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CANADA

FINAL REPORT: PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH AND DEMOCRACY DURING A POSSIBLE PANDEMIC ELECTION

**Report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and
House Affairs**

Ruby Sahota, Chair

**FEBRUARY 2021
43rd PARLIAMENT, 2nd SESSION**

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**Ruby Sahota
Chair**

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NOTICE TO READER

Reports from committee presented to the House of Commons

Presenting a report to the House is the way a committee makes public its findings and recommendations on a particular topic. Substantive reports on a subject-matter study usually contain a synopsis of the testimony heard, the recommendations made by the committee, as well as the reasons for those recommendations.

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THE STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

has the honour to present its

TWELFTH REPORT

Pursuant to its mandate under Standing Order 108(3)(a)(vi), the committee has studied the conduct of a federal election during the COVID-19 pandemic and has agreed to report the following:

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FINAL REPORT: PROTECTING PUBLIC HEALTH AND DEMOCRACY DURING A POSSIBLE PANDEMIC ELECTION

INTRODUCTION

i. Background

On 5 October 2020, Canada's Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) tabled a report in the House of Commons entitled *Special Report of the Chief Electoral Officer: Administering an Election during the COVID-19 Pandemic*. The report contained recommendations to Parliament for temporary amendments to the *Canada Elections Act* (CEA) that the CEO considered essential should a federal general election be held during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Pursuant to Standing Order 32(5), the CEO's report was referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs (the Committee) that same day. The Committee began its study on the CEO's report and related matters on 22 October 2020.

In order to present a timely report to the House, the Committee agreed to adopt an interim report by 11 December 2020. This interim report contained the witness testimony heard by the Committee up until its 9th meeting, held on 12 November 2020. As such, the Committee's interim report is the summary of the testimony of 17 witnesses during 11 meetings. The Committee presented its interim report (Report 7: Interim Report: Protecting Public Health and Democracy During a Possible Pandemic Election) to the House on 11 December 2020.

Below is the Committee's final report on the study of the CEO's special report and the conduct of a potential election during the COVID-19 pandemic. It first summarizes the testimony heard from 12 witnesses during four meetings. Taken together with the interim report, the Committee heard from 29 witnesses in total on this study. Further, the final report gives an overview of written submissions that the Committee requested be tabled by certain witnesses while they appeared before the Committee.

The Committee notes that a provincial general election was held in Newfoundland and Labrador on 13 February 2021. This election occurred as the Committee concluded its deliberations on its final report and, therefore, did not form part of the Committee's



study. However, the Committee would be remiss if it did not call attention to the serious challenges and disruptions that the COVID-19 pandemic caused to the administration of that general election and could cause for future provincial and federal general elections.

The Committee wishes to extend its sincere gratitude to all witnesses who participated in this study for their insights and valuable contributions to this study. The Committee also thanks those who provided written submissions to the Committee. Lastly, the Committee offers its deepest thanks to the many public officials who appeared during this study whose tireless work has kept countless Canadians safe and healthy during the ongoing pandemic.

ii. Overview of health data in Canada for COVID-19

On 7 December 2020, about the time the Committee presented its interim report (Report 7: Interim Report: Protecting Public Health and Democracy During a Possible Pandemic Election) to the House, the total number of COVID-19 cases in Canada was 423,054 and the number of deaths from COVID-19 was 12,777. As of 17 February 2021, the total number of cases in Canada is 834,182, representing a 97.2% increase. The number of deaths from COVID-19 is 21,435, representing a 67.8% increase.

COVID-19 health data for the provinces comparing active cases, total cases and deaths, on 7 December 2020 and on 17 February 2021, is found in Tables 1, 2 and 3 below.

**Table 1—COVID-19 Active Cases for the Canadian Provinces: Comparison
Between 7 December 2020 and 17 February 2021**

Province/Territory	Active Cases: 7 December 2020	Active Cases: 17 February 2021	% Change
British Columbia	10,338	4,226	-59.1
Alberta	20,067	4,857	-75.8
Saskatchewan	4,763	1,541	-67.6
Manitoba	5,462	1,555	-71.5
Ontario	16,034	10,985	-31.5
Quebec	14,602	9,313	-36.2
New Brunswick	81	119	46.9
Nova Scotia	90	14	-84.4
Prince Edward Island	14	2	-85.7
Newfoundland and Labrador	28	341	1,117.9
Nunavut	51	21	-58.8
Northwest Territories	0	10	n/a
Yukon	12	2	-83.3

Source: Table prepared using data obtained from the Government of Canada, [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\): Outbreak update](#), accessed 8 December 2020 and 17 February 2021.



**Table 2—Total Cases for the Canadian Provinces: Comparison Between
7 December 2020 and 17 February 2021**

Province/Territory	Total Cases: 7 December 2020	Total Cases: 17 February 2021	% Change
British Columbia	38,152	74,710	95.8
Alberta	70,301	129,615	84.4
Saskatchewan	10,412	29,953	187.7
Manitoba	19,131	31,007	62.1
Ontario	129,234	288,583	123.3
Quebec	153,176	278,987	82.1
New Brunswick	536	1,407	162.5
Nova Scotia	1,376	1,600	16.3
Prince Edward Island	84	114	35.7
Newfoundland and Labrador	351	755	115.1
Nunavut	219	324	47.9
Northwest Territories	15	42	180
Yukon	54	72	33.3

Source: Table prepared using data obtained from the Government of Canada, [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\): Outbreak update](#), accessed 8 December 2020 and 17 February 2021.

**Table 3—Deaths for the Canadian Provinces: Comparison Between 7
December 2020 and 17 February 2021**

Province/Territory	Deaths: 7 December 2020	Deaths: 17 February 2021	% Change
British Columbia	527	1,317	149.9
Alberta	631	1,798	214.9
Saskatchewan	60	362	503.3
Manitoba	407	876	115.2
Ontario	3,798	6,729	77.1
Quebec	7,277	10,258	41
New Brunswick	7	24	242.9
Nova Scotia	65	65	0
Prince Edward Island	0	0	0
Newfoundland and Labrador	4	4	0
Nunavut	0	1	n/a
Northwest Territories	0	0	0
Yukon	1	1	0

Source: Table prepared using data obtained from the Government of Canada, [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\): Outbreak update](#), accessed 8 December 2020 and 17 February 2021.

ORAL TESTIMONY HEARD BY THE COMMITTEE

Testimony of Canada’s Chief Electoral Officer

Mr. Stéphane Perrault, Canada’s CEO, appeared before the Committee on 19 November 2020¹ in the context of Committee’s study of the Main Estimates 2020–21 for the Office of the CEO. During the meeting, Mr. Perrault testified about both the Estimates and the conduct of an election during the pandemic. Consequently, the Committee adopted the following motion:

1 House of Commons, Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs (PROC), [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 11, 19 November 2020.



That the Committee adduce the evidence from the November 19th, 2020 meeting on its study entitled “Main Estimates 2020-2021”, for use in the Committee’s study entitled, “the conduct of a federal election during the COVID-19 pandemic”.²

During his appearance before the Committee, Mr. Perrault emphasized the importance of maintaining a constant state of readiness for possible elections in a minority parliament, and the additional challenges that the COVID-19 pandemic has brought.³

In particular, he highlighted the administering of two federal by-elections in Toronto Centre and York Centre that occurred on 26 October 2020.⁴ A key takeaway was the necessity for coordination with three separate public health authorities: the City of Toronto, the Province of Ontario and the federal government.⁵ In a general election, coordination would be necessary with all municipalities, provinces and territories and over 600 First Nations reserves.⁶

Mr. Perrault further noted that the existing election “regime contemplates the main option being voting in person” and if there were to be a region of the country where public health officials decided that it was unsafe for voters and poll workers to be in-person at polls, he would likely “invoke the power to make a recommendation to the Governor in Council to cancel the election.”⁷ However, during a previous appearance before the Committee, Mr. Perrault stated that a recommendation on his part to cancel a general election in every riding in the country would not be a decision that he would take lightly, as this has never occurred in Canada’s history yet the country has faced very significant challenges.⁸

Further, Mr. Perrault clarified that the authority possessed by the CEO to recommend that a writ be withdrawn occurs on a riding-by-riding basis and is not for general use.⁹

2 PROC, Minutes, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 11, 19 November 2020.

3 Perrault, 1105.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid., 1230.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

A. Preparing for increased mail-in ballot capacity

Given the challenges that the pandemic has created for in-person contact, the CEO is predicting the use of up to five million mail-in ballots if a general election occurs during the pandemic.¹⁰ In order to prepare for this influx, Elections Canada has made changes to the mail-in process, including the offering of prepaid postage in order to eliminate a financial cost to voting.¹¹ Elections Canada has also procured additional machinery to prepare and assemble mail-in ballot kits before they are sent out and is prepared to engage additional staff and space in local returning offices.¹²

However, the CEO also noted that Elections Canada is hoping as many people as possible will feel comfortable to vote in local polling stations so they are also preparing an information campaign that will inform voters of safety measures.¹³

Another measure currently being explored is the establishment of secure ballot drop-off boxes, such as those used in British Columbia, so that mail-in votes could be dropped off in-person while ensuring social distancing measures are followed.¹⁴ This would also reduce the potential costs associated with the prepaid postage on mail-in ballots.¹⁵

With regards to the existing complexities of applying for a mail-in ballot, Mr. Perrault stated that Elections Canada is currently in the process of creating an online application allowing all Canadians to apply for a mail-in ballot kit online.¹⁶ However, he cautions that not all Canadians may be comfortable or able to use this online application, so Elections Canada is also working to simplify the process in order to make it easier for all electors.¹⁷ While he stressed the improvements to the mail-in voting system, the CEO stated that:

[t]o all extent possible, we want people to vote in the regular way. If [voters] feel that they can safely go to their local polling location as they normally do, and they are

10 Ibid., 1120.

11 Ibid.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid., 1155.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid., 1220.

17 Ibid.



reassured that they can do so in a safe way, they will do so, and it will facilitate the work for everybody, including our poll workers.¹⁸

He also discussed the future possibility of identifying individual mail-in ballots with barcodes so that voters would be able to track their ballot and ensure its reception.¹⁹ However, Mr. Perrault further noted that the priority for Elections Canada is to ensure that the mail-in system can handle a potential five million electors.²⁰

B. Enhanced engagement with First Nations communities

The CEO noted that, historically, it has been difficult to ensure that all First Nations reserves that wanted to host polling centres were able to.²¹ In the 2019 general election, Mr. Perrault notes that there was increased engagement, with 389 reserves hosting polling sites, compared with 366 in the previous election in 2015.²² Further, he noted that he was not aware of a single case where a request for a polling site at a First Nations community was not accommodated in the 2019 general election.²³ It is also important to note that not all First Nations reserves wanted to have a polling site.

For a potential upcoming general election, Elections Canada will have returning officers engaging with First Nations reserves in early 2021.²⁴ This discussion is not dependant on an election being called but rather a preparatory measure that will open talks of potential sites and safety precautions.²⁵ Mr. Perrault also noted that as much as possible it is ideal to recruit temporary employees and volunteers locally, so there is also an emphasis on this.²⁶

C. Extending the election period

In the *Special Report of the Chief Electoral Officer: Administering an Election during the COVID-19 Pandemic*, the CEO suggested extending the duration of the election day to

18 Ibid., 1120.

19 Ibid., 1230.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid., 1135.

22 Ibid.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

two days and holding it on a weekend.²⁷ During his appearance before the Committee, the CEO reported challenges during the 26 October by-elections in Toronto in finding polling places, as schools were not an option. He reiterated that holding an election during a weekend would help mitigate this challenge.²⁸

D. Adjusting the Chief Electoral Officer's power

The CEO's special report emphasized the existing restrictions on his ability to adapt rules.²⁹ The CEO is currently prevented from updating existing rules for reasons of security.³⁰ One example of these restrictions is with regards to the collection of signatures necessary to become a certified candidate and the legal requirement for a witness.³¹ These challenges arose during the recent by-elections.³² The CEO is of the opinion that an online submission would be one way to mitigate these challenges, but would need more flexibility in the changing of rules in order to implement this process.³³

Another area where the ability for the CEO to adapt the *Canada Elections Act* would have an impact is on the question of telephone voting. This is an adaption that might allow for increased accessibility for voting. Mr. Perrault also mentioned options for homebound voters including using videoconferencing for voting assistance.³⁴ At the moment, Elections Canada is looking into these options but is limited by time and legislative restrictions.³⁵ The CEO did not discuss or outline any of the prohibitions or limitations that would remain in place, should his adaptation power was expanded.

E. Conduct of the election at the polls

Following up on comments made at his previous appearance before the committee on 22 October 2020, Mr. Perrault discussed the use of personal protective equipment (PPE)

27 Office of the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, [*Special Report of the Chief Electoral Officer: Administering an Election during the COVID-19 Pandemic*](#), 2020.

28 Perrault, 1145.

29 [*Special Report of the Chief Electoral Officer: Administering an Election during the COVID-19 Pandemic*](#).

30 Perrault, 1145.

31 Ibid.

32 Ibid.

33 Ibid.

34 Ibid., 1155.

35 For example, s. 127 of the CEA prescribes the manner in which electors can vote. This section does not contemplate an elector voting by telephone or by videoconferencing.



at polling stations in the Toronto by-elections.³⁶ Physical barriers were not used but all poll staff had access to shields and masks.³⁷ Voters and staff had access to hand sanitizers, and there were stickers placed demarcating social distancing protocols.³⁸

Mr. Perrault further emphasized the challenges that Elections Canada encountered in finding suitable polling locations, despite the voting period taking place on the weekend.³⁹ Consequently, there were fewer polling locations with larger polls.⁴⁰

Testimony of Canada Post Corporation's General Manager

During her appearance before the Committee on 3 December 2020, Ms. Louise Chayer, the General Manager of Customer Experience for the Canada Post Corporation, explained the mail-in ballot process that Canada Post and Elections Canada have established:⁴¹

- i. Voters interested in voting by mail would request a mail-in ballot.
- ii. Each of the 338 local returning officers would fulfil the order for the mail-in ballot.
- iii. The mail-in ballots would be received and completed by electors.
- iv. The prepaid ballot would then return to the returning officer.

Ms. Chayer also stated that:

From our discussions with Elections Canada to date, the logistics would entail people requesting a mail-in ballot, which would be fulfilled by the local RO. Three hundred and thirty-eight of them would fulfil that order for the mail-in ballot, and that return envelope would go back to the returning officer. There are some other votes that will be centralized to go to Ottawa, like the internationals and things like that.

36 Perrault, 1205.

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid.

41 PROC, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 15, 3 December 2020, 1255 (Louise Chayer, General Manager, Customer Experience, Canada Post Corporation).

By and large, the local vote will be held locally and will be returned locally. That's why it's important for us to test all of the envelopes that will be pre-produced. How they will be printed and how they will affix the return address.... It's important for us to make sure that everything is done properly, so that we can have a high mechanized rate on our equipment and make sure that we return things on time. That's part of the testing that we're doing with all 338, because they will be held locally and returned locally.⁴²

While always prepared to deliver major mailings across the country, Canada Post has recently had successful experience supporting the mass public information initiative of Health Canada's COVID-19 awareness efforts.⁴³ Canada Post also successfully supported election efforts during the pandemic with the provincial elections in New Brunswick, Saskatchewan and British Columbia, in addition to by-elections at all levels of government.⁴⁴

Ms. Chayer noted that there is often a surge of mail during election periods, due both to mail-in ballots, but also personal mail and direct mail from candidates.⁴⁵ However, in the recent provincial elections, she informed the Committee that there had been no delays or issues in the mail-ballot return process.⁴⁶ She also drew on these recent experiences to assure the committee that Canada Post is prepared to support Elections Canada whether an election date is fixed or there is a snap election.⁴⁷ She also noted that even if there was a significantly higher volume of mail-in ballots than the expected five million, that she foresees no challenges in processing them.⁴⁸

Ms. Chayer emphasized the need for enhanced communication with regards to deadlines by which voters will need to deposit their ballot in the mail, to ensure it is received in time to be counted.⁴⁹ Given that post boxes are cleared at different times, she believes that it will be important to work with Elections Canada to determine the optimal specific date and time for electors to mail their ballots by.⁵⁰

42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 1205.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.
46 Ibid., 1215.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., 1240.
49 Ibid., 1220.
50 Ibid.



