas regarding emergency medical situations and evacuations
- Occupational hygiene advice and consultation
- Fitness to work evaluations
- Services to support the Public Service Pension Plan (i.e., medical review of applications for retirement on medical grounds and service buybacks)

Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS)

- Provide guidance and support to Deputy Heads regarding strategies to address the easing of COVID-19-related restrictions at federal public service worksites.
- Provide guidance and advice to executives and managers about workplace (physical and psychological) health and safety measures in the context of COVID-19.
- Use existing flexibilities to adapt policy implementation to the next normal where possible, and/or seek exemptions or exceptions to policies from the Treasury Board as needed.
- Support departments and agencies in implementing occupational health and safety measures and duty to accommodate requirements.
- Provide advice on leveraging people management policies to respond to emerging situations related to worksite resumption (e.g., EAP, flexible work, Interchange Canada for agile staffing solutions).

TBS - Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer (including the Centre of Expertise on Mental Health in the Workplace, and the Centre of Excellence on Official Languages)

- Assess the need for new or updated policies, or consider guidance on interpretations that allow flexibility during this transition and for the future of work.

- In partnership with Health Canada's [Psychosocial Emergency Preparedness and Response Team](#), assist organizations in addressing the psychosocial risk factors for employees and how best to incorporate psychological health and safety into Business Continuity and transition plans.
- Assist organizations in addressing challenges with regard to communicating with the public and employees in English and French, and providing advice on the identification of language requirements of bilingual positions (including temporary staffing flexibilities).
- Support departments and agencies in creating safe, healthy, accessible and inclusive worksites.
- Continue to fulfill these responsibilities in collaboration with departments and agencies and consultation of the National Joint Council.
- Establish, negotiate and ensure compliance with the terms and conditions of employment and collective agreements.
- Consult with bargaining agents at the national level and other partners and stakeholders.
- Deliver public service group insurance benefit programs to support plan members' access to physical and mental health, dental and disability benefits as and when they need them.
- Along with Public Services and Procurement Canada, communicate to plan members the flexibilities and hardship provisions available to them under the public service pension and benefit plans.
- Collect data and information to support federal organizations and enterprise-wide efforts to understand risks, trends, and areas of focus during this transition, as they relate to the workforce and workplace.

TBS – Office of the Comptroller General

- Advice and guidance to departments on comptrollership policies and issues (i.e. financial, materiel, real property, projects, procurement, internal audit).
- Mobilize internal audit community to establish and implement agile tools and approaches to support business resumption activities.

Public Services and Procurement Canada (PSPC)

PSPC is a common services organization.

- Work with departments and agencies in procuring the supply of necessary equipment and personal protective equipment, if required.
- Is the designated custodian of general-purpose office accommodation for federal public servants and sets the standards for them.
- Operate and maintain an office portfolio and assign office space to clients.
- Provide advice, as appropriate, regarding the safe use of workspaces and common areas.
- Ensure that the occupants of PSPC buildings (i.e. non-custodian) have a safe environment in which to work, including augmenting standard cleaning specifications and delivering unique service requirements to tenants
 - PSPC has been proactively developing procedures to ensure healthy and productive work environments for the eventual return to increased occupancy in PSPC buildings. These include:
 - Water systems requirements to mitigate risks of water stagnation and associated bacterial growth;
 - HVAC maintenance activities to promote occupant wellness; and
 - Review of signage and communication material to support re-occupancy measures (i.e. physical distancing, elevator protocols, traffic management in buildings).

Real Property Custodian Departments

- Are the designated custodian for special purpose space in support of custodian specific program mandates excluding general purpose office space.
 - Note: PSPC's guidance was primarily developed to respond to operational requirements in general purpose administrative environments, however, the core elements of the guide are transferrable to departments with responsibilities to manage special purpose buildings, with adaptation to suit those unique program operating requirements.

Shared Services Canada (SSC)

- Provide network and digital services to support GC departments in providing critical programs and services during an unexpected and unprecedented pandemic period. This includes enabling and providing remote access into GC networks for GC employees to work effectively from the safety of their homes.
- Coordination of integrated service delivery management of IT infrastructure services to GC departments, who in turn deliver important digital services to Canadians.
- Leverage transformative technologies to enable the delivery of digital and cloud-based programs and products to GC customers in support of the Government's COVID-19 priorities, and in support of achieving a modern, secure and digital government.
- Support Partners and Clients who have developed and/or modified their IT systems through the SSC Security Assessment and Authorization service. This helps ensure confidentiality, integrity and availability of their systems and data. SSC has been committed to protecting the privacy of individuals, including their personal information and supporting Partners and Clients to protect their data and information on Government of Canada infrastructure.
- Provide, build, maintain and ensure the health and stability of the IT Infrastructure that hosts and supports all of the critical departmental applications that support the Government of Canada emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic.
- SSC plays an instrumental role in working with other department's CIOs on their respective resumption plan, to ensure remediation measures from a technology stand point are in place and network and infrastructure readiness is addressed to support these plans. Departmental CIOs should engage respective Client Executive Teams at SSC, for the prioritization of Information Technology (IT) requests based on the level of urgency and operational requirements.

