

Dear Friends,

As Minister of Seniors, I wanted to connect with you regarding COVID -19.

We know seniors are worried about their health and the health of loved ones. This situation is unprecedented and changing rapidly. And it poses an increased risk for seniors.

I want to assure you that the Government of Canada, provinces, territories and local governments are all working together to protect seniors.

We will get through this together.

That starts with giving seniors the tools to take action.

Prevention

The latest expert advice on how to keep yourself and seniors safe is available at canada.ca/covid19, from Canada's Chief Public Health Officer, Dr. Theresa Tam, at twitter.com/CPHO_Canada, and from the coronavirus information line (1-833-784-4397). There are also infographics you can print and display [here](#).

A short message to seniors from myself and my Parliamentary Secretary is available on Twitter ([English](#), [French](#)) and Facebook ([English](#), [French](#)).

Travel

Federal and provincial health leaders have recommended that all Canadians avoid travel outside of Canada and all those abroad return home. Travellers will be required to be free from symptoms in order to board flights and all border crossers will need to self-isolate for 14 days upon their return to Canada.

It is concerning that some snowbirds aren't taking the requirement to [self-isolate](#) seriously after they return to Canada. Some are getting groceries before going home. Others are going about their normal lives, going out for coffee with friends or going to the mall. Such carefree attitudes pose a real risk to public health. And if they continue, governments may be obliged to take more stringent measures.

The following recommendations need to be followed rigorously, no matter which country travellers are coming from, how they are travelling (e.g. air or ground travel) or how long they have been away.

Self-isolate means:

- Staying home and keeping your distance from others. Do not leave home unless absolutely necessary, such as to seek medical care. Do not go to school, work, other public areas (e.g. shopping malls) or use public transportation (e.g. buses, taxis). Additional information is available [here](#).
- Not having visitors, especially older adults, or those with medical conditions who are at a higher risk of developing serious illness.
- Monitoring your health for fever, cough or difficulty breathing.
- Washing your hands often with soap and warm water for 20 seconds, or using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer if soap and water are not available.
- Covering your mouth and nose with your arm when coughing or sneezing.

It is crucial that everyone follows self-isolation recommendations properly to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 to others in the home setting or in the community. These efforts will contribute to slow the spread of COVID-19 in Canada. With patience and cooperation, we can all do our part.

Please share this message broadly, along with this [handout for travellers without symptoms returning to Canada](#).

Financial security

To help protect seniors' financial security we are introducing several new measures.

For low and modest income seniors—and other Canadians—the Government will provide a one-time special payment through the Goods and Services Tax (GST) credit by early May. This will double the maximum annual GST credit payment amounts for the 2019-20 benefit year. The average boost to income for those benefitting from this measure will be close to \$400 for single individuals and close to \$600 for couples.

We are reducing required minimum withdrawals from Registered Retirement Income Funds (RRIFs) by 25 per cent for 2020. This will provide flexibility to seniors and help preserve RRIF assets during a volatile market.

Furthermore, we are extending the deadline to file your income taxes to June 1 and allowing any new balances due, or installments, to be deferred until after August 31, 2020 without incurring interest or penalties.

Social isolation

Long-term care homes are under pressure, as access to family members and friends is restricted. While a prudent response to the threat, these measures could also cause social isolation. Steps are being taken to try and address these concerns.

Seniors have always been more at risk of social isolation, and the practice of social distancing to combat the virus has aggravated that risk. We must strive to ensure seniors are supported during this difficult time.

Conclusion

As Minister of Seniors, I am a member of cabinet and sit on the special cabinet committee on COVID-19 to ensure that the government understands and makes decisions that take into account the needs of Canadian seniors.

I have also been reaching out to my provincial and territorial counterparts to better understand seniors' overall needs in their regions.

If you have identified problems or noticed trends you believe are important for my colleagues and I to be aware of in our deliberations, please don't hesitate to reach out and let me know. I know you have your ear to the ground and value your input as we work to support seniors during these exceptional times.

Together, we can and we will get through this.

Yours sincerely,

Deb Schulte
Canada's Minister of Seniors