She also assured the Committee that there is extensive testing that will take place before a possible election and that Canada Post is working with Elections Canada to undertake these tests.⁵¹

During her appearance, Ms. Chayer was asked whether Canada Post would be willing to offer, as a service, to register citizens to vote using a special ballot (i.e. mail-in ballot), should Elections Canada propose such an initiative? Ms. Chayer responded that Canada Post would certainly look at and discuss such a proposal should one be made.⁵²

One challenge that Ms. Chayer noted to the Committee was that if an election were to happen in May 2021, this would occur at the same time as the federal census, which will add to the volume of mail being delivered across the country.⁵³ However, she stated that “if they happen at the same time, it can be done.”⁵⁴

With regards to timelines, Ms. Chayer noted that all mail handled by Canada Post has its own deliverables, and that Canada Post would be working closely with Elections Canada in case different prioritizations were needed to ensure the quick delivery of mail-in ballots.⁵⁵

ELECTORS FACING INCREASED BARRIERS DUE TO COVID-19

A. People with disabilities

On 26 November 2020, representatives from People First of Canada, a national non-profit organization advocating on behalf of people with intellectual disabilities, appeared before the Committee.⁵⁶

51 Ibid., 1225.

52 Ibid., 1235.

53 Ibid.

54 Ibid.

55 Ibid., 1240.

56 People First Canada, [*About People First of Canada*](#).

i. Communications

In terms of the appearance of ballots, People First of Canada recommended that ballots include photographs of candidates, as 42% of Canadians struggle with literacy.⁵⁷ In their opinion, ballots with photographs would not only enhance accessibility for persons with disabilities, but also for Canadians more generally.

ii. Vote by mail

People First of Canada stated that mail-in ballots were useful, but cautioned that members of their community often are not aware of the names of candidates or the platforms that they represent.⁵⁸ Ms. Shelley Fletcher, Executive Director of People First of Canada, indicated that it is important for voters who vote by mail-in ballot to be aware of the candidates running in their riding.⁵⁹

iii. Vote by phone

Ms. Fletcher commented that the possibility of voting by phone could pose significant barriers to electors with literacy issues. She stated that it was not really a viable option for members of her organization.⁶⁰ Mr. Kory Earle, President of People First of Canada, added that while voting by phone could potentially work for some people, not all of the membership of his organization has access to that technology.⁶¹

iv. Duration of election period

While Ms. Fletcher supported extending the voting period to two days, and further recommended extending the hours to allow for 16 hours of voting on each day, she raised concerns over obtaining accessible transportation in rural areas.⁶² For this reason, she recommended that the voting period be held on a Friday and Saturday rather than a

57 PROC, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 13, 26 November 2020, 1220 (Kory Earle, President, People First of Canada). The Committee notes that the term “literacy” here refers to being able to understand, evaluate, use and engage with written texts at the level of a high school graduate.

58 Ibid., 1225.

59 PROC, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 13, 26 November 2020, 1225 (Shelley Fletcher, Executive Director, People First of Canada).

60 Fletcher, 1220.

61 Earle, 1240.

62 Fletcher, 1205.



Saturday and Sunday. This would allow for greater opportunity for all voters to access transportation to the polls.⁶³

She also recommended that while the voting hours be extended, the shifts of poll workers ought to be shortened to allow for two eight-hour shifts.⁶⁴ The membership of People First of Canada has identified the length of the shift as a primary reason they do not apply for the jobs.⁶⁵ This change could mitigate the challenges faced by Elections Canada of finding available elections workers.

v. Alternative voting methods

People First of Canada strongly supported the CEO's position that having a variety of voting options.⁶⁶ Ms. Fletcher commented that a greater variety of options allowed for enhanced accessibility.⁶⁷

Mr. Earle also added that voting in group homes, institutions and long-term care homes should be offered as an option, as it increased opportunities for people to vote.⁶⁸

B. Indigenous voters

On 24 November 2020, Mr. Marc LeClair, Senior Advisor to the Métis National Council, appeared before the Committee. The Métis National Council is mandated to represent the Métis Nation, at national and international levels, by the democratically elected governments of the Métis Nation.⁶⁹

i. Communications

Mr. LeClair noted that a prominent challenge to enfranchising Métis people was ensuring adequate communication occurred about voting processes and important

63 Ibid.

64 Ibid.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid.

68 Earle, 1220.

69 Métis Nation, [About](#).

dates.⁷⁰ He recommended leveraging existing community networks and media to better inform the Métis population about party platforms, candidates and election procedures.

ii. Vote by mail

Mr. LeClair noted the importance of mail-in ballots for the Métis community, given that this option enhances voting accessibility, especially for individuals who live in rural and remote areas.⁷¹ For a potential pandemic election, Mr. LeClair emphasized the importance of ensuring sufficient time and notice to allow those who vote by mail to have their votes received on time by Elections Canada and counted.⁷²

Like other witnesses, Mr. LeClair recommended leveraging the existing community networks as a tool to inform the Métis population about all the necessary steps required to vote by mail. He stated that the Métis National Council will work to ensure that every person who wants to vote in the next federal election can do so.⁷³

iii. Access to polling places

Mr. LeClair commented that a barrier to voting faced by Métis communities was the number of polling locations and the electors' ability to easily access them.⁷⁴ He stated that, while costly, adding more ballot boxes could potentially increase the voter participation of the Métis population.⁷⁵ He also endorsed the CEO's recommendation about holding the election day over an extended period. Mr. LeClair stated that having an extended election day that covered at least one weekend day would increase the available polling locations, such as schools, that could potentially be accessed.⁷⁶

C. Canadians living in poverty

On 26 November 2020, Ms. Emily Renaud, National Coordinator for Canada Without Poverty, appeared before the Committee. Canada Without Poverty is a non-profit

70 PROC, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 12, 24 November 2020, 1250 (Marc LeClair, Senior Advisor, Métis National Council).

71 Ibid., 1255.

72 Ibid., 1255.

73 Ibid., 1330.

74 Ibid., 1250.

75 Ibid.

76 Ibid.



organization which seeks to eradicate poverty in Canada by educating Canadians and identifying policy solutions.⁷⁷

i. Communications

Ms. Renaud supported calls for enhanced communication in multiple languages between Elections Canada and voters experiencing poverty, as this will facilitate a better understanding of voting in a pandemic.⁷⁸ She also raised concerns about ensuring that incarcerated voters have adequate access to information about their local candidates and party platforms, as they face significant barriers in accessing local news media.⁷⁹

One key area of communication that would enhance the participation of voters experiencing poverty would be informing them about how to access government identification that allows them to vote. Given the extra challenges in obtaining documentation rapidly during the pandemic, this is especially important.⁸⁰ Further, she suggested that cost is often a barrier to obtaining identification, and that allowing these communities to access necessary identification at a reduced cost would enhance voter participation.⁸¹

Ms. Renaud recommended that the networks of shelter workers and homelessness advocates ought to be leveraged to disseminate information to more diverse populations.⁸² She further added that providing this information in multiple languages, including indigenous languages would be beneficial.⁸³

ii. Vote by mail

Ms. Renaud supported increasing the capacity to process and receive mail-in ballots, as this makes voting more accessible to Canadians working shifts, living in remote

77 Canada Without Poverty, *About Us*.

78 PROC, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 13, 26 November 2020, 1210 (Emily Renaud, National Coordinator, Canada Without Poverty).

79 Ibid.

80 Ibid., 1215.

81 Ibid.

82 Ibid., 1255.

83 Ibid.

communities, or exercising extra caution due the risks posed by COVID-19.⁸⁴ She stressed that mail-in voting was an important option for increasing voter turnout among people living in poverty, both during the pandemic and in future elections.⁸⁵

iii. Access to polling places

Ms. Renaud suggested that to encourage voting in marginalized and impoverished communities, shelters, food banks and service centres could act as polling stations, provided these meet the necessary health guidelines.⁸⁶

She also added that if the election occurred in a warmer season, Elections Canada could consider establishing a polling station at temporary encampments, to allow the persons living there increased access to voting.⁸⁷

iv. Duration of election period

Like other witnesses, Ms. Renaud supported an extended voting period, including extending and enhancing access to advance polls.⁸⁸ However, Ms. Renaud cautioned the Committee that holding election day on Saturday and Sunday would not help precarious part-time shift workers who might still face challenges obtaining permission to vote in-person. Weekend voting also posed a barrier to single parents with school-aged children.⁸⁹ Therefore, Ms. Renaud recommended including a weekday in the voting period to reduce some of these concerns.⁹⁰

She further commented that expanding the offering of advance polling stations would allow for voters who did not request a mail-in ballot but who are not available during the election period to vote.⁹¹

84 PROC, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 13, 26 November 2020, 1210 (Emilly Renaud, National Coordinator, Canada Without Poverty).

85 Ibid.

86 Ibid., 1210.

87 Ibid., 1255.

88 Ibid., 1210.

89 Ibid.

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid., 1220.



D. Students

On 26 November 2020, Ms. Nicole Brayianis, the National Deputy Chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students, testified before the Committee. The Canadian Federation of Students is a bilingual national union representing students from university and college students' unions throughout Canada.⁹²

For his part, Mr. Taylor Gunn, President and Chief Electoral Officer of CIVIX, appeared before the Committee on 3 December 2020. CIVIX is a nationally registered charity working to build the skills and habits of active and engaged citizenship in youth.⁹³

i. Communications

Ms. Nicole Brayianis, National Deputy Chairperson of the Canadian Federation of Students, emphasized to the Committee the continued need to communicate key election information to students, especially in the event that there are changes made to the options or processes.⁹⁴ She also recommended that Elections Canada continue working on simplifying the registration process for new and first-time voters, especially as the pandemic had caused some eligible voters to relocate without registering to vote at their new address.⁹⁵

Given the limitations that the pandemic would place on candidates' accessibility to electors, Ms. Brayianis suggested establishing a non-partisan virtual space where voters can access party platforms and information about local candidates.⁹⁶

ii. Vote by mail

Ms. Brayianis emphasized the importance of mail-in ballots for the student population, especially when it came to protecting the health and safety of those who are not comfortable voting in-person.⁹⁷ However, she cautioned that the necessary information

92 Canadian Federation of Students, [About](#).

93 CIVIX, [Who We Are](#).

94 PROC, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 13, 26 November 2020, 1115 (Nicole Brayianis, National Deputy Chairperson, Canadian Federation of Students).

95 Ibid.

96 Ibid.

97 Ibid.

on how to register to vote and change addresses must be clearly communicated well in advance of important deadlines.⁹⁸

iii. Vote by phone

Mr. Taylor Gunn, President and Chief Electoral Officer of CIVIX, commented that in order to encourage as many people as possible to vote, vote by phone would be a worthwhile option to consider.⁹⁹

iv. Access to polling places

Ms. Brayiannis recommended that the use of on-campus polling stations be continued, as these had greatly increased student voter turnout in the last two general elections.¹⁰⁰ Ms. Brayiannis noted that while there have been major transitions in postsecondary institutions to online learning, on-campus polling stations should still be made accessible to students.¹⁰¹ Residence centres provide Internet access to students who would not otherwise have access to it in their home communities, and campus employees would also benefit from establishing on-campus polling stations.¹⁰²

v. Duration of election period

Mr. Gunn commented that if the election period occurred over a weekend, it would be possible to engage secondary students as volunteers and workers in the election.¹⁰³ This would not only provide a viable option to staff polling locations, but would also allow secondary students to engage in the democratic process.¹⁰⁴ Mr. Gunn further suggested that in order to best leverage the population of potential poll workers, Elections Canada could work with his organization and other student vote programs.¹⁰⁵

98 Ibid., 1130.

99 PROC, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 15, 3 December 2020, 1200 (Taylor Gunn, President and Chief Election Officer, CIVIX).

100 Brayiannis, 1115.

101 Ibid., 1145.

102 Ibid.

103 PROC, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 15, 3 December 2020, 1155 (Taylor Gunn, President and Chief Election Officer, CIVIX).

104 Ibid.

105 Ibid.



E. Immigrants and refugees

In her appearance before the committee, Ms. Dorota Blumczynska, Executive Director of the Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba, stressed that the pandemic had created conditions in which all Canadians, especially refugees and recent immigrants could fear a loss of their basic rights.¹⁰⁶ She emphasized the importance of ensuring that all votes cast were counted.¹⁰⁷

i. Communications

Ms. Blumczynska told the Committee that, due to their lived experiences, many refugees and immigrants to Canada have apathy towards the voting process as a result of holding the belief that individual votes do not count.¹⁰⁸ This is further compounded by the fact that permanent residents in Canada are not eligible to vote.¹⁰⁹ Ms. Blumczynska observed that the federal government could change this situation by enfranchising permanent residents.¹¹⁰ Nonetheless, she also noted that among newcomer, immigrant and refugee communities, there was a profound desire to participate in the democratic process, and this should be supported as much as possible.¹¹¹

She further stressed that prior to voting, refugees and immigrants must have access to extensive public education, which explains the functioning of the Canadian government and parliamentary democracy.¹¹² This information should be available in multiple languages, as complex concepts can be better understood in one's mother tongue.¹¹³

Ms. Blumczynska added that in order to facilitate communication with new immigrants and refugees, the existing network of community organizations could be leveraged to allow them to communicate clear accurate information in an elector's mother tongue.¹¹⁴

106 PROC, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 13, 26 November 2020, 1115 (Dorota Blumczynska, Executive Director, Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba).

107 Ibid.

108 Ibid., 1110.

109 Ibid.

110 Ibid.

111 Ibid., 1140.

112 Ibid., 1110.

113 Ibid.

114 Ibid., 1135.

While recognizing the advantages of information dissemination via online platforms, Ms. Blumczynska cautions that the pandemic has further revealed the challenges of the digital divide and that there must be additional time built into the communications process to allow for person-to-person communication.¹¹⁵

ii. Vote by mail

Ms. Blumczynska cautioned that mail-in ballots can further disenfranchise members of the immigrant and refugee community who lack literacy and digital literacy skills.¹¹⁶ She added that one way to mitigate these concerns would be for Elections Canada to provide multilingual resources explaining the use the mail-in ballot process and emphasizing the important deadlines.¹¹⁷

iii. Duration of election period

Ms. Blumczynska noted that in order to facilitate communication and ensure that all voters who wanted to vote were able to, she recommended as long of a writ period as possible.¹¹⁸ She also noted that the period for voting should be extended, as this will allow for greater participation.¹¹⁹

iv. Alternative voting methods

Ms. Blumczynska told the Committee that digital literacy poses a challenge for many immigrant and refugee electors, and she cautioned against the use of electronic voting and other online involvement in the voting process.¹²⁰

115 *ibid.*, 1145.

116 *ibid.*, 1110.

117 *ibid.*, 1130.

118 *ibid.*, 1145.

119 *ibid.*, 1155.

120 *ibid.*



WITNESSES ON DEMOCRACY, HEALTH AND COMMUNITIES

A. Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario

In his appearance before the Committee, Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health for Ontario, noted that the main challenges in Ontario are its geographic and population size, as there are many different circumstances and realities across the province.¹²¹ Of particular concern with regards to an election, he noted that there are also many remote First Nations communities and that it will be essential that they are both adequately protected and represented.¹²²

He also informed the committee that in the two by-elections held in Ontario in October there were no COVID-19 cases related to the election, nor was there any exacerbation of cases in the weeks following.¹²³

i. Communications

To reduce electors' potential concerns about their safety when voting, Dr. Williams stated that it will be essential that Elections Canada clearly informs voters about the safety and security standards in-place at polling locations.¹²⁴ He further observed that electors' opinions about the safety of elections would also be influenced by the success of the ongoing COVID-19 vaccination program, and where a potential election would fall in the vaccination rollout.¹²⁵

ii. Impacts of health and safety protocols on accessibility

Dr. Williams stated that it was essential that "the administration of an election [during the pandemic] should be executed without creating further barriers to voting, especially in consideration of providing every individual who is legally able to vote with the opportunity to vote, regardless of accessibility needs."¹²⁶ He specified that this included using assistive voting technology and providing assistance both at the polling locations,

121 PROC, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 17, 10 December 2020, 1115 (Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ministry of Health, Government of Ontario).

