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ONTARIO IN SECOND WAVE OF PANDEMIC

In his daily briefing on Monday, September 27, 2020, Premier Doug Ford announced that Ontario is now in the second wave of the novel coronavirus pandemic. He added that the second wave could be worse than the first. Ontario's Chief Medical Officer of Health, Dr David Williams agreed with the Premier's second wave diagnosis noting that the shape of the new surge wave is not as yet known, whether it is a ripple, a tsunami or something in between. He also drew attention to the fact that the largest numbers of cases in the second wave are localized in Toronto, Peel and Ottawa and that a surgical approach will be taken in combatting the increase in cases.

ALL ONTARIO EMPLOYERS NOW REQUIRED TO PRO-ACTIVELY SCREEN EMPLOYEES

Sherrard Kuzz LLP's Briefing Note of September 27, 2020 summarizes the impact of a regulatory amendment made by the Ontario government on September 25, 2020 (O Reg 364/20) this way, "Bottom Line: Effective September 26, 2020, each Ontario workplace is now required to pro-actively screen employees for COVID-19-related symptoms and risk factors prior to entry into the work environment, each day the employee seeks to enter the work environment (this would not apply to an employee working at home that day).

The screening tool should include, at a minimum, the questions identified in the Ministry of Health's COVID-19 Screening Tool for Workplaces (Businesses and Organizations)." Click on the following link to find the minimum screening questions that employers must ask their employees: http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/coronavirus/docs/workplace_screening_tool_guidance.pdf

PRE-BUDGET CONSULTATIONS UNDERWAY

Consultations are underway as our provincial government seeks public input for the development of a Fall 2020 Budget. Pre budget consultations normally take place at the beginning of the calendar year, in January and February, in time for the customary Spring Budget. The pandemic has caused a change in the traditional timetable. It's expected that the main themes of the fall 2020 Budget will be measures to defeat the novel coronavirus and steps to get our economy back on track.

- There are three ways to provide your advice:
- Complete the online survey
- Make a written submission

Participate in a videoconference or an in-person meeting

Details are available at the following link: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/fall-2020-budget-consultations>

2019-2020 PUBLIC ACCOUNTS REVEAL \$8.7B DEFICIT

Chair of the Treasury Board, Peter Bethlenfalvy, tabled Ontario's public accounts for the 2019-2020 fiscal year last week. Here are the highlights:

- The Province posted an \$8.7 billion deficit for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2020, which is lower than the 2019 Budget due to higher revenues and lower interest on debt, and partially offset by an increase in program spending .
- Total revenues are \$156.1 billion, which are \$1.9 billion or 1.2 per cent higher than the 2019 Budget mainly due to higher taxation revenues
- Total program expenses are \$152.3 billion, which are \$2.2 billion or 1.5 per cent higher than the 2019 Budget. While investments are higher in health, education, children's and social services, justice and other programs, program expenses in postsecondary education are lower due to lower demand in government programs
- The Province took decisive action on March 17, 2020 by declaring a state of emergency to protect the health and safety of all individuals and families and to help contain the spread of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreak.
- In 2019–20, the government invested \$53 million in the health and long-term care sectors, targeted towards increased public health funding, surveillance, and laboratory and home testing, while also investing in virtual care and Telehealth Ontario.
- COVID-19 has impacted the province financially in 2019–20 as demonstrated by the increased investments made in hospitals, long-term care and through the Support for Families program. It is anticipated that COVID-19 will have a more significant financial impact in 2020–21. As the pandemic unfolds, the impacts on the economy are continually re-evaluated and assessed.
- Interest on debt is lower than the 2019 Budget by \$0.8 billion due to lower than forecast interest rates, but slightly higher by \$0.1 billion, or 0.8 per cent from the previous year
- The net book value of Ontario's capital assets, such as buildings and transportation infrastructures, grew by \$5.6 billion during the year. Ontario invested \$11.8 billion in assets owned by the Province reflecting new capital investments, mainly in the transportation, health and education sectors. The Province also made \$2.3 billion in additional investments in transfers to non-consolidated partners and other infrastructure expenditures
- Total liabilities increased by \$21.7 billion and total financial assets increased by \$6.9 billion, resulting in an increase of \$14.8 billion or 4.4 per cent in net debt from the previous year (see details on pages 21-26). Accumulated deficit increased by \$9.1 billion or 4.2 per cent from the previous year mainly as a result of the reported deficit of \$8.7 billion and other adjustments.

The full report is available at the following link <https://www.ontario.ca/page/public-accounts-2019-20-annual-report>

FIRST THREE PILLARS IN GOVERNMENT'S SIX PILLAR PLAN

Our government has released the first three pillars of its six pillar plan to combat the novel coronavirus and avoid or minimize the impact of a possible second wave. Released in sequence on three separate days, the first three pillars are as follows:

1. The Province will be spending \$70m to purchase 5.1 million doses of influenza vaccine. In a normal year about 700,000 doses are used. By reducing hospitalizations resulting from seasonal flu, capacity can be maintained for seriously ill COVID19 patients.
2. Testing for the novel coronavirus is now available at 60 drug stores in Ontario. You can now get tested for COVID-19 at select pharmacies only if you are not showing symptoms (asymptomatic) and meet any of the following criteria:
 - are a contact of a confirmed positive case
 - live or work in an at-risk setting, such as a long-term care home, homeless shelter or other congregate setting
 - will be visiting a long-term care home
 - are a worker or resident of a specific outbreak site, including a long-term care home, retirement home or school
 - are eligible for testing as part of a targeted testing initiative as determined by the Ministry of Health or Ministry of Long-term Care, similar to the earlier campaign to target long-term care homes
 - You will need to call a participating pharmacy to book an appointment.
 - If you have symptoms, go to an assessment centre for a test.

More information about testing can be found at: <https://covid-19.ontario.ca/covid-19-test-and-testing-location-information>

3. Our government will be investing \$1.07 billion to help track, trace and isolate Covid cases. An additional \$30m has been allocated to outbreak prevention initiatives in congregate settings and to manage outbreaks when they occur.