Deputy Heads

- Develop and implement a plan to address the gradual and sustainable easing of COVID-19-related restrictions related to worksites for which the Deputy Head is responsible.
- Ensure that the plan is consistent with public health advisories (federal, provincial, territorial and municipal).
- Align implementation of the plan according to the easing of measures in each province and territory where the department or agency has physical worksites (i.e. plan for an asymmetrical implementation).
- Inform and consult with bargaining agents and the department's Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) policy and workplace committees during the development and implementation of departmental plans.
- Ensure that the plan is reviewed in light of accessibility, GBA+ principles, the diversity and inclusion lens proposed by the Joint Union Management Task Force on Diversity and Inclusion, and the *Accessible Canada Act*.
- Review the criticality of services, usually in accordance with Business Continuity Plans and the related Business Impact Analysis.
- Determine how, when and where work must be performed, taking into consideration functional and operational requirements, the terms and conditions of employment, provisions in collective agreements, and employees' personal situations to the extent possible.
- Plan for a reduced use of facilities (as physical distancing requirements continue) by undertaking an assessment of each facility's capacity based on appropriate physical distancing practices, including all assets classes and types of work locations (e.g. offices, labs, vehicles, conveyances, shared worksites, etc.).
- Protect the physical and psychological health and safety of employees, including all legislative requirements under Part II of the *Canada Labour Code*.
- Test the plan from the perspective of the workforce, the workplace, the work and partners and stakeholders.
- Ensure that privacy impacts of the plan – the collection, use or disclosure of personal information – are assessed, and risks mitigated.

- Aligned with the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (the Standard), identify psychosocial hazards (including those introduced as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and related to the easing of COVID-19-related restrictions), measure hazards and the impact hazards are having on employees, and manage risk/hazards accordingly.
- Ensure proper training and direction are provided on health and safety, duty to accommodate, and accessibility.
- Ensure proper training and direction are provided on wellness, inclusion and diversity, and that proper supports (such as the services of Indigenous elders) are made available. Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) and the Canada School for the Public Service offer a comprehensive suite of online training on GBA+ as well as diversity and inclusion.
- Continue to monitor COVID-19 cases within the workforce and report on Work Refusals.
- Ensure that information on COVID-19 and related measures is communicated to employees, while protecting employee privacy.
- Set the expectation that executives and managers pay attention to, both priority business outcomes and the individual circumstances of employees, have frequent and open discussions about their needs, and use judgement and flexibility in managing the workplace and workforce.

Managers

- Implement the strategy defined by the Deputy Head and consult departmental OHS units, labour relations and other internal services as required.
- Protect the physical and psychological health and safety of employees, including all legislative requirements under Part II of the *Canada Labour Code*.
- Discuss personal circumstances with employees individually to understand whether they are candidates for a return to the worksite and any required accommodation (e.g. working remotely, flexible work hours). Factors may include health conditions (chronic or immunity-related) or personal circumstances (family responsibilities, schools opening, living with people at

higher risk of contracting COVID-19, living in vulnerable communities). When asking employees to provide personal information, managers should focus on what is directly needed for decisions to be made.

- In supporting employees, including those that may contract COVID-19, particular attention should be paid to privacy rights and human rights. Promote and encourage the use of mental health supports and services.
- Address the 13 psychosocial factors that impact employees, and respond to psychological hazards that emerge (e.g. anxiety around contracting COVID-19 in the workplace, the loss of a team member or loved one, effects of discrimination related to COVID-19).
- Work with employees to address their concerns as they arise and advise them on what services are available, such as the Employee Assistance Program (EAP). Personal circumstances as well as issues related to health and safety, or the duty to accommodate should be addressed on a case-by-case basis.
- Put in place controls to reduce risks related to exposure to COVID-19, in consultation with OHS committees. Communicate and provide training to the employees to ensure that they are able to carry out their duties as per the established controls. Promote compliance, and monitor the effectiveness of the controls in line with the evolving risks.
- Ensure the alignment with OHS guidance on the maximum number of employees that could report to work at a given time while maintaining physical distancing and other public health measures related to COVID-19.
- Communicate with all employees about any plans to ask some or all employees to return to worksites, including employees that will continue to work remotely.
- Communicate with employees who will return to the worksite beforehand to reassure them of the measures in place to protect their health and safety. Take steps to ensure employees returning to the worksite are given appropriate notice.
- Regularly invite and consider the concerns of all employees, including those related to accessibility, wellness, inclusion and diversity, and the duty to accommodate, whether working remotely or “on-site”.

- Collaborate with local union representatives as required, especially in duty to accommodate processes and to resolve workplace conflict.
- Ensure compliance with health guidelines and all preventative measures in force in the worksite.
- Ensure the provisions of safe occupancy are met.
- Ensure that all employees – those that are working remotely and those that are reporting on-site – are treated with equal respect and value, understand the expectation for results, and are offered equivalent supports and opportunities.

Employees at all levels

- Follow public health measures including hand hygiene, physical distancing and follow local public health direction to and from the worksite and outside the worksite.
 - Stay home when showing symptoms identified by health authorities. If already in the workplace, immediately:
 - Self-isolate in a separate space or designated area, if possible;
 - Notify their supervisor or most appropriate contact;
 - Notify local public health for further assessment and guidance;
 - Call 911 or emergency services if symptoms are life threatening.
- Take steps to support personal mental health, including taking regular breaks. If mental or emotional health is suffering, access EAP or a health care professional (e.g. a family doctor).
- While working remotely, take all health, safety, and security precautions in accordance with all laws, policies and regulations, and maintain regular contact with their manager and colleagues.
- Collaborate with managers to maximize their contribution to the organization's objectives, in consideration of their personal circumstances.
- Practice good information management, including appropriate documentation of decisions, and alignment with privacy and security requirements.
- Provide health attestations or certificates as may be required.

- Provide information and documentation supporting accommodation requirements in timely fashion.
- Follow the health and preventive measures necessary to protect the health, safety and physical integrity of others in the workplace.
- Work with others to maintain safe use of the workplace and create a healthy environment.
- Respectfully share concerns about their personal situation, the workplace, or the behavior of colleagues with management.