122 Ibid.

123 Ibid.

124 Ibid., 1135.

125 Ibid.

126 Ibid., 1110.

and potentially in other places of residence like correctional facilities, and long-term care and group homes.¹²⁷

Specifically discussing voters in long-term care homes, Dr. Williams stated that he would not recommend having polling locations in the homes themselves.¹²⁸ While he was comfortable with an essential visitor supporting a resident of a long-term care home with voting, he also advocated mail-in ballots and all alternatives that would avoid additional visitors to the long-term care homes.¹²⁹

iii. Access to polling places

Dr. Williams noted that Elections Canada will likely face challenges in identifying viable polling locations.¹³⁰ He stated that flexibility in selecting locations will be important, as well as ensuring consistent and tailored processes for each voting location.¹³¹ Further, he recommended establishing linkages with regional health authorities in advance of the writ period in order to support these processes.¹³²

In order for election workers and voters to feel confident in their safety, Dr. Williams recommended a comprehensive training program be established for election workers that would include dry runs of the election processes.¹³³ He told the Committee that his preference was to avoid having election workers move between different geographic zones, as each zone could have different levels of COVID-19 cases and movement between zones could lead to outbreaks of COVID-19.¹³⁴

This affirms testimony from witnesses who indicated that measures such as rapid-testing an election worker for COVID-19 and allowing them into a single long-term care facility to administer the vote, such as Mr. Jason Lee, Canadian Association for Long Term Care, who stated that “would work, absolutely...I don’t see why it can’t be part of the

127 ibid.
128 ibid., 1150.
129 ibid.
130 ibid., 1110.
131 ibid.
132 ibid.
133 ibid.
134 ibid.



conversation or the solution.”¹³⁵ However, Mr. Lee also noted that during the ongoing pandemic, it was not safe to have an election worker go from facility to facility to administer the vote.¹³⁶

iv. Duration of election period

Dr. Williams stated that a longer writ period would have public health benefits, especially if there was more time allocated for advance polling.¹³⁷ He believes that this would not only reduce concerns of having large numbers of electors gather in a short period of time, but also allow for electors facing barriers to have more access to voting.¹³⁸

B. Mr. André Blais, Professor at Université de Montréal’s Department of Political Science

On 26 November 2020, Mr. André Blais, professor in the department of political science at the University of Montréal and the university’s Research Chair in Electoral Studies, appeared before the Committee. He is of the opinion that there should not be an election until October 2023, when the next fixed election is scheduled.¹³⁹

i. Proposals of Chief Electoral Officer

Mr. Blais is in full agreement with the recommendations made by Election Canada in the CEO’s special report and added that, in his opinion, there should be more polling stations to make voting easier.¹⁴⁰ He also suggested the possibility of having an express line for vulnerable electors in order to minimize their time spent in close proximity to others.¹⁴¹ He raised the possibility of allowing electors to reserve a timeslot, similar to what many local public health organizations have done for the influenza vaccine in

135 PROC, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 9, 12 November 2020, 1120 (Mr. Jason Lee, Treasurer, Canadian Association for Long Term Care).

136 Ibid., 1105.

137 Williams, 1135.

138 Ibid.

139 PROC, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 13, 26 November 2020, 1105 (André Blais, Professor, Department of Political Science, Université de Montréal, As an Individual).

140 Ibid.

141 Ibid.

2020.¹⁴² He further opined that these measures should be established not just for the duration of the pandemic but maintained for the future in order to make voting “as easy and quick as possible.”¹⁴³

ii. Voting in long-term care facilities

Mr. Blais was in full agreement with the CEO’s proposals to facilitate increased flexibility for voting in long-term care facilities.¹⁴⁴

C. Ms. Sabreena Delhon, Open Democracy Fellow, DemocracyXChange, Open Democracy Project

On 3 December 2020, Ms. Sabreena Delhon, Open Democracy Fellow at the Open Democracy Project, appeared before the Committee.

i. Communications

Ms. Delhon suggested that communication with electors by Elections Canada can be supported by working with community-based organizations.¹⁴⁵ She emphasized that not only can these groups disseminate critical information about the voting process, but they can also reinforce messaging about safety measures for voting during a pandemic.¹⁴⁶ She further suggested that Elections Canada ought to proceed with hiring community relations officers as early as possible, in order to begin community outreach.¹⁴⁷

With regards to key messaging, Ms. Delhon stated the importance of countering “the American narrative that registering to vote and voting are onerous.”¹⁴⁸ She believes it will be critical to inform all electors that voting is simple, easy and safe.¹⁴⁹ She noted that

142 Ibid.

143 Ibid.

144 Ibid.

145 PROC, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 15, 3 December 2020, 1105 (Sabreena Delhon, Open Democracy Fellow, DemocracyXChange, Open Democracy Project).

146 Ibid.

147 Ibid.

148 Ibid.

149 Ibid.



this approach was used successfully in the most recent provincial election in British Columbia, especially in preparing the voters for mail-in ballots.¹⁵⁰

ii. Vote by phone

Ms. Delhon advised that given the success of telephone voting during the recent provincial election in British Columbia, it should be considered as an option for a federal general election.¹⁵¹

D. Mr. Raymond Orb, President, Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities)

i. Communications

If a federal general election is held during the pandemic, Mr. Raymond Orb, President of the Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities, stated to the Committee that it will be essential to communicate the reason for its occurrence.¹⁵² He emphasized that in order for rural voters to engage in the election, the government must ensure that these voters understand why an election was being held.¹⁵³

ii. Vote by mail

Mr. Orb told the Committee that during the recent provincial election in Saskatchewan there were record numbers of mail-in ballots returned.¹⁵⁴ He recommended that the method for distributing and receiving mail-in ballots at the federal level be fine-tuned and well-promoted in order to encourage voting by mail.¹⁵⁵ However, he cautioned that in order to announce an election result on the day the election period has finished, mail-in ballots ought to be received and counted in advance of election day.¹⁵⁶

150 Ibid., 1125.

151 Ibid., 1200.

152 PROC, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 15, 3 December 2020, 1210 (Raymond Orb, President, Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities).

153 Ibid.

154 Ibid.

155 Ibid.

156 Ibid.

Regarding the online registration process for mail-in ballots, Mr. Orb noted that given challenges with rural connectivity, he is concerned that the population he represents will face difficulties accessing this process.¹⁵⁷ In order to avoid these challenges, he suggested allowing registration to take place at Canada Post outlets.¹⁵⁸

iii. Vote by phone

Given the challenges of rural connectivity, Mr. Orb was hesitant to endorse the idea of telephone voting, but did support it for voters who had access to landlines.¹⁵⁹ Like other witnesses, he agreed that providing electors with more voting options would allow more people to feel comfortable voting during a pandemic.

iv. Duration of election period

Mr. Orb told the Committee that for the 2020 provincial election in Saskatchewan, the use of advance voting increased 67% from the previous election held in 2016.¹⁶⁰ Given these numbers, he stated that it was imperative that advance polls be well-promoted and made easily accessible.¹⁶¹ Further, he noted that advance polling days should be increased.¹⁶²

Commenting on the duration of the writ period, Mr. Orb endorsed a reasonably long writ period to ensure enough time for preparations by Elections Canada. However, he cautioned that “a long writ period and all the campaigning that goes with it seems to weigh on people.”¹⁶³

Regarding the election period itself, Mr. Orb supported the idea of extending the voting period in order to avoid congestion at the polls.¹⁶⁴

157 *ibid.*, 1235.

158 *ibid.*

159 *ibid.*

160 *ibid.*, 1210.

161 *ibid.*

162 *ibid.*

163 *ibid.*, 1240.

164 *ibid.*, 1250.



WRITTEN SUBMISSIONS

A. Chief Electoral Officer of Canada

In the context of his appearance on 22 October 2020,¹⁶⁵ Canada's CEO, Mr. Stéphane Perrault, was asked to table several documents with the Committee. On 12 November 2020, the Committee received a written response from Mr. Perrault, to which various documents answering requests from the Committee were appended.

Further, the Committee received a written response from Mr. Perrault on 14 December 2020 providing the information he was requested to table with the Committee during his appearance at the 19 November 2020 meeting.¹⁶⁶

i. Elections Canada's consultations with public health authorities and officials

On 22 October 2020, Mr. Perrault was asked to table with the Committee a list of the health officials Elections Canada had consulted with and the dates of each consultation. The first annex of the 12 November 2020 written response presented a record of Elections Canada's consultations with Canadian public health authorities as of 22 October 2020. The record provided a rationale for every individual consultation. Note that in some cases, Elections Canada held only a single consultation with a given organization, but the consultation took place over several weeks. In other cases, Elections Canada held multiple consultations with the same organization over several weeks.

The record indicates that consultations were held with the following authorities and officials:

Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety: one consultation from 25 September to 22 October 2020, regarding links to COVID-19 resources from the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety.

- **Government Operations Centre:** four consultations from September to October 2020, the first of which regarding the creation of a working group to discuss various issues concerning elections planning and public

165 PROC, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 4, 22 October 2020.

166 PROC, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 11, 19 November 2020.

health. Subsequent consultations correspond to meetings of this working group.

- **Health Canada:** one consultation from 20 July to 31 August 2020, on the subject of accountable health and safety policy for Canadians, which includes guidance to public health authorities for transition planning and strategic approach to lifting restrictive public health measures. The question of how communications of the proposed election delivery approach aligns with local public health measures was also discussed.
- **Health Portfolio Operations Centre:** three consultations from July to September 2020, on various topics including required public health measures for the safe conduct of an election, enhancing public confidence in the measures and establishing relationships for advice support.
- **Medical Officer of Health, Ontario:** four consultations from September to October 2020, on topics including specific guidelines and restrictions for federal by-elections. The question of capacity limitation issues following new restrictions put in place by the province of Ontario was also discussed.
- **Public Health Agency of Canada:** fourteen consultations from June to October 2020, on various topics including the roles and responsibilities of each organization, the conduct of elections during the pandemic, the use of personal protective equipment, administering the vote in quarantine centres and self-assessment of election workers.
- **Toronto Public Health:** three consultations from September to October 2020, on subjects including confirming contact information for liaison purposes, contact-tracing questions as well as public service definition and health guidelines.
- **York Region Public Health, Health Emergency Operations Centre:** one consultation from 22 September to 26 October 2020 in order to confirm contact information for liaison purposes.



ii. Toronto Centre and York Centre By-elections

On 26 October 2020, by-elections occurred in the two ridings of Toronto Centre, and York Centre. The following subsections refer to the health measures implemented, and consultations held by Elections Canada for those by-elections.

a) Health and Safety Measures

On 22 October 2020, Mr. Perrault was asked to table with the Committee all health and safety measures related to COVID-19 that were implemented in each of the Toronto Centre and York Centre by-elections, as well as corresponding authority from the *Canada Elections Act* (CEA). The second annex of Mr. Perrault's 12 November written response presents a list of those measures in polling places and returning officers' offices. The measures implemented during the Toronto Centre and York Centre by-elections include, but are not limited to:

- measures related to masks, including the availability of non-medical masks for electors, workers (including scrutineers) and visitors;
- hand sanitizer stations;
- protective personal equipment for poll workers;
- reduction of the number of poll workers;
- implementation of local or provincial health measures such as registries for contact tracing;
- single-use pencils;
- physical distancing and directional signage throughout polling places, as well as larger rented space to accommodate physical distancing;
- self-assessment tools for office workers and poll workers;
- training programs for election workers adapted to convey safety messages.

The legal authority to implement these health and safety measures can be found under section 16(c) of the CEA, which provides that the CEO shall issue to election officers the instructions that the CEO considers necessary for the administration of the act.¹⁶⁷

b) Consultations with long-term care facilities

On 22 October 2020, Mr. Perrault was asked to table with the Committee a list of consultations between Elections Canada and long-term care facilities regarding the by-elections in Toronto Centre and York Centre. A list of consultation was shared as the third annex of the written response received on 12 November 2020.

In total, three consultations occurred with facilities in Toronto Centre, while five consultations occurred with facilities in York Centre. The consultations spanned from 12 October to 26 October 2020. Topics of discussion with long-term care facilities administrators included available voting options and coordination of drop-off and pick-up of completed special-ballot application kits. Different voting options were retained by specific facilities.

In Toronto Centre, the office of the returning officer contacted administrators for the Fudger House Home for the Aged and the Re kai Centres (Wellesley and Sherbourne). The Fudger House Home for the Aged opted for the vote-by-mail option, while the Re kai Centres decided to proceed with the mobile poll option on election day.

In York Centre, the office of the returning officer contacted administrators for the Downsview Senior Retirement Residence, the Kensington Place Retirement Residence, the L'Chaim Retirement Home, the St. Bernard's Seniors Residence, the Valleyview Residence Nursing Home and the Sage Care. Five of the six long-term care facilities chose the vote-by-mail option for their residents. For their part, the Sage Care, a high-risk long-term care facility serving individuals with dementia, decided that it could not participate. Alternative options on voting by special ballot was provided so that family members could assist their loved one to vote by mail.

c) Protections for Poll Workers and Long-term Care Facility Staff and Residents

On 22 October 2020, Mr. Perrault was asked to table with the Committee a list of measures taken during the two by-elections to ensure the safety of poll workers and long-term care facilities residents and staff. Elections Canada provided the Committee

167 [Canada Elections Act](#), S.C. 2000, c. 9, s. 16(c).



with descriptions of implemented measures in Annex 4 of the 12 November 2020 written response. The implemented measures are as follows:

- Elections Canada provided a COVID-19 guide to returning officers. At a later date, upon requirements from Toronto Public Health, contact tracing instructions, a privacy policy related to COVID-19 tracing and a contact tracing log were also provided to returning officers. A copy of those documents was attached to the written response.
- Elections Canada provided equipment such as non-medical masks, face shields, disposable gloves and hand sanitizer for election office staff and poll workers. Furthermore, disinfecting wipes for cleaning surfaces were provided, hand sanitizer was available at points of entry and exists, and masks were made available for visitors who did not bring their own.
- Local public health guidelines and Elections Canada signage were posted in facilities where polls were held. Further, Elections Canada attempted to lease larger facilities to allow for physical distancing.
- Data collection for contact tracing was performed at all locations, including in training facilities.¹⁶⁸
- Single-use pencils were provided to voters, who could also bring their own.
- The use of self-assessment tools to monitor for symptoms of COVID-19 was encouraged for election office workers and poll workers. Workers were also asked to refrain from work if they believed they had COVID-19 symptoms.
- Elections Canada developed a document entitled “Contingency Plan for By-Elections in Toronto Centre and York Centre.” The document, which was attached to the written response, provided election administrators with instructions and guidelines to manage potential COVID-19 outbreaks.

168 The Committee notes that Elections Canada did collect contact tracing data at the two Toronto by-elections held on 26 October 2020. However, as Toronto Public Health suspended contact tracing outside of outbreaks in congregate settings, follow-up for contact tracing at polling sites did not occur.

- Returning officers were allowed to appoint an additional election administrator to assist with election administration duties.
- Finally, the training program for polls workers was adapted to include health and safety components.

d) Additional information

On 19 November 2020, Mr. Perrault was asked to table with the Committee several miscellaneous facts and figures about the 26 October 2020 by-elections. In his 14 December 2020 response, Mr. Perrault indicated that Elections Canada incurred \$216,000 in expenditures for personal protective equipment during the two by-elections (e.g. masks, face shields, hand sanitizer, gloves, disinfectant wipes). The written response also indicated that Elections Canada had not been made aware of any COVID-19 outbreak related to any points of service during the by-elections.

