

Dear Lesley;

Thank you for your email from the COVID-19 Town Hall. I appreciate the opportunity to respond.

Alberta is working to bend the curve of COVID-19 spread to protect our health system, but we must be careful not to lift restrictions too quickly. A roadmap was developed to help Albertans understand how restrictions will be eased in steps over the coming months. The [Path Forward](#) (see appendix A (ALEC)) outlines the sectors that will see gradual changes to public health restrictions at each step based on hospitalization benchmarks. A targeted approach will help to open more activities and opportunities for Albertans and businesses, while protecting the health-care system.

This pandemic, and the measures Albertans have had to take to address this challenge, have had a profound impact on our day to day lives. What used to be simple tasks, such as going to a live event, are no longer so simple. Your frustration is justified. As we look ahead to reopening businesses, including entertainment venues we will consider your feedback, as well as other learnings to ensure our guidance is reasonable and appropriate.

In response to your questions:

1. What would the events industry need to do to be treated more like restaurants, retail and places of worship?

The [Path Forward](#) (see appendix A (ALEC)) outlines which sectors will see gradual changes to public health restrictions at each step based on hospitalization benchmarks. A targeted approach will help to open more activities and opportunities for Albertans and businesses, while protecting the health care system.

We've introduced a clear, step-wise approach to easing public health restrictions that outlines when sectors are able to begin increasing activities as hospitalizations decline. These steps and benchmarks will provide a transparent approach to easing restrictions for businesses and individuals, while at the same time protecting the health-care system.

Each step has an associated benchmark of hospitalized COVID-19 patients, inclusive of intensive care patients. Changes to restrictions will be considered once a benchmark is reached.

This stepped approach will only work if Albertans continue to follow existing health measures and make good choices to keep our numbers trending down. Indoor masking and distancing requirements will remain in place throughout the entire stepped approach, and some degree of restrictions will still apply to all activities within each step.

It's important to note that there are several considerations that have contributed to the easing of measures related to places of worship, retail activities, and restaurants. Worship is a constitutionally protected right, and activities permitted within worship settings have limits in place to ensure minimal interaction between attendees. Retail transactions are typically short and physically-distanced, and browsing is done individually. Dine-in services for restaurants are limited to households only, and there is no entertainment or mingling of large numbers allowed at this time as opposed to larger groups of people coming together to meet with different booths or other vendors.

Alberta recognizes that the ALEC professionals are partners in the pandemic response. Given the data that indicates in-person social gatherings have been a main driver for transmission, events that include in-person attendance are considered for later steps of the Path Forward. Even significant life events have been limited, such as weddings and funerals, as these are emotional situations that would be extremely difficult for people to maintain public health measures.

2. Why were tradeshow allowed last year and into the fall but are now in step four? What changed to have their status to something that appears more high risk? The tattoo show happened in October with zero transmission.

The COVID-19 pandemic has left the Government of Alberta with difficult and unprecedented decisions in order to manage the spread of the disease. The underlying purpose of the current health measures is to limit personal interactions during the public health state of emergency wherever possible. The rising cases seen in the late fall and early winter demonstrated the need for additional restrictions to control the spread of COVID-19, which impacted many sectors across the province.

As we move through the Path Forward, we are taking a conservative approach to easing restrictions to limit the need to bounce back and forth between easing and tightening restrictions if we move too fast in re-opening. We are listening to Albertans and businesses who have clearly stated they do not want to be in a yo-yo situation. A gradual approach will mitigate, but not eliminate this risk.

The grouping and sequencing of steps is based on relative risk for COVID-19 transmission. Actions with the lowest relative risk will be considered for easing, first. We know that some activities pose higher risk than others, such as:

- Indoor social gathering, where physical distancing and masking can be challenging
- Settings where interacting closely with other people is likely to occur, like weddings and funerals
- Activities where there are large groups of people and many high touch surfaces, especially indoors.

This targeted approach will help to open more activities and opportunities for Albertans and businesses, while protecting the health-care system.

3. Is there any hope for outdoor summer events to open? What would you say to the festivals that are desperately hoping to happen this summer (and who are likely going to go bankrupt and not be able to function again if they cannot bring in revenue for another year)?

