

CAFII ALERTS WEEKLY DIGEST: June 18 TO June 25, 2021

June 25, 2021

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REGULATOR AND POLICY-MAKER NEWS

CISRO Warns Industry About Fraudulent LLQP Results Website

By Brendan Wycks, CAFII, June 24, 2021

On June 24, Ron Fullan, Chair of the Canadian Insurance Services Regulatory Organisations (CISRO), issued the following warning/cautionary email to industry stakeholders:

TO: LLQP Stakeholders

Yesterday afternoon, the Durham College LLQP team was made aware of a website that is claiming to offer LLQP exam results.

This website has no affiliation with Durham College or the LLQP activities that they administer for any CISRO jurisdiction. The Durham IT team is currently investigating this in an effort to determine potential origin.

The Durham College process is to send all results directly to candidates via email. No websites or portals are used to provide this information. For course providers and industry recruiters, we wanted to advise you immediately so that you can alert current and prospective candidates of this fraudulent site.

Thank you.

Ron Fullan

Chair, CISRO

Federal Government Announces Peter Routledge As Next Superintendent Of Financial Institutions

By Department of Finance Canada News Release, June 24, 2021

Today, the Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, announced the appointment of Peter Routledge as the next Superintendent of Financial Institutions effective June 29, 2021, for a seven-year term. Mr. Routledge will succeed Jeremy Rudin, who announced, last December, that he would retire from the public service once he concludes his seven-year term.

Mr. Routledge has served as President and Chief Executive Officer of the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation (CDIC) since 2018. Prior to joining the public sector in 2017, he held a variety of leadership roles in the financial sector, both in Canada and abroad.

By Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions Website, June 24, 2021

Earlier today, the Minister of Finance announced that Peter Routledge has been appointed as the new Superintendent of Financial Institutions. His term will begin on June 29, immediately after my retirement.

Mr. Routledge has been the CEO of our sister agency, the Canada Deposit Insurance Corporation (CDIC), since 2018. Prior to this, he gained extensive experience with Canadian financial sector issues both in the public sector at the Department of Finance and in the private sector at National Bank Financial and Moody's Canada.

Peter Routledge holds an MBA from INSEAD in France and a Bachelor's degree in business and economics from Simon Fraser University.

Please join me in congratulating him on his appointment and wishing him every success as Superintendent.

It has been a privilege to serve the people and Government of Canada as Superintendent of Financial Institutions.

Sincerely,

Jeremy Rudin

Bank Of Canada Set To Ask Ottawa For New Mandate

Governor Macklem could request permission to run the economy hot

By Shelly Hagan, Bloomberg, June 23, 2021

https://www.wealthprofessional.ca/business-news/boc-set-to-ask-ottawa-for-new-mandate/357470?utm_source=GA&utm_medium=20210623&utm_campaign=WPCW-MorningBriefing-20210623&utm_content=9B8F63D4-69B1-4D0C-AE64-59C8BBAFABC8&tu=9B8F63D4-69B1-4D0C-AE64-59C8BBAFABC8

Bank of Canada Governor Tiff Macklem is in the final stages of a mandate review that could see him request more authority from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government to run the economy hot.

The central bank's five-year inflation targeting mandate is up for renewal this year, with few signs a major overhaul is in the works.

But Macklem might lean toward design and communication changes to the 2% target, perhaps by focusing on labor-market metrics or putting more emphasis on the Bank of Canada's allowable range for inflation. That could give him some more flexibility to address under-performance in the economy at a time when other central banks are doing the same.

The Federal Reserve in the U.S. adopted so-called average inflation targeting last year -- on top of its dual maximum employment mandate -- that allows the U.S. central bank to overshoot its 2% target, though developments last week suggest there are limits to its tolerance. The European Central Bank is also in the midst of potentially its biggest policy overhaul in almost two decades.

Options the Bank of Canada is likely considering in its review include the following:

Status Quo

Canada's central bank has been studying the possibility of larger wholesale mandate changes to make its policies more suitable for the current weak-growth era, and the COVID-19 pandemic has only sharpened that focus. But Macklem could argue the existing mandate already provides the flexibility needed.

Since the 1990s, the bank has been narrowly focused on a single objective: to keep prices stable. The goal has been to keep inflation within a range of 1% to 3% as much as possible. Operationally, that's meant aiming for a 2% target over the central bank's forecast horizon, a period of about two years.

There's plenty of leeway, though. The bank has scope to delay the return of inflation to target beyond the two-year span. Macklem and his officials also have discretion to put more weight on certain risks over others. In a world just emerging from an unprecedented crisis, for example, tightening too quickly is seen as a bigger policy risk than having inflation slightly faster than target.

The Bank of Canada is drawing on some of that flexibility right now to keep emergency levels of stimulus in place.

In its latest forecasts released in April, officials projected inflation at 2.4% in the final quarter of 2023, a rare divergence from target almost three years into the future. Macklem has also begun hinting about using the central bank's "inflation-control range" of 1% to 3% as a policy tool, a departure from recent practice.

But that explanation risks becoming a bit obscure as Macklem tests his mandate's limits.

For one, there's no guidance yet on when the bank actually expects inflation to return to target. Meanwhile, inflation that's risen to 3.6% -- the highest in a decade -- coupled with the Bank of Canada's quantitative easing program have become a political issue, with the main opposition Conservative Party already questioning the governor's actions.

For political cover alone, Macklem might want to codify some of the adjustments he's already put into place.

"He may want some more formal flexibility to do what he seems to want to do right now," said Don Drummond, a former chief economist at Toronto-Dominion Bank who worked in senior positions at the finance department when inflation targeting was implemented in the early 1990s.

New Language

Macklem could incorporate some new language that's already central to his policy narrative. Since last July, for example, bank officials have been promising not to raise borrowing costs until inflation has "sustainably" returned to target. By sustainably, officials mean inflation above 2% is no longer sufficient to trigger a response; the economy will also need to have relatively tight labour-market conditions.

Deputy Governor Tim Lane said this month that the differences between the Federal Reserve and Bank of Canada mandates diminish once that nuance is taken into account.

"Even though we don't have a mandate for maximum employment, at the same time we do take account of labour market conditions very much in making our assessment of when inflation is sustainably at target," Lane said at a June 10 press conference.

Labour Market

Another option is to add explicit labour-market metrics or language into the mandate.

The Bank of Canada is already putting increased emphasis on a "full" labour-market recovery as it considers when to scale back emergency levels of stimulus, and is focusing in particular on the pandemic's unequal impact on groups such as women and youth.

"The bigger question for me is are they going to put more emphasis on the labour market, because we are hearing them talk about it more than in the past," Beata Caranci, chief economist at Toronto-Dominion Bank, said by phone.

Asked about the inflation mandate renewal at a June 16 press conference, Macklem said consultations with the public show "a consensus that employment should be a part of the thinking, the framework and this is something that we have taken to heart."

The Bank of Canada could prioritize certain indicators, like the participation rate, or start forecasting unemployment like the U.S. to emphasize the importance of the jobs market, Caranci said.

The Band

At a mandate renewal exactly two decades ago, the Bank of Canada took steps to demote the importance of the inflation range and put more weight on the 2% target.

Benjamin Reitzes, a rates and macro strategist at BMO Capital Markets, believes that pendulum could swing back, which would give the central bank more flexibility to overshoot at times.

"It really is just a subtle change but provides a bit more flexibility to run hot for a bit long if needed," Reitzes said by email. "The language can be a bit tricky but should be very doable."

Ex-Deputy Governor Warns Bank Of Canada Against 'Mission Creep'

By Mark Rendell, *The Globe and Mail*, June 22, 2021

Former Bank of Canada deputy governor John Murray is cautioning the central bank against “mission creep” as it moves into the final months of a major review of its monetary policy framework. The bank should focus on maintaining or adjusting its core inflation targeting mandate, and avoid adding policy goals explicitly tied to unemployment, inequality or climate change, Mr. Murray said in a report for the C.D. Howe Institute published on Tuesday, June 22. “By putting too much on the central bank, you risk eroding its independence, its effectiveness through monetary policy ... and taking responsibility away to a degree from those who really should be sharing it,” Mr. Murray said in an interview before the publication of his report, *Mission Creep and Monetary Policy*. The Bank of Canada renews its mandate with the federal government every five years. This latest review, which is expected to wrap up in the fall, is happening as conversation grows among central bankers about the limits of monetary policy, and whether they can and should play a more active role in dealing with social and environmental issues.

Read Story (Subscription Required): <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/article-ex-deputy-governor-warns-bank-of-canada-against-mission-creep/>

DIVERSITY/INCLUSION/FIGHTING SYSTEMIC RACISM NEWS

Canada's Banks Facing Calls To Address Racial Barriers

Programs aim to root out bias from customer service, but more work is needed

By Melissa Shin, *Investment Executive*, June 22, 2021

https://www.investmentexecutive.com/news/industry-news/banks-facing-calls-to-address-racial-barriers/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=nl&utm_content=investmentexecutive&utm_campaign=INT-EN

Calls have grown in recent months for banks to consider how systemic racism affects their customer service and lending practices.

A survey of 342 Black entrepreneurs released in May found that anti-Black systemic racism, particularly at banks, creates widespread barriers. The survey, commissioned by the African Canadian Senate Group and Senator Colin Deacon, revealed that only 19% of Black entrepreneurs said they trust banks to do what is right for them and their community.

That mistrust correlated with a lack of access to loans: almost all survey respondents said they started financing their businesses through personal savings or credit cards, with only 15% using a bank loan.

“The reality of anti-Black racism is that it impacts you in every institution you come into contact with. The banking industry is no different,” said Nova Scotia Senator Wanda Thomas Bernard, a member of the African Canadian Senate Group.

Another report released in April found that 78.5% of Black female entrepreneurs had trouble accessing financing.

“The bank has been a barrier to the Black community gaining any kind of generational wealth,” said Charline Grant, co-founder of advocacy group Parents of Black Children and partner with Kedz Consulting, an anti-racism training organization based in Vaughan, Ontario. “Getting good service for a Black person [at a bank] is a lottery draw. My outcome is based on who I get and how they view me.”

Grant said banks have shown a lack of understanding of her experiences and the businesses she runs, which has made it difficult to access financing.

“Underwriters don’t look like me when they’re doing the mortgages. Loan officers don’t look like me when doing business loans,” she said, adding that lenders have not understood the growth prospects for her businesses that serve the Black community.

She also criticized the “discretionary practices” lenders employ when deciding who gets a loan and at what rate.

“Wherever there is discretion, there will always be discrimination. Who will be discriminated against? Black folks and Indigenous [people]. Because every narrative tells everyone to be afraid of our Black skin. And that’s what we face when we walk into the bank.”

Girish Ganesan, global head of diversity and inclusion with TD Bank Group, acknowledged banks have work to do, particularly in light of a series of incidents at an Ottawa TD branch that made headlines in April.

“We know that eliminating bias and removing impacts of racism is not a passive effort. It requires us to be actively anti-racist,” Ganesan said. “In addition to educational programs, we know we have some work to do in terms of eliminating bias that might exist in procedures. That’s not just limited to TD; this is about the industry. We are looking at a variety of strategies on how to work on that.”

Ganesan said that as of late April, 94% of TD employees had completed training modules titled Understanding Black Experiences and Anti-Black Racism/Anti-Racism.

Breaking Down Barriers

All of the Big Six Banks are part of the Government of Canada’s Black Entrepreneurship Loan Fund, which began accepting applications on May 31.

Banks are also taking steps to root out bias from customer service experiences.

Brent Chamberlain, associate vice-president of inclusion and diversity with CIBC, said the bank has revamped its unconscious bias training in the past 12 months.

“I’ve heard team members describe our previous approach like a car wash: you go through your unconscious bias training and you come through squeaky clean on other side. But that’s not true,” Chamberlain said.

To change that perception, CIBC has evolved its training from “a one-time thing into an experiential journey that lasts a number of months and has reinforcing steps along the way.”

CIBC also launched a banking program in February that aims “to remove barriers to access for business owners from the Black community” as a supplemental program to the Black Entrepreneurship Loan Fund.

Dominic Cole-Morgan, senior vice-president of total rewards at Scotiabank, said the bank has launched inclusion training for all customer-facing employees in Canada that “includes tips or strategies to help manage through several scenarios, including if a customer says something racist to an employee.”

The training is part of the bank’s overall commitment to inclusion and “a fundamental part is that our customer-facing employees understand that [a customer’s] experiences may be different to their own,” Cole-Morgan said.

A Bank of Montreal spokesperson said that more than 90% of the bank’s front-line and branch staff have completed training modules related to Indigenous perspectives and unconscious bias. The bank will launch training on racial justice and the Black experience for all employees “in the coming months.”

RBC, which did not respond to interview requests for this article, announced in July 2020 that it would lend \$100 million to Black entrepreneurs over five years and make anti-racism and anti-bias training mandatory for all employees.

National Bank of Canada declined to be interviewed. According to the bank’s diversity and inclusion booklet, 97% of National Bank employees had completed diversity and inclusion training as of December 31, 2020.

Making Things Right

In March, Amalgamated Bank became the first major bank to endorse U.S. legislation for a commission to develop reparations for Black Americans.

Do reparations have a place in Canada’s banking industry?

“If you think about the multigenerational harm caused by systemic anti-Black racism, then yes, reparations are certainly important and due,” Thomas Bernard said.

She said many banks are already taking reparation-like action, such as funding scholarships for Black students and donating to Black community organizations.

“There are many different kinds of strategies that can be used to advance reparations,” Thomas Bernard said. “Part of that is an acknowledgement that systemic anti-Black racism is wrong; for the institutions to say, ‘We know that we’ve been a part of this, and now we want to be part of the solution.’ Part of that can be engaging with the community to change the cycle of inequality and to create cycles of opportunity.”

Grant said she would like to see steps such as discounted banking fees or business loans that can be partially forgiven, similar to the Canada Emergency Business Account offered by the federal government during the COVID crisis.

“There’s nothing I’m saying that hasn’t been done for other communities,” Grant said, noting that banks have discounted fees for minor-league hockey teams.

Thomas Bernard emphasized that marginalized communities are looking for “opportunities to help them to reach their full potential,” not a handout. “If we have more equity in the opportunities that are given, we will have more equity in the outcomes.”

Financial Firms Made Big Pledges About Racial Justice Last Year. What’s Happened Since?

Many firms have new targets and strategies, but real change will take time

By Melissa Shin, Investment Executive, June 23, 2021

https://www.investmentexecutive.com/news/industry-news/financial-firms-made-big-pledges-about-racial-justice-last-year-whats-happened-since/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=nl&utm_content=investmentexecutive&utm_campaign=INT-EN

Last year, financial firms across North America committed to combating racial injustice in the wake of George Floyd’s murder by Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin. Where do things stand a year later?

“In this past year, there’s been more awareness and more focused attention — I’m thinking about the BlackNorth Initiative — [for firms] to speak specifically about changes they will implement in the next four to five years,” said Nova Scotia Senator Wanda Thomas Bernard, a member of the African Canadian Senate Group.

The BlackNorth Initiative’s pledge — which requires signatories to commit to Black people holding at least 3.5% of executive and board roles based in Canada by 2025 and to hiring at least 5% of its student workforce from the Black community — now has nearly 500 signatories, including dozens from the financial industry. BlackNorth’s directors include the CEOs of CIBC, Fairfax Financial Holdings Ltd., Mackenzie Inc., and Scotiabank.

“What makes [a difference] is when institutions make a decision to address and deal with anti-Black racism: first off acknowledging that it exists, and then developing specific strategies to address it,” said Thomas Bernard, who co-sponsored a survey of 342 Black entrepreneurs that found anti-Black systemic racism creates widespread barriers to wealth creation.

“Many banks have diversity and inclusion plans. But how well are they really being integrated in all aspects of the organization? What are the targets? How are they being measured? Where’s the accountability?” she said. “We need to make sure the checks and balances are in place to ensure that industry is removing barriers.”

To help answer some of those questions, Advisor’s Edge reached out to the 20 asset managers, banks and insurers we spoke to in 2020 to check on the status of their commitments.

Setting And Meeting Goals

Of the 20 firms, 11 have signed the BlackNorth pledge. Many praised the support, resources and networking the initiative provides.

“BlackNorth offers a strong peer mentoring circle,” said Brent Chamberlain, associate vice-president of inclusion and diversity with CIBC, adding that his circle meets monthly. “We can only solve anti-Black racism in partnership with other organizations.”

Two of the Big Six banks — TD and RBC — had not signed the pledge at press time.

Girish Ganesan, global head of diversity and inclusion with TD Bank Group, said the BlackNorth Initiative’s “goals, philosophy and stance align with TD very well. [But] we are answerable to our U.S. colleagues, and BlackNorth is Canada-only.” TD intends to double its representation of Black executives by the end of 2022 and increase minority executive representation across the bank by 50% by 2025.

In February, RBC CEO Dave McKay told the Toronto Star the bank had not signed the pledge because it wanted to “first focus on the commitments RBC had already made.” RBC, which did not respond to interview requests, has set a goal for 30% of its executives to be Black, Indigenous or people of colour (BIPOC), “with a focus on increasing Black and Indigenous representation.” No deadline was provided.

Raymond James Canada has signed up for the 50-30 Challenge, which asks that organizations “aspire to” 50% women and 30% underrepresented groups on Canadian boards and in senior management.

All 20 firms were invited to share examples of progress made since 2020.

Those that responded pointed to initiatives such as improved education and training, particularly around the histories of Black and Indigenous communities; donations to and partnerships with organizations supporting under-represented communities; targeted recruitment efforts; BIPOC advisory councils and employee groups; mentorship programs for BIPOC staff; days devoted to reflection; and facilitated conversations about racism among staff.

Some banks have taken specific action to address bias in customer service, and several firms, including all Big Six banks, include diversity and inclusion criteria as a formal component of C-level executive compensation.