Finally, Elections Canada reported a decrease in the number of election workers for the by-elections in comparison with the number of workers for the two ridings during the 43rd general election, from 1,635 workers to 1,066 workers. The decrease reflected both the requirement to merge polling sites due to the lack of available rental places and the need to implement physical distancing.

iii. Surveys on voter turnout

On 22 October 2020, Mr. Perrault offered to table with the Committee surveys conducted by Elections Canada on how the pandemic may affect voter turnout. The information collected, as well as efforts planned by Elections Canada to mitigate information and access barriers, was presented in Annex 5 of the CEO's 12 November written submission.

Results of Elections Canada's commissioned research¹⁶⁹ on Canadians view of pandemic elections show a significant reduction in voting intentions among electors in the context of a future federal election, particularly among electors who perceived a high level of risk from COVID-19. The results further indicated that while a decrease in intention was observed in all age groups, the impact of COVID-19 on voters' intention was twice as great among voters of 24 years of age and younger than among electors over the age of

169 Elections Canada, [*Information sharing and monitoring the electoral environment*](#).



65. The impact of the pandemic on lowering intention to vote was also greater among less educated electors as well as urban electors.

The results further indicated no difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous electors regarding the impact of the pandemic on their turnout intention, although the small sample size of the survey may not detect mild-to-modest effects in voting intentions.

Further, Elections Canada consulted various stakeholder groups representing voters who face specific barriers to voting. These groups include people with disabilities, Indigenous people, youth, new Canadians and senior electors. Among the feedback received, Elections Canada heard concerns regarding the over-reliance on digital communication and digital tools to access voter services. Elections Canada indicates that it will engage with groups representing electors that face barriers to voting to share information on safety measures and on changes to voter services in a pandemic context, and that returning officers will continue to be encouraged to hire community relations officers to facilitate liaison with these groups.

iv. Communication documents in languages other than English and French

On 22 October 2020, Mr. Perrault was asked to table with the Committee information on languages other than English and French used by Elections Canada in their communication strategy. The answer to this request was included as the sixth annex to the CEO's 12 November written submission and is reproduced in this report in Appendix A.

Elections Canada's [Voter Information Campaign](#) provides electors with information on when, where and how to register and vote during a federal general election. The document tabled with the Committee indicates that two new components will be included in the next voter information campaign: an enhancement of the recruitment campaign for election workers, and a safety campaign, which will provide information on health and safety measures implemented to protect electors and election workers.

The campaign will include advertisement in both English and French, as well as Inuktitut and 30 other Indigenous and heritage languages, depending on the medium. As examples, 29 languages will be targeted in radio communications, while 30 languages will be targeted for television advertisements. Investments of \$1,271,646 in ethnic media and of \$543,403 in Indigenous media are planned.

Further, specific communications products, including the [*Guide to the Federal Election*](#) and the ID tear-off sheet are available in 33 heritage languages and 16 Indigenous languages.

v. Planned spending for the 44th general election

On 19 November 2020, Mr. Perrault was asked to table with the Committee information on planned spending for the 44th federal general election, with an emphasis on costs to be incurred in response to the pandemic. On 14 December 2020, Mr. Perrault provided a written response, which indicates that, as mentioned during his testimony, to date, Elections Canada has engaged additional expenses totalling \$99 million in preparing to deliver an election in a pandemic context. Of this number, \$52 million relates directly to the pandemic, including the following costs:

- \$37 million for the purchase of protective equipment (e.g. masks, face shields, hand sanitizer, gloves, single-use pencils, physical barriers);
- \$11.8 million for vote-by-mail related expenses, which includes \$10.9 million for prepaid postage for outgoing ballot kits and returned ballots, and \$900,000 for the acquisition of envelopes;
- \$3.1 million for creative and media placements in relation with a new health and safety information campaign.

The remaining \$47 million represents costs incurred for election readiness measures, including additional temporary hires, training and pre-event assignments, deployment of hardware to regional warehouses and the replenishment of electoral supplies. That amount also includes the costs of the York and Toronto Centres by-elections.

Elections Canada specifies that the planned spending for pandemic measures for the next federal general election represents a 10% increase over the costs of the 43rd general election.

vi. Voter information campaign

On 19 November 2020, Mr. Perrault was asked to table with the Committee information on costs related to a future voter information campaign in the context of a pandemic. The following information was provided in Mr. Perrault's 14 December written response.

For both the pre-writ and the election period for the 43rd general election, the advertising portion of Elections Canada's voter information campaign amounted to a



total of \$13.8 million. For the 44th general election, a more extensive campaign, which will include health and safety measures components, is currently under development. Planned spending amount to \$16.3 million in advertising, including \$2.8 million on the health and safety information campaign and \$475,000 on the recruitment campaign.

For printed products, the costs amounted to \$29.1 million for the 43rd general election. Elections Canada estimates that the costs will amount to \$34.9 million for the next election, an increase which is both accounting for inflation and for the growth in the number of electors and households in Canada. The increase can also be explained by funds set aside for the reprinting of voter information cards due to the potential loss of polling sites in the event of an election during the pandemic.

vii. Comparison with the 42nd and 43rd general elections

On 19 November 2020, Mr. Perrault was asked to table with the Committee some comparative information regarding the 42nd and 43rd general elections. In his 14 December written response, the Committee was provided with a link to a section of an Election Canada webpage entitled [Comparing the costs of the 42nd and 43rd general elections](#), which shows that the 2019 general election costs increased by approximately \$36.9 million compared to the final cost of the 2015 general election.

The written response also contained figures about:

- a 4.4% increase in paid election workers, or an increase of 9,773 workers, from the 42nd to the 43rd general election (i.e., from 221,826 paid election workers to 231,599 paid election workers); and
- A 66.6% increase in mail-in ballots, or an increase of 33,491 ballots, from the 42nd general election to 43rd general election (i.e from 50,265 mail-in ballots to 83,756 mail-in ballots).

The written response also refers to the [Report on the 42nd General Election of October 19, 2015](#) and the [Report on the 43rd General Election of October 21, 2019](#). These reports indicate that there were increases in the number of advance polls (24.7%) and votes cast at advance polls (32.7%):

- from 9 to 12 October 2015, 4,946 advance polls were set up, and a total of 3,677,217 electors cast votes at those advance polls; and
- from 11 to 14 October 2019, 6,166 advance polls were set up and a total of 4,879,312 electors cast ballots at those advance polls.

B. Provincial Chief Electoral Officers and Other Jurisdictions

i. British Columbia

a) Safety audit

During his appearance before the Committee on 3 November 2020,¹⁷⁰ Mr. Anton Boegman, CEO of British Columbia, was asked by the Committee to provide a written response regarding the number of safety audits passed by Elections BC. Mr. Boegman was further asked to include a description of the safety audits.

In a written response received on 25 November 2020, Elections BC indicates that it passed three COVID-19 safety audits. The organization further indicates that inspectors from WorkSafeBC visited two voting places. Further, WorkSafeBC, jointly with a regional health authority, also visited one district electoral office.

The written response further specifies that the purpose of the inspections was to review Elections BC's response to the pandemic in relation to workers' health and safety, and that the inspection reports indicate the presence of COVID-19 controls and measures in the workplace as outline in the employer's COVID-19 safety plan.

b) Provincial health guidance during the writ period

During his appearance before the Committee, Mr. Boegman was asked to table with the Committee a copy of the provincial health guidance to safeguard public health for the election.

In the 25 November written response, Elections BC indicates that its work is considered an essential service by the province, and that it must follow the orders and guidance provided by the Provincial Health Officer to ensure safe operations and reduce the risk of transmission of the virus. Elections BC also followed the guidelines of WorkSafe BC, as well as general guidance and resources from the BC Centre for Disease Control.

Following these guidelines, Elections BC developed a district electoral offices safety plan and a voting place safety plan, copies of which were attached to the written response. Drafts of these plans were reviewed by a group of experts from the Provincial Health Office, WorkSafeBC and the BC Centre for Disease Control.

170 PROC, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 7, 3 November 2020.



The [Safe Voting Places - COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan](#) includes workplace policies describing the minimum safety measures that must be in place in each respective voting place and how workers can be kept safe. It also specifies who can be at the voting place and how to address illness that may arise in a voting place. Further, the safety plan includes work protocols to minimize the impact of a potential positive case of COVID-19 in voting places. The [Safe District Electoral Offices - COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan](#) includes similar elements, adapted for the particularities of district electoral offices.

c) Recommendations regarding long-term care facilities

During his appearance before the Committee, Mr. Boegman was asked to table with the Committee recommendations made to ensure the health and safety of B.C. residents and staff of long-term care facilities. The 25 November 2020 written response shows that in addition to the practices outlined in safety plans, Elections BC received guidance from the Ministry of Health regarding the creation of voting process options for assisted living and long-term care facilities.

Attachments to the written response included a document entitled “Assisted Living And Long-Term Care Homes: BC Voting Process Options,” which presents arrangements for voting in long-term care facilities under normal election conditions, under pandemic conditions without an outbreak and in case of an outbreak at the facility. The explored voting options for each scenario are detailed in Appendix B.

d) Comparison of public health guidance

During his appearance before the Committee, Mr. Boegman was asked to table with the Committee a comparison of the public health guidance for a usual election side-by-side with the guidance for the 2020 election.

In its 25 November 2020 written response, Elections BC indicates that the major change with regards to the direction provided to district electoral officers was linked to the requirement for a COVID-19 safety plan. Each district electoral officer had to create a written, site-specific safe work plan for each advance and general voting places. Election officials were also to review two videos on COVID-19 safety as part of their online training.

e) Health and safety measures in polling stations

During his appearance before the Committee, Mr. Boegman was asked to table with the Committee a list of health and safety measures put in place at the polling stations for

election day. In its 25 November 2020 written response, Election BC summarized the key protocols put in place, which include the following:

- voting places had to be established and operate in accordance with public health guidelines;
- voting places had to be set up to meet physical distancing requirements;
- workplace policies were developed to help ensure that (1) election officials and visitors with symptoms of COVID-19 did not enter the voting place; (2) election officials feeling ill while at work were removed from the voting place; (3) the flow of visitors in the voting place was limited and lineups controlled to ensure physical distancing;
- election officials who exhibit symptoms of COVID-19 had to stay home;
- election officials had to make a “declaration of health” each day prior to arrival at the voting place or to a training class;
- occupancy limits for voting places were identified and enforced;
- appropriate signage had to be placed at the voting place entryway and, as appropriate, in other facility areas;
- transparent screens were placed at voting stations;
- voting officers worked alone to ensure physical distancing;
- hand sanitizer was provided at voting places;
- voters were encouraged to wear masks, and some were offered to voters who did not have their own;
- election officials were required to wear masks at all times while working; and
- election officials cleaned and sanitized high-touch areas regularly.



f) Change in costs for increased number of polling stations and workers

During his appearance before the Committee, Mr. Boegman was asked to table with the Committee an itemization of the percentage change in costs for increased number of polling stations and workers.

Elections BC tabled a written response on 25 November 2020 indicating that, as noted by Mr. Boegman during the Committee meeting, the costs will not be available until the CEO report on the administration of the election is published. In the meantime, Elections BC provided the following comparative numbers:

- the number of election officials decreased by 21% (4,835 fewer election officials);
- the number of district electoral office staff increased by 23% (292 more office staff);
- the number of advance voting places decreased by 1%;
- the number of general voting day places decreased by 5%.

The written response further indicates that the advance voting place statistic does not take into consideration the fact that there was an overall increase by 19% in the number of advance voting opportunities as the result of an extra day of advance voting in 2020. In addition, the use of vote-by-mail increased by over 7,200% during the 2020 election.

g) Streamlined process for mail-in ballots

During his appearance before the Committee, Mr. Boegman was asked to table with the Committee copies of documents outlining Elections BC efforts to streamline the process for mail-in ballots.

In its written response, Elections BC indicated that vote-by-mail processes have been significantly streamlined over the past two election cycles. The response describes each step of the vote-by-mail process extensively, which can be summarized as follows:

1. The voter requests a voting package;
2. Election officials process the request, assemble the voting package and send it to the voter;

3. The voter completes the voting package;
4. The voter returns the voting package;
5. Election officials process the returned package for counting.

Importantly, Elections BC provided many different options with regards to returning their ballot packages on time. In their response, they provided the following information:

Elections BC provided voters with as many options as possible to return their packages on time. As well as returning packages through the mail, voters could drop their completed package at any district electoral office, advance or general voting place, or at most Service BC locations, which offer a suite of government services in B.C. communities. Many Service BC locations had exterior drop boxes available, so voters concerned about the pandemic could return their package without entering a building. Likewise, at voting places, ballot boxes for returned voting packages were placed at the entrance, monitored by an Information Officer.

The response further includes four attached forms that were used by Elections BC during the election with regards to vote by mail.

Finally, Elections BC further indicates that the assisted telephone voting process was also streamlined and expended to be offered to individuals who could not vote in person as they were in a locked-down care facility, self-isolating or deployed with the Canadian Forces.

ii. Saskatchewan

a) Recommendations regarding long-term care facilities

During his appearance before the Committee on 3 November 2020,¹⁷¹ Dr. Michael Boda, CEO of Saskatchewan, was asked to table with the Committee recommendations made to ensure the health and safety of Saskatchewan's residents and staff of long-term care facilities. The Committee received a written response from Dr. Boda on 23 December 2020.

In his written response, Dr. Boda indicates that Elections Saskatchewan worked in close collaboration with the province's Chief Medical Health Officer on all plans for voting during the election, including on administering the vote in care facilities and hospitals. He further specifies that plans were first developed by Elections Saskatchewan staff in

171 ibid.



consultation with an infection prevention and control consultant. The plans were later reviewed and agreed to by the Office of the Chief Medical Health Officer, and then communicated to the Saskatchewan Health Authority, which holds responsibility over hospitals and long-term care homes, and the Saskatchewan Ministry of Health, which is responsible for licensing personal care homes.

Attached to the response were two letters from Dr. Boda addressed to Mr. Scott Livingstone, Chief Executive Officer at Saskatchewan Health Authority, with regards to voting in hospitals and acute care facilities and voting in long-term care homes. A third letter, addressed to the Deputy Minister of Health, Mr. Max Hendricks, regarding voting in personal care homes, was also attached. The three letters outline the process for voting in each type of facilities.

b) Comparison of public health guidance

During his appearance before the Committee on 3 November 2020, Dr. Boda was asked to table with the Committee a comparison of public health guidance for a usual election in comparison to the guidance provided during the 2020 elections. In his 23 December 2020 written response, Dr. Boda highlighted the following points:

- **Absentee voting:** Historically, absentee voting has been available for residents of Saskatchewan who would have been outside of the province during voting. The process was rarely used and managed by local returning offices. In 2020, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, absentee voting was completely redesigned to be a vote-by-mail process. Vote-by-mail was made accessible to any voter who had concerns about voting in person. An online portal was developed to facilitate the application process and all applications were managed through the Elections Saskatchewan head office.
- **In person voting for regular and advance polls:** In 2020, due to the pandemic, specific protocols were implemented at polling stations, including by requiring election workers to wear masks, by making hand sanitizing available at entrances and exits, by scheduling cleaning and disinfestation of surfaces and by screening workers and voters for symptoms.
- **Personal care facilities, hospitals, remand and temporarily displaced voting:** For the 2016 general election, polls for personal care facilities, hospitals, remand and temporarily displaced voting were centrally

located. Door to door voting for those unable to use the central poll was also used. For the 2020 general election, central polling locations were established in common area of hospitals. PPE was worn by all election workers, and sanitization protocols were followed. Furthermore, physical distancing was preserved throughout the voting process, and plastic screens separated workers from voters. As for door to door voting, it was made available for those who could not travel to the central poll. Elections workers wore full PPE, and hospital staff acted as go-between so that the election worker never went within 6 feet of the voter.

- **Extraordinary voting:** Extraordinary voting was not available in prior elections, as it was developed to offer an option for voters affected by COVID-19. Extraordinary voting was designed for self-isolating voters. After the deadline for vote-by-mail, anyone who was placed on self-isolation was given instructions by the Saskatchewan Health Authority and a special phone to apply for extraordinary voting. Ballots were delivered by courier and were then picked up and delivered to Elections Saskatchewan head office.

c) Health and safety measures in polling stations

During his appearance before the Committee on 3 November 2020, Dr. Boda was asked to table with the Committee a copy of health and safety measures that were put in place at polling stations. In his 23 December 2020 written response, Dr. Boda indicates that Elections Saskatchewan developed comprehensive health and safety measures, in consultation with an infection prevention and control consultant as well as the Office of the Chief Medical Health Officer. These measures included:

- Physical distancing of 2 metres;
- Clear dividers between voters and workers;
- A strong recommendation to wear a mask inside, and all workers wearing masks;
- Hand sanitizer;
- Surfaces in polling locations disinfected throughout the day;
- Single-use pencils for everyone.