Planning toolbox

▼ In this section

- [Common assumptions](#)
- [Conditions that will support increasing access to worksites](#)
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- [Official languages](#)

Whether Business Continuity Plans have been activated or not, as epidemiological conditions improve, Deputy Heads will bring programs and services back on-line incrementally, in a way that protects both Canadians and employees. In most cases this will require maximizing the use of remote work to the extent possible, while recognizing that some onsite presence may be required.

Guided by public health advice and provincial plans, Deputy Heads determine the date and level at which business will resume in the worksites for their respective organizations. This date(s) will become the starting point of the 'next normal', which – in most cases - will include having some employees present in the worksite and others continuing to work remotely. **The planning scenario section** provides different and complementary scenarios from the perspective of the work, the workforce, the physical space, and partners, stakeholders and communities. In any case, the following common assumptions and supporting conditions may be used to guide planning.

Common assumptions

The easing of restrictions will occur gradually and at a different pace based on geography, function, physical space, availability of public infrastructure and individual employee circumstances.

Employees whose work can be done remotely should continue to take advantage of recent investments in IT infrastructure and digital skills, as the work and equipment permit, in accordance with flexible work provisions and applicable directives.

Employees who are considered vulnerable as defined by public health agencies should be supported to continue to work remotely when possible; this includes people with chronic illnesses or are immuno-suppressed (or living with others who qualify).

There may be a need to ramp down access to worksites should there be a resurgence of cases or new public health restrictions.

Allocation of remote technological equipment and accesses should be regularly assessed so as to maximize productivity.

- A large majority of public servants have been directed to work remotely for the last several weeks as a critical measure to achieve physical distancing. Efforts are ongoing to ensure that all employees are supported in being able to make a full contribution.

- With highest priority on critical services for Canadians, and notably work that supports economic recovery and government priorities, departments will need to optimize operational capacity by allocating resources in accordance with criticality of services.
- There is a risk that too few employees will be ready to return to the worksite due to personal concerns about their health and safety, whether founded or not. This risk can be minimized by ensuring only those employees who are needed to deliver critical services and other priority work that cannot be done remotely are asked to return, initially, and to ensure that measures taken to protect employee health and safety are well communicated.
- As things progress, there may be employees who wish to return to the worksite for reasons of wellbeing. Consideration may need to be given to a rotating remote work / on-site schedule for those employees to support their wellbeing.
- At the same time, entire teams forming part of sectors that have been intensively engaged in the response to date will need time to rebuild energy, while summer and the absence of childcare services will see the resumption of vacation requests, often regulated by collective agreement provisions. Careful HR planning will ensure fairness, practicality and sustainable operations.

In all cases, give consideration to the workforce, the physical worksite and everyone accessing it, digital tools, security, communications, and the work itself, as described hereafter.

Conditions that will support increasing access to worksites

- Early collaboration of Workplace OHS Committees
- Availability of public transit and childcare/schools
- Availability of PPE and other equipment (such as non-medical masks) for employees who require it
- Capacity to prepare and maintain a clean and safe physical space
- Information to employees and bargaining agents regarding the priorities and sequence
- Clear leadership and oversight responsibilities

- Coordination mechanisms to plan, oversee, and monitor the transition

Available resources

The tools and resources presented in this document complement and should be considered alongside the following resources:

- Public health guidance – at the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal levels (See the [Public Health Agency of Canada's page on Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#), and Health Canada's Occupational Health advisories for the Public Service)
 - [Health Canada's Public Service Occupational Health Program General Occupational Health Advisory](#)
- [Health Canada Guidance: Preventing the Spread of Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) in Workplaces in the Government of Canada's Core Public Administration](#)
- Guidance from Public Services and Procurement Canada
 - [Real Property Services Workplace Resumption - Practices and guidance](#)
 - [PSPC Building Management Direction for Coronavirus Disease 2019 \(COVID-19\)](#)
- [Guidance for Information Management and Technology](#)
- [Labour Program and federally regulated workplaces – COVID-19 \(from Employment and Social Development Canada\)](#)
- [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\): Employee illness and leave](#) (including Guidance on the use of Other Leave with Pay (Code 699))
- [Guidance from the Centre of Expertise on Mental Health in the Workplace](#)
- [Guidance on Working Remotely](#)
- [Canada Labour Code, Part II](#)
- [Workers' Compensation](#)
- [Association of Workers' Compensation Boards of Canada \(AWCBC\)](#)
- [Terms and conditions of employment and collective agreements](#)
- [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety resources](#)
- The [Policy on People Management](#), and corresponding directives, including:
 - [Directive on Employment Equity, Diversity and Inclusion](#)

- [Directive on the Duty to Accommodate](#) (See also, [Duty to accommodate framework for the Federal Public Service](#))

For up-to-date tools and guidance, see [Information for Government of Canada employees: Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\)](#)

Tracking cases of COVID-19

- Testing, tracking and contact tracing are the responsibilities of local/regional public health agencies. Organizations should consult the applicable public health agencies for information on how to proceed in cases where an employee has tested positive.
- A tool, called COVID-19 tracker, was developed by TBS-OCRHO to provide departments and agencies a vehicle to identify impacts of COVID-19 to their workforce, from an occupational health and safety perspective. The tracker reports on:
 - Confirmed cases for public servants;
 - Refusals to work; and
 - Physical location closures.
- An Information Sharing Protocol for the COVID-19 tracker was developed by OCHRO. The focus of this document is to provide clarity around how organizations can report on their own data, and how TBS is sharing information. Consequently, only aggregate data on the confirmed COVID-19 cases is being published.
- Further, a Communications Strategy provides guidance to the enterprise on how to manage the information found in the tool, focusing on media relations and data privacy. The information tracked is being captured under occupational health and safety authorities and, in accordance with the *Privacy Act*, shall not be used for any other purposes.
- Departments and agencies are expected to continue reporting into this tool until such a time as the health crisis is over.
- TBS-OCHRO has strongly suggested that departments and agencies report into the COVID-19 tracker daily. If this is not possible, departments and agencies are

asked to report at minimum twice a week (Mondays and Wednesdays).