Quantifying progress was difficult, especially for firms that set their goals less than a year ago (see box, “Progress check-in”). While more than half of firms in our sample track diversity data, with several reporting data quarterly at the board level, most said it was too early to share progress. Goal achievement deadlines ranged from annually to 2025.

Chamberlain said CIBC is closer to meeting its goal of having 4% of board-approved executive roles held by a member of the Black community by the end of 2023. “Last year, we went from 1% to 3%, and that figure includes our chief legal officer [Kikelomo Lawal],” he said.

Michelle Taylor-Jones, vice-president of global diversity, equity and inclusion with Manulife, said that 52% of new graduates hired in 2020 were BIPOC, double the goal of 25% set a year earlier.

Lessons Learned

As firms implemented their diversity and inclusion strategies, they picked up lessons along the way.

Chamberlain said that CIBC has learned to be more explicit when enumerating its goals: instead of setting blanket representation targets for visible minority groups, the bank decided to be “clear and concise around the goals for under-represented groups like members of the Black community.”

Crystal Hardie Langston, chief diversity officer with The Vanguard Group, said her firm has also taken care with language.

“A person is not diverse; a team is diverse,” she said. “We’re so quick to use ‘diverse’ to describe a woman or a person of colour, and that excludes white males who are part of diverse teams. It also ‘others’ women and people of colour. There’s a vernacular shift that we’re trying to get people to re-learn.”

Langston said that framing her firm’s efforts in this way has allowed all employees to contribute to a more inclusive workplace.

“We are unapologetic about our representation goals and [the fact] that they are focused on under-represented populations,” she said. “But our inclusion goals are for everyone.”

(Vanguard’s goals are not public, but Langston said they aim for “proportionate representation at every leadership level.”)

Regina Curry, chief diversity officer with Franklin Templeton, also spoke to issues of framing. “Overall, we are reframing [diversity and inclusion] as a business opportunity to contribute to meeting our strategic, innovation and performance objectives — not as a problem to be solved,” she said.

Franklin Templeton tracks ethnic minority data for its U.S. division, and a spokesperson said the firm is working on capturing data in Canada and elsewhere.

Leaders were cognizant, however, that some employees could be experiencing “diversity fatigue” as a result of their firms’ efforts during the past year.

“For centuries, we haven’t talked about race and anti-racism, and all of a sudden it’s hitting you left, right and centre,” Ganesan said. “Had [the lessons] been bite-sized over the years, that wouldn’t be the case.”

Ganesan said that he counsels colleagues to learn about the issues facing under-represented communities, but to focus on learning deeply about one or two areas. “If your passion lies within a certain area of diversity, double down on that,” he said. “But don’t close your mind to other issues that are going on, so at least you’re aware and educated.”

Langston recommended weaving inclusion into everyday processes so that it doesn’t feel like a separate item to address.

Chamberlain agreed. “It’s about doing the work you’re already doing, but differently,” he said. “So it could be thinking harder about that hiring decision. How can you create a larger professional network that includes people who don’t look like you or share the same experiences as you? Then when you have a hiring decision in the future, you have that network to draw from.”

Real Change?

Interviewees used words such as “inflection point” and “sea change” to describe the racial justice reckoning of 2020. Are things really different this time around?

“The difference is our employees are going to keep us accountable. Our communities, our customers, and our shareholders are going to keep us accountable,” said Manulife’s Taylor-Jones. “When you talk about embedding this work within the lifecycle of an organization, as we have done, it will take some time to see significant change and growth.”

Shareholders have used their clout to influence change. For example, following a shareholder proposal that was subsequently withdrawn, BlackRock Inc. committed to performing a racial audit of its operations in 2022. Several Canadian banks received proposals regarding board diversity targets.

And in May, TMX Group Ltd. shareholders voted 98% in favour of a shareholder proposal on Indigenous inclusion and reconciliation — a proposal TMX supported. (A forthcoming article will look at what reconciliation looks like in an investment context.)

Senator Thomas Bernard said she’s encouraged by the public commitments organizations have made.

“I remain cautiously optimistic about the potential for systemic change to really take root this time. [Nonetheless], there’s a voice constantly at the back of my mind saying, ‘We have to make sure these decision-makers and policy-makers are held accountable,’” she said.

“There’s a risk of performative change happening — and that’s not long-lasting. But we need long-lasting, systemic change. One of the ways we can help push for accountability is by keeping [racial justice] at the top of the agenda.”

Sexual Harassment, Bullying Claims Spread In Mortgage Broker Industry

By Fergal McAlinden, Mortgage Broker News, June 23, 2021

https://www.mortgagebrokernews.ca/news/sexual-harassment-bullying-claims-spread-in-mortgage-industry-357466.aspx?utm_source=GA&utm_medium=20210623&utm_campaign=WPCW-Newsletter-20210623&utm_content=9B8F63D4-69B1-4D0C-AE64-59C8BBAFABC8&tu=9B8F63D4-69B1-4D0C-AE64-59C8BBAFABC8

As a conversation around harassment and bullying in the mortgage industry gathers pace, multiple women have contacted Mortgage Broker News in recent weeks with claims of having been subjected to sexual misconduct and inappropriate behaviour in their work as a mortgage professional.

One woman, who said that sexual harassment had been part of the reason she briefly left the industry, reported having been groped “between 15 and 20 times” during her work as a business development manager (BDM). Others said they had received unsolicited, sexually explicit social media messages from industry members, with inappropriate and lewd behaviour at industry events also widely reported.

Some of the events are reported to have occurred as recently as inside the past year. Each of the women chose to remain anonymous, citing the risk that coming forward posed to their careers and future in the industry.

The reports come in the wake of Mortgage Broker News’ publication of an anonymously-posted open letter, detailing a contributor’s experience of sexual assault in the mortgage industry.

Many accounts described excessive alcohol consumption and unprofessional behaviour at conferences and industry events, with one woman reporting that she was sexually harassed “any time there was drinking involved.”

In some cases, mortgage professionals became unwilling to attend events because of the environment they expected to encounter there, even though they knew it would be looked on unfavourably.

“It got to the point where I didn’t even want to go to events anymore,” said one woman who reported having been groped and subjected to sexual comments on such occasions. “I would cancel events or no-show, which I knew wouldn’t look good for my job – but I didn’t feel comfortable going anymore.”

Other reports of inappropriate behaviour at industry events included a female mortgage professional being asked to go to an industry member’s hotel room, another being grabbed by the shoulders and kissed without permission, and repeated sexual or derogatory remarks about women’s appearance.

Three women reported having been sent unsolicited sexually explicit social media messages by professional acquaintances, with one saying she was sent a link to a pornographic video despite asking the sender not to do so.

"If I pick up my phone and I'm in my home, the last thing I should have to worry about is an industry member sending me ridiculously offside and inappropriate comments, because I've got no buffer for it," one of the women said.

"Equally, when I'm at industry events, I'm there to learn and network, and I shouldn't be told to watch what I drink, and to make sure I go to bed by 10:00, because then you're just further handcuffing the women, rather than addressing this as the systemic issue that it actually is."

"A Lion's Den"

Laura Martin, chief operating officer of Matrix Mortgage Global, described a "frat house, old boys' club mentality" that she said pervades the industry, with excessive drinking often occurring during events and unprofessional behaviour towards women taking place both in and outside the office.

"It's totally acceptable to get pretty drunk at the industry events," she said. "I find that there can be major flareups at them; I've seen people get grabbed, and I've had men leer at me and say lewd things."

"At one industry event, I felt like I was in a lion's den. I was being preyed on by members of the mortgage industry that were not interested in any kind of professional discussion with me. It got to the point where I just left prematurely."

That behaviour, Martin said, is not restricted solely to events and conferences, with inappropriate conduct also common in meetings and office environments.

"I've been in the mortgage industry for 14 years, and the nature of it has always been overly flirty and handsy – even where alcohol is not involved," she said. "Is it really necessary for someone that's a very loose acquaintance to greet me with a kiss or a bear hug? I'm going to say it's not."

Martin said that women who had experienced sexual harassment in the mortgage industry often decide against raising the issue with higher levels because of the belief that nothing will be done about it.

"A lot of stuff is swept under the rug, because if the women ever did bring it up, it would go absolutely nowhere," she said. "No heads roll. No-one gets fired. No-one gets reprimanded. It only alienates them, and they're just seen as someone that can't take a joke."

One of the women who came forward said that many of the comments she had been subjected to would not have occurred if she was a man.

"[Many in the industry] are very quick to comment on what you're wearing or how you look or if you've lost weight," she said. "I know for a fact that these are not the comments they come out with when they address a male counterpart at a social event."

A Growing Conversation

A Mortgage Magnates/BHBTv panel discussion drew attention last month to the issue of harassment and bullying in the mortgage industry.

Veronica Love, national senior vice president of corporate development for TMG The Mortgage Group, who participated in the panel, also recently highlighted the issue by speaking of her own experiences with sexual misconduct in an Instagram video in support of a colleague who had suffered harassment.

Speaking with Mortgage Broker News about the conversation currently taking place in the industry, she said that she had received a “shocking” number of messages from other industry members recounting their own stories of bullying and harassment in the wake of posting the video.

She also said that although she had a lot of quiet support, she had recently faced criticism within the industry for her prominent role in the discussion, even being referred to as a bully – a development she described as a “saddening” one that might prevent other women from feeling safe when they share their stories.

However, Love noted that the industry’s response to the ongoing conversation had seen some heartening developments.

“This is a big stain on our industry, and it’s also one that can be fixed,” she said. “Believe me, this conversation has come up before in years past, and these stories have been whispered at trade shows and behind the scenes for years now. Nothing has been done about it.

“But now, all of a sudden I’m seeing lenders and brokerages making public statements; I’m hearing of training that’s being done with business development managers and management teams, and managers are saying to their people, ‘This is a safe place to work, and we want to make it safer.’”

Love said that it was essential for the discussion around sexual harassment in the mortgage industry to continue, with further measures required to ensure any toxic elements of the industry’s culture are removed.

“Continued conversations and training need to happen if we really want safer events,” she said. “I encourage all leaders to find ways to make their company events and workplaces safer for both men and women.”

In addition to having experienced sexual harassment, one female business development manager described often encountering a “disrespectful and aggressive” environment when dealing with male brokers, including having recently been dismissed as a “fucking BDM” during a business call.

“The feeling that came over me was one of complete deflation,” she said. “The wind was taken right out of my sails. I felt it was insulting, really demeaning, and it came from a place of power: the broker knew full well that I was aiming to get business from his firm.”

Christine Buemann, a broker at The Collective Mortgage Group who participated in the Mortgage Magnates/BHBTv video, told Mortgage Broker News that the debate around harassment and bullying in the workplace was an essential one, with aggressive behaviour having no place in the mortgage industry.

“The purpose of my involvement is to open the conversation so that people feel comfortable setting their own boundaries and respecting those of others,” she said. “For me, it’s about challenging what we accept as normalized behaviour.

“This industry feels like a rollercoaster at the best of times, and it’s easy to listen defensively and react emotionally. I believe the strongest choice we can make in these moments is to choose to be calm and kind.”

Pam Pikkert, a mortgage broker with Regional Mortgage Group and participant in the panel discussion, also called for further training, as well as the establishment of structures for women to report instances of harassment with confidence that they would be taken seriously.

“My vision for the entire real estate industry is that all of the regulators would have inclusivity and sexual harassment training as mandatory for all real estate professionals across Canada, and that there would be an actual way to report these and for them to be addressed,” she said.

“The number of women who’ve reached out to me in the past few weeks on this issue just tells me that we have some widespread healing as an industry to go through, in conjunction with putting some metrics in place to make sure this behaviour stops.”

The Associations’ Responses

Last month, Mortgage Professionals Canada (MPC) president and CEO Paul Taylor issued a statement on recent stories of harassment and bullying within the mortgage industry.

“Mortgage Professionals Canada, our executive board and I have no tolerance for this type of behaviour both within our industry and our Association,” the statement read. “Mortgage Professionals Canada values professionalism above all else. We are committed to providing a safe environment for our staff, board, volunteers and everyone in the industry.

“We remain dedicated to the success of our members and the mortgage industry as a whole. We recognize that a safe environment, free of harassment and bullying is the only space in which we can truly advance the mortgage broker channel.”

The Canadian Mortgage Brokers Association (CMBA) also released its own statement on the matter, saying that it planned to re-evaluate its code of conduct and ethics statements to address the growing conversation on bullying and harassment.

“The mortgage industry should be one in which we pride ourselves on our diversity, individual talent and skill that enables our members and the broader community to house and maintain the livelihood of their clients,” the CMBA statement read.

“At CMBA, we have no tolerance for this behaviour or any harassment, bullying, or discrimination, and we will be addressing this as our top priority.”

The Problem With Saying ‘We Only Hire The Best’

Opinion By Karima-Catherine Goundiam, Founder and Chief Executive Officer of digital strategy firm Red Dot Digital and business matchmaking platform B2BeeMatch, Special To The Globe and Mail, June 20, 2021

https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/commentary/article-the-problem-with-saying-we-only-hire-the-best/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=Morning%20Update&utm_content=2021-6-23_6&utm_term=Morning%20Update:%20Trudeau%20pushes%20China%20to%20probe%20its%20mistreatment%20of%20Uyghurs&utm_campaign=newsletter&cu_id=Ts6FwhWx6n2rSHC0x7MiReEeeFJOJkTb

In the business world, I often hear the sentence “We only hire the best.” Sounds like a positive thing, doesn’t it? In theory, sure.

But in practice, this sentence is almost always said or written in response to questions about workplace diversity. And in that context, it indicates a problem.

Before I break down the problems with “only hiring the best,” I want to give the benefit of the doubt: Some companies really do try to establish an objective “best.”

Sometimes, “The Best” Means Trying To Reduce Bias

In many cases, in a bid to strip out hiring bias, employers hire anonymously. This means they remove all identifying data from applications and conduct interviews in such a way that they never find out what age, gender and race someone is.

This is the only way to be truly objective when it comes to qualifications, and it can be a really useful approach.

But it’s not appropriate for every type of job; it works best in entry-level positions. In many cases, it’s also very hard to examine a person’s résumé or conduct a rich interview without ever learning details of a person’s work experience that would identify some personal attributes.

Anonymity also risks reducing people to just their formal qualifications, removing a lot of the human element that might be part of what makes them a great candidate.

A softer version of the anonymous interview approach is one in which employers use pre-employment tests for candidates and choose their top scorers.

However, this brings up several problems. Appropriate tests can be expensive and time-consuming to create, and may lead to ethical and legal issues, or even deter great candidates.

As well, every test has its limitations. Even if an employer balances out those limitations somehow, testing is often just a first step that leads to an interview in the end anyway.

Ultimately, people aren't numbers. The top scorer on your test could be a sexual harasser, embezzler or someone who does great working alone at a desk but can't function in a team environment.

Your slightly lower-scoring person could be the heart of a team – someone with a great sense of humour who can really pull people together when the business is facing tough times. These qualities are very hard to measure objectively, and must be considered as a package.

Also, if your five top scorers are all exactly the same, demographically, then even if they're strong at their work as individuals, the lack of diversity within the team means you're going to get fewer new or unexpected ideas, fewer checks and balances on decisions, less innovation and so forth.

Your company's interests are not served well by this approach. So a "best" that's focused on high test scores may not be the best after all.

If your company uses these techniques, rather than saying "we only hire the best," you're probably better off saying something such as, "We prioritize diversity and part of how we do that is by using hiring processes that aim to strip out bias." It's a more accurate message, and a much more appealing one too.

But now that I've put in this disclaimer about one relatively positive way that sentence can be improved, let's move on to the problems with the ways I often hear it – which have nothing to do with anonymity or test scores.

Often, The Meaning Of "Hiring The Best" Is Very Hard To Pin Down

It's a sneaky expression that, on its own, doesn't really provide a clear message. Here are a few examples of what I mean.

Focusing on "the best" can also mean discriminating along very traditional lines. For example, young women are sometimes avoided as new hires because it's assumed they'll get pregnant and leave the work force, which makes them not "the best" choice.

But many young women are entrepreneurs, and their numbers continue to grow. That indicates that a lot of women have leadership qualities and multifaceted skill sets, but find traditional workplaces less interesting than running their own shops.

And having children doesn't seem to be stopping them. In fact, female entrepreneurs are often drawn to starting their own businesses in order to have more flexible schedules. What are companies missing when "the best" leaves out these high achievers?

"The best" can also mean choosing the top picks from a classic pool of candidates who, over all, are not so great. For instance, statistically, men are known to be higher-risk drivers than women, and insurance rates reflect this. But men also make up the bulk of the transportation industry.

In cases such as this, truly “hiring the best” would mean aggressively seeking out female candidates and creating a drastic change in the industry’s demographics. Instead, we see a workplace culture pattern repeating itself over time.

If your industry isn’t very diverse, your company may be missing out on the highest possible quality of candidates by simply picking from among the people who are already most likely to apply.

What if “the best” means picking candidates who’ve gone to elite schools or achieved other privileged qualifications?

Unfortunately, Ivy League universities choose “legacy candidates” at a high rate to keep donations from wealthy families pouring in. But wealth and connections don’t in any way reflect quality, skill or intelligence – just opportunity.

Beyond legacy candidates, in an era of serious income disparities and rising tuition, candidates with degrees from fancy schools may just demonstrate how easy their lives have been, relatively speaking, not how skilled they are. This idea of “the best” leaves out people who are smart, determined problem-solvers with lots of valuable life experience.

By all these metrics, “the best” often just ... isn’t.

What Does “The Best” Mean To Your Company?

If you can’t explain it in clear and objective terms, or can’t measure it, then ask yourself if this phrase really expresses something useful to an applicant or says something positive about your workplace culture. It may just be flagging that your company is trying to justify choices not made on the basis of a true “best” at all.

Think about it this way: It’s safe to assume most employers seek out the best possible candidates for a job. So if someone asks a manager or leader about diversity in their company, why would their response need to specify they look for the “best?”

It’s a strange response, because workplace diversity and individual excellence are not incompatible. It implies there’s some reason hiring with diversity in mind would require you to not hire the best.