The written response further refers to a publicly available Elections Saskatchewan’s video entitled “[COVID-19 and the 2020 Saskatchewan General Election.](#)”

d) Increase of ballots and comparison in costs

During his appearance before the Committee on 3 November 2020, Dr. Boda was asked to table with the Committee data regarding the percentage increase of ballots, and a comparison in costs for the election. In his 23 December written response, Dr. Boda indicates that this data is not currently available but could be provided to the Committee after the CEO’s report containing this information was tabled with the Saskatchewan Legislative Assembly. The report is expected to be tabled in October 2021.

iii. New Brunswick

a) Cost comparison of a COVID-19 election

During her appearance before the Committee on 27 October 2020, Kimberly Poffenroth, CEO of New Brunswick, was asked to table with the Committee the estimated additional costs of holding a provincial election during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Committee received a written response from Ms. Poffenroth on 18 January 2020.

In her written response, Ms. Poffenroth states that the 2020 provincial election in fact cost less than the 2018 provincial election. The reasons were:

- Elections New Brunswick made a significant capital investment in information technology for the 2018 election;
- the 2020 election period was significantly shorter than the 2018 election period, leading to reductions in costs for returning office rent and staff of returning offices; and
- additional polls were not established on post-secondary education campuses and in long-term care facilities.

However, there were additional costs incurred related to holding an election during the COVID-19 pandemic. These were:

- Protective personal equipment, cleaning supplies, vote-by-mail: \$997,052.92
- cleaning of RO and polls: \$103,895.00

- Media costs: \$96,379.42
- Additional poll workers: \$307,520.65 (or a 22% increase over the 2018 election)

The media costs directly attributable to COVID-19 related to Elections NB's "Vote Early. Vote Safely" campaign. Overall, however, less was spent on advertising in the PGE 2020 because of the shorter election period and the election being unscheduled; also, in PGE 2018, Elections NB conducted a significant awareness campaign regarding social media and misinformation.

b) Provincial COVID-19 cases during 2020 election period

During her appearance before the Committee on 27 October 2020, Ms. Poffenroth was asked to table with the Committee the provincial COVID-19 cases during the election period.

In her written response, she states that the election period for New Brunswick's 40th general election was from 17 August 2020 to 14 September 2020. During that period, a total of 11 new cases of COVID-19 were reported. The highest number of active cases during the election period was 15 active cases on 16 August 2020. Further, she notes that on 14 September 2020, there were only 3 active cases.

c) Instructions for election workers related to the pandemic

In response to a request made during her appearance before the Committee, Ms. Poffenroth tabled with the Committee the instructions given by Elections New Brunswick to election workers regarding pandemic-related procedures.

The manual, entitled *Instructions for Returning Officers and Election Clerks – Pandemic Procedures (Provincial Elections)*, details the specific activities that a returning officer is required to perform to mitigate risks related to conducting an election during the COVID-19 pandemic. The manual states that its contents supplement the other training materials provided to election workers in the training sessions held prior to the election.

The manual is divided into two parts: information related to returning offices and information related to polling stations. With respect to returning offices, the manual details requirements for election workers about physical distancing, hand and respiratory hygiene, screening and monitoring, and cleaning and disinfection.



For polling stations, the manual provides criteria for selecting locations, and guidelines and advice when hiring poll workers. It also details the procedures on voting days, the set-up of polling stations, additional responsibilities poll workers must undertake, and the use and handling of advance voting materials.

iv. Prince Edward Island

a) COVID-19 cases during the by-election writ period

During his appearance before the Committee on 27 October 2020,¹⁷² Mr. Tim Garrity, CEO of Prince Edward Island, was asked to table with the Committee the range and the number of COVID-19 cases, as well as the average number of cases, in Prince Edward Island during the District 10 by-election.

The Committee received a written response from Elections Prince Edward Island on 16 November 2020. The response indicates that the province did not have any active cases of COVID-19 on 6 October 2020, which corresponds to the date of the writ of election. During the election period, 3 travel-related cases were recorded in the province, while the number of community-spread cases remained of zero. Elections Prince Edward Island further specifies that no COVID-19 cases were reported in District 10 during the election period.

b) Additional spending related to public health measures

During his appearance before the Committee on 27 October 2020, Mr. Garrity was asked to table the percentage of increase in extra spending on the by-election related to COVID-19 public health measures.

The Committee was provided with a written response on 16 November 2020, which indicates that the costs incurred for the District 10 by-election were 30% higher than for the last by-election. Elections Prince-Edward Island indicates that part of this increase (25%) was due to COVID-19 protocols and additional staff and supplies needed.

172 PROC, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 5, 27 October 2020.

v. New Zealand

During its 5 November 2020 meeting, the Committee concurred in the First Report of the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure, which included the following recommendation:

That, in relation to its study on the conduct of a federal election during the COVID-19 pandemic, the committee instruct the Chair to write to the Ms. Alicia Wright, Chief Electoral Officer of New Zealand, requesting a written response which outlines the New Zealand's experience in conducting a general election during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁷³

On 4 December 2020, the New Zealand Electoral Commission (the Commission) provided a written response which will be discussed in the following subsections. In its written response, the Commission stressed the existence of important differences in the environmental and legal regimes of Canada and New Zealand and underlined that those differences would impact any advice on conducting elections in the context of the pandemic the Commission could provide.

a) Background

New Zealand's 53rd general election was held on Saturday 17 October 2020. The election was originally scheduled to occur in September 2020, but was postponed by the Prime Minister in August in response to a spike of COVID-19 cases in the region of Auckland¹⁷⁴.

As of 30 September 2020, the country had an estimated population of 5,101,400 people¹⁷⁵, a number comparable to the population of the province of British Columbia. New Zealand's House of Representatives is composed of 120 seats, and members are elected under a mixed member proportional representation system. Under this system, electors vote twice, once for their preferred political party, and once to choose the member they want to represent their local electorate. For the 53rd parliament, 72 members of the House of Representatives were elected from single-member electorates

173 PROC, *Minutes*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 8, 5 November 2020.

174 "[New Zealand: Jacinda Ardern delays election over coronavirus fears](#)", *BBC News*, 17 August 2020; Eleanor Ainge Roy, "[New Zealand delays general election by a month amid Auckland Covid-19 outbreak](#)", *The Guardian*, 17 August 2020.

175 Stats NZ Tauranga Aotearoa, *Population* (consulted on 6 January 2021).



(including 7 Māori electorates) while 48 members were elected from nationwide party lists.¹⁷⁶

According to documentation provided by the Commission in its written response, as of 7 October 2020, or 10 days before election day, all of New Zealand was at Alert Level 1. Alert Level 1 is the minimal level of COVID-19-related restrictions for the country, which indicates that the disease is contained. As of 5 January 2021, a total of 2,186 COVID-19 cases were reported in New Zealand since the beginning of the pandemic.¹⁷⁷

The Commission indicated voter turnout to be 81.54% of enrolled electors for the 2020 general election.¹⁷⁸ This represents an increase since the 2017 general election, on which voter turnout represented 79.01% of enrolled electors.¹⁷⁹

b) Advice and Preparedness

In its written response, the Commission provided to the Committee its early recommendations for holding an election during the COVID-19 pandemic, which recognize the changing and unpredictable nature of the pandemic:

- consider the extent to which delivery of a general election is possible under different scenarios;
- consider and make recommendations about a range of possible approaches that could be adopted to enable delivery of the event under these different public health scenarios;
- assess the benefits, costs and risks that are likely to arise under the various delivery approaches; and
- seek to identify and agree on a path under which a general election could be assured up to a defined worst-case scenario in order to provide certainty for both the Commission and its stakeholders.

The Commission specified that the general election was ultimately delivered as if the country was in Alert Level 2 (disease contained, but risks of community transmission

176 New Zealand Parliament, [What is the MMP voting system?](#).

177 Ministry of Health (New Zealand), [COVID-19: Current cases](#) (consulted on 5 January 2021).

178 Electoral Commission (New Zealand), [2020 General Election voter turnout statistics](#).

179 Electoral Commission (New Zealand), [2017 General Election : Voter turnout statistics for the 2017 General Election](#).

growing), although the country was under Alert Level 1 at the time of the election (disease contained). The Commission was also ready to adapt the election for an Alert Level 3 (heightened risk that disease is not contained) if required.

c) Critical Success Factors

The Commission identified, in its written response, the following characteristics as critical to the success of administering an election in the context of a pandemic:

- **Inter-agency connectedness:** The Commission stresses the importance of working closely with the government sector to ensure the approach chosen to deliver the election is aligned with broader public objectives. The Commission further underlines that responding to the COVID-19 pandemic before and during the election required a co-ordinated response across government, which helped ensure public confidence in the Commission's actions and encouraged consistent behaviours.
- **Service delivery protocols:** The Commission, in consultation with the Ministry of Health, developed protocols for delivery of electoral services in voting places and other Commission sites under various COVID-19 scenarios. Simulations of delivery of electoral services were run by the Commission staff and attended by public health experts.
- **Regulatory Environment:** To ensure that the regulatory framework enabled effective delivery in a COVID-19 environment, temporary changes were made to electoral legislation. Among others, changes were made to allow an application for a special vote to be made in any manner approved by the Commission, to remove the ability of candidates to nominate persons who may witness special vote declarations, and to enable persons to vote as a special voter by telephone dictation in certain circumstances. Further, specific provisions were included in COVID-19 Public Health Orders to provide for election preparations.
- **Funding:** The Commission secured additional funding of \$28 million for its COVID-19 response during the general election, which corresponds to approximately 17% of its overall general budget.
- **Measures to support public safety in voting places:** The Commission developed and implemented changes to voting place services to ensure public safety during the voting process. The Commission planned to



“spread people out” during the voting process by providing more voting places and encouraging electors to vote during the advance voting period. Further, a number of public health measures were implemented in voting places, including by providing masks, face shields and other personal protective equipment to staff and by ensuring physical distancing during the voting process. The Commission also increased the number of workers it had on “stand-by” in case other election workers became unavailable.

- **Alternative services for at-risk and isolated voters:** The Commission developed and delivered alternative services to at-risk and isolated voters, although time constraints did not allow for the development of radically different services from previous elections. The main service provided was a centralized postal voting option, which voters could opt into. The Commission estimates that around 750,000 electors were considered as “at risk”, but only 6,500 voters requested the alternative service, although this could be explained by the low alert level at the time of the election. Another service was a dictation voting service through telephone to serve isolation and quarantine facilities; the service was previously only available to blind people, people in remote overseas locations and people physically unable to mark a vote on paper.
- **Contingency preparation:** The Commission developed contingency plans to deal with changing circumstances under short notice. The Commission was therefore ready to rapidly shift to a higher Alert Level in voting places if required. The number of “stand-by” electoral workers was also increased, and additional supplies were also available if the alert levels were to be modified.
- **Communication:** The Commission indicated that communicating effectively with the public and staff to guide behaviour and expectations and to avoid surprises was also a success factor.

C. Canada Post

i. International mail timelines

On 3 December 2020, during her appearance before the Committee,¹⁸⁰ Louise Chayer, general manager of customer experience at Canada Post, was asked to table with the Committee information on international mail delivery timeline, particularly with regards to Hong Kong mail.

On 7 December 2020, Canada Post provided the Committee with a written response which specifies international “LetterMail” delivery standards. The description offered by Canada Post is reproduced in Appendix C.

ii. Return envelopes for mail-in ballots

During her 3 December appearance before the Committee, Ms. Chayer was asked whether Post Canada plays a role in the printing of return envelopes for mail-in ballots. In its 7 December 2020 written response, Canada Post indicated that Elections Canada is the body responsible for printing return envelopes for mail-in ballots.

D. Health Officials

i. Canada

a) Summary of the letter from Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada’s Chief Public Health Officer, to the Committee

At its meeting on 24 November 2020, the Committee concurred in the Second Report of the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure. That report contained a request that Dr. Theresa Tam, Canada’s Chief Public Health Officer, provide a written response to the Committee clerk, outlining updated Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) advice on conducting a federal general election in the context of high, and rapidly increasing COVID-19 caseloads in several regions of the country.

The Committee received a letter from Dr. Tam on 3 December 2020. In her letter, Dr. Tam stated that the main priority, from the perspective of the PHAC, for a federal election

180 PROC, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 15, 3 December 2020.



held during the pandemic would be the protection of Canadian voters and communities, as well as election workers and volunteers.

She stated that PHAC has continuously shared guidance, tools, and advice with Elections Canada during the ongoing pandemic. The guidance, tools and advice were based on current scientific evidence, expert opinion, and public health practises. This support was meant to assist Elections Canada in determining what risk mitigation strategies should be considered at offices and polling stations across Canada to prevent and reduce the transmission of COVID-19.

Dr. Tam noted that there was no “one size fits all” approach to safely holding a federal general election, given the variability of COVID-19 epidemiology across the country. PHAC has assisted Elections Canada to connect with provincial and territorial public health officials so that provincial and local advice and guidance can be incorporated into Elections Canada’s planning.

Dr. Tam also indicated that different roles and situations needed to be considered by participants in the electoral process when conducting risk assessments for various scenarios and elements of a campaign period. She noted that the Government of Canada webpage has two helpful resources that offer practical advice for planners, organizers, operators, and employers about assessing and mitigating health risks in places and during activities.

b) Meetings between Public Health Agency Canada and Elections Canada

At her appearance on 29 October 2020, Dr. Barbara Raymond, Public Health Agency of Canada, was asked to table with the Committee all consultations that have taken place with the provinces and territories regarding election planning.

In response, on 3 December 2020, PHAC provided a written response to the Committee which stated that Elections Canada convened a meeting on 1 September 2020 of the Special Advisory Committee, a body whose membership includes the Chief Medical Officers of Health for provinces and territories. During this meeting, Elections Canada provided an overview of their planning for an election during the pandemic.

Furthermore, officials from Elections Canada and PHAC met 17 times between 4 June 2020 and 30 October 2020. A table containing the date and a brief description of the 17 meetings is found in Appendix D.

c) Public health reference materials PHAC shared with Elections Canada

During her appearance before the Committee on 29 October 2020, Dr. Raymond was asked to table with the Committee examples of the risk and mitigation strategies that PHAC has recommended to Elections Canada.

In a written response received on 3 December 2020, PHAC provided the Committee with 12 public health website resources that have been shared with Elections Canada to assist with their readiness for a general election held during the pandemic. The topics of 11 of these resources are listed below and the sites can be accessed at Government of Canada website: [Coronavirus disease \(COVID-19\): Guidance documents](#):

- Risk mitigation tool for workplaces/businesses operating during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Advice for essential retailers during COVID19 pandemic;
- How businesses and employees can stay safe while operating during COVID-19;
- Community-based measures to mitigate the spread of COVID-19 in Canada;
- A framework for risk assessment and mitigation in community settings during the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Risk mitigation tool for gatherings and events operating during the COVID-19 pandemic; and
- COVID-19: Cleaning and disinfecting.

Further, PHAC provided the Committee with the weblink to the [Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety](#).

d) COVID-19 outbreaks in Canada (March to October 2020)

During her appearance before the Committee on 29 October 2020, Dr. Raymond was asked to table with the Committee data on the new number of COVID-19 cases as of that date, the cumulative number of cases, percentage of positive tests, and the number of people tested per 100,000 population, for all the provinces and territories.



