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**GREATER  
PARKLAND  
REGIONAL  
CHAMBER**

Office of the Premier  
Executive Branch  
307 Legislature Building  
10800-97 Avenue  
Edmonton, AB  
T5K 2B6

Tuesday June 15, 2021

Dear Premier Kenney

As COVID-19 continues to impact small businesses across Canada, many entrepreneurs have been directly affected by changes to their business model. As a large provincial Chamber, the Greater Parkland Regional Chamber of Commerce has witnessed an alarming rise over the last 15 months in those willing to share their mental health wellbeing. This is concerning for several reasons; how many in our communities are sitting in silence as they have no one to talk to or are alone and have no way of reaching supporting services. Some just do not want to share their stories through a sense of stigma. As new measures and impacts were introduced – especially quarantine and its effects on many people’s usual activities, routines, or livelihoods – levels of loneliness, depression, harmful alcohol and drug use, and self-harm or suicidal behaviour have all seen a rise.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shaped more than 15 months of our lives, cancelling plans, upending livelihoods, and causing feelings of grief, stress, and anxiety. Our COVID-19 business focused surveys have highlighted a dramatic response to the question regarding impacts on business apart from revenues, 62% of respondents have reported psychological health issues over the last two surveys. Several respondents expressed helplessness, with nearly half saying their mental health had severely or moderately deteriorated because of the pandemic.

Online mental health services and resources have been particularly critical given that significant populations have been quarantined or otherwise isolated in ways that interrupt the availability of in-person services. Our businesses have been on a significant roller coaster.

The financial impact on business resulting from the pandemic and the restrictions have been catastrophic. Many businesses have dealt with unexpected extra expenses that have come from PPE and ensuring their business is adhering to health and safety protocols, loss of customers, and cancelled business investments and expansion plans. This has all resulted in elevated stress or anxiety.

The Medicine Hat Chamber of Commerce policy submission on Increasing Access to Mental Wellness Workplace Supports makes the recommendations of 1. Implementing an Alberta Wellness Grant to provide two-thirds funding

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for mental health and wellness services for employees, employers, owners and those who are self employed; 2. Explore the possibility of including mental health and wellness services within the Alberta Health Care system model; 3. Reinstatement of the Alberta Health Care Premium and 4. Support a community-led, collaborative and entrepreneurial approach to service delivery early detection, prevention and treatment to avoid duplication and reduce service delivery costs. The Greater Parkland Regional Chamber of Commerce supports these recommendations.

Improving mental health will take a collective effort and we urge the government to take steps to address the mental health consequences of COVID-19 during the current crisis and beyond.

Yours sincerely

Sarah Parry, CEO GPRC

CC:

Minister Doug Schweitzer, Minister of Jobs, Economy and Innovation

Minister Tyler Shandro, Minister of Health

Jason Luan, Associate Minister of Mental Health and Addictions

Searle Turton, MLA Spruce Grove – Stony Plain

Shane Getson, MLA Lac Ste. Anne – Parkland

Mark Smith, MLA Drayton Valley – Devon

Darcy Torhjem, Chair GPRC

Dan Duckering, Director & Chair, Advocacy Committee GPRC

Melissa Johnson, Director & Vice Chair, Advocacy Committee GPRC

Paulla Adamitz, Director & Advocacy Committee Member GPRC

Kelly John Rose, Director & Advocacy Committee Member GPRC

Tyler Reil, Advocacy Committee Member GPRC

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