The subtext here is that diverse candidates aren’t the best. It’s the only idea that fills the logic gap between the question and the answer.

In turn, this makes it clear the opposite is true: It implies you don’t consider diversity to be important, or you don’t want to provide real information about your company’s approach. And it sounds as if you’re defending a choice to avoid diversity in the workplace.

This kind of response, in turn, discourages diverse candidates from applying, because candidates from marginalized groups want to know they’ll be treated well in the workplace in all the fullness of their diversity, not seen through a colour-blind lens that erases parts of who they are.

Remember, attributes that make candidates different are part of what they offer as employees, and it's been proven time and again that a more diverse team tends to make better decisions that benefit the bottom line.

In the end, employers who use the phrase may in fact end up missing out on "the best" they say they want.

What's the solution? I say, drop this recycled sentence and focus on the facts. Most excellent, diverse candidates, in addition to hearing about the specific performance metrics or qualifications you're seeking, will want to see your company make a strong, positive statement about workplace diversity backed up with concrete examples of your initiatives and policies.

Diversity is a key part of being the best, and it's time for us to say it loud and clear.

Has Giving Gratuities Reached A Tipping Point In Restaurants? New Report Shows Shifting Attitudes

By Laura Brehaut, *National Post*, June 24, 2021

[Has giving gratuities reached a tipping point in restaurants? New report shows shifting attitudes \(msn.com\)](https://www.msn.com/en-ca/news/story/Has-giving-gratuities-reached-a-tipping-point-in-restaurants?hpid=hp_hp-top-table-main-gratuities%3Arestaurants%3Ahomepage%2Ft%3Acafii&hpt=hp_hp-top-table-main-gratuities%3Arestaurants%3Ahomepage%2Ft%3Acafii)

Long a contentious issue, tipping has become even more so during the pandemic. Delivery drivers and others in food service have essentially become front-line workers. In recognition of the potential risk they face in making and delivering meals, ethicists have advised showing appreciation with a tip — and, if you can afford it, a heftier one than usual.

Simultaneously, a new crop of restaurants is experimenting with going tip-free. Tipping is more complex than simply adding 15–20 per cent (or more, during the pandemic) onto the bill. Data has shown that tipping can perpetuate inequalities of class, gender, race and sexuality. It has also been identified as reinforcing a dynamic of servitude — only one constant in the guest-server equation has the power to give or hold back money as they see fit — and contributing to the social stigma of hospitality work as a stopgap, not a career.

"No matter how you do it, tipping hits BIPOC workers in the pocketbook, it exposes more female workers to sexual harassment, and it keeps all workers from making a steady, solid salary," Canadian chef and anti-tipping advocate Amanda Cohen of New York City's Dirt Candy told Eater in September 2020.

The pandemic has provided an opportunity for people to rethink the way forward, and some restaurants have adopted no-tipping policies in an effort to make workplaces more equitable. Toronto's Avelo, Burdock Brewery, Richmond Station and Ten have all gone tip-free over the past year.

“It sounds radical, but it really shouldn’t,” Emma Herrera, head chef at Burdock Brewery, told NOW Magazine in August 2020. “We’re just aiming for the most basic acceptable professional level, the same as all other industries. We don’t want our staff to have to rely on the whims of guests to make sure they can pay their rent.”

These conversations about equity are occurring alongside those supporting the status quo, says Poppy Nicolette Riddle, research associate at Dalhousie University’s Agri-Food Analytics Lab (AAL), and lead author of a new preliminary report examining Canadian perceptions of tipping habits. As social norms shift and people start to imagine what emerging from the pandemic could look like, she adds, the timing was right to focus on attitudes towards tipping.

For the report, the AAL surveyed 990 Canadians in April 2021 and found that though most Canadians see tipping as being beneficial — “in the form of social relatedness, a feeling of being in control and perceiving that tipping has a positive impact on others” — only 20 per cent intend to tip more after the pandemic.

The researchers asked respondents about their perception of tipping as part of food service or food delivery, and found that few support no-tipping policies: 34 per cent say that tipping motivates workers; 30 per cent believe it makes the job worth doing; 19 per cent feel it should be regulated; and 17 per cent think the practice should be prohibited.

In combining the last two groups, however, the report suggests that a large minority of Canadians (36 per cent) feel negatively towards tipping, which could be an indication “that social support may be there when the food service industry is ready to change.”

On the one hand, says Riddle, Canadians recognize that there’s a group of people who have tip-dependent careers or income, and see tipping as part of social engagement. “Conversely, we could also have that exact same conversation and go, ‘The restaurant industry is still not evolving, business models are still not changing.’ They’re trying to go back to the exact same structure that was before, and it’s putting this exact same population at risk when the next large-scale crisis comes,” she adds. “So it is a really complex discussion and ... there’s not an easy answer out there right now.”

The AAL report builds on previous research by Elizabeth Dunn, Lara Aknin and Michael Norton published in *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, which focused on spending and happiness, and the “warm glow of giving.” People feel good when they think they’re giving money to someone who could benefit from it; the process of spending satisfies “one or more core human needs.”

When we order takeout from a favourite restaurant and tip generously, for example, “we get a little shot of oxytocin,” says Riddle, which contributes to this warm glow. On the other end of the spectrum, when we have the opportunity to spend but hold back, “we get a shot of cortisol,” and can feel shame.

Riddle was most surprised when it came to the data around whether people anticipate their tipping habits to change due to the pandemic and perceptions of their own happiness when they tip. Most Canadians see tipping as an act of generosity, although that 53.4 per cent is closely followed by those who feel it's either entirely or mostly an obligation (46.6 per cent). Nearly half (48 per cent) feel that the social obligation to tip well has increased during COVID-19, and most (71 per cent) don't anticipate changing the way they tip after the pandemic.

Of the respondents who anticipate tipping more after COVID-19 (the aforementioned 20 per cent), 58 per cent reported feeling happy when tipping. "That was quite surprising because some of the other questions that I had leading into it gave me the sense that (people had) a negative feeling when anticipating having to tip more," says Riddle, adding that the results are in line with previous studies suggesting that prosocial spending yields happiness. "But I was surprised to see it so much in tipping, and to see that there's still so much support for it."

Restaurants operate on notoriously low profit margins, with the average falling below five per cent, explains Riddle. As conversations continue around no-tipping models and livable wages in food service and food delivery, her next step may be to investigate Canadians' awareness of and attitudes towards issues of equity in the industry.

With food and labour costs rising, diminishing worker availability and hygiene rules increasing as a result of the pandemic, she anticipates that the very nature of full-service restaurants will need to radically adapt.

"It's going to have to change just like all other businesses are going to have to change. Just like education has had to change," says Riddle. "When we're at the cusp of going back to normal — we're getting our immunizations and provinces are relaxing restrictions, and we're starting to get this glimpse of what we want to go back to — we do have a choice. We have a choice in what we want to go back to."

CAFII MEMBER AND/OR PARENT COMPANY-SPECIFIC NEWS

How Has COVID Changed How Credit Protection Insurance Customers Purchase Coverage?

By Lyle Adriano, Insurance Business Canada, June 18, 2021

<https://www.insurancebusinessmag.com/ca/news/breaking-news/how-has-COVID-changed-how-credit-protection-insurance-customers-purchase-coverage-258283.aspx>

A new report from the Canadian Association of Financial Institutions in Insurance (CAFII) has found that many Canadian consumers with credit protection insurance (CPI) have switched the way they conduct certain financial transactions — and it might be a permanent change.

A survey conducted by Pollara Strategic Insights for CAFII found that 84% of Canadian CPI customers said their experience during COVID-19 has made them more comfortable conducting financial transactions online. It also revealed that 72% said it changed the way they want to conduct these transactions in the future, and that 70% said that they have upgraded their technology to make it easier to conduct financial transactions from home.

Prior to the pandemic, Canadians were most likely to conduct financial transactions such as arranging for loans or buying insurance in person at a branch, the study found. About 48% of respondents with CPI said that they conducted transactions in-person. But only 36% of respondents say they will return to a branch for these types of transactions after the pandemic – a 12-point decline over 2018.

Despite this decline, consumers still put a high value on branches; 66% of respondents said they are looking forward to going back. Also, 88% of respondents said they would prefer this method particularly for arranging loans and insurance. But 47% said they would prefer another channel to speak with a representative such as over the phone (23%), to have a person come to their home (13%), or to speak with someone over video conferencing (11%).

77% of respondents said that they would prefer to submit a claim on their CPI with the assistance of a representative, compared to 22% who would choose self-service as their preferred option. But of that 77%, only 35% said they prefer it to submit a claim through a branch, instead of through other channels such as phone, home visit, video conferencing or email.

"While the pandemic has and will continue to change the way that people conduct financial transactions in Canada, we are pleased to see consumers are adapting well to their new reality, and that our industry's customer satisfaction levels have been up to the challenge," said CAFII co-executive director Keith Martin. "We also appreciate the value that Canadians place on the availability of in-person service, and their confidence in the people working in financial services who provide it."

Court Approves \$100-Million BMO Class Action Settlement Over Foreign Exchange Fees

The legal team gets \$20 million, and a former advisor turned plaintiff was awarded \$50,000

By James Langton, Investment Executive, June 18, 2021

https://www.investmentexecutive.com/news/from-the-regulators/court-approves-100-million-bmo-class-action-settlement-over-fx-fees/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=nl&utm_content=investmentexecutive&utm_campaign=NT-EN-All-afternoon

An Ontario court has approved a \$100-million settlement in a class action against several Bank of Montreal (BMO) subsidiaries over undisclosed foreign exchange fees charged in clients' RRSPs and other registered accounts.

The Ontario Superior Court of Justice approved the deal, which was brought against the bank's brokerage subsidiaries, BMO Nesbitt Burns Inc. and BMO Investorline Inc., and BMO Trust Co. in 2006.

The settlement followed a court ruling in 2020, which found that "the BMO defendants were liable to the class over the 10-year class period for breach of trust, breach of fiduciary duty and breach of contract, and concluded that the appropriate remedy for the defendants' wrongdoing was an accounting and disgorgement of profits."

Ultimately, the two sides agreed on a settlement of \$100 million, which will be paid out to approximately 135,000 affected clients, subject to a \$25 minimum, with the defendants paying the distribution costs.

The court granted the plaintiffs' lawyers a \$20 million fee and granted \$50,000 to a former advisor who helped bring the case.

The court said that approving the settlement was easy, as the \$100 million amount "is well within the required zone of reasonableness" and the resolution is "fair and reasonable and in the best interests of the class."

On the tougher issue of legal fees, the court ruled that \$20 million was appropriate, saying that in a "mega" settlement such as this, "the legal fees approved must take into account not only the risks incurred and results achieved but also the need to maintain the integrity of the legal profession."

In this case, the class counsel sought a \$25-million fee, reflecting their 25% contingent retainer.

However, the court said that simply applying a contingency fee percentage in mega-settlements "can result in undeserved windfalls and transform class action litigation into something approaching a lottery."

Ultimately, after considering the risks incurred and the results achieved by the litigation, "the most this court can justify and explain in a principled fashion consistent with comparable case law is a legal fees award that falls within a range of \$18 million to \$20 million," the decision read.

"The right number may well be around \$19 million," the court said. "However, given that this was a truly self-made class action that consumed 15 years of litigation, 10,000 hours in docketed time and resulted in a genuinely commendable settlement, I am prepared to err on the side of caution and in favour of class counsel."

The representative plaintiffs in the case were also awarded a combined \$70,000 with \$10,000 going to each of two representative plaintiffs, and \$50,000 going to a third plaintiff — James Richard Macdonald, a former advisor at Nesbitt Burns, who the court said suffered financial hardship as a result of bringing the case.

Macdonald was "entitled to the additional \$40,000 because of the financial harm he sustained as the lead plaintiff in what became a high-profile class action in the banking community," the court ruled.

“His employment as an investment advisor became strained and he had to leave the industry well before his retirement age,” the court said, noting that while Macdonald ultimately found a job teaching finance courses at a local community college, “his income today is much less than when he worked as an investment advisor.”

“I therefore have no difficulty concluding that Mr. MacDonald suffered significant financial hardship in taking on the role and responsibilities of the lead representative plaintiff. The request for a \$50,000 honorarium is more than justified,” the court said.

COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE, RESILIENCE AND RECOVERY NEWS

Why Canadians Need To Pay Close Attention When Shopping For Travel Insurance

By Salmaan Farooqui, The Canadian Press, June 24, 2021

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/investing/personal-finance/household-finances/article-why-canadians-need-to-pay-close-attention-when-shopping-for-travel/>

Canadians who are eager to be part of the first wave of travellers to head abroad once border restrictions ease should pay close attention to what their travel insurance will and will not cover, experts say.

There may be many exemptions in coverage at the moment since the Canadian government is still advising against non-essential travel to all foreign countries, the Travel Health Insurance Association of Canada said.

In particular, travellers should confirm that their policy covers trip cancellation and COVID-19-related health emergencies, said Will McAleer, executive director of THIA.

“The key thing to look for is will your policy cover you if there’s a travel advisory to avoid all non-essential travel,” he said.

According to McAleer, most insurance providers will not currently cover trip interruptions that happen before you leave and are a direct impact of the pandemic.

In addition, many providers will likely make changes to how much compensation you’re entitled to for common claims.

He said many insurance providers have lower maximum payout amounts for issues related to COVID-19, and may only pay a small per diem in certain scenarios, rather than a large overall amount.

For example, he said some insurance providers capped per diem payments at around \$150 for people who get COVID-19 and incur expenses related to quarantine measures and testing.

One way to maximize what you're entitled to is by getting vaccinated, McAleer said.

The travel association said some insurance companies are already mandating different maximum payouts for people based on their vaccination status. McAleer said one insurance agency he knows of has a maximum payout of \$5 million for a COVID-19 related medical emergency for fully vaccinated clients, compared to only a \$1 million payout for those who aren't.

Even if you do your due diligence, consumers should expect to have to pay some money out-of-pocket if their trip is disrupted, said Ian Lee, an associate professor at Carleton University's Sprott School of Business.

"There's lots of fine print restrictions," said Lee.

"Anyone who says, 'I just want to be completely insured so if I go abroad, I don't lose a penny to get back home,' I think that's an expectation that's not valid."

He said travellers should be aware that insurance companies can change their policies on a whim, and said those companies need to protect themselves from taking on too much risk.

According to Lee, the top risk facing travellers is the threat of border closures that spark a mad rush to change flights and get back home.

Both McAleer and Lee say they expect travel insurance will start returning to normal when there is more certainty around the end of the pandemic, and when countries lift their travel advisories.

McAleer said consumers should also carefully consider where they decide to spend their holiday, since the security situations of certain destinations have changed.

He pointed out that the global pandemic has been an economic crisis as well as a health crisis, and there may be an increase in crime in countries where economic conditions deteriorated.

"Some of the destinations that were once very safe and secure may not be any more," said McAleer.

"The world might be a bit different out there, and early travellers might be more susceptible to some of the more minor petty crimes and pickpocketing and things like that."

Restrictions At U.S. Border To Remain In Place Until End Of July, Trudeau Says

By Jordan Press, The Canadian Press, June 18, 2021

[Restrictions at U.S. border to remain in place until end of July, Trudeau says \(msn.com\)](https://www.msn.com/en-ca/news/story/restrictions-at-u.s.-border-to-remain-in-place-until-end-of-july-trudeau-says)

Travel restrictions at the Canada-U.S. border will remain in place for at least another month to prevent a fourth wave of COVID-19, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said on Friday, June 18 while acknowledging growing frustration with how the issue was being managed.

Measures to limit non-essential international travel have been in place since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, with the latest extension set to expire on Monday, June 21.

On Friday morning, June 18, the measures got another one month extension until July 21.

Pressure to relax restrictions is mounting from businesses and politicians on both sides of the border as vaccination rates climb in Canada.

Trudeau said it would take 75 per cent of Canadians getting a first dose and 20 per cent receiving a second before rules can be loosened because a fully vaccinated individual can pass COVID-19 to someone who is not vaccinated.

He said he understood growing impatience from tourism operators and Canadians who want to travel, but the government didn't want to risk another flare-up of COVID-19.

"If we are able to avoid more outbreaks like we've seen in some places across the country, even recently, by delaying a little bit more by keeping people safe — so we're not seeing more people in hospitals, and more people and more families losing loved ones — then that's the right decision," Trudeau said from his Ottawa residence, where he is isolating after a trip to the U.K. to meet with leaders from G7 nations.

The decision garnered immediate criticism from two U.S. congressmen who co-chair the Canada-U.S. Interparliamentary Group.

Western New York Democrat Brian Higgins and Michigan Republican Bill Huizenga decried the lack of transparency around the border talks as a disservice to residents on both sides of the border who want to see loved ones and renew business ties.

"While the arrival of vaccines in record time has been a modern marvel, the inability of the U.S. and Canadian governments to reach an agreement on alleviating border restrictions or aligning additional essential traveller classes is simply unacceptable," the duo said in a statement.

Goldy Hyder, president of the Business Council of Canada, which represents Canada's largest employers, called for a clearly articulated plan to re-open the border safely "so that friends and families can be reunited and businesses can welcome back travellers."

Perrin Beatty, president of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, said the policy should be based on whether a traveller is vaccinated, not on nationality. He noted how France now allows Canadians and Americans to visit, which makes it easier to travel abroad than within this country and to our closest neighbour.

"We are the deer caught in the headlights, unable to move," Beatty said in an interview. "What the government is doing flies in the face of science, of economics and good public policy."

The scenario envisioned, and laid out to premiers during a Thursday night, June 17 call with Trudeau, would see restrictions gradually eased starting July 21 for fully vaccinated travellers first, said Quebec Premier François Legault.

"It's clear that either you get a double dose of AstraZenca, or a double dose of Moderna or of Pfizer, or a mix of double doses, (and) you will have access to international flights," Legault said at an event in Laval, Quebec.