In a written response received on 3 December 2020, PHAC provided the Committee with the following data about COVID-19 in Canada:

On 29 October 2020, there were 80 outbreaks reported in Canada. The cumulative count of outbreaks from 12 March 2020 to 19 October 2020 was 2,757.181

181 The Public Health Agency of Canada notes the following about its data on outbreaks in Canada: These counts include all outbreaks with two or more cases, with the exception of long-term care facilities, where an outbreak of one case or more was counted. Due to the timing and nature of reporting outbreaks, this may be an underestimation of outbreaks, and in the case of multi-jurisdictional outbreaks, these may have been reported by more than one public health authority.

Table 4—Provincial and territorial COVID-19 data: new cases, total cases, percentage of positive tests and people tested per 100,00 (as of 29 October 2020)

Province/territory	New cases in last 24 hours	Total cases	Percentage of positive tests	People tested per 100,000
British Columbia	234	14,109	2.30%	11,942.0
Alberta	477	27,042	2.10%	28,711.7
Saskatchewan	82	2,990	1.40%	17,557.4
Manitoba	193	4,894	2.20%	17,877.6
Ontario	934	73,819	1.50%	33,382.1
Quebec	1,030	103,844	5.10%	22,226.0
Newfoundland and Labrador	0	291	0.60%	9,946.7
New Brunswick	4	341	0.40%	10,724.0
Nova Scotia	0	1,102	1.00%	11,519.4
Prince Edward Island	0	64	0.10%	30,342.1
Yukon	1	23	0.60%	9,800.8
Northwest Territories	1	10	0.20%	12,093.4
Nunavut	N/A	0	0.00%	7,699.9
Total	2,956	228,542	2.40%	24,920.2

Source: Data provided from the Public Health Agency Canada laboratory tests, as of 29 October 2020.



**Table 5—COVID-19 cases and total cases in Canada’s ten most populous cities
(as of 29 October 2020)**

City/Health Region	Province	Active Cases	Total Cases
Vancouver Coastal Health	British Columbia	46	4,590
Calgary Zone	Alberta	212	11,979
Edmonton Zone	Alberta	197	9,706
Winnipeg Regional Health Authority	Manitoba	141	3,096
City of Toronto Health Unit	Ontario	431	27,961
City of Ottawa Health Unit	Ontario	58	6,830
City of Hamilton Health Unit	Ontario	13	1,751
Waterloo Health Unit	Ontario	14	2,114
Region of Montreal	Quebec	243	41,894
National Capital Region	Ontario/Quebec	119	8,631

e) Health advice for campaigning

During her appearance before the Committee on 29 October 2020, Dr. Raymond was asked by the Committee to provide a written response about guidelines or best practices that PHAC recommends political parties could adopt for use during an election period. On 3 December 2020, the Committee received a written response from PHAC.

In general terms, PHAC recommended that the health protocols put in place for campaigning be used in combination or layered to strengthen their overall effectiveness in mitigating the risk of COVID-19 transmission. PHAC also noted that mitigation strategies would differ depending on settings, activities and participants, as well as the local epidemiology.

Should a campaign decide to hold a rally or large gathering, the event should be planned in alignment with jurisdictional recommendations on the size limits of gatherings and the implementation of public health measures.

A health risk assessment should be performed at campaign offices to inform that office’s operations, activities and events. Once risks are identified, a mitigation plan that follows the modified hierarchy of controls should be implemented (i.e., physical distancing, engineering controls, administrative controls, personal protective equipment/non-

medical masks). PHAC emphasized that it is important to carry out this process in collaboration with the appropriate provincial/territorial/regional/local public health authorities.

PHAC noted that Elections Canada has also published advice for how to federal parties can canvass safely during the COVID-19 pandemic.

PHAC also provided guidelines for important basic personal practices to reduce the spread of COVID-19, such as:

- remaining at home if the person experiences symptoms of COVID-19, even if mild;
- maintaining physical distancing of 2 metres from others outside of the immediate household;
- performing regular hand hygiene, proper respiratory etiquette and avoid touching one's face;
- cleaning and disinfecting personal surfaces and objects; and
- wearing a non-medical mask or face covering when in public

ii. Saskatchewan

a) COVID-19 cases for Saskatchewan during the provincial election period

During his appearance before the Committee on 5 November 2020, Dr. Saqib Shahab, Saskatchewan's Chief Medical Health Officer, was asked to table with the Committee the range of COVID-19 cases in Saskatchewan, both daily and on average, during the 2020 provincial election period. The election period began 29 September 2020 and ended 26 October 2020. In addition to being provided with the data for Saskatchewan, the Committee also asked for data for the cities of Regina, Saskatoon and Prince Albert.

In a written response received on 25 November 2020, the Government of Saskatchewan provided the Committee with the following information:

- The range of COVID-19 cases (daily and average) during the campaign period for Saskatchewan was 5 to 78 new cases per day, with a new case 7-day average of 10.9 to 57.4 cases per day;



- The range of COVID-19 cases (daily and average) during the campaign period for the Regina Subzone was 0 to 20 new cases per day with a new case 7-day average of 1.4 to 10.4 cases per day;
- The range of COVID-19 cases (daily and average) during the campaign period for the Saskatoon Subzone was 0 to 33 new cases per day with a new case 7-day average of 2.7 to 20.6 cases per day; and
- The range of COVID-19 cases (daily and average) during the campaign period for the Prince Albert (North Central 2) Subzone was 0 to 12 new cases per day with a new case 7-day average of 0 to 5.9 cases per day.

b) Provincial health guidance for administering the vote in long-term care facilities

During his appearance before the Committee on 5 November 2020, Dr. Shahab was asked to table the health guidance that his office prepared for administering the vote at long-term care facilities. In a written response received on 25 November 2020, the Government of Saskatchewan provided the Committee with a link to a webpage entitled, [*Recommendations for Patient/Resident Voting*](#), found on the Saskatchewan Health Authority's website.

The information on that site pertains to the practices to be followed by patients, residents, health care providers, elections officials, staff and volunteers when taking part in voting activities within Saskatchewan Health Authority (SHA) facilities.

The advice for patients and residents included:

- patients and residents who are suspected or confirmed COVID-19 positive will be able to vote in their room only;
- mobile patients and residents may leave their room to go to a voting area;
- patients and residents must perform hand sanitizing and wear a mask; and
- patients and residents who vote in their room must perform hand hygiene prior to handling the ballot.

The advice for elections officials and volunteers included:

- upon entry into a facility, officials and volunteers must sanitize their hands and wear a mask. In addition, hand sanitizing must occur when entering or exiting a unit, and when leaving the facility;
- at the polling station, officials and volunteers will be asked to maintain 2 metre physical distancing from patients, residents and staff at all times; and
- for in-room voting, officials and volunteers can supervise voting procedures from outside the doorway while a staff member assists the patient or resident with voting.

The advice for staff of long-term care facilities included:

- staff who are required to assist patients or residents with in-room voting must wear personal protective equipment;
- place the ballot on a clipboard, cover a table top or firm surface with a paper towel and place the clipboard on the covered surface;
- when the voting process is complete, remove personal protective equipment inside the room and perform hand hygiene; and
- use facility approved disinfectant wipes to clean items taken into the patient's or resident's room (e.g., pens and clipboards) prior to moving on to the next room.

c) Provincial health guidelines for door-to-door canvassing or campaigning

During his appearance before the Committee on 5 November 2020, Dr. Shahab was asked by the Committee to provide a written response about the health guidance that his office prepared for door-to-door canvassing or campaigning during the COVID-19 pandemic. In a written response received on 25 November 2020, the Government of Saskatchewan provided the Committee with a link to a webpage entitled, [*Door-to-Door Canvassing and Sales Guidelines*](#), found on the Government of Saskatchewan's website.

According to this webpage, door-to-door sales and canvassing is permitted in Saskatchewan as of 21 July 2020. However, canvassers are told to be aware that the public may not be comfortable with this type of activity at their place of residence.

Guidelines for use by canvassers and campaigners include:



- no door-to-door activities should occur if the canvasser or campaigner feels ill or is experiencing COVID-19-like symptoms;
- two metres of physical distance must be maintained at all times;
- no direct contact between canvassers/campaigners and public is permitted;
- canvassers or campaigners should be provided with their own pencil/pen and should limit sharing with colleagues;
- whenever possible, use contactless forms of payment; and
- if canvassing/campaigning in groups, only those from the same household should share vehicles.

E. Groups Representing Electors facing Barriers

i. The Ontario Long Term Care Association

On 12 November 2020, during her appearance before the Committee, Donna Duncan, Ontario Long Term Care Association, was asked to table with the Committee information about staffing needs in long-term care facilities in Ontario and staffing statistics at these facilities.

On 9 December 2020, Ms. Duncan provided the Committee with the weblink to the [*Long-Term Care Staffing Study*](#), prepared in July 2020. The study noted that long-term care facilities in Ontario employed over 100,000 staff.¹⁸² However, during the COVID-19 pandemic, 38 facilities reported critical staffing shortages. The largest proportion of missing shifts were among personal support workers (PSW). For example, one facility reported 60 vacant PSW shifts daily.¹⁸³ Shortages existed in other staffing categories, such as registered nurses.

The study further noted that, in general terms, while the demand for long-term care has increased, healthcare staffing levels have not kept pace. There has been a documented decline in the nursing workforce. Among PSWs, 50% are retained in the health care

182 Government of Ontario, [*Long-Term Care Staffing Study - Long-Term Care Staffing Study Advisory Group July 30, 2020*](#), p. 7.

183 *Ibid.*, p. 16.

sector for fewer than 5 years, and 43% left the sector due to burnout of working short staffed.¹⁸⁴ This reinforces Ms. Duncan's earlier testimony that:

The more condensed and more defined the process can be, the more contained it can be. Certainly we think that the easier it can be, the better. We would prefer something that is not overly prolonged, given the demands on staff [...].¹⁸⁵

Ms. Duncan also indicated that it was not possible to obtain the comprehensive information regarding full staffing needs across Ontario, as requested by the Committee. She indicated that the Government of Ontario had begun to collect this information.

ii. The Canadian Association for Long Term Care

On 12 November 2020, during his appearance before the Committee, Jason Lee, the Canadian Association for Long Term Care, was asked to table with the Committee written responses to multiple questions related to COVID-19 and long-term care facilities in Canada. On 8 December 2020, Mr. Lee provided the Committee with responses to the questions posed to him.

However, Mr. Lee notes that the data in his responses relies on indicators that have been captured and reported differently across the country. This is due to capacity, implementation and resource challenges faced by long-term care facilities with respect to data collection. To that end, Mr. Lee stated that governments needed to make investments in data solutions that are aimed at improving the health system and enable better care provision in long-term care facilities.

A summary of the questions posed to Mr. Lee during his appearance before the Committee and his written responses are provided below:

1. How many long-term care facilities are in outbreak across all provinces at this time?

As of 4 December 2020, 1,898 facilities were in outbreak.

2. How many active staff cases of COVID-19 are there at this time across all provinces?

184 Ibid., p. 9 and 10.

185 PROC, *Evidence*, 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 9, 12 November 2020, 1140 (Ms. Donna Duncan, Chief Executive Officer, Ontario Long Term Care Association).



As of 4 December 2020, there have been a total of 13,968 staff cases of COVID-19.

3. How many active resident cases of COVID-19 are there at this time across all provinces?

As of 4 December 2020, there were a total of 29,405 COVID-19 cases among residents living in long-term care facilities.

4. How many deaths have there been in long-term care facilities due to COVID-19?

As of 4 December 2020, there have been 8,958 deaths in long-term care facilities due to COVID-19.

5. Is there data to indicate when there was increase in deaths as part of the second wave of COVID-19?

As of 4 June 2020, 6,236 residents living in long-term care facilities had died due to COVID-19. Since then, the number of total resident deaths in long-term care increased to 7,411 by 1 October 2020, followed by another spike by 4 December 2020, with a total of 8,958 deaths among residents living in long-term care facilities. In the months of October and November, the increase in deaths was 1,547.

6. It was reported that the Government of Quebec committed to hiring 8,000 people by mid-September 2020. Has that happened? Can you table with the Committee how many people have been hired?

Unfortunately, the Canadian Association for Long Term Care was unable to quantify how many people had been hired in Quebec.

7. It was reported that the Government of British Columbia committed to hire and train up to 7,000 people as health care aides in long-term care facilities. Can you table with the Committee how many people have been hired?

Funding was provided to long-term care facility operators and recruitment was ongoing. As of 9 November 2020, the following data was available:

- Approximately 826 full-time equivalents had been hired across all health authorities;
 - 8,949 participants had expressed interest in the program and nearly 5,000 had undergone a preliminary interview/screening process;
 - 101 health-care support worker positions had been allocated across British Columbia through early adopter cohorts;
 - Training was being done in collaboration with five post-secondary institutions: Selkirk College, College of New Caledonia, Langara College, Vancouver Community College and North Island College.
8. What outreach has been done by Elections Canada to the Canadian Association for Long Term Care? Have you had meetings about how to have elections in long-term care? Could you table the dates of any meetings?

Elections Canada has not reached out to the Canadian Association for Long Term Care to date, but some association members had been consulted about their specific ridings.

iii. The Canadian National Institute for the Blind

During her appearance before the Committee on 12 November 2020, Diane Bergeron, Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), was asked to table with the Committee a report entitled, *Recommendations from CNIB Foundation to Elections Canada - Enhancing the secrecy and independence of voting for Canadians with sight loss*.

On 7 December 2020, Ms. Bergeron provided the Committee with a copy of the report. It contains the CNIB's recommendations to make Canada's electoral system more accessible for people who are blind or partially sighted. The report states that there are 1.5 million Canadians who are blind or partially sighted, as well as those with deteriorating sight due to age and electors with multiple and compounding disabilities.

The recommendations contained in the report are as follows:

- That Elections Canada hold a two-day polling period on a Friday and Saturday or Sunday and Monday to include at least one polling day with regularly scheduled public transit;



- That Elections Canada provide poll workers with face masks that have clear windows over the mouth to facilitate lip reading for electors who are hard of hearing or deaf;
- That Elections Canada explore online and/or telephone voting options to facilitate independent and secret ballots for Canadians who are blind or partially sighted or who have other disabilities;
- That Elections Canada prepare a policy around the use of smartphone applications at the polls to alleviate confusion when voters who are blind or partially sighted use mobile applications to read and mark the ballot;
- That Elections Canada explore electronic voting tabulators with audio output to allow Canadians who are blind or partially sighted to vote independently;
- That Elections Canada explore electronic voting at home for electors with disabilities so they can use their preferred adaptive equipment at home;
- That Elections Canada update the style of the ballot and voter information card to adhere to CNIB's clear print guidelines. Specifically, CNIB recommends the use of high contrast colours for font and background, such as black and white; and
- That the Government of Canada include intervention for voters who are deafblind as part of their accessible offerings on election day – just as Elections Canada provides sign language interpretation for voters who are deaf.

iv. Council of Canadians with Disabilities

During her appearance before the Committee on 12 November 2020, Jewelles Smith, Council of Canadians with Disabilities, was asked to table with the Committee any additional recommendations for amendments to the CEA, beyond those she made before the Committee, the names of the organizations that have council seats, and the number of COVID-19 cases that have happened in group residences.

On 7 December 2020, Ms. Smith provided the Committee with a written response to the questions posed to her.

Ms. Smith notes that during her appearance before the Committee, she provided the majority of the recommendations for amendments to the CEA that the Council of Canadians with Disabilities favours. She added the following additional recommendations:

- use vouching photos that have the names of candidates;
- improve independent voting for Canadians who are blind/low vision, or have a communication disability, including the option to vote by phone;
- increase the availability of American Sign Language for voters;
- improved access to vote by mail;
- on written materials, use font size and font choices that accommodate dyslexia and are larger for easier reading;
- educate candidates on the need to create inclusive events during campaigns; and
- ensure all voting locations meet the accessibility standards in the CEA.

The following 15 organizations have seats on the Council of Canadians with Disabilities:

- Disability Alliance BC Society;
- Voice of Albertans with Disabilities;
- Saskatchewan Voice of People with Disabilities;
- Manitoba League of Persons with Disabilities;
- Citizens with Disabilities – Ontario;
- Confédération des organismes de personnes handicapées du Québec;
- Nova Scotia League for Equal Opportunities;
- PEI Council of People with Disabilities;
- Coalition of Persons with Disabilities – NFLD and Labrador;



- Alliance for Equality of Blind Canadians;
- Canadian Association of the Deaf;
- National Educational Assembly of Disabled Students;
- National Network for Mental Health;
- Thalidomide Victims Association; and
- N.W.T. Disabilities Council (affiliate/non-voting member).

