

ISSUE: The role of governments towards a robust digital infrastructure in the post pandemic world

BACKGROUND:

Digital and Data Infrastructure are an important pillar to create an engine of innovation and wealth creation. COVID19 has accelerated the transformation to Digitalization and highlighted the many benefits in a short period.

Unfortunately, COVID19 also represents a tremendous economic shock and burden. According to experts, recovery is what will be required over the next 18–24 months to get output back to its pre-crisis level.

To build a stronger position in the near term, we can build on the COVID lessons turning around the negative impacts from the pandemic to fast track the use technology and communication networks. We have seen how fast people can adapt and how productive hundreds of millions of people ramped up the use of digital tools to remain connected, productive and healthy.

For the better part of a decade, Digital Transformation has been the core driver of organizational change. The transition from legacy IT to cloud computing; the expansion of retail and banking into the mobile space; the rise of machine learning, artificial intelligence, and smart automation; improving safety and reliability of public transit through predictive maintenance; and the growth of the IoT were, among other massively transformative technologies, at the heart of a generational forward evolutionary leap. And it is therefore not surprising that these very technologies have enabled businesses, governments, healthcare systems, tech companies, students, and workers to adapt to the turmoil of disruption caused by the pandemic.¹

The ability for us to adapt so quickly under these unprecedented conditions only underscores the critical need for governments to continue to invest in digital technology, robust, high-speed communication networks, innovation, and a connected infrastructure.

As part of the plan for recovery, the Oakville Chamber believes that governments at all levels will need to enhance digital connections and e-services amongst business, employees, citizens and government to create an attractive climate for business investment and job creation for economic growth.

Digital infrastructure allows us to connect people and places, improve productivity, increase economic growth, create healthy and safer communities through valuable insights gained from data analytics and new technologies.

This will result in our ability to solve complex problems, improve the sustainability of our cities, build new businesses creating new jobs and create a step-change for competitiveness for our region.

An increasingly digital economy will require major investments in sophisticated networks, cybersecurity and electronics. It will also force businesses to adopt new technologies and business models to interact with customers, clients and employees.

About 2.5 billion people are connected to the internet today, a third of the world's population; there are projected to be about 4 billion users by 2020, or more than half the global population.

Continuous access to information, commerce and communication has become a daily fact of life for billions and will soon become a reality for billions more. As the internet makes its full weight felt in more high-impact

¹ [Forbes](#)

areas such as healthcare, education and government services, access to digital services will only become more essential for everyone in the years to come.

The digital economy is growing at more than 10% a year, significantly faster than the economy as a whole. In emerging markets, the internet economy is growing at 12-25% per year, and it is having a far-reaching social and political, as well as economic, impact. Around the world, it is an increasingly important source of growth and, frequently, jobs.²

Governments, businesses, and other stakeholders including post secondary institutions should commit to near, mid and long-term actions that promote growth of digital services and the digital economy.

All stakeholders can establish comprehensive, aspirational plans that lay out a path to broadband connectivity for all. Making expanded connectivity a reality requires a continuing commitment to investment and innovation by the private and public sectors – and an understanding of the importance of keeping digital traffic flowing. Governments in particular need to recognize the broader role that digital services can play in economic development and growth; the digital economy is much more than a potential source of tax revenues.³

The COVID19 Pandemic has also accelerated businesses' digital transformation. It also showed us how quickly work itself can change. Adaptability, flexibility, and a commitment to lifelong learning will be vital, especially as companies and entire industries reposition themselves in a highly digital, data-driven new world and search for the talent that will help them succeed.

For businesses and government, the way to remain competitive lies in upskilling to enable them building a future-ready workforce; for individuals, it's a way to keep their skills relevant and stay future-ready themselves. Making deliberate, significant investments in learning will ensure organizations and employees alike have the knowledge, skills, and capabilities needed to work effectively in a digitized, automated world.⁴

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That the Federal Government:

1. Introduce multijurisdictional programs, funding and incentives for digitization across all levels of government to improve Canada's productivity and economic recovery.
2. Commit to actions that promote the long-term growth of the digital economy including removing impediments to the expansion of digital infrastructure and modernize policies to encourage investment and innovation throughout the internet ecosystem.
3. Create a mandatory obligation for stimulus funds to be applied with digitalization included in the scope of deliverables.
4. Create funding mechanisms for public post secondary institutions to establish digital literacy programs to ensure workforce is future ready, as well as investing in research and digital skills training to meet the future labour demands.

² [World Economic Forum](#)

³ [World Economic Forum](#)

⁴ [COVID-19 The upskilling imperative - Building a Future Ready Workforce for the AI Age](#)