More details on rules for vaccinated Canadians and permanent residents are scheduled to land on Monday, June 21.

Trudeau said the government plans to have Canadians upload proof of vaccination pictures to the ArriveCan app so border agents can verify someone is fully vaccinated when travelling this summer.

For the fall, Trudeau said federal officials are working with provinces to automatically share vaccination status, which could then be accepted around the world.

He also said the government is working with other countries on ensuring travellers who receive vaccines not approved in arriving countries are still able to safely enter.

"Having to demonstrate that you have been vaccinated has been a standard piece of international travel since international aviation began," said Mike McNaney, president of the National Airlines Council of Canada, in an interview.

"We've been quite supportive of the government coming up with a policy and a mechanism on how it's going to capture that data."

There are yet other issues that need to be addressed, Trudeau said, including what to do about children under 12 for whom vaccines have not been approved. He suggested children could be subject to a repeated testing regime after arrival because having a two-week quarantine away from vaccinated parents may not be possible.

Later on Friday, June 18, the Federal Court upheld the constitutionality of the federal government's quarantine hotel program, but said the way the measures were imposed on one applicant in the case — who wasn't told where she was going or of her right to a lawyer — violated her charter rights.

The ruling from Chief Justice Paul Crampton said anyone engaging in behaviour that poses a risk to public health cannot expect the law to prevent the state from performing its essential function of protecting citizens.

U.S Extends Travel Restrictions At Canada, Mexico Land Borders Through July 21

By Reuters, June 20, 2021

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/politics/u-s-extends-travel-restrictions-at-canada-mexico-land-borders-through-july-21-1.5478402>

U.S. land borders with Canada and Mexico will remain closed to non-essential travel until at least July 21, the U.S. Homeland Security Department said on Sunday, June 20.

The 30-day extension came after Canada announced its own extension on Friday, June 18 of the requirements that were set to expire on Monday, June 21 and have been in place since March 2020 because of the coronavirus pandemic. The U.S. government held working-group meetings with Canada and Mexico last week.

Homeland Security said in a statement it noted "positive developments in recent weeks and is participating with other U.S. agencies in the White House's expert working groups with Canada and Mexico to identify the conditions under which restrictions may be eased safely and sustainably."

Trudeau Defends Extension Of Canada-U.S. Border Closure Until July 21, 2021

By Steven Chase, The Globe and Mail, June 18, 2021

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-canada-us-restrictions-on-non-essential-travel-extended-until-july-21/>

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is defending his government's decision to extend restrictions against non-essential travel to the United States for another month, saying Canada has not yet reached a safety threshold of first- and second-dose vaccinations.

The Canada-U.S. border will remain closed to non-essential travel until July 21, the government announced on Friday, June 18, a renewal of a monthly agreement with the United States that has been repeatedly extended since the pandemic emerged in early 2020.

Mr. Trudeau said Canada is still not sufficiently protected by vaccination to relax cross-border travel.

"I get people's impatience. But from the very beginning, we as a government have been there for Canadians, and that means doing what's necessary to keep them safe."

“We have to hit our targets of 75 per cent vaccinated with a first dose and at least 20 per cent vaccinated with a second dose before we can start loosening things up, because even a fully vaccinated individual can pass on COVID-19 to someone who is not vaccinated,” he told reporters.

He said Ottawa is nevertheless planning to significantly ease post-travel quarantine restrictions soon for fully vaccinated Canadians, permanent residents and other eligible individuals. Ottawa said on June 9 that the loosening of rules was planned for early July. Further details including a precise date are expected on Monday, June 21.

The Prime Minister acknowledged, however, that a national vaccine passport in the works to verify that people have been immunized – one that would be accepted around the world – won’t be ready this summer. He said a national certification of vaccination status is a medium-term target for the fall of 2021, and access to provincial health databases would be needed to verify who has received two doses. “The provinces, of course, have your health data and your vaccination status.”

He said in the interim – as quarantine requirements after travel are relaxed for Canadians with two vaccine doses – people will have to upload photos of their vaccination documents to the ArriveCAN software app to prove to border officers that they are fully vaccinated.

Ottawa announced last week that fully vaccinated Canadians, permanent residents and other essential travellers will be subject to a far shorter quarantine – days, not weeks – if they test negative for COVID-19 upon arrival. The changes would also mean qualifying travellers who arrive by air can skip government-mandated quarantine hotels and isolate at home until they receive a negative result on their arrival COVID-test.

There are signs, however, that the United States isn’t ready to welcome Canadians who have received doses of Oxford-AstraZeneca. Reports suggest theatre venues in New York will only admit individuals who got vaccines approved by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration: Pfizer-BioNTech, Moderna or Johnson & Johnson.

Mr. Trudeau acknowledged that the easing of post-travel quarantine rules for fully vaccinated Canadians could still leave their young children subject to mandatory 14-day quarantine rules, because COVID-19 vaccines in Canada have not been approved for those under 12. He suggested a workaround might be possible using repeated testing, but gave no guarantees. Current rules exempt unaccompanied minors from the mandatory hotel quarantine.

“We have to put the safety of Canadians first.”

The Prime Minister was asked about problems arising for fully vaccinated Canadians who have received vaccines not approved by the federal Department of Health. Only vaccines approved in Canada will be accepted in determining whether an incoming traveller counts as fully vaccinated. He said Canada could expand the range of acceptable vaccines to those assessed and listed for use by the World Health Organization, but gave no guarantees.

About 16 per cent of Canadians are fully vaccinated and two-thirds have received their first shot. The number of double-dosed individuals is expected to rise quickly as provincial vaccination campaigns continue.

The Globe and Mail reported last week that travellers whose vaccination documents are not in French or English will have to pay for an official translation. If the credibility of the documents is in doubt, the traveller would be directed to a government-sanctioned quarantine hotel.

At least 25 countries, including France, Spain and Denmark, plan to re-open their borders to vaccinated travellers from some countries. Many are requiring a negative COVID-19 test and official proof of vaccination, while some are allowing unvaccinated travellers who test negative for COVID-19.

Goldy Hyder, president of the Business Council of Canada, said he was disappointed to hear the Canada-U.S. border remains closed to non-essential travel.

“Our two countries have missed an opportunity to make amendments to the border agreement which would recognize the increasing number of people who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19,” Mr. Hyder said.

“Canadians need a clearly articulated plan to re-open the border safely so that friends and families can be reunited and businesses can welcome back travellers.”

Mr. Trudeau said Canada is on track to have received 68 million doses by the end of July, which is more than enough to fully vaccinate all 33.2 million Canadians over the age of 12.

Canada had expected enough to fully vaccinate 75 per cent of all eligible people before August, but Moderna has scheduled another 11 million doses to be delivered in late June and early July.

New Brunswick Premier Says Provinces Discussing July For Border Re-Opening

By Caroline O'Neill, CTV News, June 21, 2021

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/n-b-premier-says-provinces-discussing-july-for-border-re-opening-1.5479886>

New Brunswick Premier Blaine Higgs says the provinces are talking about July for the Canada-U.S. border to re-open.

Higgs told CTV News Channel's Power Play on Monday that July 21 is “in the realm” of that timeframe.

“We were talking in our national call a week ago, we were talking about mid-July ... through the different provinces,” Higgs said.

The Canada-U.S. border closure was extended to at least July 21. The border was closed in March 2020 and that closure has been extended each month since.

Higgs said he was hopeful the re-opening "would come forward."

Businesses, U.S. Legislators Fume As Canada Extends Travel Ban, Trudeau Stands Firm

By David Ljunggren, Reuters, June 18, 2021

[Businesses, U.S. legislators fume as Canada extends travel ban, Trudeau stands firm \(msn.com\)](#)

Canada is extending a ban on non-essential travel with the United States and the rest of the world until July 21, officials said on Friday, prompting frustration from businesses and U.S. legislators.

Canada is under pressure from companies and the tourism industry to ease the ban, which was imposed in March 2020 to help contain spread of the coronavirus and has been renewed on a monthly basis ever since.

But Prime Minister Justin Trudeau stood firm, saying the border would stay largely shut until 75% of Canadians had received the first of a two-dose coronavirus vaccine and 20% had been given both shots.

Although Trudeau said Canada had basically achieved the first target, official data released after he spoke showed 73.4% had received their first shot. Only 5.5% of the eligible population has had both shots.

"Even a fully vaccinated individual can pass on COVID-19 to someone who is not vaccinated," Trudeau told reporters, saying Canada needed to avoid "any further massive waves."

The ban, which does not affect trade in goods, is hitting travel operators and the export of services.

"The inability of the U.S. and Canadian governments to reach an agreement on alleviating border restrictions ... is simply unacceptable," said U.S. Representatives Brian Higgins and Bill Huizenga, co-chairs of the Canada-U.S. Interparliamentary Group.

The United States is Canada's largest trading partner.

The Canadian Chamber of Commerce - a national group that advocates for businesses - lamented what it said was Ottawa's excessive caution.

"All of the science would say we should be moving ahead to re-open the border. We don't even have a plan at this point," said Perrin Beatty, the group's president and chief executive.

The Business Council of Canada - which groups chief executives - and the Canadian Airports Council both expressed disappointment at the extension.

Ottawa will reveal on Monday how it plans to start easing measures for fully vaccinated Canadians. Officials say quarantine protocols will be scrapped for citizens who had received their second dose.

U.S. Politicians Fume Over Canada's Extended Border Restrictions

Members of Congress urge Biden to re-open border unilaterally

By Alexander Panetta, CBC News, June 18, 2021

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/world/us-canada-border-closed-reaction-1.6071737>

American politicians who are normally friendly to Canada are fuming over news that the border will remain closed to non-essential travel for at least another month.

They decried the latest prolongation on Friday as overly cautious, unfounded in science and unclear.

"I wish there was a more artful way to say this — but this is bullshit," said Representative Brian Higgins, a Democratic congressman whose Buffalo, New York district touches the border.

"It's arbitrary. It doesn't follow the science, it doesn't follow the facts, it doesn't follow the data."

Higgins' state is the No. 1 source of cross-border travellers to Canada, and 62 per cent of New York state's adults have been fully vaccinated; COVID-19 cases and deaths there have plunged.

And he's not typically a firebrand on cross-border affairs.

Higgins speaks frequently about his connections to Canada; resisted when the last administration threatened a new NAFTA without Canada; and urged the current administration to send more vaccines.

'Caving' To Trudeau

Now, politicians from both U.S. parties are pressing President Joe Biden to just move ahead unilaterally — and fling open America's border to Canadian travel.

A senior Republican from New York, Representative Elise Stefanik, demanded a unilateral re-opening in a recent letter to the administration — urging Biden to get tougher with his Canadian counterpart.

Biden "missed a huge opportunity at the G7 summit to stand up for America and deliver a plan to safely re-open," Stefanik said in a statement on Friday, June 18. "Instead, caving to Prime Minister Trudeau's incessant desire to delay."

In Ottawa, one official said on Friday, June 18 that there hasn't actually been much pressure from Biden's administration to re-open immediately.

But Biden is getting pressure at home.

That pressure is coming from powerful senators. For his part, Higgins has also been calling and writing to administration officials to re-open the U.S. unilaterally.

He says he believes the administration is considering a unilateral move but that bureaucratic inertia is bogging it down.

"Nobody's making a decision. You speak to [U.S.] cabinet secretaries, everybody says the right thing and then everybody has to bring it to a task force," Higgins said.

"We need someone to make a decision. The person to make that decision is the president of the United States and the prime minister of Canada. They're men of good will."

Another lawmaker from New York, Republican Representative Chris Jacobs, introduced a bill to demand details of what the national governments have been telling each other behind the scenes.

The White House declined to comment on the Canadian announcement and said it has working groups discussing the border re-opening with Canada and other countries.

'Incensed' Over Hockey

Higgins calls it immoral that NHL players got a travel exemption for the playoffs while fully vaccinated people can't cross to see their loved ones or their property.

"People should be incensed by that," he said in an interview.

He's especially annoyed at the lack of clarity about the re-opening plan and questions such as how vaccinations will be recognized. Higgins said these details should have been dealt with months ago.

Canada has said it wants 75 per cent of its population to have one dose of vaccine and for 20 per cent to be fully vaccinated before re-opening travel.

As of Friday, June 18, those thresholds have either been met or will soon be, for those aged 12 and older.

One Canadian MP who works on Canada-U.S. issues says he's been hearing from his peers in Congress over the last few days.

"We've had a few phone calls," said Randy Hoback, a Saskatchewan MP who sits on House of Commons committees related to trade and U.S.-Canada affairs.

"They're just trying to understand the resistance here and why we're not moving forward faster. They're trying to understand why there isn't a game plan put in place that people can look at and say, 'OK, that makes sense.'"

The current discussion is a reversal of the usual dynamic between the countries.

For decades, especially since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, it's been Canadians pleading with Americans to keep the border open.

Post-9/11 safety measures slowed travel and trade and Canadians were constantly pushing back against false reports of terrorists entering from Canada.

Canada's former ambassador Gary Doer would attend meetings in Washington carrying pages of the 9/11 commission report in his suit pocket — to show people the attackers hadn't come from Canada.

He says he's hopeful things can get back to normal at the border in relatively short order. Doer believes we'll see an announcement soon about when, and how, the re-opening will work.

"I think we can do it," Doer said in an interview. "I'm very confident we're going to move quickly in the next couple of weeks."

Will there be any lingering ill will from the current disruption?

Higgins says things will get better.

He blames the former Trump administration for poisoning relations in recent years, but said the bonds between the countries are too deep.

"We'll recover," he said. "We love Canada; we love Canadians."

One business group said it speaks volumes, however, that Higgins is sounding angry these days.

"You have to go out of your way to tick off Brian Higgins," said Maryscott Greenwood of the Canadian American Business Council.

"It's too bad that he has to reach that point of exasperation before people will pay attention ... It makes very little sense to alienate your closest champions."

She added a prediction: that the U.S. border will re-open to Canadian travel soon, either on June 22, or at the latest on July 22 — no matter what Canada does.

"The U.S. isn't going to wait forever," Greenwood said. "Because the U.S. is ready. The U.S. is ready today."

Canadians Are Losing Patience With The Border Closure

The federal government says it's taking no chances. Its critics say Ottawa is taking its time.

By Chris Hall, CBC News, June 19, 2021

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/thehouse/bill-blair-border-re-opening-1.6071142>

For many Canadians, the ban on most travel to and from the United States — in place now for 15 months — borders on the excessive.

Public Safety Minister Bill Blair says he gets it, even as he defends the decision to continue with the cross-border restrictions for at least another month.

"Let me acknowledge that we've heard very clearly from our border area mayors and from communities across the country that have been impacted by these restrictions. We're certainly hearing from some of the American interests as well," Blair said in an interview airing on Saturday, June 19 on CBC's The House.

But while the border closure has been stressful for the families kept apart by it, and awkward for the people barred from visiting vacation properties and cross-border shopping, Blair insisted that protecting Canadians' health remains the government's priority — and it won't move on the border until it's "safe to proceed."

"I want to be really clear with you and with Canadians that we rely very much on the advice we receive from our public officials, from scientists in the medical community," he said.

Save The Summer, Mps Say

On Monday, June 21, Blair is expected to announce when, how and to whom the border will be re-opened for non-essential travel.

But patience is running thin. Frustration is building.

At this week's Liberal caucus meeting, a number of MPs representing ridings that depend on tourism and other cross-border travel called for the border to be re-opened before the critical summer vacation period is gone. Those appeals went unanswered.

For a town such as Stanstead, Quebec, which sits right on the border with Vermont, the ban on non-essential travel is having consequences that are both economic and personal.

Jeanette Sisco works in a local antique store that used to get a lot of American customers.

"It's slow," she told CBC News. "I'll be glad when they start coming back in because there were regulars every week and we haven't seen them for two years now."

Laura Wood has been separated from her 63-year-old mother, who lives just on the other side of the border past a wrought iron fence — the only physical barrier separating the two countries in that part of Stanstead.

Lives Put On Hold

She said that she and her mom have been visiting at the Haskell Free Library and Opera House, which straddles the border between Rock Island, Quebec and Derby Line, Vermont. There's no touching permitted, no straying across a line that seems more imaginary than real.

"It's been difficult not enjoying time with her," Wood said. She and her mother had made plans for a real visit, thinking the border would re-open next week — plans that will have to be put on hold, again.

"Yeah ... she's really wanting for that to happen."

Individual Canadians aren't the only ones getting impatient.

The Business Council of Canada (BCC) said the decision to extend the border ban fails to recognize the increasing number of people who are fully vaccinated against COVID-19.

"We hope that on Monday, the government will follow the advice of its own COVID-19 Testing and Screening Expert Advisory Panel that calls for the gradual easing of some border restrictions," BCC president Goldy Hyder said in a media statement released on Friday, June 18.

"Canadians need a clearly articulated plan to re-open the border safely so that friends and families can be reunited and businesses can welcome back travellers."

U.S. Representative Brian Higgins of Buffalo, NY, a Democrat, is co-chair of the northern border caucus. He called the month-long extension "bullshit" in a tweet.

"Millions of Americans and Canadians are counting on our governments to work together to reach an agreement that provides a clear roadmap for re-opening the border between our two nations," he said in a media statement.

"The lack of transparency surrounding these negotiations is a disservice to our constituents and the millions of residents on both sides of the border waiting to see their loved ones, visit their property, and renew business ties."

Blair said the two countries are working together on a re-opening plan. He acknowledged, however, that there are still some wild cards in the mix — such as the fact that travel restrictions remain in place between some provinces.

"Frankly, our concern is about the protection of Canadians. And so for people travelling from the U.S. or anywhere else in the world, we want to make sure that when they come to Canada, they can do so safely and don't put Canadians at risk," he said.

"But when a significant portion of this country is fully vaccinated — we think that threshold, at least on the advice so far from the public health agency, is approximately 75 per cent — that's going to set up conditions where we can move to further easing of restrictions."