With respect to the number of COVID-19 cases that have happened in group residences, Ms. Smith indicated that the mandate of her organization does not include compiling these figures.

F. Political parties

As part of its study on conducting a federal general election during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Committee considered it important to seek the perspectives on this topic from the registered political parties that have members elected to the House of Commons. At its meeting on 5 November 2020, the Committee concurred in the First Report of the Subcommittee on Agenda and Procedure. That report contained the following section:

That, in relation to its study on the conduct of the federal election during the COVID-19 pandemic, the committee instruct the Chair to write to the presidents of all registered parties, with at least one elected member of Parliament in the House of Commons, requesting that they provide written responses, containing their recommendations, concerns, advice on how a federal election could be conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Committee received responses from representatives of every party with members in the House of Commons.

i. Liberal Party of Canada

On 15 January 2020, the Committee received a written submission from Suzanne Cowan, President of the Liberal Party of Canada. In her letter, Ms. Cowan provided the

Committee with the Liberal Party's perspectives on matters of importance for the administration of an election during the pandemic.

Ms. Cowan stated that Liberal Party believes that all options for improving the procedures for voting during a pandemic should be given in-depth study by the Committee. These options included examining voting procedures, counting of special ballots, and constituting alternative polling stations to increase accessibility to voters.

According to Ms. Cowan, importance should be placed on respecting public health guidelines, protecting vulnerable populations and ensuring accessibility.

Further, she stated that importance should be placed on informing voters about all of their options and opportunities. Ms. Cowan stated that her party favoured ensuring that voters who wish to cast their ballot by mail may do so effortlessly and safely.

ii. Conservative Party of Canada

On 22 January 2021, the Committee received a written submission from Scott Lamb, President of the Conservative Party of Canada (CPC). In it, Mr. Lamb provides the CPC's perspectives on the CEO's report and makes additional recommendations about the conduct of a potential federal general election during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mr. Lamb indicated that the CPC supports the recommendation that the CEO made in his report about extending the voting period to take place over a Saturday, Sunday and Monday.

With respect to the use of special ballots (i.e. mail-in ballots), Mr. Lamb stated that Canadians should be provided with all the necessary tools and information about their use. As importantly, special ballots ought to be cast and returned before the close of polls on the final day of the election period. He indicates that allowing mail-in ballots received 24 hours after the close of the polls to be counted could potentially delay announcements about results, which could damage Canadians' faith in their democratic process.

The CPC recommends that Elections Canada, as part of its advertising campaign for a potential election, work with Canada Post to publish ballot submission guidelines to ensure ballots arrive in time to be counted.

Further, Mr. Lamb stated that the CPC recommends:



- a longer writ period, as this would provide administrative advantages for Elections Canada in implementing appropriate public health measures;
- that the CEO ought to proactively submit any additional changes made to the electoral process to representatives of the major political parties for discussion and approval; and
- that the CEO and the government give serious consideration to making use of rapid-tests to help eliminate the risk of exposing vulnerable populations to COVID-19.

iii. Bloc Québécois

On 2 December 2020, the Committee received a written submission from Josée Beaudin, General Director of the Bloc Québécois. It contained the Bloc's advice and recommendations concerning the CEO's special report, and makes additional recommendations for amendments to the CEA.

With respect to the recommendations made by the CEO, Ms. Beaudin stated that the Bloc would be in favour of the government swiftly introducing new legislation that amended the CEA to:

- change election day from Monday to a two-day election period of Saturday and Sunday;
- authorize the CEO to strengthen voting parameters in long-term care facilities; and
- adjust the CEO's adaptation power under the CEA to provide that the CEO can adapt the Act to comply with up-to-date health guidance.

Ms. Beaudin emphasized that the new legislation needed to respect agreements with Quebec and provincial authorities.

Further, Ms. Beaudin recommended that the CEA be amended to

- permit candidates to collect electronic signatures for nomination papers;
- limit the number of political party representatives to one per polling station and that this person have access to all polling division tables;

- allow Elections Canada to hire election workers who do not reside in the electoral district or who do not have voter status.

Ms. Beaudin also stated that her party holds strong reservations about the CEO's proposal to accept outer envelopes until 6:00 p.m. on the day following the final day of voting, as this could potentially delay the announcement of election results.

iv. The New Democratic Party

On 30 November 2020, the Committee received a written submission from the New Democratic Party of Canada (NDP). It contained the NDP's perspectives and recommendations on proposed administrative and legislative changes to Canada's electoral framework and services.

According to the letter, the NDP identified the following matters as key priorities where amendments to the CEA should be made for a federal general election held during the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Increasing options for voting by mail. However, since voting by mail is “not a panacea,” increasing voting by mail options should not be coupled with any reduction of voting hours, polling locations, or other voting services;
- Increasing the number of days for advanced voting, and expanding election day voting from one day to two, held over a weekend. In addition, the NDP does not favour any reduction in polling hours and it recommends that Elections Canada secure more and/or larger polling locations;
- Eliminating transfer certificates.¹⁸⁶ Voters should be allowed to vote in any polling station in their riding and the transfer certificate system is confusing and widely misunderstood by both electors and elections staff;
- Indigenous electors living on-reserve must continue to be able to vote on-reserve; and
- Police stations must not continue to be used as voting locations.

186 Sections 158 and 159 of the *Canada Elections Act* permit transfer certificates to be issued to an elector to allow that person to vote at a polling station other than their own.



In addition, the letter contains information that expands on the party's perspectives on its key priorities, and identifies other matters of importance related to a pandemic election. These are:

a) Voting by mail

- Increased voting by mail services should extend to all future elections;
- Elections Canada should ensure that vote-by-mail ballots have the largest window for acceptance, even if this delays voting results following election day;
- Permit voters to register with Elections Canada over the phone and in-person;
- Ensure that voting by mail is restriction free and requires no special circumstances; and
- Permit electors who register to vote by mail to have the additional option to vote in-person, provided that the elector only votes once.

b) Counting of special and mail-in ballots

- Counting of ballots should start early and continue beyond election day; mail-in ballots should be accepted up to and including on election day (e.g., ballots postmarked on election day should be accepted);
- Counting of special ballots should occur both locally and centrally prior to, on and after election day; and
- Security procedures for special ballots must be strengthened (e.g., alarm and security systems, dual-lock rooms, and a plan for nightly scrutineering of storage), training of local officials increased, and checks and balances involving party representatives included.

c) Polling locations

- Larger polling places should be used in certain areas even if that means that some electors will need to travel further to vote. However, the NDP notes that the selection of voting locations needs to take into account

that many potential locations are not accessible by transit, or in remote locations only accessible by car. Elections Canada must ensure that low-income and rural populations do not face undue burdens when attempting to vote. Seasonal road travel conditions must be considered, along with communities that have community-monitored travel restrictions.

d) Continuation of the Vote on Campus Program

- The NDP strongly opposes the suspension during the pandemic by Elections Canada of the Vote on Campus Program. Many university and college campuses are open and continue to provide student services. Students often have difficulties meeting the identification requirements to register and vote.

e) Transfer certificates

- The transfer certificate system places a large and unnecessary burden on voters and creates frustration and disenfranchisement. Voters should be able to choose any polling station when voting in a federal election and have their ballots counted as special ballots. Many jurisdictions in Canada have such a system and there is no reason not to implement it federally, especially given the circumstances of an election during a pandemic.

f) Candidate declaration and social distancing

- The NDP supports the use of videoconferences to receive solemn declarations by candidates.

g) Candidates and candidates' representatives

- The NDP supports the issuance of public health guidelines to be followed by candidates and their representatives. Further, the NDP recommends that political parties and chief agents have the ability to appoint a "super representative" whose role it would be to submit paperwork and documentation on behalf of candidates via the Election Services portal.



h) Canvassing During the Election Period

- Canvassing by candidates in buildings is a legally protected right and needs to be upheld and maintained. No owner or manager should have the unfettered right to bar candidates from entering their properties. Standards for entry into buildings should be developed. Requests to bar candidates from entering buildings should be made and approved by Elections Canada and/or local health authorities and notice posted on the property.
- Exceptions could be made, such as for high-risk long-term care facilities, but these exceptions should be determined by Elections Canada.
- Elections Canada should establish guidelines for canvassing procedures that candidates and their representatives must follow. There should be a complaint procedure for electors in cases where individuals not following the guidelines.

i) Joint meeting of confirmed candidates

- The NDP supports flexibility in determining how candidate meetings can be conducted during a pandemic. All candidates should have the opportunity to participate in these meetings virtually.

j) Public inspection of nomination papers

- The NDP supports allowing the public inspection of nomination papers. However, the NDP concedes that by allowing the public inspection of nomination papers to be done online, it would be difficult to put in place measures to ensure the protection of personal information or from preventing individuals from gaining permanent copies of these documents.

k) Single-use pencils

- The NDP supports the use of single-use pencils for electors to mark their ballot. However, the NDP holds concerns that Elections Canada must ensure that all voters who show up to vote must have access to a ballot and a pencil. Elections Canada should plan for more electors, not fewer.

l) Collection of nomination signatures

- Elections Canada should consider how the process of signature collection by candidates will be conducted during the pandemic and should consider accepting electronic signatures.

v. Green Party of Canada

On 12 February 2020, the Committee received a written submission from Elizabeth May, the member for Saanich—Gulf Islands. It contained the Green Party of Canada’s perspectives on the conduct and outcomes of the federal by-elections and provincial elections during the COVID-19 pandemic. The letter also makes recommendations concerning the conduct of a federal general election held during the pandemic.

Ms. May stated that the Green Party strongly urges that no elections take place during the pandemic, as this would not better serve democracy.

However, if a federal general election was to be called, Ms. May indicated that the federal and provincial public health officers be empowered to dictate the allowable conduct for the campaign. Further, Ms. May recommended that

- the Governor General must confer with public health officials to confirm that the risk to public health is minimal;
- the campaign writ period be extended considerably;
- the days for voting in person and for voting by mail be extended;
- political campaign advertising by radio and television not be permitted, except for free public service announcements on all media (including access to social media platforms); and
- the CEA be amended to ensure “truth in advertising” provisions applying to political parties and third party groups.

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In its interim report entitled [*Report 7 - Interim Report: Protecting Public Health and Democracy During a Possible Pandemic Election*](#), presented to the House of Commons on 11 December 2020, the Committee focused the recommendations that it made on



the matters raised in the CEO's special report on the challenges of holding an election during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Specifically, the Committee limited its recommendations to the following three topics: extending the voting period, long-term care voting and adjusting the CEO's adaptation power. The Committee invites readers to refer to the Interim Report to find its recommendations and reflections on those topics.

Federal general elections are complicated events. Moreover, a general election held during the COVID-19 pandemic would be especially complex. As such, the considerations, elements and factors that enter into the planning and administering of a successful election go beyond those three matters that the Committee addressed in the recommendations found in its interim report.

The Committee makes the following recommendations to the House of Commons to help better ensure that the health and safety of electors, election workers and electoral participants is made the top priority. Further, the Committee considers ensuring the fullest possible participation for all eligible electors to be essential. The Committee's recommendations are informed by the breadth of advice it heard from representatives of electors facing barriers, communities, election management bodies, public health authorities, as well as experts on the democratic process. Of note, some of the following recommendations refers to testimony captured in the interim report.

A. Health and safety

Ensuring the health and safety of electors, election workers and participants in the electoral process is a primary concern for the Committee, in the event a federal general election is held during the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the Committee is of the view:

That COVID-19 is an unparalleled threat to the health, social and economic well-being of Canadians and the global community.

That Elections Canada recognizes and takes into consideration the regional nature of COVID-19 and new variants outbreaks across the country, as it undertakes its planning and operationalizing of any election during the COVID-19 pandemic.

That protecting the health and safety of Canadians must be of paramount importance and a consideration in all planning and operationalizing of any election during the COVID-19 pandemic.

That all federal political parties be required to publish a pandemic preparedness plan, guided by public health advice.

That every effort is made to ensure contact tracing is in place for all electoral districts throughout the election.

B. Duration of the election period

The Committee heard from Mr. Perrault that the length of the election period was the most important factor involved in holding a successful election during a pandemic. He encouraged the government to set the longest possible election period. Similarly, during their respective appearance before the Committee, the CEO's of Saskatchewan, British Columbia and New Brunswick's all stated that, for administering an election during the COVID-19 pandemic, their preference for the length of an election period was longer rather than shorter.

Moreover, Ms. Blumczynska stressed that a longer election period would allow for better communication with voters, while Mr. Orb indicated that a longer election would permit Elections Canada to prepare adequately.

However, Mr. Orb also warned that an election period lasting too long could weigh on electors, while the Committee heard from Ms. Duncan that her association had concerns that a longer election period could place a greater burden on staff at long-term care facilities.

The Committee does not wish to make recommendations with respect to the length of the election period at this time.

C. Electoral advisory body

In British Columbia and New Brunswick, election legislation requires the establishment of year-round election advisory committees.¹⁸⁷ These committees are chaired by the respective CEOs and their membership is composed of certain members of registered political parties. Their role is to, among other things, advise the CEO on the application of their respective election acts.

187 In British Columbia's *Election Act*, the relevant sections on the advisory committee are sections 14 to 16; in New Brunswick's *Election Act*, the relevant sections on the advisory committee are 154 to 161.



In Saskatchewan, where such a statutory body is not mandated, Dr. Boda established an advisory body in the lead-up to their 2020 election. Membership was composed of the Chief Electoral Officer, the Chief Medical Health Officer, and the two House leaders from the Legislative Assembly. The group met once a month to discuss how COVID-19 could affect the conduct of the provincial election.

At the federal level, section 21.1 of the CEA requires that an Advisory Committee of Political Parties be established, with a membership that consists of the CEO and two representatives of each registered party appointed by the party's leader. The role of the committee is to provide the CEO with advice and recommendations relating to elections and political financing.

The Committee recommends:

That the advisory committee of political parties as established by Elections Canada consult and receive guidance from the Chief Public Health Officer and the Provincial and Territorial Public Health Officers on running an electoral process during COVID-19.

That a broader stakeholder advisory group be established to consult and gain input from other key stakeholder groups representing individuals from segments of the population who are disproportionately at-risk of negative health outcomes due to COVID-19, and that these groups work with the Chief Electoral Officer and Public Health Officer to determine the best way to support individuals in exercising their democratic right.

D. Administering the vote to electors facing barriers

i. Indigenous voters

The Committee heard that in British Columbia, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick, close and constant contact was maintained with voters in Indigenous communities. Arrangements were put in place in British Columbia and Saskatchewan to ensure that Indigenous electors could be provided with the ability to vote, even if certain communities decided to restrict entry due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Further, Ms. Amber Potts, from the Assembly of First Nations, told the Committee that Elections Canada ought to maintain close and constant contact with Indigenous communities, while respecting their right to restrict entry into their jurisdictions. Similarly, Mr. LeClair indicated that ensuring adequate communication took place about voting procedures and important dates was crucial to enfranchise Métis electors.

Ms. Potts and Mr. LeClair both commented on access to vote by mail for indigenous voters. Ms. Potts indicated the process for voting by mail needed to be clear and accessible. Support may also need to be provided to elders in terms of getting to a polling place, language assistance, and assistance in respect of possible disabilities. For his part, Mr. LeClair told the Committee that vote by mail improves accessibility for Métis electors living in rural and remote areas, and that community networks should be used to inform Métis communities of that option.

Mr. LeClair described the issue of access to polling places, both in terms of the number of locations and electors' ability to easily access them, as a potential barrier to voting.

The Committee is of the view:

That holding a federal election during a pandemic does pose a considerable risk that Canadians who already experience barriers to exercising their vote may not be able to vote, or may choose not to vote because the barriers to doing so simply make it feel too difficult.

