

Yellowknife, NT – January 30, 2022 –Since the onset of the pandemic, the Yellowknife business community has borne the brunt of the economic fallout/effects of public health orders that restrict gathering sizes and cross-border travel. The recent public health orders, that recommended large employers have their employees work from home and closed schools, were just as devastating to downtown businesses as stricter measures have been in the past. The measures that were introduced effectively closed businesses by reducing foot traffic to near zero and proliferating a shelter in place mentality within the community.

We have heard from many of our member businesses – they are hurting, they are frustrated and they are exhausted. Many have experienced catastrophic revenue drops, shrinking customer base and loss of irreplaceable staff. There is no more ability to pivot or adapt to offer a new service or product as was the case earlier in the pandemic - businesses simply need customers to return.

This is especially true for those businesses that cater to tourism. Enough is enough. We need immediate action and leadership on this issue.

Vaccines work in reducing serious infection and the Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce fully supported the GNWT's Proof of Vaccination program. The Yellowknife community has done the work, stepped up and gotten vaccinated. Territory-wide, 77% of eligible people are fully vaccinated¹. Furthermore, 81.4% of eligible Canadians are fully vaccinated². At this point, restrictions in place for Canadians to visit the Northwest Territories, with such a high rate of vaccination both in the NWT and Canada-wide, is indefensible.

We are the only jurisdiction in Canada still employing this type of measure and the time has come for it to end. The GNWT appears to keep waiting for the perfect time to reopen to leisure travel only to hit yet another reason to delay it. As this current outbreak subsides many in the Yellowknife business community simply cannot survive any further waiting and indecision.

What's more, with the introduction of antiviral drugs, at-home rapid tests and a case-by-case approach to keeping schools and workplaces open, we have the toolbox to deal with COVID-19. Why then are we still using sweeping measures from two years ago such as closed borders, blanket work from home policies and capacity restrictions in restaurants? With such high vaccination rates, greater understanding of COVID-19 health risks and access to mitigation tools,

¹ <https://nwt-covid.shinyapps.io/Testing-and-Cases/?lang=1>

² <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/covid-19/vaccination-coverage/>



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how can we ask business owners to continue to experience lost revenue, for some a complete loss of their businesses, because of blunt-force public health measures?

We need to move forward and away from public health orders that restrict travel, keep employees home and close schools. The time has come to move forward: end border restrictions on leisure travel, end sweeping work from home edicts, lay out a plan for when the public health emergency will be lifted, how the COVID secretariat will be disbanded and its many resources re-allocated.

Our new reality is about risk mitigation. And indeed, the GNWT's new campaign engages the public to measure their own level of risk and use available safety nets. These include getting vaccinated, distancing when warranted, masking when in crowds and staying home when you are sick. Sending employees to work from home en-masse, reducing capacity in restaurants, and restricting travellers to our Territory are not the safety nets business owners can or need to labour under any longer.

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