The vaccination campaign is approaching that target. Until it hits the mark, the Canada-U.S. border remains a barrier — a line that can't be crossed for at least another month.

Two Good Reasons For Keeping The Border Closed, And One Bad One

By The Globe and Mail Editorial Board, June 21, 2021

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/editorials/article-two-good-reasons-for-keeping-the-border-closed-and-one-bad-one/>

The federal government exasperated a lot of people on Friday, when it announced that the ban on non-essential travel over the U.S.-Canada border will continue until at least July 21.

The rolling one-month ban, first introduced in March, 2020, and now reupped for the 15th time, means that Canadian businesses hungry for American tourists, and people who would just like to visit family on either side of the border, will have to keep being patient.

On the surface, there appear to be inconsistencies in the decision.

For one thing, the rate of COVID-19 infections in the United States has dropped dramatically. As of Friday, Canada's seven-day average rate of cases per million people was just 29.23, while the U.S. rate was 31.42.

Gone are the dark days of winter, when the U.S. rate was almost four times that of Canada.

As well, vaccinations in Canada are moving along remarkably well. As of Friday, about 75 per cent of Canadians 12 years of age and older had received one shot, and almost 20 per cent had two. The U.S. figures were 62 per cent and 52 per cent, respectively.

Meanwhile, the European Union last week recommended allowing non-essential travel for fully vaccinated Americans.

Canadians may wonder why their country isn't following suit. We can think of two very good reasons.

First, Canada has yet to fully re-open to itself. Public-health orders continue to restrict activities and movement, in a bid to stamp out the third wave's last embers.

Ontarians can't get a haircut, go to school, see a movie, visit a museum or have a meal inside a restaurant. In Montreal, only 3,500 fans were allowed to attend the Montreal Canadiens' Stanley Cup playoff games on Friday and Sunday. In Manitoba, all indoor and outdoor gatherings on private property are prohibited.

To top it off, anyone entering Canada must quarantine for 14 days; air travellers were still required, as of Friday, to isolate in a hotel room for as many as three of those days. (The Trudeau government is expected to announce a change to the rules – for vaccinated travellers – on Monday.)

It would make no sense to allow millions of American and other tourists into a country that, as part of what is hopefully our last round in the fight against COVID-19, is still restricting so many basic activities.

The other good reason to hold off on a complete border re-opening is that, though Canada's vaccination campaign is going well, it's still not where it needs to be.

On Friday, Ottawa announced that Canada is on track to receive 68 million doses of vaccine by the end of July, thanks to another increase in Moderna shipments. That's more than enough to give two doses to every eligible Canadian by late July.

But we're not there yet. With the growing prevalence of the Delta variant of the novel coronavirus, which is more transmissible and appears to be more resistant to a single dose of vaccine, there should be no rush to re-open the border before a much higher percentage of people have had their second shots.

Unfortunately, there is also a bad reason to keep on restricting non-essential travel – the failure of Ottawa and the provinces to set up a system for tracking and sharing information on who has been vaccinated.

Governments should have been preparing since mid-2020 to address this obvious issue. Instead, Ottawa said last week it won't have a centralized vaccine confirmation system ready before the fall.

Canada's progress on vaccinations, and continued success on COVID-19 suppression, is setting the stage for a re-opening of the border, in a matter of weeks, for anyone who is fully vaccinated. Yet it's hard to see how Ottawa will be able to do that until it has a credible system for confirming travellers' vaccination claims. The challenge is further complicated by the need to co-ordinate with other countries, including a U.S. government that says it has no intention of creating vaccine credentials for Americans.

Before Canada takes down its border barriers, COVID-19 cases have to fall further. Second-dose vaccinations have to rise, by a lot. And a system for checking travellers' vaccination status has to be in place. Once all that happens – it can be done in a matter of weeks – then the border can re-open to tourism.

The Extraordinarily Slow Plan To Re-Open The Border

By Justin Ling, Maclean's, June 21, 2021

[The extraordinarily slow plan to re-open the border \(msn.com\)](https://www.msn.com/en-ca/news/health/the-extraordinarily-slow-plan-to-re-open-the-border)

The Trudeau government is keeping shut the U.S-Canada border for the foreseeable future, with no clear end date in place nor with any metrics on when, and how, the border will re-open.

Nothing will change about the border measures at all until July 5, when fully-vaccinated travellers coming into Canada will no longer have to quarantine, providing they test negative for the virus when crossing.

It's a painfully minor development that appears fundamentally at odds with the reality on the ground in the United States and Canada, where case counts are plummeting and vaccines are being put in arms at an ambitious pace.

It is particularly frustrating for towns and businesses that rely on cross-border traffic, a hurting tourism sector, families separated by the restrictions, workers who have endured the two-week quarantine one or more times, and scores of others.

Through it all, Ottawa has promised that it is working furiously to bring online technologies that will allow for this re-opening: allowing Canadians, workers, and tourists alike to come-and-go from the country.

Sources who spoke to Maclean's, however, said those technologies—from an app tasked with scanning physical vaccine cards, to a digital vaccine passport—have not been pursued with any kind of urgency.

The sluggish pace of re-opening seems to belie two intertwined issues: the Trudeau government is coasting on a swell of public opinion that remains distrustful and anxious of even our nearest neighbours; and Ottawa seems fundamentally ill-prepared for a broader re-opening.

What's In A Target?

For months, the Trudeau government has responded to questions about the border by saying that, in order for things to get “back to normal,” as the Prime Minister said in May, that “cases need to be under control, and over 75 per cent of people need to be vaccinated”—sometimes adding that 20 per cent equally need to have both doses.

Canada is set to hit those targets this week, yet normal still feels a hundred miles off.

Both the United States and Canada have seen cases, hospitalizations and deaths plummet over the spring: for months, America reported a lower rate of cases than Canada for the first time since the start of the pandemic.

According to CTV, three-quarters of Canada have received at least one vaccine dose while just shy of 20 per cent are fully vaccinated. In America, 62 per cent have received at least one dose while more than half are fully vaccinated.

While the more-transmissible Delta variant is responsible for community spread in the United States, contributing to roughly 10 per cent of cases there, it has equally taken hold in Canada: more than a quarter of cases reported in Ontario are from that variant, first identified in India. Even still, cases continue to fall.

Canada's numbers have prompted a broad re-opening at home. Montrealers can crowd into the Bell Centre to watch the Habs, and Calgarians will be able to revel in the Stampede: neither are free to drive and visit their southern neighbours.

On Monday, June 21, however, Health Minister Patty Hajdu insisted their approach is "based on science and evidence, and reflects the ongoing science and evidence."

Ottawa's insistence that it is following expert advice rings hollow, as the federal government's Testing and Screening Expert Advisory Panel made a suite of recommendations in May: few of which are actually being adopted.

The advisory panel recommended a suite of "immediate" measures: that fully vaccinated travellers be allowed to skip the pre-departure test, requiring partially-vaccinated travellers to quarantine only until they receive a negative test, and to reduce the quarantine period for unvaccinated travellers to just seven days.

They suggested a phased approach for a broader re-opening plan.

But, a month later, Ottawa is still ignoring the majority of those recommendations based on the fear, as Health Minister Patty Hajdu said on Monday, June 21, that "the Delta variant [could be] able to get a foothold in our community in a significant way."

Hajdu and her colleagues pointed to the United Kingdom, which is currently seeing a spike in cases tied to the Delta variant—not mentioned by the cabinet ministers, however, is that hospitalizations have not risen in tandem. New data from the National Health Service in the UK shows that even one dose of a vaccine offers a 75 per cent chance of preventing hospitalization from the variant.

Hajdu's office has indicated that the marginal change slated for July 6 could be a test to see whether cases rise—precipitating a quicker re-opening pace if things go well. The current border closure is slated to continue until July 21, but a source with knowledge of the situation said it could stretch into August. Liberal Member of Parliament Nathaniel Erskine-Smith says that overly-cautious approach is too gun-shy.

"Governments impose restrictions in keeping with the evidence," he says. "We also have an expectation that those restrictions would be lifted in keeping with the evidence."

The most important target for the government appears to be public support. Conversations with federal officials in recent days around the border have consistently turned to a widespread feeling that America is struggling to contain COVID-19 and facing down a troubling vaccine skepticism problem: effectively playing into widely-held, but not altogether accurate, fears that America could export COVID-19 to Canada.

An Angus-Reid poll from late May found half of Canadians support shutting down all airports and borders entirely. Only about a third of respondents said the border should re-open to non-essential travel.

Ontario Premier Doug Ford hammered Ottawa's quarantine plans throughout the third wave, even though evidence was clear that community spread was driving the province's caseloads: not travel.

Hajdu and other ministers seemed to lean into that anxiety, telling Canadians on Monday, June 21 that "as COVID rages out of control in other countries, it presents a clear and present danger to all countries."

Erskine-Smith has been a vocal proponent of moving up the border re-opening. "You have people separated from their families. You have a Canadian tourism sector that is crushed," he adds.

Is It A Hotdog?

On Monday, Public Safety Minister Bill Blair announced new technology, designed to facilitate fully-vaccinated travellers' trips across the border.

Starting July 6, he said, those eligible to come into Canada by land or air will need to submit "proof of vaccination electronically through the ArriveCAN app."

How to accept and verify proof of vaccination has been identified for months as a challenge.

Yet, according to one source with knowledge of the ArriveCAN app development, civil servants inside Public Safety Canada only began working on a solution to that problem in April. Work on the add-on did not begin in earnest until May. They rushed to implement "optical character recognition" (OCR) technology that, they hoped, would allow for the government to assess whether the proof of vaccination is, in fact, genuine. It was designed to be an interim measure, as Ottawa forges ahead on a full vaccine passport.

On Monday, June 21, Blair insisted that "the application itself can verify the validity of the documentation that's been submitted."

OCR is hardly novel—it enables Canadians to deposit cheques in their bank account with only their smartphone, for example—but the technology has limitations, as evidenced by a video demonstration of the app.

The video was shared with Maclean's on the condition it not be published, as it may identify the source, who was not authorized to speak on the record. The video shows the add-on scanning and pulling information from various vaccine cards: From Ontario, Quebec, the United States and United Kingdom. The add-on checks for four things: The traveller's name, the vaccine manufacturer, mention of COVID-19, and details on the vaccinator. If it can correctly read all four, it gives a grade of 100 per cent.

In the demonstration, using sample vaccine records, the add-on scored 75 per cent on a Quebec vaccine receipt (because Quebec uses abbreviations to refer to the manufacturers); a perfect score on an American CDC card and an Ontario receipt; and 50 per cent on a U.K. card. It was also able to confirm that a photo of a hot dog was not, in fact, a proof of vaccine.

Given the add-on can't properly even read all Canadian vaccine cards, there are concerns about how useful it will really be. "Some provinces' [vaccine records] are going to fail," the source said. What's more: the scan of the vaccine record will only be sent to the Canadian Border Services Agency employee once the traveller arrives at the border.

The add-on has not yet been tested in the real world: the department hopes to implement the update to ArriveCAN in time for the measures on July 5. It can only read Latin characters, the source noted.

That begs the question why the technology is preferable to just handing the agent the actual proof of vaccination. The source with knowledge of the application says CBSA agents will be required to manually check the vaccine regardless.

What's more, unlike Blair's assurances, the technology is not able to assess whether these cards are legitimate, or even just crude forgeries. "This is not going to check fraud," the source said. "You're not going to be able to make decisions off this."

The add-on will not be able to read QR codes, which the Quebec government has begun issuing as its proof of vaccination, at least not yet.

Writ large, the source said the effort to add new layers of bureaucracy and technology isn't terribly effective. "They're over-complicating it," they said.

Erskine-Smith agrees. "If that technology isn't ready for this, then I kind of shrug my shoulders and say: 'So what?'" he says. "CBSA officers are more than capable. Let's get down to the hard work of working with our American partners."

A source in Public Safety Minister Bill Blair's office stressed that the border re-opening was not contingent on the application being finished.

Papers, Please

The slow pace of the preparation for the re-opening bodes ill for a broader effort to get back to normal. The Trudeau government has signalled it intends to adopt some form of a vaccine passport, allowing Canadians to have their vaccines validated abroad, and to allow Canadian border agents to ensure foreigners are vaccinated before vacationing in Canada.

The source, with knowledge of the vaccine passport process, said there had been plans to have a passport completed by Q3 of this year—before the end of September. But, they said, that target remains incredibly unrealistic, as Ottawa has not even issued a request for proposals. It is not even clear which department will spearhead the project. They said it is possible the technology will be online before the end of 2021.

Asked directly on Monday, June 21, neither Blair nor Hajdu offered a timeline for when the passport would be ready.

"The vaccine passport is all over the place," the source said. "There are different competing proposals."

Transport Canada, is pursuing an app called Travel Pass being pioneered by the International Air Transport Association. That won't work for Canada's land borders, however.

Blair's office confirmed that work on the vaccine passport has been slow going, pointing to uncertainty worldwide on the technology—it was a topic of conversation at the recently-completed G7 leaders meeting in the United Kingdom.

Hajdu's office indicated that one proposal on the table would be a portal where Canadians can submit their vaccine records to be approved and verified by Health Canada.

As Maclean's has reported previously, Canada still lacks a national vaccine registry: something that will be required for any kind of passport. Without being able to check those provincial registries, Ottawa won't be able to validate whether Canadians have been, in fact, inoculated. Deloitte Canada was awarded a contract late last year to build the technology in Ottawa to validate those provincial vaccine records, although it's unclear how far along that project is.

Dana O'Born, Director of Strategic Initiatives for the Council of Canadian Innovators, told Maclean's that developing technology that can marry all the provincial and territorial registries is "complex" but that "these are issues that should have been addressed with adequate planning in advance of where we find ourselves today."

Most other major economies have central vaccine registries. "Canada is behind several G-7 countries," O'Born added.

Two sources told Maclean's that IBM Canada and Deloitte Canada are the likely contenders for any kind of vaccine passport project. "There are domestic companies supporting local health units across the country on vaccine-related issues—from vaccine booking to identity verification," O'Born says. Her organization worries that a vaccine passport system "will use technology that does not integrate seamlessly with the Canadian companies on the ground already serving the public."

Other governments have already figured out some form of validation: New York state residents can show proof of vaccination through the state-run app Excelsior.

Erskine-Smith has been publicly critical of his own government's slow pace on re-opening. "I have been vocal on this because I haven't seen action on this that I would have expected."

In regular times, some 300,000 people cross the shared land border per day. The last time the porous border was shut, after the terror attacks of September 11, 2001, it took about two months before a plan was put together to let citizens of both countries come-and-go. As of today, the border has been closed for 15 months.

Democrat Representative Brian Higgins, who represents the American side of Niagara, has been increasingly frustrated about the prolonged closure. "There's no other way to say it: another month's delay is bulls-t," he tweeted earlier in June.

Two U.S. Senators Want To Let Canadian Snowbirds Stay South For Longer. Here's How Their Proposed Law Would Work

By Steve McKinley, June 22, 2021

<https://granthshala.com/two-u-s-senators-want-to-let-canadian-snowbirds-stay-south-for-longer-heres-how-their-proposed-law-would-work/>

Being north of the border this winter was a new one for Bob Slack.

It'd been 22 years since the retired school principal had spent a winter in Canada. Every November since 1998, he and his wife have packed up their belongings and made the drive to Winter Haven, Fla., just southwest of Orlando, from Athens, Ont., near Brockville, to stay until late April when the Great White North completes its thaw.

Last year, COVID-19 put a crimp in those plans, but only temporarily, Slack says. When this November rolls around, he and his wife will be once again packing up the car and heading south, joining the migration of Canadians shunning the cold for warmer climes.

Those Canadians — an estimated one million — spend between three and six months of each year south of the border, primarily in Florida, Arizona and California, and inject billions of dollars into the U.S. economy.

When they arrive next winter, though, those snowbirds may find a reason to tarry.

Last week, Florida senators Marco Rubio and Rick Scott reintroduced federal legislation that would allow them to stay in the U.S. an extra two months, up to eight from the six months currently allowed by U.S. immigration policy.

"The COVID-19 pandemic has severely hurt Florida's travel and tourism industries," said Scott at the time. "Now as we continue to recover, we should do everything we can to welcome visitors to our state, like our neighbours to the north.

"I'm proud to join Sen. Rubio in sponsoring this bill to allow Canadian snowbirds to enjoy two more months of Florida's incredible weather and continue to support our tourism industry."

If passed, the bill would allow Canadian citizens over the age of 50 who own or rent a residence in the U.S. to remain in the country for up to 240 days each year, without being subject to U.S. taxation.

But while the bill could help snowbirds overcome obstacles from the U.S. government, they are still somewhat restricted by domestic policies.

If the bill were to pass, Slack says, a new round of negotiations would be needed between the Canadian Snowbirds Association and the provincial governments on health-care coverage.

And there's no guarantee that would go smoothly. Last September, a court ruled in favour of snowbirds when it ordered Ontario to restore health insurance coverage for residents who face medical emergencies while travelling outside of the country.

The Doug Ford government had cancelled that coverage at the beginning of the year.

Also, most provinces restrict out-of-province health-care coverage to seven months. Currently, Newfoundland and Labrador is the only province that extends health-care coverage to eight out-of-province months.

The new bill could mean a windfall for those Sun Belt states that are popular winter destinations and that have lost billions of dollars due to pandemic travel restrictions.

In Arizona, snowbirds inject an estimated \$1.4 billion annually into that state's economy. In Florida, where Canadians spend \$6.6 billion in a non-pandemic year, that could mean an extra \$1.3 billion into the coffers from the 350,000 Canadians who overwinter there.

For the snowbirds themselves, the bill could mean more choices, not only in terms of how long they might stay in the U.S., but also in terms of their travel plans when they get back home.

"From the standpoint of a snowbird, it's all pro in terms of allowing snowbirds greater flexibility in their travel to the U.S.," says Evan Rachkovsky, spokesperson for the Canadian Snowbird Association.