- The information provided by departments and agencies in the COVID-19 tracker will enable decision making on the return to the worksite from a health and safety lens.

Communications and engagement

- Clear, direct and timely communications to employees will be critical to an organization's ability to establish trust and to successfully manage the complex and challenging process with which we are confronted in the return to the worksite. Messaging will need to be frequent, employee-centric, empathetic and empowering, while reflecting the seriousness of the current landscape. Where employees may be asked to return to the worksite, the communications timeline will need to be mindful that employees will require appropriate notice and adequate lead time in order to prepare. Internal communications teams may need to be ramped up in the short to medium-term to support this significant change-management initiative.
- Consultation with respect to the easing of restrictions will continue both internally to the public service and with key partners such as bargaining agents. Feedback from employees, private and public sectors partners, and the public we serve should be considered as we adjust our measures, policies, programs and services.
- While Deputy Heads will develop plans to communicate the easing of restrictions within their organizations, it will be important for their communications teams to consult with central agencies to encourage consistency of messaging. Departments should develop their own communications strategies informed by the government-wide framework and guidance, and grounded in the specific context of their approach to easing restrictions, and change management requirements.
- Departments should ensure effective engagement with whole-of-government coordination and information-sharing mechanisms (the Internal Communications Sub-committee on COVID-19 and the Return to Federal

Worksite Communications Steering Committee), and its supporting toolkit; research reports, communications calendar, evergreen media lines, media relations protocol, branding and lexicon, and integrated web presence.

Members of the Steering Committee (TBS, PCO, HC/PHAC, PSPC, and SSC) with the support of other departments as required, will provide coordinated guidance to departments to encourage a consistent approach to employee communications.

- Communications tools, guidance and best practices will be developed and shared using a 'digital first' approach, using common terminology and visual elements (including signage) while respecting official languages and accessibility requirements. Communications teams should be brought into plans early as they are integral to any change management process, and Deputy Heads should set clear expectations for policy and program colleagues to engage them.

Psychological health and safety

- Deputy Heads need to ensure that psychological health and safety continues to be a consideration when developing scenarios for the easing of restrictions.
- In addition, they should align with the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace which explicitly states that organizations should be 1) establishing and sustaining processes to ensure the psychological health and safety risks and impacts of critical events are continually assessed and 2) ensuring that the management of the pandemic and decisions around the pandemic are executed in a manner that reduces psychological risks to the extent possible and supports ongoing psychological safety.
- Moreover, Deputy Heads have an obligation to protect psychological health and safety of employees during the pandemic (with special consideration for front-line, critical and other high-risk staff). This could include addressing the psychosocial risks identified by the enterprise, incorporate psychological health and safety into Business Continuity Plans (to ensure business continuity for

front-line and critical employees), and identifying and promoting mental health information, services and supporting and encouraging its use.

- Managers should provide tools and resources to their employees in regard to mental health, promote mental health services, support and tools, and create safe and inclusive environments. It is important that employees feel comfortable to come forward with concerns and are encouraged to seek care.
- OCHRO has worked and will continue to work in collaboration with departments and agencies to ensure resources are readily available on public-facing websites for employees seeking help; these resources include [EAP services providers](#), [community resources](#), [other services](#), which include [crisis lines](#) for employees who may be affected by gender-based violence.

Employment conditions and labour relations

- The guidance on the use of Other Leave with Pay (Code 699) is expected to evolve over time in accordance with changing circumstances. Deputy heads should keep apprised of these developments to ensure the continued appropriate use of 699 within their organisation.
- In preparing their plans, Deputy Heads should establish and/or modify work schedules using the existing flexibilities (e.g., those in collective agreements and relevant terms and conditions of employment), while respecting:
 - Collective agreements and relevant terms and conditions of employment 2;
 - *Canada Labour Code* and *Canada Occupational Health and Safety Regulations*; and
 - Duty to accommodate requirements.
- Once employees who are to return to the worksite have been identified, steps should be taken to communicate this list to the bargaining agent representing these employees.
 - Provide employees with a forum where they can ask questions and get the appropriate answers prior to their return.

- Provide employees with the information on their schedule of work. Ensure compliance with the collective agreement in that regard.
- Provide employees with information on EAP to support them when they return to the worksite.
- Provide employees requiring assistance during emergencies with the information they need to safely enter and exit the worksite.
- Provide employees with information on the PPE or other equipment/material that the employer will be providing them when they return to the worksite.
- Deputy Heads will consult with bargaining agents during the development and implementation of the plan, being sure to include those who participated on its development at the OHS committee. It is important to work with the department's policy and workplace committees to ensure the plan is vetted from an OHS perspective.
- Departments are encouraged to develop training material and information sheets for employees who are returning to worksites and to ensure that this material is vetted by the departmental OHS committees. Departments should ensure that proper training and directions are provided to managers and employees on health and safety matters. Existing training resources may also be leveraged, such as the [Joint Learning Program's new Empowering Conversations in the Workplace](#), which help employees and managers talk about the challenges they are facing due to COVID-19.