Festivals and other outdoor summer events will be considered as part of Step 4 in the Path Forward. We will only be able to advance to Steps 3 and 4 if Albertans continue to follow existing health measures and make good choices to keep our numbers trending down. The Small and Medium Enterprise Relaunch Grant announced last month offers financial assistance to Alberta organizations (businesses, cooperatives and non-profits) that were ordered to close or curtail operations, and that experienced a revenue reduction of at least 30%, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Details on this and other potential funding streams are [available here](#). (see appendix b (ALEC))

4. We are now seeing fall events start to cancel or reschedule due to uncertainty, which if it continues means our industry is heading into 18-24 months without any revenue - what is the best case scenario for the fall/winter? Is it 25% capacity? This is crucial for you to actually give a firm answer. If events are able to go in the summer/fall/winter – we will start at 25% capacity and move up to 50% capacity in 3 weeks and so on.

While it is impossible to predict what measures may be in place at specific points in the future, we anticipate that community transmission of COVID-19 will be reduced as immunization rates increase in the months ahead. As the overall risk to public health lessens, so will restrictions governing various sectors. Once in-person events are permitted, operators can expect a gradual increase in their permitted capacities in line with that lessened public health risk.

Detailed planning that considers projected immunization is ongoing.

5. How can we work with you to build capacity gradually with events based on space instead of a set number? (so the number permitted is based on the size of the venue rather than the number of people)

Alberta Health welcomes feedback through forums such as this and meets regularly with key stakeholders in the industry. We are committed to ongoing dialogue and engagement with the live events sector. Our goal right now is to move forward, not backward. We want to create a sustainable path forward where our businesses and communities can reopen safely, and stay open. Our team has been regularly engaging with the hospitality, hotels and convention centres and live music industries. We welcome ongoing dialogue with the ALEC board on a regular and/or as needed basis. We are also committed to attending community engagement opportunities led by ALEC to hear key insights from the Coalition's broad stakeholder groups. Furthermore, our team will attend future government town hall meetings with ALEC. I encourage you to continue to engage with our team to share your views and insights.

6. What special considerations need to happen for indoor seated events to happen again?

Some indoor seated events are expected to re-open as part of Step 3. As with other activities, masking and physical distancing measures will remain in place. The stepped approach to easing restrictions is meant to limit the need to bounce back and forth between easing and tightening restrictions if we move too fast in re-opening. We are listening to Albertans and businesses who have clearly stated they do not want to be in a yo-yo situation. Hospitalization rates and other indicators must continue to trend in a positive direction in order to advance to Steps 3 and 4.

7. What further economic supports may become available to groups that will be further impacted by not being significantly limited or not allowed to operate until step 4 (and potentially well into step 4)

On February 17, 2021, Alberta's government announced the new Enhanced COVID-19 Business Benefit. Businesses that can demonstrate a revenue reduction of 60 per cent or more will be eligible to receive 15 per cent of their monthly revenue, up to a maximum of \$10,000. The challenges associated with COVID-19 are ongoing, and this additional payment will provide even more immediate relief to Alberta's small businesses. Payments under the Enhanced COVID-19 Business Benefit will be available in April 2021 following the conclusion of the Small and Medium Enterprise Relaunch Grant program. Detailed information on program guidelines will be available closer to the launch date in April. For updates, please follow <http://www.alberta.ca/biz-connect.aspx> (see appendix b)

8. How can we work with you to develop a set of guidelines on events that are easy to get AHS approval on? ALEC has submitted so many best practices documents that these documents show an ease in re-opening safely

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9. Can venues open for internal purposes (i.e. a theatre can be open for rehearsals providing they follow recommended health and safety protocols)?

Effective March 8, venues can open for rehearsal or virtual purposes provided the appropriate guidance is followed. More information is [available here](https://www.alberta.ca/enhanced-public-health-measures.aspx#businessrestrictions). <https://www.alberta.ca/enhanced-public-health-measures.aspx#businessrestrictions>

10. How can we work with the GOA and AHS on proper verbiage so there is no misunderstanding and inconsistencies with messaging on guidelines for this industry? We have seen people work "around" what is being said and our fear as this will continue to happen and it will reflect in a poor perception of our industry and have another chance of being shut down

Alberta Health welcomes feedback through forums such as this and meets regularly with key stakeholders in the industry. We are committed to ongoing dialogue and engagement with the live events sector. Our goal right now is to move forward, not backward. We want to create a sustainable path forward where our businesses and communities can reopen safely, and stay open. I encourage you to continue to engage with our team to share your views and insights.