"When I talk to members of our association, it's not necessarily that they want to spend the full eight months in Florida, but they like the flexibility of being able to go down there for six months during the winter, and then, if there's an emergency or an issue at their property, they would have additional time to spend there."

Currently, U.S. immigration laws limit snowbirds to a six month stay and those Canadians can only avoid paying U.S. taxes for that length of time. The new bill would extend those limits to eight months.

It's a potential boon for northern border states' economies as well, Rachkovsky says. When snowbirds return to Canada after maxing out their time in the U.S., they don't have the option of crossing the border on day trips. An extended two months makes those day trips — and even longer ones — plausible.

For Slack, who typically only spends five-and-a-half months in Florida, the legislation — if passed — likely won't mean he'll extend his stay there, but it will offer him, and those like him who live near the border, more flexibility to cross when he's residing in Canada.

"There's some nice golf courses we used to go to all the time," says Slack, who crosses to upper New York via Brockville. "And if you wanted to go shopping, or if you want to go to a different restaurant ... even a Sunday drive."

But the snowbirds that would really benefit from the proposed legislation, Slack says, are the permanent RV population — those who live in RVs full time and merely move their homes from north to south.

Typically, in Canada, he says, the RV campgrounds that host those snowbirds begin to close up in mid-October and don't re-open until mid-May. That means seven months of unavailable sites for RVs, only six of which can be spent in the U.S.

"They're the ones that would really benefit from a passage of a bill such as that which was introduced last week," he says.

But there's no guarantee the Canadian Snowbirds Act, as it is called, will become law.

Rubio and Scott first introduced it in 2019, but it died on the table when elections rolled around. In fact, Slack says, about five different versions of the bill have been introduced and failed to pass since 2011, each bill stalled when it failed to pass before a new set of elections cleared the legislative table.

"We always say this is the time that is going to happen," says Slack, who, as a former president of the CSA, had been involved with consultations on the previous bills.

"We might be more a little bit more optimistic this time than we have been previously. This president seems to be more friendly to immigration policies."

Canada To Announce Easing Of Some Travel Restrictions After Passing Vaccination Threshold

By Christian Paas-Lang, CBC News, June 20, 2021

[Canada to announce easing of some travel restrictions after passing vaccination threshold \(msn.com\)](https://www.msn.com/en-ca/news/canada/canada-to-announce-easing-of-some-travel-restrictions-after-passing-vaccination-threshold)

The federal government is set to announce Monday the loosening of some border restrictions for fully vaccinated Canadians and permanent residents but says "the finish line" won't come until there are significantly increased vaccination rates in Canada.

The changes to the border restrictions will be limited to a few measures, with all non-essential travel still discouraged, Public Safety Minister Bill Blair told CBC chief political correspondent Rosemary Barton in an interview that aired Sunday on Rosemary Barton Live.

There would be "changes with respect to the government-assisted hotels, perhaps some implication on who would be subject to quarantine, what it means to be a fully vaccinated traveller and what changes can now be accommodated for those people who are, in fact, fully vaccinated," Blair said.

Ottawa announced Friday it would be continuing existing restrictions at the Canada-U.S. border for at least another month, until July 21, but that changes would be coming on Monday for fully vaccinated Canadians and permanent residents.

The shift in policy at the border comes as many Canadian provinces have hit key vaccination targets — with more than 75 per cent of eligible Canadians receiving at least one dose, and over 20 per cent receiving two.

Blair said the government was "working cautiously but steadily toward a phased re-opening."

But the public safety minister warned that Canada wouldn't reach "the finish line" until about 75 per cent of eligible Canadians are fully vaccinated.

"We're moving toward those targets and we're making changes, I think, appropriate to the level of vaccination that's currently in place," he said.

"We've hit an important benchmark, but we haven't reached the finish line."

More Travellers Expected After Rule Change

Blair told Barton that he expects the changes in rules for fully vaccinated travellers would impact the number of people coming to Canada and that he has been working with the Public Health Agency of Canada and border services to ensure there was appropriate capacity.

"I'm absolutely certain it's going to have an impact on traveller volumes," Blair said, adding that there were likely many Canadians thinking of travelling to the United States to take care of property.

To determine whether travellers returning to Canada are fully vaccinated, Blair reiterated the government was co-ordinating with international partners, including the U.S. and European countries, on a vaccine verification system for international travel.

"We're working with our global partners, particularly with the United States, in the development of the vaccine certification system that will be very efficient and be able to gain access and utilize appropriately — and with appropriate personal privacy concerns accommodated within it."

But as an "interim" measure, Blair said the ArriveCAN app — currently in use at the border — would be modified to enable it to accept vaccine verification documents.

"We believe this app is going to help us accommodate the inevitable increase in traveller volumes," he said.

Ottawa Eases Quarantine For Vaccinated Travellers, But Won't Give Firm Date For Full Re-Opening Of U.S. Border

By Brian Platt, National Post, June 21, 2021

[Ottawa eases quarantine for vaccinated travellers, but won't give firm date for full re-opening of U.S. border \(msn.com\)](#)

Federal cabinet ministers are refusing to outline a clear threshold for when the Canada-U.S. border can re-open for non-essential travel, saying instead that they are looking at a wide range of factors — and that even if Canada's domestic numbers look good, the international situation may not allow for it.

Health Minister Patty Hajdu suggested that one key metric will be getting 75 per cent of eligible Canadians fully vaccinated. But she went on to list numerous other metrics that could play a role in re-opening, including whether other countries have their own COVID-19 case rate under control.

Business groups, travel companies and politicians on both sides of the border have been calling for a gradual opening of the U.S. border or, at the very least, a clear plan for when the restrictions can be rolled back for fully vaccinated travellers.

Over the weekend, U.S. Senate Majority Leader Charles Schumer told the Buffalo News he was “really angry” that the border is staying closed for another month, and had called Canada’s ambassador to the United States to voice his concerns. The border has been closed to non-essential travel since March 2020.

On Monday, June 21, Liberal ministers held a news conference to announce the quarantine requirement will be eliminated on July 5 for vaccinated travellers who are already allowed to enter Canada under the current rules and have a negative test. Even then, however, children under 12 would still have to quarantine at home.

But as for re-opening the land border with the U.S., Hajdu said the vaccination rate is just one of many considerations.

“We are looking at a variety of metrics,” Hajdu said, adding that it requires collaboration with provincial governments. “One metric that Canadians can watch for is the rate of fully vaccinated Canadians that is at least 75 per cent. And also how the disease is behaving in Canada. Are we seeing sustained and prolonged outbreaks in regions of the country? How are we managing in terms of our own hospitalization rates and capacity?”

She said it was just a few weeks ago that some parts of Canada were dealing with overloaded hospitals, and the government wants to ensure that never happens again. But even as daily case rates plummet in Canada and vaccine supply scales up dramatically, Hajdu said the international situation might delay re-opening.

“As COVID rages out of control in other countries, it presents a clear and present danger to all countries,” she said. “On the international front, (we’re) monitoring very closely what’s happening with the virus as it shifts and adapts to its population. So we’ll come back to Canadians. We know there’s a desire for next steps, and we’ll be very clear and transparent with Canadians, but for now, I would say to Canadians: continue to step up and get immunized.”

Public Safety Minister Bill Blair also mentioned the 75 per cent metric in a TV interview that aired on Sunday. “We haven’t reached the finish line, and the finish line is when a significant majority of Canadians, approximately 75 per cent, are fully vaccinated,” Blair told the CBC.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau had suggested on Friday, June 18 that further re-opening couldn’t happen until 75 per cent of eligible Canadians had one dose and 20 per cent had two, but didn’t clarify what exactly that would mean for border rules.

As of Friday, the Public Health Agency of Canada reported that 73.44 per cent of eligible Canadians have had at least one dose and 14.67 per cent are fully vaccinated. Other estimates put the number higher; according to the website COVID19tracker.ca, 21.8 per cent of Canadians have now received two doses as of Monday morning.

The Canadian government announced on Friday, June 18 that in co-ordination with the U.S. government, it's extending the border closure to at least July 21.

Monday, June 21's announcement revealed details of how Canada will ease quarantine measures for people who are flying into Canada or are allowed to cross the U.S. border under current rules.

Starting at 11:59 pm on July 5, fully vaccinated travellers will not have to quarantine or do a follow-up test on their eighth day as long as they have proof of their vaccination and have tested negative on their pre-departure and arrival tests.

However, children under 12 — who are not yet eligible for any approved vaccines in Canada — must still quarantine at home under the new rules, even if their parents are fully vaccinated. The parents would be allowed to leave the quarantine, but federal officials acknowledged this will be a significant obstacle for families looking to travel.

"Undoubtedly, this will be challenging for families who want to travel at this time," Hajdu said. "The research and science obviously indicates that children can get sick with COVID-19 and they can transmit COVID-19."

The government also announced it is lifting restrictions that had barred recently accepted permanent residents from flying to Canada under most conditions.

Goldy Hyder, CEO of the Business Council of Canada, said he welcomed the move on easing the quarantine but is disappointed that "the government hasn't seen fit to tell Canadians what they can look forward to as the vaccination campaign rolls on."

"A transparent plan with clear benchmarks to re-open travel would be a powerful tool for encouraging Canadians to get fully vaccinated," he said in a statement. "I'm disappointed, too, that the light at the end of the tunnel is still a long ways off for Canada's battered travel, tourism and hospitality sectors."

Mayor Of Niagara Falls, Ontario Hopes For 'More Meaningful Step' To Allow For Vaccinated U.S. Tourists

By Don Mitchell, Global News, June 22, 2021

<https://globalnews.ca/news/7971905/mayor-niagara-falls-vaccinated-tourists/>

The mayor of Niagara Falls, Ontario says a forthcoming change in quarantine rules for Canadians from Ottawa is "a good step in the right direction," but it's just a "baby step" when it comes to much needed tourism dollars.

Jim Diodati told Global News that the federal government needs to take “a more meaningful step” that allows anyone fully vaccinated to cross borders, not just Canadians.

“If the vaccines do work, which we know they do, and if it really is the panacea, we want to encourage people and incentivize them to get their vaccines,” Diodati said.

“Let’s have a little bit of love and let us cross the border both ways.”

The mayor suggested that allowing Canadians to cross borders without the hassle of having to quarantine upon returning with a negative COVID-19 test means that thousands of dollars will likely go south and not be reciprocated by partners to the south.

“If we sit on our hands any longer, the U.S. is going to do it unilaterally,” said Diodati.

“What happens then? Canadians will be allowed into the U.S. to go spend hard earned money, but Americans won’t be allowed into our country to spend their money.”

On Monday, June 21, the federal government cleared the way for “fully vaccinated” Canadians with two doses to enter the country by land or air without having to quarantine — as long as they test negative for COVID-19.

The new rule is set to take effect on July 5 and applies only to people already eligible to travel to Canada, including citizens, permanent residents and people registered under the Indian Act.

Diodati says the pandemic devastated Niagara Falls in 2020 with an estimated 32,000 (15.6 per cent) residents affected by job losses between February and June of last year.

Off and on shutdowns due to the pandemic last summer particularly hurt Niagara businesses since many follow what Diodati calls the ‘80/20’ rule, in which 80 per cent of their money is made in 20 per cent of the year.

“So between the July 1st weekend and Labour Day weekend, that’s when the majority of money comes in that carries them through the shoulder season when it gets cold and the tourists aren’t here,” Diodati said.

Prior to the pandemic, an estimated 14 million people typically travelled to Niagara Falls annually with 25 per cent coming from the U.S., representing 50 per cent of Niagara Falls’ tourism revenue.

To offset last year’s losses across Ontario, the Ford government injected \$200 million in support programs last March in the hopes of revitalizing the province’s tourism and hospitality industry.

At a press conference in Niagara Falls, Premier Doug Ford and Tourism Minister Lisa McLeod laid out details of a \$100-million tourism and hospitality small business support grant program and a one-time \$100 million Ontario tourism recovery program.

Brian Higgins, congressman representing portions of Erie and Niagara counties in New York state, says COVID-19 vaccines have changed the game in the U.S. and believes they've done the same in Canada.

Both countries' economies are 'mutually dependent' in Higgins' eyes and he is hopeful of action to allow fully vaccinated Canadians to go to the U.S., and vice versa, without red tape.

"They have powerful immunity against giving or getting COVID, they should be able to cross the border," said Higgins.

The congressman suggests re-opening the border might prove to be beneficial for those Canadians who have not yet had a first or second dose since western New York has an abundance of COVID-19 vaccines.

"Folks in Canada who can't get the vaccine should be able to come to western New York, get vaccinated and go back to Canada," Higgins said.

"We are discarding, as medical waste, surplus vaccines because they're not being used."

Dr. Dionne Aleman from the University of Toronto who focuses on pandemic planning says fully opening the border "poses a more risky situation" since the U.S. statistically is still struggling with achieving numbers that would be "commensurate with herd immunity."

As of Monday, 45.7 per cent of residents in the U.S. have been fully vaccinated, still below the estimated 70 to 80 per cent much of the medical community would recognize as reaching 'herd immunity,' according to Aleman.

She also suggests having a large number of children aged between 2 and 12 not vaccinated also represents a threat. Although youth are less affected symptomatically by the virus, they still could spread it.

"Until then, it does make sense to just take a slow and cautious approach" Aleman said.

"Certainly, the particular measures that are in place in Ontario and have been in place here for the past several months are open to criticism, but that doesn't mean it's wrong."

In recent months, Ontario has been calling for the federal government to strengthen border enforcement, saying more infectious COVID-19 variants are threatening the province's re-opening plan.

In June, the Ford government sent a letter to its federal counterparts and outlined the province's concerns about the risks of international travel during the third wave of the pandemic.

The letter called for a federal requirement that fully-vaccinated international travellers present proof of immunization and take a COVID-19 test on arrival. The province also asked for a strong quarantine regimen for those who have not been vaccinated against COVID-19.

"Ontario is committed to working with you to do whatever it takes to protect Canadians from the Delta variant and future variants," the ministers wrote.

“We urge you to heed these concerns and act now to finally secure our borders.”

Meanwhile, Mayor Diodati says time is already running out for tourism in Niagara Falls.

The mayor says it's particularly frustrating to watch the U.S.-based 'Maid of the Mist' boat tour consistently at capacity on a daily basis while the Canadian equivalent "Hornblower" remains in dry dock.

"I'm really hopeful that they're going to realize that maybe they haven't made the best decision at this point and they're going to correct it."

Ontario Should Promote Travel Within The Province As COVID-19 Restrictions Ease, Report Says

By Kristin Rushowy, Toronto Star, June 23, 2021

Ontario should offer smaller, "bite-sized" tourism experiences — such as road shows — until COVID-19 restrictions ease, and create "Yours to Discover" days and travel point cards, recommends a task force looking at a recovery plan for the hard-hit tourism industry. "There are better times ahead — there's no doubt that a significant part of the public want to get back out and explore, rediscover, re-engage with local businesses and attractions once it becomes safe to do so," said Tim Hudak, the former Progressive Conservative party leader and tourism minister who chaired the tourism economic recovery ministerial task force. "The government should use the exact same energy and effort to tell Ontarians — they told them to stay home during the pandemic, then in turn to tell them to get out and travel, enjoy this province and create new and lasting memories," Hudak said on Wednesday morning, June 23 at an outdoor news conference in Niagara-on-the-Lake alongside Tourism and Culture Minister Lisa MacLeod. MacLeod's ministry has a five-year recovery plan for the \$37-billion sector, which saw massive job losses during the pandemic, accounting for one in every four people unemployed. Hudak's task force has now handed over 10 recommendations to the minister. Among them: a 20 per cent travel incentive to boost travelling and stays; promoting "year of the staycation" through a public campaign; creating a "branded Ontario travels point cards with a mobile app"; start "Yours to Discover days" to make up for lost vacations due to the pandemic; and to focus on nature and outdoor tourism experiences.

Read Story (Subscription Required): https://www.thestar.com/politics/provincial/2021/06/23/ontario-should-promote-travel-within-the-province-as-COVID-19-restrictions-ease-report-says.html?source=newsletter&utm_content=a06&utm_source=ts_nl&utm_medium=email&utm_email=6D73923380F292A40DC042B455F0FDE3&utm_campaign=sbj_59595

'Back To Normal:' Alberta To Lift All Remaining COVID-19 Public Health Restrictions On July 1

By The Canadian Press, June 18, 2021

['No more limits': Alberta to lift all remaining COVID-19 public health restrictions \(msn.com\)](#)

Alberta will lift its remaining COVID-19 health restrictions on July 1, becoming the first province or territory in Canada to do so.

Premier Jason Kenney says 70.2 per cent of Albertans aged 12 and over have now received at least one dose of a COVID-19 vaccine.

He says that means it's safe to return to normal after the vaccines take full effect in two weeks.

Alberta has administered about 3.6 million vaccine doses and almost one-quarter of those eligible have had the required two shots.

Some doctors have said the province needs to get more second doses administered to be fully protected against the Delta variant.

Health Minister Tyler Shandro says people who received their first dose in May are now eligible to book their second doses.

Tourism Operators To Albertans: 'We Could Really Use Some Visitors'

Industry pins pandemic recovery on Albertans first, then other Canadians before summer slips away

By Bryan Labby, CBC News, June 23, 2021

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/calgary/alberta-tourism-re-opening-COVID-1.6074182>

In the span of 17 years, Jason Thornhill has transformed a flat section of prairie into a destination for gardeners, campers, adventure seekers and train lovers.

The section of land southeast of Calgary, covering 90 or so acres (36 hectares), had the good fortune of having an old, unused CP Rail line cutting through it. So after Thornhill established a garden centre, gift shop and campground, he turned his attention to trains.

Thornhill purchased the 22-kilometre section of track and started buying up old passenger railcars and engines. Since 2015, he's been running a number of lunch and dinner excursions for guests through the summer — and winter, after he secured the rights to the Polar Express story from Warner Bros. Entertainment. The Polar Express excursion alone involves 80 staff members.

But COVID-19 derailed his business as the trains haven't rolled since last fall.