Employee Assistance Services

Health Canada Services

- Employee Assistance Program (EAP) – provides short-term, professional mental health counselling at no cost to the employee. More than 80 federal departments and agencies receive their EAP services through [Health Canada](#), which is available to students, casual workers, recent retirees, as well as immediate family members of employees. Other organizations provide this

service internally or purchase it from the private sector ([EAP departmental listing](#)).

- Specialized Organizational Services (SOS) – provides a number of psychosocial services for managers and teams on a cost-recovery basis, including: group grief and loss sessions; coping, including dealing with tragic events; stress management and self-care, including prolonged operational stress.
- Psychosocial Emergency Response Team (PSERT) – is a team of emergency and disaster mental health experts who provide mental health support, such as on-site counselling, to federal employees while they are responding to events that could be disruptive or traumatic (e.g., natural disaster, terrorist act, violent protest, death of a colleague killed in the line of duty).
- Occupational Critical Incident Stress Management (OCISM) program – provides peer support to Indigenous Services Canada and band employed nurses working in First Nations communities, isolated posts and health centers. They support nurses who have experienced traumatic events and also offer specialized training such as Prevention of Occupational Stress Injuries.

Executive Services

- Advisory Services for Executives (Hosted by APEX) – a service to all Executives across the federal public service that provides, free of charge, a discreet and confidential sounding board; a safe place to discuss sensitive issues; and advice and referral to specialized services available to the Executive community.

Employee benefits

- The PSHCP provides coverage for prescription drugs, paramedical services, mental health support, and other services and equipment to support the health and well-being of employees. Select paramedical services (e.g., mental health) that are offered through virtual means are eligible for coverage.
- The Public Service Health Care Plan (PSHCP) provides coverage for mental health counselling and treatment. As described below, temporary measures are currently in place that expand the types of eligible practitioners and that waive

the prescription requirement in order to facilitate access to mental health support during the pandemic.

- Temporary measures are currently in place to facilitate access to health care while also minimizing physical interaction with providers, and will continue until non-essential business is authorized to resume or as indicated otherwise:
 - For employees who travelled abroad before the lockdown began, a temporary extension of emergency travel benefits is available for employees and eligible dependents if they left Canada on or after January 17, 2020. The extension ensures that employees can continue to access emergency travel benefits and will protect their health and wellbeing until they return.
 - A temporary relaxing of early prescription refills at the professional discretion of the pharmacist and provincial and territorial regulations is currently implemented. This helps employees minimize visits to the pharmacy and is especially important for employees with pre-existing or complex conditions.
 - In recognition of the stress and negative impact on mental health that the pandemic could cause, social workers in all areas across the country and psychotherapists working directly with plan participants are temporarily accepted as mental health practitioners under the PSHCP. The temporary enhancement is helping employees maintain good mental health and receive needed supports.
 - The requirement to have a prescription for mental health or physiotherapy services under the PSHCP is temporarily suspended. The temporary waiver is facilitating employee access to these services without a visit to their doctor's office in order to help maintain their physical and mental health.
 - Existing prescriptions for paramedical services that expired on or after March 20, 2020, continue to be honoured. This is helping employees access these services without a visit to their doctor's office and maintain their physical and mental health as they prepare to return to the worksite.
 - The PSHCP continues to cover members and their eligible dependents when they receive virtual services provided by the following types of paramedical

practitioner as long as the practitioner is registered in the province or territory in which the member resides:

- Chiropodists
- Chiropractors
- Naturopaths
- Osteopaths
- Podiatrists
- Psychologists
- Physiotherapists
- Social Workers or Psychotherapists
- Speech Therapists

Access to virtual services helps minimize physical interactions while ensuring access to health care during and after the pandemic.

- Sun Life Financial, the insurer, is available to answer employees and their dependants' questions.
- Detailed information on [PSHCP flexibilities](#) are available.
- When employees become ill or injured for a longer period, the Disability Insurance plan and the Public Service Management Insurance Plan (PSMIP) offer income replacement up to 70% of salaried income after a 13-week waiting period, which is generally covered by accumulated sick leave.
 - Employees who are unable to return to the worksite due to COVID-19 illness or related complications may submit a claim under one of these plans if they meet the disability definitions that make them eligible for disability coverage under the Disability Insurance plan or the PSMIP.
 - More details on the [Disability Insurance Plan and the PSMIP](#)
- Temporary measures for the administration of the Public Service Dental Care Plan (PSDCP) and the Pensioners' Dental Services Plan (PDSP) have also been introduced to help lessen the impact of the suspension of non-emergency dental services and support the recommendations of public health authorities for physical distancing. These measures will be in effect for one year from a date

determined by the Government of Canada once non-emergency dental services are again available. **New**

- More details on the temporary administrative measures : [COVID-19 temporary administrative measures: Public Service Dental Care Plan \(PSDCP\) and Pensioners' Dental Services Plan \(PDSP\)](#).
- Under the Public Service Pension Plan, provisions are available to provide flexibility that may be helpful during the COVID-19 pandemic.
 - If plan members are having difficulty meeting their financial obligations or deadlines for pension-related transactions, it is advised that they contact the [Government of Canada Pension Centre](#). The Pension Centre will explain the options that are available to them based on their individual circumstances.
 - Flexibilities are available in respect of [Service buybacks](#), [Leave without pay contributions](#), [Pension transfer agreements](#), [Pension benefit options](#), [Pension overpayments](#), and [Required documentation](#).
 - Bargaining agents have been engaged in discussions related to the impacts of COVID-19 on the public service pension plan via the Public Service Pension Advisory Committee.
 - More details on the [Public Service Pension Plan](#)

