

MEDIA RELEASE**August 24, 2021****Kelowna Chamber Calls for Delay in Implementation of Vaccine Card**

Kelowna: A modest majority of businesses in the Kelowna area appear supportive of a vaccine verification card announced by the Province on Monday, but strong opposition to the plan exists and there remain many important questions to be answered. The Kelowna Chamber surveyed its members on the issue over the last few days and the majority (57%) of respondents stated they were supportive of some sort of vaccine verification system for non-essential activities if it meant getting back to normal business levels but more than a third (36%) were strongly opposed.

“Our members have strong feelings on this subject,” says Jeffrey Robinson, President of the Kelowna Chamber of Commerce. “The common ground seems to be a desire to return to normal, but there are fundamental differences over whether requiring some private businesses to refuse service to unvaccinated customers is consistent with that goal.”

The Chamber also has some concerns about government preparing and supporting those businesses that will be required to implement vaccine verification.

“Businesses that will be impacted by this decision want to know how it will be enforced and what support government will provide them,” says Chamber Executive Director Dan Rogers. “There needs to be clarity so that employees are not unfairly put in conflict with customers so we would encourage government to re-examine the timeline for implementation so businesses can fully understand and reasonably plan for what it appears the government is going to ask them to do.”

The Chamber’s survey also indicated that many members prefer alternate methods for reducing COVID-19 transmission, such as the ability for customers to prove they are not infectious using rapid tests kits (62% in favour of no cost rapid test kits) and/or a proof of a recent negative test.

“Given that a significant minority of our population are deeply opposed to vaccination, we think it is incumbent on the government to explore these alternatives” says Robinson. “There are many businesses not being subject to mandatory vaccine verification that are eager to protect their employees and customers using testing.”

The Kelowna Chamber will also be seeking to clarify that when this system gets put in place that for those businesses where the vaccine card will be required, the current restrictions in our Health Region will be lifted. One aspect of this decision is that it would prevent those who are not vaccinated to dine in at a restaurant so we believe the early cut off of liquor sales in our region will no longer be necessary.

The Chamber would also like to see capacity limits increased where vaccine cards are required to help many struggling businesses earn the revenue they need to pull through, particularly in the hard-hit hospitality sector.

“We can appreciate that increased vaccinations will help us get back to normal, but we continue to call on the government to lay out a long-term plan as to what the regulations will be when vaccinations reach their limit in BC—whatever that limit turns out to be,” says Rogers. “Not everyone will get vaccinated, nor should government force them to, so how does the economy and businesses function in that environment in the long term? The government needs to engage businesses across the province in that discussion, so we know what 2022 looks like.”

The Chamber acknowledges that the government has stated this is a short-term measure only and it will be removed once vaccination levels increase, and case levels decrease. The Kelowna Chamber would like to see an end date entrenched in the order with a requirement that it would need the consent of the entire legislature to keep it in place any longer than that fixed end date.

BACKGROUND

The Chamber polled members from Friday August 20 through Tuesday August 24. More than 25% (268) of the Kelowna Chamber’s 1,000 members responded. The short poll asked their opinion on:

- 1) Do you support a vaccine verification system for non-essential activities?
➤ RESULT: Yes 157 (57%) / No 97 (36%) / Unsure 18 (7%)
- 2) Are you considering any plans to restrict access to your business?
➤ RESULT: Yes 84 (31%) / No 163 (61%) / Unsure 21 (8%)
- 3) Are you in favour of a using a low-to-no-cost rapid test kit if it were available?
➤ RESULT: Yes 165 (62%) / No 63 (24%) / Unsure 40 (14%)

(END)