"We're down approximately 30 per cent of our income with all that's been happening," he said.

That's his overall business operation. His train excursions went from 20,000 passengers a year to 2,000 last year.

"We could really use some visitors in 2021."

It's become the rallying cry for tourism operators in Alberta, who are trying to salvage something over the next few months as people shake loose from COVID restrictions and start to think about dining out, visiting museums and attractions such as Thornhill's Aspen Crossing near Mossleigh.

The summer of 2021, according to the CEO of Tourism Calgary, is all about recovering from the pandemic — and tourism operators have less than three months to do it.

"You look to see who's left standing, you look to see, you know, who's going to emerge and how differently that emergence will be as we move into this," said Cindy Ady.

In 2019, tourism spending in Alberta contributed \$6.5 billion to the provincial economy.

But 2020 will be the industry's year to forget.

"It slammed us shut from top to bottom, whether it was airline, hotel, restaurant, food, catering, attractions — you name it. Our industry got hit across the board," said Ady.

Attractions Slowly Re-Open

WinSport is still waiting to re-open some of its more popular summer attractions at Canada Olympic Park in Calgary, including mountain biking and a zip line known as the monster — activities that have been closed since 2019. Downhill carting opened earlier this month. The summer, bobsleigh isn't scheduled to return until August 1.

The non-profit organization was allowed to stay open for downhill skiing over the winter, which helped bring in much-needed revenue. But WinSport is not making any predictions for this summer.

"We're not making any assumptions of what the summer is going to look like. We're assuming there will be people taking staycations," said Dale Oviatt, the senior manager of communications for WinSport.

"Hopefully, we'll get some sort of, at least travel within Canada, and that can help us during the summer season," he said.

The Canada-U.S. border remains closed to non-essential travellers until at least July 21. The government says travellers from the United States spent \$991 million in Alberta in 2019.

Southland Transportation, which operates coach service to Canmore and Banff under the On It brand, says the border closure has resulted in roughly 25 per cent fewer customers. The company is hoping to bounce back this summer, but still expects a decline from the 20,000 passengers it saw in 2019.

"I'm hoping to exceed 10,000 passengers this year travelling out, that's our target," said Jonathan Weal, Southland's director of business development.

Long Road To Recovery

Tourism experts and industry groups predict a long recovery for accommodation, transportation and food and beverage businesses, as well as conference, event and attraction operators.

The Hotel Association of Canada said during a recent conference call about the border re-opening that 70 per cent of its members are at a breaking point and will not survive the remainder of the year without further government support.

Hala Dehais, who is the academic chair at the School of Hospitality and Tourism at SAIT, says it's predicted it will take two to three years for the industry to recover from the effects of the pandemic.

An emerging concern is the ability to lure employees back to the sector.

"A lot of people have either re-skilled into new industries or aren't quite ready to come back yet," said Dehais.

"I think the stability will bring people back," she said. "Knowing that there's not a risk to coming back is really going to help."

The school is hoping to increase enrolment in its program from 240 students per year to as many as 400.

Restrictions Easing, Visitors Expected

Calaway Park, an amusement park and campground just west of Calgary, is looking forward to the end of most COVID restrictions that have limited guest numbers and revenues.

The one-third capacity limit is expected to be lifted on July 1. However, the general manager hasn't decided if Calaway will move immediately to 100 per cent capacity.

"We'll look at best practices," said Bob Williams, who says government wage subsidies helped his business during the pandemic.

It's a cautious approach in an industry that has lost so much.

"[The] tourism industry was the hardest hit, and it will be the last to recover," he said.

Campaign To Target Albertans First

Travel Alberta launched a campaign last week that is also taking a somewhat cautious approach. It's encouraging Albertans to visit local attractions before booking a post-pandemic getaway outside the province or country.

"We're targeting Albertans to see if we can inspire them to find the hidden gems throughout the province," said Tannis Gaffney, who is the vice-president of destination promotion with Travel Alberta.

She says the commercials will run outside of Alberta as restrictions ease and more people are immunized against COVID-19.

"We know that about 30 per cent of tourism operators in the province are at risk of closing," she said.

"So this summer is critical to get those travelers and visitors through the door so that, you know, we can save these local operators and ensure that they're open for business for a number of seasons to come."

Summer Travel Demand So Far Focused On Driving And Family, Say Travel Agents

By Cameron French, CTV News, June 21, 2021

<https://www.ctvnews.ca/health/coronavirus/summer-travel-demand-so-far-focused-on-driving-and-family-say-travel-agents-1.5479585>

There's an old adage in Ontario cottage country that God isn't making any more waterfront. It's a truth that's particularly relevant in 2021 as demand for lakeside retreats has been understandably high.

"People booked up very early because last year they found if they were last minute they were not getting places. So people were much more proactive this year about booking early so we were mostly booked up for the summer by January or February," William Wallace, who runs Muskoka-focused rental agency cottagetravel.com, told CTVnews.ca in an interview.

With provincial travel restrictions loosening and Canada set to lift most international travel restrictions for vaccinated Canadians on July 5, the possibility of a summer trip may seem within reach for Canadians who have spent the winter riding out the pandemic at home.

However, travel agents say July and August are shaping up to be a summer of driving rather than flying, as Canadians book summer cottage and house rentals, or focus their vacation efforts on family visits.

"There's a lot of demand for visiting friends and relatives. It's the easy thing to pull off and the least complicated because you're not arranging hotels and wondering what's open and all of that," said Richard Vanderlubbe, president of Tripcentral.ca.

Ontario opened its borders with Quebec and Manitoba to non-essential travel on Wednesday, and there are few travel restrictions in Western Canada. A quick perusal of booking sites shows cheap air fares between many Canadian cities.

But with indoor dining still restricted in many parts of the country and many attractions closed, the appeal of many typical travel destinations is greatly reduced, says Vanderlubbe. He also noted the Canadian government still officially recommends avoiding non-essential travel, which is putting a chill on bookings.

Lesley Paull, president of Paull Travel in Edmonton, said most of her booking activity has also been for driving vacations and largely limited to Alberta and British Columbia destinations, such as Jasper, the Okanagan, and Vancouver Island. She said she has been struggling to find cottage and house rentals for clients looking for destinations within driving distance of their homes.

"A lot of that is full right now and there [are] certainly not any deals. Everything is regular price or higher," she said.

She said most of the international travel demand she's seen has been for the late fall and 2022, but the announcement on Monday that the Canadian government will allow fully vaccinated Canadians to return to the country without quarantining starting July 5 may start to open the door to U.S. travel.

"I know a lot of people going back to their homes in Phoenix and Palm Springs that haven't been there all winter, and also Hawaii is a big destination," she said.

"We Know The Pent-Up Demand Is Going To Be Like Nothing We've Ever Seen": Brand USA's Thompson

By Travelweek Group, June 24, 2021

<https://www.travelweek.ca/news/we-know-the-pent-up-demand-is-going-to-be-like-nothing-weve-ever-seen-brand-usas-thompson/>

Brand USA's 'USA Training Day' specifically for Canadian travel agents took place with possibly – hopefully – just weeks to go before the gradual re-opening of the Canada-U.S. border gets underway.

Chris Thompson, CEO and President, Brand USA told agents at the June 23 online event that he's cautiously optimistic as momentum builds towards a potential re-opening of the border.

"We welcome our friends and visitors back from Canada," said Thompson in his opening remarks to the session.

"It's no surprise to any of you that Canada is our largest source market," he said. "We have nearly 80 million visitors a year and a quarter of those come from our friends north of our border. So Canada always has been and will be a critical contributor to our return – to whatever 'the next normal' looks like."

Thompson said he's "more optimistic than I've ever been about a future that's a little brighter."

At the same time, he's well aware that the key to restoring cross-border travel between Canada and the U.S. is re-opening the border.

"I do have cautious optimism because, as we well know, there are still a lot of things that are outside of each of our control as it relates to impediments that have not allowed people to travel. Certainly, a lot of that has to do with our two governments and them getting together and getting the border open ... so we're optimistic," he said.

On June 21, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said further easing of Canada's travel restrictions could be weeks away, not months, provided vaccination rates stay strong and COVID numbers continue to trend down. Starting 11:59 p.m. on July 5, fully vaccinated Canadian travellers and permanent residents returning to Canada from abroad will no longer be required to quarantine, and do not need to do the Day 8 PCR test. The pre-departure and on-arrive PCR tests are still mandatory. Canada's travel advisory against non-essential travel is still in effect.

Meanwhile, the closure of the Canada-U.S. border has been extended to July 21; however, based on Trudeau's June 21 remarks, it's possible this could be the last closure renewal.

"Now's the time to plan, assuming that's going to happen," Thompson told agents yesterday.

He added: "We know the pent-up demand is going to be like nothing we've ever seen."

Even when the border re-opens, said Thompson, a critical component to get travel started again is gaining the consumer's confidence. Thompson said the rapid return to a robust domestic travel market in the U.S. underlines the country's competence in getting travel restarted safely, which should help build confidence levels for international visitors, including Canadians.

Full Recovery At Least Five Years Away For Waterloo Region's Tourism And Hospitality Sector

By Catherine Thompson, Waterloo Region Record, June 17, 2021

https://www.therecord.com/news/council/2021/06/17/full-recovery-at-least-five-years-away-for-regions-tourism-and-hospitality-sector.html?source=newsletter&utm_content=a06&utm_source=ml_nl&utm_medium=email&utm_email=6D73923380F292A40DC042B455F0FDE3&utm_campaign=wrhp_100931

It could take five years for the local tourism and hospitality sector to recover from the economic body blows of the pandemic, said the head of Waterloo Region's tourism marketing corporation.

The sector was the hardest hit and will be the last to recover, said Minto Schneider, CEO of Explore Waterloo Region, at a virtual joint meeting on Thursday, June 17 of all eight local municipal councils.

Tourism and hospitality relies on the ability of people to move freely around, Schneider said. “The ability to enjoy the taste of a culinary experience, hike or cycle our trails, see a live performance, go to a festival, visit an attraction — those experiences cannot be replicated fully online.”

In Waterloo Region alone, 6,500 hospitality and tourism jobs have disappeared since the pandemic hit. “Although we’ve seen some job recovery, the industry is still down by 26.5 per cent,” she said. “Businesses have closed, people have lost their jobs and successful businesses have been forced to rely on government support to survive.”

With those staggering impacts, it will likely take five years or more for the industry to fully recover, because larger events such as conferences or major sports tournaments take time to plan and are booked years in advance.

“Getting up and running is one thing, but building capacity to 2019 levels is likely not going to happen for our industry until 2024,” Schneider told councillors.

The sector was understaffed before the pandemic hit and even once the recovery begins, it will face labour shortages as it re-opens, she said.

A big challenge will be convincing people that it’s safe to go out again, she said. One solution might be to hold smaller events that allow physical distancing.

The impact has been real and devastating, agreed Waterloo Region Chair Karen Redman, who said she felt “overwhelmed by the pandemic” at a recent meeting in which the anguish of restaurateurs was plain.

“We heard the angst from those restaurateurs, and it wasn’t about their investment and their places of business, as much as it was about their employees.”

A vibrant tourism sector is crucial to the Region’s overall economic development and the ability of booming sectors like tech to attract talent, Schneider said.

“Tourism is economic development’s first date,” she said. “Nobody ever chooses to move a business, or move their family or move themselves, for a job to a community until they visit as a tourist first.”

The healthier the sector, the more options — for dining out, for live entertainment — there will be for locals as well, she said.

Explore Waterloo Region is working on several fronts to market the Region, such as working with other nearby areas such as Stratford, Hamilton and Guelph to promote combo destinations for weekend getaways, promoting bicycle tourism, and lining up sports tournaments.

“We need to get people back to work and we need to make sure businesses survive so that people can return to the jobs that they love,” she said.

Judge Rules For Florida On CDC Order Blocking Cruise Ships

By Curt Anderson, *The Associated Press*, June 18, 2021

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/world/article-judge-rules-for-florida-on-cdc-order-blocking-cruise-ships-2/>

A federal judge on Friday, June 18 ruled for Florida in a lawsuit challenging a U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention order making it difficult for cruise ships to resume sailing due to the coronavirus pandemic.

U.S. District Judge Steven Merryday wrote in a 124-page decision that Florida would be harmed if the CDC order, which the state said effectively blocked most cruises, were to continue.

The Tampa-based judge granted a preliminary injunction that prevents the CDC from enforcing the order pending further legal action on a broader Florida lawsuit.

"This order finds that Florida is highly likely to prevail on the merits of the claim that CDC's conditional sailing order and the implementing orders exceed the authority delegated to the CDC," Merryday wrote.

Florida Attorney General Ashley Moody praised the decision in a statement on Friday, June 18.

"Today's ruling is a victory for the hard-working Floridians whose livelihoods depend on the cruise industry," said Moody, a Republican. "The federal government does not, nor should it ever, have the authority to single out and lock down an entire industry indefinitely."

While the CDC could appeal, Merryday ordered both sides to return to mediation to attempt to work out a full solution – a previous attempt failed – and said the CDC could fashion a modification in which it would retain some public health authority.

The CDC first flatly halted cruise ships from sailing in March 2020 in response to the coronavirus pandemic, which had affected passengers and crew on numerous ships. Then the CDC on October 30 of last year imposed a four-phase conditional framework it said would allow the industry to gradually resume operations if certain thresholds were met.

Republican Governor Ron DeSantis said in a statement that framework imposed onerous bureaucratic requirements on the industry, such as requiring a "vaccine passport" for passengers and that cruise ships conduct a simulated voyage before embarking passengers.

"The CDC has been wrong all along, and they knew it," DeSantis said.

Cruise lines such as Royal Caribbean have been gearing up to return to sailing under the CDC's four-part framework. Merryday's decision means the CDC can't enforce those rules for Florida-based ships and that they would merely be considered non-binding recommendations or guidelines.

However, Merryday delayed the effect of his order until just after midnight on July 18.

This would be similar to CDC guidelines for the re-opening of other industries such as airlines, casinos, hotels, sports venues and subways, Merryday wrote. Otherwise, the cruise industry would face a daunting task to restart operations.

"Florida persuasively claims that the conditional sailing order will shut down most cruises through the summer and perhaps much longer," the judge wrote, adding that Florida "faces an increasingly threatening and imminent prospect that the cruise industry will depart the state."

A Major Cruise Line Will Welcome Back Fully Vaccinated Customers This Fall - Here's Where It's Sailing To

By Brittany Chang, Business Insider, June 18, 2021

[A major cruise line will welcome back fully vaccinated customers this fall - here's where it's sailing to \(msn.com\)](https://www.msn.com/en-us/news/cruise/a-major-cruise-line-will-welcome-back-fully-vaccinated-customers-this-fall-here-s-where-it-s-sailing-to)

Princess Cruises will resume US-based cruises this fall, more than a year after stopping all trips.

The cruises will bring passengers from California and Florida to destinations like Hawaii and the Caribbean.

Guests must be fully vaccinated, and provide proof of that vaccination. Princess Cruises has announced it will resume sailing in US waters this fall after over a year of no US-based cruises amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the cruise line said Thursday.

The cruise line will usher "travel-starved" passengers - as Jan Swartz, Princess Cruises president said in a press release - from California and Fort Lauderdale to destinations like the Caribbean, Mexico, and Hawaii from September 25 to November 28 aboard eight ships:

Majestic Princess and Grand Princess will sail from Los Angeles to Mexico and across the coast of California on three, five, and seven-day cruises, and to Hawaii on 15-day cruises.

Ruby Princess will bring passengers from San Francisco across the coast of California on seven-day cruises, to Hawaii on 15-day cruises, and to Mexico on 10-day sailings.

Enchanted Princess will sail from Fort Lauderdale to the Caribbean on 10-day cruises.

Sky Princess, Regal Princess, and Caribbean Princess will cruise from Fort Lauderdale to the Caribbean on three, five, seven, and 14-day cruises.

Crown Princess will operate from Fort Lauderdale to the Panama Canal on 10-day cruises.

Guests must be fully vaccinated at least 14 days before their cruise and provide proof of vaccination. However, Princess' fully vaccinated cruises - and any cruise line with a vaccine requirement - operating out of Florida could face fines from the state, which has banned "vaccine passports."

Princess initially found workarounds to the cruising ban by offering land-based Alaska tours and stays at the Princess Alaska Lodges. During the pandemic, the cruise line also announced it would upgrade all of its cruise ships with "land-like" WiFi to create "offices at sea."

Carnival Pledges Its Cruises Will Be Carbon Neutral By 2050

By Jonathan Levin, Bloomberg, June 22, 2021

<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2021-06-22/carnival-pledges-its-cruises-will-be-carbon-neutral-by-2050>

Carnival Corp., the world's largest cruise company, plans to slash its carbon footprint by 2030 and be carbon neutral by 2050.

The company wants to cut its carbon rate -- based on capacity -- by 40% relative to 2008 levels by the end of the decade, according to sustainability goals released Tuesday.

Part of Carnival's strategy involves using more liquefied natural gas-powered vessels, optimizing hull designs to reduce drag and using shore-side power sources when available.

Cruise lines, which essentially operate floating resorts that are heavily dependent on fossil fuels, have struggled to shed their image as major polluters. In 2016, Carnival's Princess line agreed to pay a \$40 million fine and plead guilty to dumping oil-contaminated waste water and covering it up.

Carnival's other sustainability goals include:

Cutting "absolute air emissions of particulate matter" by 50% by 2030 relative to 2015.

Slashing single-use plastic items by 50% by the end of this year versus 2018.

Reducing food waste by 30% by 2022 and 50% by 2030, relative to a 2019 baseline.

Swoop 'Seeing Light At The End Of The Tunnel' After Incredibly Difficult 15 Months

'People are clearly willing and able to book that long-awaited trip,' airline executive says

By Desmond Brown, CBC News, June 18, 2021

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/swoop-recovery-1.6071442>

Low-cost airline Swoop is on the rebound, head of commercial and finance Bert van der Stege said on Friday, June 18, after the carrier was hit hard by the COVID-19 pandemic.