Diversity, inclusion and accessibility

- Deputy Heads should apply a diversity and inclusion lens to decisions and plans. During this time of transition, a focus should be placed on ensuring every employee can stay healthy, stay safe, and make their best possible contribution to the public service. Deputy heads and managers are to integrate accessibility principles and practices in the development and implementation of their respective plans.
- In addition, efforts should be made to help normalize wellness, diversity, inclusion and accessibility as part of the workplace culture by emphasizing the collective responsibility of creating safe, healthy, inclusive and diverse workplace, and by encouraging managers and executives to be flexible, supporting employees in remembering that resumption of work at worksites is

not a “return to normal”. Continued flexibility with work arrangements will help smooth the transition and ensure all employees feel well supported.

- Deputy Heads should embody an ongoing commitment to inclusion, respect and civility in the workplace, and helping employees feel comfortable voicing their concerns when these principles are not upheld by assuring them there will be action and no reprisal. Deputy Heads should make wellness, inclusion and diversity a regular feature in their communications to employees, with an emphasis on empathy for those who are feeling particularly vulnerable.
- Managers should reflect on the fact that each person is experiencing this unprecedented period differently, with various factors impacting their safety, their well-being, and their ability to contribute to the work of the unit.
- At the same time, keeping in mind that decisions from public health authorities could have a direct impact on the circumstances of individual employees, managers ought to make sure they understand the unique circumstances of each employee, and remain flexible about each person’s ability to contribute to the work of the unit, ensure no barriers are inadvertently created, and seek guidance from executives as needed.
- Managers should continue to apply the principles for the management of a remote workforce and leading at a distance, remain aware of the state of mind and vulnerability felt by members of their work unit and remain vigilant about respect and civility in the workplace, recognizing that tensions in the workplace or among colleagues can be intensified during stressful periods, and to not let inappropriate behavior become a problem.
- Managers should review requests for additional equipment on a case-by-case basis, prioritizing requests from employees who are delivering critical services and those for whom the employer has a [Duty to Accommodate](#). Should you need additional information, you can review the [Guidance for Equipping Employees Working Remotely](#).

Official languages

- Deputy heads should work with their official languages champion who will support them in fully respecting official languages as restrictions related to COVID-19 are eased.
- More specifically, they should ensure that official languages implications are considered in all aspects of communications and decision-making (refer to the [OL Checklist for Deputy Heads](#)), including in the provision of tools that support telework, and that messages to employees in their organization are available simultaneously in both languages.
- Managers need to be sensitive to the linguistic make-up of their teams. When in a bilingual region, they need to encourage the use of either official language in team meetings, engage employees individually in their preferred official language and make information available simultaneously in both official languages.
- Managers should also encourage staff to work in their preferred official language, reach out to the person responsible for official languages in their organization to discuss how the crisis and easing of COVID-19 restrictions may have affected official languages in the workplace, and, when referring employees to support services, make sure they are available in the employee's preferred official language.

Scenario planning

▼ In this section

- [People](#)
- [Physical space](#)
- [The work](#)
- [Partners, stakeholders, communities](#)

This section provides a variety of approaches for Deputy Heads as they elaborate the strategy for their workplace after the appropriate authorities have eased COVID-19-related restrictions.

People

How many employees are unavailable to work due to illness, personal health conditions, technical limitations, accommodation requirements, absence of public infrastructure (schools, transit), etc.?

What priority work needs to continue? What can be reassigned? What work can continue to be done remotely? At what frequency?

Does the physical work environment or the availability of PPE limit the easing of COVID-19 restrictions in some occupations?

Which employees hold the skills required to deliver on priority work? Who needs to be reskilled or upskilled?

What work can be reassigned to other regions?

Physical space

How many employees can be reintegrated in the worksite(s), taking into account requirements for safe occupancy, as required by the *Canada Labour Code* and OHS guidance?

Which functions/teams should be included in the first wave for resuming work in the worksite?

Can we move beyond the paradigm of an assigned office space for a person, and assign appropriately distanced desks to the employees who need to be onsite regardless of previous allocations?

I have an unconventional floor worksite; should I consult with a medical expert and space designer to maximize productivity while safeguarding trust and safety of the workforce?

Can I share space with other federal tenants who may continue to work remotely?

Will we need to take other precautions to secure meditation/prayer/private rooms, active workstations and other common spaces respect the public health guidance?

Do we need to make further changes to the physical space to meet our Duty to Accommodate?

The work

Note that consideration of the reorganization or redistribution of work must take account of the Employer's obligations under collective agreements.

Will resources need to be reprioritised in our organization to meet new priorities?

Which work needs to be re-assessed/ re-envisioned/ recalibrated?

Is there work that is more adaptable to remote/telework than previously thought?

Are there new ways of delivering services that will minimize risk of virus transmission for both employees and citizens?

Can services be improved through digitization or automation as a result of recent lessons learned?

Partners, Stakeholders, Communities

Consider all partners, stakeholders and communities that receive services from your department, including citizens, economic sectors, civil society, Indigenous communities, etc.

How can your department support a safe approach to re-opening sectors of the economy?

How are services being provided and do options exist to deliver those services differently (e.g. digital platform)

What unique challenges do your stakeholders face as a result of COVID-19?

Can engagement and consultation be undertaken online or using other approaches?

What steps can be taken to protect the health and safety of employees and partners, stakeholders, and communities?