11. Now that the population is scarred at leaving their homes, what is the plan to bring live events back

As public health measures are eased in the coming weeks and months, along with reduced rates of community transmission of COVID-19 and increased rates of immunization, we expect public confidence in the safety of live events to return. Live events are an important part of Albertans' lives and we anticipate many Albertans will embrace the opportunity to attend these settings once again as restrictions allow.

As you are aware, COVID-19 is a virus that is totally new to humans, no one has had the chance to build immunity against it. That is an important part of why it matters that we are all vigilant about slowing the spread by following public health measures, practising physical distancing and good hygiene, and continuing to act responsibly.

As the situation with COVID-19 continues to evolve, the Government of Alberta will continue to update public health orders, guidance and recommendations based on evidence and the expert advice of our public health officials. You are encouraged to visit alberta.ca/COVID regularly for the most up-to-date information.

Thank you for writing.

Sincerely,

Tyler Shandro, Q.C.
Minister of Health

All Appendix is done by ALEC in order for ease of seeing information

Appendix A

STEP 1 <600 hospitalizations	STEP 2 <450 hospitalizations	STEP 3 <300 hospitalizations	STEP 4 <150 hospitalizations
<p>Restrictions eased Feb. 8:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restaurants • Indoor fitness • Children's sport and performance activities 	<p>Restrictions eased March 1:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Further easing of indoor fitness activities • Libraries <p>Restrictions eased March 8:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Banquet halls, community halls, conference centres and hotels • Collegiate sport and recreation activities • Further easing of performance activities • Retail 	<p>Potential easing in these areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adult team sports • Casinos, racing centres and bingo halls • Further easing of youth sport and recreation activities • Indoor social gatherings, with restrictions • Indoor seated events (movie theatres and auditoria) • Museums, art galleries, zoos, interpretive centres • Places of worship 	<p>Potential easing in these areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Amusement parks • Concerts (indoor) • Festivals (indoor and outdoor) • Funeral receptions • Indoor entertainment centres and play centres • Performance activities (singing, dancing and wind instruments) • Sporting events (indoor and outdoor) • Tradeshows, conferences and exhibiting events • Wedding ceremonies and receptions • Workplaces (lift working from home)

Appendix B

Overview

The Small and Medium Enterprise Relaunch Grant offers financial assistance to Alberta organizations (businesses, cooperatives and non-profits) that were ordered to close or curtail operations, and that experienced a revenue reduction of at least 30%, as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The program offers the following:

- Up to \$20,000 in funding for organizations established before February 29, 2020, including unregistered sole proprietors.
- Up to \$15,000 in funding for new organizations which began operations between March 1 and October 31 2020, including unregistered sole proprietors.

Businesses, cooperatives and non-profits can use these funds as they see fit to help offset a portion of the impact of new public health measures or their relaunch costs, such as implementing measures to minimize the risk of virus transmission, which could include:

- physical barriers
- purchasing personal protective equipment and disinfecting supplies
- paying rent and employee wages
- replacing inventory and more

Application status

Open: Applications will remain open until March 31, 2021.

Once an application is submitted, it will remain under consideration until a decision on eligibility has been reached.

Ministry responsible

Jobs, Economy and Innovation



Funding

The Government of Alberta has committed up to \$500 million in funding for the program.

The program provides funding to organizations that saw a revenue reduction of at least 30% due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

First payment for existing organizations

Grant funding amounts for the first payment are calculated based on 15% of the eligible organization's pre-COVID-19 monthly revenue up to a maximum of \$5,000 per business, cooperative or non-profit.

- Each applicant will receive one first payment representing 15% of one month's worth of pre-COVID-19 revenue up to a maximum of \$5,000.
- Applicants can choose either April or May 2020 to maximize their benefit payment.

Second payment for existing organizations

A second payment is available to businesses, cooperatives and non-profits that were required to curtail operations as a result of new public health orders in effect from November 6, 2020 and later.

The second payment is 3 times the amount of the approved first payment, up to a maximum of \$15,000.

Payment to new organizations

Grant funding amounts are calculated based on 15% of the eligible organization's monthly revenue from any month between March and October 2020. This amount is multiplied 3 times up to a maximum of \$15,000 per business, cooperative or non-profit.

- Each applicant will receive one payment representing 3 times 15% of one month's worth of revenue up to a maximum of \$15,000.
- Applicants can choose any month between November or December 2020 to maximize their benefit payment.

For more information, refer to the:

- [Small and Medium Enterprise Relaunch Grant program guidelines](#)
- [Small and Medium Enterprise Relaunch Grant companion guide](#) (PDF, 2.2 MB)