



March 8, 2022

Dear Premier Horgan, Minister Dix and Dr. Henry:

Every province in Canada, with the exception of British Columbia has announced the lifting of mandates in place due to COVID-19.

The Chambers of Commerce from Armstrong, Lake Country, Peachland, Penticton, Summerland and Board of Trade from West Kelowna would like to bring forward some concerns regarding the mandates that have remained in place in BC and the effect that this is having on local businesses, the economy, and our communities. As our neighboring Provinces are in the process of lifting mandates, along with other Provinces across the country and other countries around the world, BC's mandates seem to have no end in sight. While we understand that each Province has created and followed their own health guidelines, the lack of consistent scientific evidence amongst health authorities and scientists, both nationally and internationally, for the implementation of mandates and vaccine passports have instead resulted in detrimental harms to society.

The last two years has created an incredible amount of instability and we have the following concerns for the businesses and communities of our Province if we are not to follow suit with the lifting of restrictions in the very near future.

1. **90.07% of people 18 and over are fully vaccinated** in BC as of February 20, 2022. This leaves approximately 10% unvaccinated, a number that has been consistent for some time, despite the mandates. That is 10% of the population that continues to be excluded.
2. The economic impact of 10% of the population, plus their families and friends in some instances, not spending in general society (restaurants, events, gyms, community centers, etc.) is estimated at \$1.4B economic loss annually for our small businesses in BC alone. This estimate is based on monthly spending of \$300 spent in restaurants, \$200 on entertainment and \$100 on recreation and fitness. This is substantial and cannot be ignored.
3. BC's tourism industry generated \$22.3 billion in 2019. This number fell to \$7.1 billion in 2020 with numbers yet unavailable for 2021. This is the largest industry in our region and already the hardest hit. We anticipate it will suffer even further as many will choose to take holidays in Provinces without restrictions over Spring Break and as we approach the warmer weather. There is proof of this in the US where the States without mandates and restrictions saw booming tourism while those with greater restrictions have continued to struggle and many businesses continue to close to this day.
4. We have a major labor shortage, and it has been very difficult for businesses of all sizes, in all industries to attract staff. People (of all vaccination status) will be more likely to choose a Province with stability to seek work and to invest in, which will further affect these issues.

5. After 2 long years of disruption, small businesses urgently need stability so that they can make plans for their future. Business owners need to know that their doors won't be closed, or capacities won't be limited at the drop of a hat. Currently our neighboring provinces are offering that stability, which means we may lose not only labor but businesses who would prefer to relocate to a province that understands the negative impacts of these mandates and who also understand that the cure cannot be worse than the disease.
6. We already have a major shortage of family doctors, chiropractors, and other health care providers, so losing even one more is too many. We have heard of health care professionals that are moving their practices to Alberta due to the mandates. This will also affect the attraction of labor if people cannot get the health care services, they need when considering this Province as their potential home.
7. The “vaxxed” vs “unvaxxed” dialogue has created a detrimental division in our communities that we may never fully recover from. The lockdowns and mandates, along with this division, are resulting in historic levels of mental health issues and addiction. We already struggle with deep socioeconomic issues in our communities and now even more people are losing their jobs and their businesses. Families and friends have been divided, and the problem is only going to be accelerated by continued division and mandates that according to many doctors and scientists from around the world, should be stopped immediately.

Transparency has been requested from our government by our local Chambers in the past months and those requests have been ignored, but there is no denying that the harms of these mandates cannot be ignored and will only worsen with time. Businesses and individuals have been detrimentally affected because of the response to the pandemic, and the lack of transparency behind the science which has guided these decisions, cannot remain optional. We must have access to all the information so that we can learn from the past, ensure that we are not doing more harm than good and so we can move forward in a collective healing.

There must be transparency on decision making, especially when it appears the science is differing from Province to Province. Health officials and leaders must be held accountable for their decisions and the impact that they have on our communities and businesses.

Our Chambers are here to ensure that our communities and businesses are able to compete and survive, and the continued mandates create barriers to this survival. We need clear explanations for why they remain in place.

Respectfully,

Armstrong Spallumcheen Chamber of Commerce
Greater Westside Board of Trade
Lake Country Chamber of Commerce
Peachland Chamber of Commerce
Penticton & Wine Country Chamber of Commerce
Summerland Chamber of Commerce