Practical considerations and checklists for the easing of restrictions (short-term considerations)

▼ In this section

- [Preamble](#)
- [Develop and implement a plan – overview checklist](#)
- [Communications and engagement](#)
- [Determining whether work should be performed onsite or by working remotely](#)
- [Training checklist – continuous learning and reskilling](#)
- [Psychological health and safety](#)
- [Employee Assistance Program \(EAP\)](#)
- [Diversity, inclusion and accessibility](#)
- [Official languages](#)

Preamble

This section is intended to provide Deputy Heads and Managers with a practical list of considerations as we ease restrictions related to COVID-19. These considerations should apply to most worksites while taking into consideration that many employees work in unique environments. The objective is to protect the health and wellbeing of employees that are returning to federal worksites and to prevent the spread of COVID-19. With this in mind; Deputy Heads and Managers are asked to focus their plans for the easing of restrictions on those employees who are necessary to provide critical services to Canadians, that need to be “onsite” to support government priorities, or whose work cannot reasonably be done remotely. As working remotely is the safest option available, managers are encouraged to adopt best practices to support high-functioning virtual teams where possible.

It is understood that as we transition to the next normal, that federal worksites will not be able to sustain a return of an important majority of their employees while respecting physical distancing measures. This ratio will need to be calculated looking

at office space design / square footage, as well as network capacity for the remaining virtual workers, in order to strike a balance that will ensure productivity of all employees.

Develop and implement a plan – overview checklist

Deputy Heads are responsible for developing and implementing a plan to address the gradual and sustainable easing of COVID-related restrictions related to worksites for which the Deputy Head is responsible. In developing and implementing the plan, departments should:

- Ensure that the plan is reviewed in light of GBA+ principles, physical and psychological health and safety consideration, the Diversity and Inclusion lens, and accessibility requirements.
- Ensure that the privacy impacts for any collection, use or disclosure of personal information in the plan been assessed, and risks been mitigated.
- Align implementation of the plan to conditions resulting from the easing of measures in each location (province and territory, municipality) where the department or agency has physical worksites (i.e. asymmetrical implementation).
- Ensure that the plan is consistent with public health advisories (including federal, provincial, territorial and municipal advisories).
- Inform and consult with bargaining agents during the development and implementation of the plan.
- Continue to monitor COVID-19 cases through the enterprise application.
- Where Business Continuity Plans have been activated, determine the date at which the Business Continuity Plan will be deactivated.
- Determine how many employees can be reintegrated in the worksite(s), taking into account Health Canada guidance for physical distancing and the use of PPE.
- Include a protocol for visitors, with a view to minimizing in-person contact.
- Minimize the number of employees asked to return to the worksite by prioritizing work to be done onsite. To assess which work should be prioritized, the following considerations should be taken into account:

- Is the work critical to business continuity and achieving the departmental mandate or service delivery standards?
 - Can the work be done remotely? For example, can the work continue to be done without the requirement for in-person interactions with the public or colleagues?
 - Does the employee have all the necessary equipment, technology, systems and/or data or does the work require access to information only available on-location?
 - Is the work suitable for remote working? (i.e. timing, deadlines, autonomy)
 - Is security and safety maintained if working remotely? (e.g. data, physical)
 - Does anyone else depend on this work being done in the office or a specific location? (e.g. security, clients)
 - How do GBA+, diversity and inclusion, and accessibility considerations impact the decisions? It is important not to make assumptions, give opportunities for employees to be heard.
- Identify the employees who are to return to the worksite. Communicate this list to the bargaining agent representing these employees.
 - Provide employees with information regarding return to worksite protocols and a forum where they can ask questions and get the appropriate answers prior to their return.
 - Provide employees with the information on their schedule of work, ensuring compliance with the collective agreement.
 - Provide employees with information on the organization's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) and other mental health resources to support them when they return to the worksite.
 - Provide employees with the available first aid attendants contact information.
 - Put in place emergency protocols to ensure it is known how many employees are onsite for appropriate response in case of emergency. Provide employees requiring assistance during emergencies with the information they need to safely enter and exit the worksite.
 - Provide employees with information on the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) or other equipment, materials and measures that the employer will be providing

when they return to the worksite.

- Review guidance on use of code 699 Other Leave with Pay to keep apprised of changes to eligibility as circumstances related to COVID-19 evolve, and ensure the continued appropriate use of 669 within organizations.
- Inform and consult with bargaining agents, the department's Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) policy and workplace committees and other partners and stakeholders during the development and implementation of the plan.
- Develop training material and information sheets for employees who are returning to the worksite. Ensure material is vetted by the departmental OHS committees.
- Ensure proper training and directions are provided to managers and employees on occupational health and safety matters.

Communications and engagement

- Frequent communications with Employees.
- Ensure alignment to enterprise-wide messaging, and alignment in messaging within the organization.
- In order to build trust and resilience, and avoid the spread of misinformation, consider the following when developing messaging: content, clarity, consistency, frequency, and tone.
- Be transparent and authentic.
- Encourage dialogue and flexibility to adapt to specific circumstances.
- Develop information sheets and clear signage for employees who are returning to the worksite. The material is to be vetted by the departmental OHS committees, and be provided in accessible formats.

Determining whether work should be performed onsite or by working remotely

- Consider occupational health and safety, duty to accommodate, accessibility, GBA+ considerations, and the diversity and inclusion lens.
- Take into consideration functional and operational requirements.