According to van der Stege, the carrier lost more than 90 per cent of its revenue and roughly 90 per cent of its passenger volume over the course of the pandemic.

"The past 15 months or so have been incredibly difficult," van der Stege said during an executive exchange held virtually with Hamilton International Airport.

"It's been a difficult 15 months [but] we believe we are seeing light at the end of the tunnel now and have reached a turning point."

Van der Stege said a "great demand" for seats is "slowly coming back".

"We've seen a period of record sales again now. People are clearly willing and able to book that long-awaited trip," he said.

Van der Stege said Swoop will initially focus on domestic travel as it emerges from the fallout caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, adding that's where they expect the rebound to start.

He said sales and forecast passenger numbers "are picking up really nicely, in particular in and out of jurisdictions that have outlined a clear path to recovery, easing travel restrictions, [and] a path to open up based on science."

After that initial period of domestic recovery and domestic travel, van der Stege said Swoop will once again partner with Hamilton International Airport and open up international travel.

"This summer, we expect to serve five destinations within Canada from Hamilton airport, and then as we approach the following winter season we will be adding five international destinations from Hamilton."

Swoop will launch a new flight from Hamilton to Kelowna this Sunday, June 20, while the winter schedule from Hamilton will include the following:

- Puerto Vallarta, Mexico.
- Cancun, Mexico.
- Montego Bay, Jamaica
- Orlando and Tampa Bay, Florida.

Swoop, operated by WestJet, launched in Hamilton back in 2018 with a trip from Hamilton to Abbotsford, B.C. for just \$129.

Since its inception the airline has carried more than one million passengers in and out of Hamilton airport. In total, Swoop has transported more than three million passengers.

The airline has also created more than 500 direct jobs at Hamilton's John C. Munro Hamilton International Airport.

"With the two brands, WestJet and Swoop being present here in Hamilton, we believe that we can assist in the recovery of the tourism and hospitality industry sector, not just focusing on getting Hamiltonians out of Hamilton using Hamilton airport, but also bringing visitors back," van der Stege said.

With the airline seeing sales "on par with pre-COVID levels," van der Stege said they will be adding another Boeing 737 to the fleet by the end of the year.

Cathie Puckering, president and CEO of Hamilton's John C. Munro Hamilton International Airport, said the number of passengers that Swoop has put into the market in such a short time "was amazing."

She said Hamilton experienced almost a 70 per cent decline in passenger volumes last year due to COVID-19.

Puckering said this year is just as hard but she is confident that things will get back to normal.

"The aviation industry has had shocks and has been hurt before [but] it has been resilient and we have bounced back," Puckering said.

"So as long as we continue with the vaccine rollout and we continue to follow the restrictions and the measures ... travel will recover and we're optimistic about what the future will hold and Swoop's growth in Hamilton."

Tread Cautiously With Airline Stocks Such As Air Canada, Even With Business Travel Returning

By David Berman, The Globe and Mail, June 24, 2021

As North America eases up on many of its pandemic restrictions, airline stocks have been rebounding as consumers plan getaways farther away than their neighbourhood grocery stores. But investors should keep a close eye on business travel, which looks a lot less predictable than leisure travel right now. Briefcase-armed travellers accounted for about 30 per cent of U.S. trips and 50 per cent of airline revenues before the pandemic, giving them a huge influence over the financial health of many mainstream carriers that cater to business. Some observers say the full return of these travellers is far from certain, though. "As the pandemic fades, uneven improvements in global inoculation rates and a greater comfort with video meetings suggest that global business travel has a long road to recovery," Stephen Trent, an analyst at Citigroup, said in a research note.

Read Story (Subscription Required): https://www.theglobeandmail.com/investing/markets/inside-the-market/article-tread-cautiously-with-airline-stocks-like-air-canada-even-with/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=Market%20Update&utm_content=2020&utm_term=&utm_campaign=newsletter&cu_id=Ts6FwhWx6n2rSHC0x7MiReEeFJOJkTb

Big U.S. Banks To Employees: Return To The Office Vaccinated

Several banks will require documented proof or declaration of vaccination

By Ken Sweet, The Associated Press, June 23, 2021

https://www.investmentexecutive.com/news/industry-news/big-u-s-banks-to-employees-return-to-the-office-vaccinated/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=nl&utm_content=investmentexecutive&utm_campaign=INT-EN

Wall Street's big investment banks are sending a message to their employees this summer: get back into the office, and bring your vaccination card.

New York-based Morgan Stanley said this week that all employees will be required to attest to their vaccination status. Those not vaccinated will be required to work remotely, which could potentially put their jobs at risk, since the bank's top executives have said they everyone back in the office by September.

"If you can go into a restaurant in New York City, you can come into the office," said Morgan Stanley CEO James Gorman at an industry conference earlier this month.

Morgan Stanley is one of several big banks requiring employees to return to the office and also provide documentation of having received a coronavirus vaccine or making a formal declaration confirming vaccination.

Goldman Sachs required most of its employees to return to the office on June 14, with some exceptions extending that deadline to September 30. It requires every employee to state their vaccine status, but does not require proof. JPMorgan is asking employees to submit their vaccination records as well, in the form of an internal portal.

The return-to-office arm-wrenching has its roots in banking-industry culture. Despite years of observing modernization and digital banking, the industry's top executives still operate under a culture that prizes in-person meetings to carve out deals. This has made banks among the leading industries pushing for employees to return to the office as soon as possible as the pandemic wanes.

"We know from experience that our culture of collaboration, innovation and apprenticeship thrives when our people come together, and we look forward to having more of our colleagues back in the office so that they can experience that once again on a regular basis," Goldman Sachs executives wrote in a memo to employees earlier this month.

This isn't the first time banks have tried to return their employees to the office in the pandemic. JPMorgan Chase CEO Jamie Dimon tried to mandate a return to offices for traders back in September 2020, long before the availability of a vaccine. The experiment lasted less than a week, resulting in several traders becoming infected with COVID.

OTHER CAFII MEMBER-RELEVANT NEWS/ISSUES

Canadian Life Insurance Claims Related To COVID-19 Increased Amid Second Wave

Last year, December had the second-highest monthly total for individual claims attributable to the virus

By Investment Executive Staff, June 23, 2021

https://www.investmentexecutive.com/news/research-and-markets/life-insurance-claims-related-to-COVID-19-increase-amid-second-wave/?utm_source=newsletter&utm_medium=nl&utm_content=investmentexecutive&utm_campaign=INT-EN-morning

The second wave of COVID-19 had a significant impact on life insurance claims, says a report from the Canadian Institute of Actuaries (CIA) released on Wednesday.

In December 2020, individual life insurance claims related to COVID-19 reached the second-highest monthly total of the year, hitting about 75% of the peak level of COVID-related claims recorded in April of last year, the report said.

Claims totalled \$30.8 million in December and \$41.44 million in April. The number of individual claims related to COVID-19 in those months were 630 and 899, respectively.

The CIA's quarterly report analyzed data from January 2019 to December 2020 provided by 13 insurers, including Canada Life, Manulife, Sun Life, RBC and Industrial Alliance.

The institute has been collecting insurers' data to ascertain whether the overall level of life insurance claims during the pandemic last year was different from previous years and whether COVID-19 is a significant cause of death for insurance claims in Canada.

December's individual life insurance COVID-related claims accounted for 9.6% of total individual life insurance claims that month, the report said. That was down slightly from the peak in April (12.9%) and May (10.9%) but up significantly from the low of less than 1% in August.

The level of individual life insurance claims in almost every month last year increased compared to 2019, the report found.

When monthly aggregate claims amounts were calibrated by dividing each month's claims amount by the total year exposure as reported at the start of the year, monthly claims in 2020 exceeded 0.02% in every month other than June and July. That level was exceeded in only one month in 2019, the report said.

The sample insurers recorded a total of 3,179 individual claims that identified COVID-19 as cause of death in 2020.

In group life insurance, claims in the first half of last year were mostly consistent with the level of claims in 2019.

However, in the second half of 2020, aggregate monthly claims (after calibration) in some months — such as October — were greater compared to 2019.

As additional claims continue to be reported for the later months of 2020 due to reporting lags, “it is reasonable to assume that November and December 2020 will also exceed the equivalent months in 2019,” the report said.

The institute said it will continue to collect and analyze data as long as new or additional insight can be gleaned.

“The CIA is committed to this ongoing data collection to help Canada’s decision-makers manage the future impacts of the pandemic on the industry, mitigate risks and ensure financial stability,” Keith Walter, chairman of the CIA Research Council, said in a release.

Why The U.S. Competition Regulator Wants To Stop The Aon-Willis Merger

By Greg Meckbach, Canadian Underwriter, June 17, 2021

https://www.canadianunderwriter.ca/insurance/why-the-u-s-competition-regular-wants-to-stop-the-aon-willis-merger-1004209199/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=newcom&utm_campaign=CanadianUnderwriterWeek&utm_content=20210618152612

Almost all large firms in the United States buy their property and casualty insurance through either Marsh, Aon, or Willis Towers Watson, with the latter two of the ‘Big Three’ having market share of more than 40% in property and liability insurance, the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) says.

This is among the reasons the DOJ announced on June 16 that it wants to block Aon plc’s proposed acquisition of Willis Towers Watson plc, a deal approved in August, 2020 by shareholders of both commercial brokerages.

The proposed friendly merger was originally announced in March of 2020.

Marsh, Aon, and Willis respectively are the top three on A.M. Best Company’s list of the world’s biggest commercial property and casualty insurance brokerages.

In its recent filing with the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, the DOJ is asking for a declaration that Aon’s proposed acquisition of the shares of Willis Towers Watson would be unlawful and violate Section 7 of the Clayton Act. That is a U.S. federal law which prohibits mergers and acquisitions where the effect “may be substantially to lessen competition, or to tend to create a monopoly.”

Aon said on June 16 that the DOJ's civil lawsuit reflects a lack of understanding of Aon's business, the clients Aon serves, and the marketplaces in which Aon operates.

It was not clear how a combined entity could have monopoly power in P&C. The DOJ did not give examples of specific lines of insurance or specific services that are currently only offered by Willis Towers Watson and Aon and are not offered by other large commercial brokerages such as Marsh, Gallagher or NFP.

Willis Towers Watson and Aon cannot actually operate together until the deal closes, Aon CEO Greg Case said on February 5 during a conference call discussing Aon's 2020 financial results.

The DOJ said in its court filing that Marsh, Aon, and Willis Towers Watson "dominate competition for insurance broking for the largest companies in the United States, almost all of which are customers of at least one of them."

Among large customers in the U.S., Aon and Willis have a combined market share of at least 40% for broking property damage risk, third-party liability risk, and financial risk, which together account for the majority of most large customers' commercial risk insurance expenditures, the DOJ said in its court filing.

The DOJ quoted from a Willis Towers Watson strategy presentation which stated: "Marsh and Aon dominate the large account space" and, along with Marsh and Aon, WTW is "one of the only brokers positioned to serve and win in [the] large account space."

To alleviate anti-trust concerns, WTW announced on May 12 that it agreed to sell several major operations to Gallagher for US\$3.57 billion. If it closes, that deal would include some of WTW's P&C brokerage business from predominantly middle-market and large-account clients located in select markets such as San Francisco, Houston and Bermuda, across niches such as construction and energy. It would also include all of WTW's reinsurance brokerage operations plus certain retail brokerage operations in Germany, Netherlands, Spain, and France, as well as cyber, space and aerospace products in Britain.

RESEARCH/THOUGHT LEADERSHIP/TECHNOLOGY/DIGITIZATION NEWS

Are All Your Colleagues Quitting? As Remote Work Erodes Company Culture, More Employees Find It Easier To Leave

By Navio Kwok, Vice-President Of Research And Marketing, Kilberry Leadership Advisors, Special To The Globe And Mail, June 22, 2021

https://www.theglobeandmail.com/business/careers/leadership/article-are-all-your-colleagues-quitting-as-remote-work-erodes-company-culture/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=Top%20Business%20Headlines&utm_content=2021-6-22_17&utm_term=&utm_campaign=newsletter&cu_id=Ts6FwhWx6n2rSHC0x7MiReEefFJOJkTb

As nations slowly win their battle against COVID-19, organizations are quietly losing the fight for the best talent.

With talks of the “great resignation” looming, organizational leaders may find themselves scrambling to retain their talent once the pandemic has subsided. Microsoft’s recent global survey of over 30,000 people across 31 countries revealed that 41 per cent of workers are considering leaving their current employer this year. Homing in on Canada, LifeWorks (formerly Morneau Shepell) reported that approximately one in four Canadians are considering a career change, despite their employers handling the pandemic well.

One reason for the influx of resignations is the gradual erosion of organizational culture amidst the transition to remote working for many during the pandemic. An organization’s culture is their unique ecosystem involving elements that vary in visibility – ranging from the highly observable, such as work products or services and colleague interactions, to the deeply felt DNA of an organization, which can be best described as “how we do things around here.” How this culture is perceived, experienced, and shared – by those inside and outside the organization – influences whether people enjoy working at the organization, and therefore choose to stay.

An important component of any culture is its rituals, which include social conventions spanning basic handshake greetings to larger ceremonies such as weddings. Unlike habits or routines, which are simply repetitive behaviours, rituals signify and reinforce deeper meaning – such as company values and team purpose – and serve critical social and psychological functions, including promoting group cohesion.

After over a year of remote work, the organizational meaning-imbued rituals that punctuate work experiences have been disrupted. For instance, celebrations that mark promotions or the completion of important projects no longer involve the same pomp and circumstance. Friday ‘beer o’clock’ and other informal means of colleague interaction have also disappeared. The consequence? What employees used to express as the unique flavour of their specific organization is now missing. And if that special sauce is gone, workers no longer feel glued to the same company.

If your organizational culture is fading, consider the following recommendations to re-ignite that spark:

Celebrate milestones collectively: Important signposts along one's career, such as onboarding, promotions or project completions, should be celebrated – this is especially important during a pandemic, where wins may feel rare. A challenge unique to remote work is ensuring that the celebratory experience is consistent across workers – a consideration far easier to manage with everyone in the same location, looking at the same things, and eating similar food. To enhance cohesiveness during virtual celebrations, plan events well in advance such that participants bring and interact with the same items from their own spaces – be it food, drinks or activities. Better yet, mail out directly what you'd like for them to have. Who doesn't like receiving a package in the mail? And as we head into the coveted months of Canadian summer, coupled with easing COVID restrictions, take advantage of the opportunity to hold in-person celebrations where possible to safely do so.

Enhance your organizational identity: As employees continue to work remotely, all the organizational symbols and colours that are embedded in the physical workspace remain absent. Yet prior to the pandemic, organizational leaders went to great lengths designing the workplace to market their organization internally and generate envy externally. An alternative, remote-friendly approach to enhance camaraderie is to provide functional and well-designed company gear or products that support employees or their family members. Importantly, offer items that reinforce your organizational values. For instance, Royal Bank of Canada recently gave all employees a one-year subscription to popular meditation app Headspace, in support of staff mental health and well-being.

Re-introduce the informal: Casual conversations among colleagues in the hallways, while riding elevators and between meetings are regularly occurring informal rituals that facilitate social connections across employees. Yet, with Zoom fatigue top of mind, many aim to keep virtual meetings concise by limiting informal banter. Recently published research emphasizes the importance of allowing colleagues to connect informally, as it can actually help combat video conferencing fatigue by helping people feel like a team again. To keep meetings on track, the key is to designate time on the agenda for these conversations. Alternatively, schedule separate meetings or leverage instant-messaging platforms for these informal moments. Although it may feel less organic or spontaneous than usual, something is always better than nothing.

With hybrid work arrangements an impending reality, organizations are at a critical inflection point. Your new "how we do things around here" is emerging and solidifying, and it will be incredibly difficult to change after the fact. Just look at remote working as an example – the idea was first introduced in the 1970s, and it only took 50 years and a global pandemic before more organizational leaders embraced its adoption.

UPCOMING WEBINARS AND EVENTS

Web Seminar: What's Driving Innovation in Canada's Insurance Sector?

Date: July 15, 2021

Time: 10:00 am - 11:00 am (EDT)

Toronto Finance International (TFI) and the Insurance Bureau of Canada (IBC) are pleased to invite you to a discussion on innovation in Canada's insurance sector.

Canada's insurance sector is currently undergoing significant innovation driven by the pandemic, the growth of FinTech and other technologies, changing consumer preferences, regulatory changes and other market factors. The panel below will bring together leaders from the sector to speak about upcoming trends, challenges and opportunities.

[Register here](#)

Web Seminar: Future of Insurance Canada 2021 By Reuters Events

Date: August 24-25, 2021

Time: (TBD)

Insurers have been masters of resilience for years but now is the time to use these skills to go from simply surviving to thriving, by reinventing insurance as we know it.

This is the time to seize opportunities.

Now, more than ever, we must urgently transform products and services, tackle emerging risks, and strategize for success in a dramatically changed, digital landscape.

Which is why Reuters Events is bringing The Future of Insurance Canada 2021 (August 24-25) combined with the inaugural Connected Claims Canada (August 26). This is your chance to join insurance industry titans as we explore future-setting trends and practical case studies that will reinvent insurance.

[Pre-order information pack here](#)

Web Seminar: Connected Claims Canada 2021 By Reuters Events

Date: August 26, 2021

Time: (TBD)

Reuters Events is excited to announce that the largest claims innovation and technology event in the world is finally coming to Canada.

Connected Claims Canada will take place in August 26th and will be hosted alongside the most influential event for the Canadian insurance industry, the Future of Insurance Canada (August 24-25).

When digital is no longer a competitive advantage but a requirement to do business, transforming claims is the most successful strategy to reduce costs and create an omni-channel, Amazon-like customer experience.

Join Connected Claims Canada to discover the strategies to deliver an unforgettable customer experience, no matter the channel or the complexity of the claim

This is the time to seize opportunities.

[Pre-order information pack here](#)