- In assessing which employees should be asked to return to the worksite, specific impacts to individuals will need to be considered as part of protecting the health and safety of employees. Some employees may have specific personal circumstances that may require accommodation, for example, medical conditions, family and childcare responsibilities, at-risk age group, living with people with elevated health risks, living in vulnerable communities, as well other considerations such as travel restrictions.
- Establish and/or modify work schedules using existing flexibilities (e.g., those in collective agreements and relevant terms and conditions of employment) while respecting:
 - Collective agreements and relevant terms and conditions of employment;
 - The *Canada Labour Code* and *Canada Occupational Health and Safety Regulations*; and
 - Duty to accommodate requirements.

Training checklist – continuous learning and reskilling

When considering what training is required, the following should be considered:

- Occupational health and safety (including related legislation), duty to accommodate, privacy, and accessibility guidelines.
- Wellness, inclusion and diversity.
- Mental Health supports.
- Management and leadership – new normal means adapting the way we lead people.
- Virtual and remote work management tools and guidelines.

Psychological health and safety

The Centre of Expertise on Mental Health in the Workplace offers tools and supports. In considering how to support psychological health and safety, the following should be taken into account:

- As this is a plan to mobilize people, and considering the [psychosocial impacts of the pandemic on all Canadians](#), psychological health and safety and the potential

impacts on the 13 psychosocial factors outlined in the [National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety](#) should be a consideration in all people management decisions, including when developing scenarios for the easing of restrictions.

- Include OHS and HR/Wellness partners and stakeholders at the decision-making tables and/or consult them.
- Promote departmental and enterprise-wide mental health services, resources and training that are available for all employees and ensure ease of access.
- The approach to addressing psychological health and safety should align with the National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in regards to critical event preparedness, which states that organizations “shall establish and sustain processes to:
 - a. ensure the psychological health and safety risks and impacts of critical events are assessed; and,
 - b. manage critical events in a manner that reduces psychological risks to the extent possible and supports ongoing psychological safety”.
- Psychological health and safety risks and impacts can be assessed through relevant workplace data (e.g., pulse surveys, programs and services utilization reports, etc.) and organizations should consider prioritizing top psychosocial risks (e.g., Leadership, Influence, Balance, Workload, etc.).
- Provide tools and resources to equip managers on how to support themselves and their employees in regard to mental health.

Employee Assistance Program (EAP)

- Make EAP contact information and Executive Advisory Services available to all staff.
- Promote the use of these services.
- Contact your EAP provider for options on other possible workplace supports.

Diversity, inclusion and accessibility

- Efforts should be made to help normalize wellness, diversity and inclusion as a regular topic of discussion.
- Embody an ongoing commitment to respect and civility in the workplace.
- Reflect on the fact that each person is experiencing this unprecedented period differently, with various factors impacting their health, safety, well-being, and ability to contribute to the work of the unit.
- Understand the unique circumstances of each employee, and remain flexible about each person's ability to contribute to the work of the unit, seeking guidance from executives as needed.
- Apply the principles for the management of a remote workforce and leading at a distance, remain aware of the state of mind and vulnerability felt by members of their work unit and remain vigilant about respect and civility in the workplace.

Official languages

- Seek support from official languages champion as the organization returns to work.
- Ensure that official languages implications are considered in all aspects of communications and decision-making (refer to the [OL Checklist for Deputy Heads](#)), including in the provision of tools that support telework, and that messages to employees in their organization are available simultaneously in both languages.
- Make messages to employees available simultaneously in both languages.
- When in a bilingual region, need to encourage the use of either official language in team meetings, engage employees individually in their preferred official language and make information available simultaneously in both official languages.
- Encourage staff to work in their preferred official language, reach out to the person responsible for official languages in their organization to discuss how the crisis and return to the worksite may have affected official languages and, when referring employees to support services, make sure they are available in the employee's preferred official language.

The Joint Learning Program – empowering conversations in the workplace

The Joint Learning Program (JLP) is a unique partnership between the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat (TBS) and the PSAC. In response to the current crisis, the JLP has launched a new series of short guided discussions to help employees and managers talk about the challenges they are facing due to COVID-19. Each discussion in the Empowering Conversations series stands alone and requests can be made for one, two or three sessions.

The guided discussions are led by two trained JLP facilitators and are intended for intact teams. Each session can have between 3 and 15 participants. The first two sessions are designed to take place remotely using the technology that is available to teams, while the third can be done remotely or in person.

Grounding Ourselves in Uncertain Times (1.5 hours – online)

This discussion aims to help participants:

- Discuss experiences and identify stressors
- Share tools for managing health during isolation
- Build stronger online connections, networks and relationships

Returning to the Worksite: Now What? (1.5 hours – online)

The second discussion will help participants:

- Review the available departmental information about the return to the worksite
- Identify questions and information needed
- Begin planning for returning to the worksite

Rebuilding and Reconnecting, Post COVID-19 (3 hours – online/in-person)

The third discussion in the series will enable participants to:

- Reconnect with their colleagues in the post COVID-19 world
- Discuss fears and opportunities for growth
- Plan for rebuilding the workplace

During this time, dialogue between employees and managers is essential. There is a renewed sense of collaboration and a hunger for connection. Considering the impact of physical distancing and isolation on mental health and wellness and to foster a sense of community in COVID-19 times, *Empowering Conversations* creates space for focused, honest discussions about the impact the pandemic has had on employees and their families.

To request a facilitated discussion from [Empowering Conversations](#) for your team, please visit the [JLP website](#).

Footnotes

- 1 The word “employee” is used throughout this document and is meant to be read broadly to include executives, managers, and employees without supervisory responsibility. In some instances the context will imply a narrower meaning (i.e. “non-managers”).
- 2 Note that the some federal collective agreements are subject to a statutory freeze pursuant to the *Federal Public Service Labour Relations Act*

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