That Elections Canada should, without delay, establish a team to reach out proactively to Canada's Indigenous communities to engage with them about the challenges they may face during a pandemic election, how to establish a polling station in their community if they wish to, including the question of providing training to people in the community who want to work as election staff, and how to facilitate mail-in voting.

ii. Persons with disabilities

The Committee heard that people with disabilities will likely face increased barriers to voting in the context of the pandemic. Ms. Smith and Ms. Bergeron emphasized the importance of considering the impacts of health and safety measures and changes to voting processes on people with disabilities. Alternative voting options, including vote by mail and vote by phone, as well as allowing vouchers to vouch for more than one elector, were identified as potential ways to mitigate barriers to voting for these individuals.

Representatives of People First of Canada also spoke about specific barriers to voting for electors with intellectual disabilities and noted that providing a greater variety of voting options would increase accessibility.

The Committee recommends:



That Elections Canada apply an accessibility lens in all of its electoral and pandemic considerations, and that measures are tested by qualified people with disabilities before implementation.

That additional community relations officers, able to provide accessibility, be made available to ensure that no new barriers to voting are created.

That Elections Canada ensure all voting locations are accessible for those living with disabilities, and that alternative methods of voting, such as mail-in ballots, are adequately accessible for electors who do not wish to leave their home.

That the CEO evaluate the possibility of expanding paratransit services for persons with physical or intellectual disabilities to offset the decrease in service on Saturdays and Sundays in some areas.

Further, the Committee is of the view:

That holding a federal election during a pandemic does pose a considerable risk and that Canadians who already experience barriers to exercising their vote may not be able to vote, or may choose not to vote because the barriers to doing so simply make it feel too difficult.

That Elections Canada should, without delay, consult with Canada's disability stakeholder organizations in order to create a list of accommodations it can deliver to people living with disabilities to help them overcome long-standing barriers to their exercise of the vote, as well as new challenges that would arise in the case of a federal election held during a pandemic.

iii. Canadians living in poverty

The Committee heard from Ms. Renaud that steps could be taken by Elections Canada to better ensure that electors experiencing poverty have full access to voting at an election held during the COVID-19 pandemic.

She noted that enhancing communication efforts to reach and inform Canadians living in poverty was important. Ms. Renaud favoured a longer period for voting as well as a clear and simple process for voting by mail. Further, Ms. Renaud advocated for assisting electors living in poverty in obtaining the identification required to vote, and expanding the number of polling places to include those frequented by or familiar to Canadians living in poverty.

The Committee therefore recommends:

That Elections Canada should, without delay, consult with Canada's poverty stakeholder organizations about the challenges that Canadians living in poverty may face during a pandemic election including a plan for how to assist Canadians living in poverty to obtain the identification required to vote and registering to vote.

iv. Students

Representatives of Canadian students told the Committee that enhanced communication with voting-aged students was an important element to ensuring their full participation at an election held during the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, Elections Canada ought to provide students with information that sets out the voting process in clear and simple terms, makes important deadlines known, and provides them with the options for how to vote. Further, the Committee heard that on-campus polling stations should be established for an election held during the pandemic.

At this time, the Committee does not wish to make recommendations with respect to this topic.

v. New Canadians

The Committee heard from Ms. Blumczynska that education and outreach, on the part of Elections Canada, would help to strengthen the participation of immigrants and refugees at an election held during the COVID-19 pandemic. In communicating with immigrant and refugee electors, it was crucial to offer a multitude of language options so that the information could be correctly understood by the intended audience. The information ought to clarify the electoral process and provide options about how to vote. However, Ms. Blumczynska cautioned the Committee that an outreach and education campaign about the electoral process for immigrants and refugees should not rely only printed material or online communications. Instead, Elections Canada ought to consider partnering with community networks to ensure their message is faithfully transmitted and received.

The Committee therefore recommends:

That Elections Canada develop a communications plan to clarify the electoral process and explain voting options to new Canadians. This plan should include partnering with community networks to maximize the accessibility of the message.



That Elections Canada make voting instructions available in as many languages as possible and allow Canadians to indicate on their mail-in ballot application what language they would like to receive their instructions in above and beyond either of Canada's official languages.

E. Voting by mail

The Committee heard from the CEOs of British Columbia, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and P.E.I. that, during their provincial elections held during the COVID-19 pandemic, they experienced significant increases in the demand by electors for voting by mail.

In British Columbia, there was an increase of about 7,200% from the 2017 to 2020 provincial election; in Saskatchewan, the use of mail-in ballots rose from 1% in 2016 to 12.5% in 2020; in New Brunswick, the increase in use of mail-in ballots went from less than 100 voters on average to 13,000 in 2020; and in the P.E.I. by-election, a large number of voters had applied for a mail-in ballot. Further, the Committee heard that, in British Columbia, steps were taken prior to the election to ensure the design of the voting package for mail-in ballots would minimize potential errors by voters. The packages were straightforward, user-friendly and contained instructions.

Mr. Perrault told the Committee that surveys indicated that about 4 million to 5 million voters would vote by mail in a federal general election held during the COVID-19 pandemic. He assured the Committee that steps had been taken to ensure that Elections Canada was prepared to process such an increase in mail-in ballots. Ms. Chayer stressed that Canada Post would be able to handle the increase in the number of mail-in ballots that an election during the pandemic could cause, and that extensive testing would take place prior to a possible election.

Vote by mail was identified by several witnesses as a means of increasing accessibility for electors facing barriers to voting, including for persons with disabilities, Indigenous voters, persons living in poverty, and students. However, other witnesses indicated that vote by mail could create additional difficulties for some electors, including people with intellectual disabilities and some immigrants and refugees. Online registration processes for vote by mail could also create challenges for Canadians living in rural areas where internet connectivity is limited.

The Committee recommends:

That Elections Canada expand, optimize and promote the mail-in process to increase awareness and prepare for a potential influx of mail-in ballots.

That a straightforward online application for mail-in ballots be put in place to ensure accessibility, eligibility and be user-friendliness.

That the Chief Electoral Officer be encouraged to take into account those that do not have access to printers/scanners when requesting mail-in ballots and consider an alternative method of proving identity.

That Elections Canada implement community drop boxes, with particular consideration given to remote locations that may have delays in mail service, and/or do not have easy access to a returning office.

That Elections Canada explore the use of a tracking mechanism to confirm receipt for mail-in votes.

That Elections Canada outline a plan to reconcile the number of special ballots received during the course of the election with the number of special ballots distributed, and that up-to-date information on who has received mail-in ballots be made available to candidates and registered political parties throughout the election.

That the Chief Electoral Officer implement an effective system for handling mail-in ballots that meets the expected increase in requests from electors wishing to vote remotely so that electors are not prevented from being able to exercise their right during the pandemic.

That registration for voting by mail should be available in-person, in addition to on-line. Elections Canada should consider partnering with Canada Post to make in-person registration at postal outlets possible.

That Canadians who apply for a mail-in ballot but do not vote by mail should not be prevented from voting in person.

F. Campaigning

The Committee heard that the election management bodies in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick and P.E.I. are not mandated by their respective legislatures to oversee campaigning activities.

However, in British Columbia, Saskatchewan and New Brunswick, guidelines for how to campaign safely during the COVID-19 pandemic were developed and provided to political parties. These guidelines were established by the office Chief Medical Health Officer, often in collaboration with the CEO and registered political parties. For example,



in British Columbia, a document was prepared which addressed the topics of canvassing strategies, campaign events and accepting political contributions.

In P.E.I., political parties submitted their campaign plans to the Chief Public Health Officer that they met with health standards and guidelines, and for approval.

The Committee recommends:

That the Advisory Committee and Political Parties, as established by the *Canada Elections Act*, consult and receive guidance from the Chief Public Health Officer, provincial and territorial public health officers and stakeholder groups representing populations who face a high risk of negative health outcomes due to COVID-19, or who may face additional barriers to voting in the pandemic context, and establish guidelines for campaigning that are consistent with the best public health advice and, to the greatest extent possible, mutually acceptable to as many of Canada's registered political parties as possible.

G. Communication with the public and stakeholders

The provincial CEOs and Chief Public Health Officers told the Committee about the importance of constant, clear and unified communication with the public to inform voters of not only how, when and where to vote, but to provide information about the health and safety measures that voters can expect in polling places and that voting is a safe activity.

Dr. Bonnie Henry, British Columbia's provincial health officer, told the Committee that the most important lesson her office learned about holding an election during the COVID-19 pandemic was "to connect early and often" with the public.¹⁸⁸ For his part, Dr. Williams told the Committee of the importance for Elections Canada to inform electors about the security standards in place at polling sites.

Mr. Perrault told the Committee that Elections Canada is planning on launching a communication campaign to properly inform electors about all of the safety measures that will be put in place at polling stations to reassure electors that going to a polling place to vote is a safe activity. This campaign will call to voters' attention the importance of alternative voting options and will be made available in a broad range of languages. The Committee heard from Ms. Chayer that deadlines related to mail-in ballots must be effectively communicated to the public.

188 Henry, 1100.

A number of witnesses stressed the importance of improving communication with groups facing specific barriers to voting, including by leveraging existing advocacy and groups for this purpose. As an example, Ms. Renaud told the Committee that communication in multiple languages between Elections Canada and voters living in poverty was important, and that shelter workers and homelessness advocates should be used to disseminate information. Ms. Blumczynska also pointed out the importance of communication in multiple languages for refugees and immigrants, particularly with respect to information on the Canadian government and parliamentary democracy.

The Committee recommends:

Recognizing the unique circumstances and challenges of holding a general election in a pandemic and the need to take a highly collaborative approach, that Elections Canada will work to clarify the roles and responsibilities of all the stakeholders involved.

That there is a clear and constant communication plan to educate voters on voting options and tailor a communication plan for Indigenous voters and other electors experiencing barriers.

That Elections Canada develop a communications plan, including clean and simple messages about protecting the health and safety of Canadians, what voters can expect in terms of protocols at polling stations, what alternative methods exist for voting, how to vote, where to vote and important dates, and the different ways to reach Elections Canada.

That Elections Canada include appropriate communications with mail-in ballots to ensure voters are aware of how they can vote should they miss the mail-in deadline.

That Elections Canada put in place a clear and constant communication campaign to properly inform electors about the safety measures that will be put in place to reassure voters that they can vote safely. The message must start early and must be communicated often.

That the Chief Electoral Officer work with various citizens' groups and organizations to provide the necessary information and to adequately inform electors about the changes to the electoral process due to the pandemic, and that special action be taken as soon as possible with Indigenous communities to explain the process for registering and for mail-in voting.



In addition to outlining the safety measures at polling places, that the Elections Canada’s planned communication campaign include specific guidance for those experiencing barriers due to COVID-19 and extensive information on mail-in voting.

That the Chief Electoral Officer provide electors with information at the beginning of the election campaign on the changes to the electoral process due to the pandemic, including:

- a. the health measures and guidelines that will be put in place at polling stations to ensure the safety of election workers and electors who will be voting in person;**
- b. the timing of, and instructions for, the different voting methods (advance, remote, in person, in long-term care facilities);**
- c. voting instructions for those experiencing barriers and persons who are self-isolating or who have tested positive for COVID-19.**

H. Voting under quarantine

The Committee heard that in New Brunswick, the vote needed to be administered to a small number of electors who were in quarantine as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. In those instances, electors had the option to contact Elections New Brunswick by email to request a special ballot. Election workers hand delivered and collected ballots from those voters.

The Committee recommends:

That Elections Canada should develop a plan in advance of any potential election for how voters who are required to quarantine within two weeks of the final day of the writ period will be able to vote.

I. Voting by phone

The Committee heard that during its 2020 election, British Columbia employed voting by telephone. This allowed electors who had contracted COVID-19 or who were in public health-mandated quarantine, to vote.

Saskatchewan’s CEO told the Committee that he was aware that British Columbia had used telephone voting in their 2020 provincial election, but that such a mechanism could not be implemented in Saskatchewan without changing the electoral law.

New Brunswick's CEO indicated to the Committee that Elections New Brunswick will consider implementing the option of voting over the phone for residents of long-term care facilities during the 2021 municipal elections.

Further, both Ms. Smith and Ms. Bergeron recommended adding vote by phone as an option for federal elections and stressed the importance of this option for people with disabilities. However, Ms. Fletcher indicated that the possibility of voting by phone might not be an option for electors with literacy issues.

Both Mr. Taylor Gunn and Ms. Delhon agreed that vote by phone should be an option considered for the federal election as it may encourage more people to vote. Mr. Orb indicated that vote by phone could be an interesting option for voters able to access landlines, but cautioned that given the challenges of rural connectivity, it was not a viable option for all electors.

The Committee recommends:

That Elections Canada should explore the options for establishing a vote by phone option.

J. Elections Workers

The Committee heard of the need to ensure the health and safety of election workers and to train them appropriately in the context of a pandemic. Dr. Williams recommended that a comprehensive training program for election workers be established. He also indicated that election workers should not move between different geographic areas to avoid risks of COVID-19 outbreaks.

The question of the recruitment of poll workers was raised by several witnesses. Ms. Fletcher recommended shortening the shifts of poll workers, as this would increase the likelihood that people with intellectual disabilities would apply. For his part, Mr. Gunn indicated that students could work as poll workers if the voting period was on a weekend.

The Committee recommends:

That Elections Canada work to develop a targeted recruitment strategy for poll workers that takes into account, the need for more human resources, scheduling changes and the need for shorter shifts, COVID-related health and safety protocols and training, distribution of personal protective equipment.



K. Conduct of the election

Multiple witnesses have told the Committee, including Canada's CEO, that holding a federal general election during the pandemic will undoubtedly pose extra challenges and difficulties for Elections Canada. The Committee is confident that Elections Canada has undertaken the diligent planning and preparedness necessary to deliver a successful and accessible election during the pandemic. Nevertheless, the Committee wishes to offer recommendations for the House's consideration that are specifically aimed at facilitating the administration of an election during the pandemic with the least possible disruption.

The Committee recommends:

That Elections Canada ensure that customized safety plans are implemented for electoral offices and polling stations.

That Elections Canada and the Chief Public Health Officer work together to develop a clearly articulated guidance document for site selection for advance polling locations and e-day polling locations, maintaining consistency between them whenever possibility.

That Elections Canada review and consider best practices from provinces that held elections during COVID-19, including, but not limited to: inclusion of IPAC specialists; choice of polling locations; number of polling stations and hours; mock-up of polling stations; number of personnel; installation of barrier protections in polling stations to protect poll staff, voters and campaign staff, such as scrutineers; training of poll workers on workplace guidelines and COVID-19 protocols; capacity limits in polling stations; cleaning protocols, sanitizers, personal protective equipment to protect poll staff, voters and campaign staff, such as scrutineers; inclusion of COVID compliance officers in polling stations; health and safety audits during the election and voting; and sign-in protocol for purposes of contact tracing.

That the Government commit to making rapid tests available to Elections Canada for the purpose of conducting an election during the COVID-19 pandemic.

That the government make amendments to the Canada Elections Act so that the Chief Electoral Officer can make the necessary changes should an election be held during the pandemic, including amendments to provisions relating to the Register of Electors and the nomination process, in order to ensure the safe conduct of the election campaign and to protect the health of electors, election workers and candidates. The Committee recommends that signatures in support of a nomination paper be collected electronically so as to avoid knocking on doors or soliciting signatures in public spaces.

With respect to the recruitment of election workers, that the Chief Electoral Officer provide comprehensive and mandatory training to election workers on health and safety measures to be followed during the voting period and the counting of votes, and that a summary of the guidelines issued by the respective provincial public health authority be provided to them.

In order to facilitate physical distancing and reduce the risk of spreading the virus at polling stations, the number of election workers be reduced and spread out among a greater number of polling stations.

L. Royal prerogative of dissolution

The royal prerogative is a series of reserve powers officially held by the Crown. However, over time, it became established that the bulk of the prerogative powers could be exercised only through and on advice of ministers responsible to Parliament. In the Canadian context, the Governor General must always follow the lawful and constitutional advice which is tendered by the federal Cabinet, provided the Cabinet enjoys the confidence of a majority in the House of Commons.¹⁸⁹

Among the prerogative powers currently held by the Governor General in Canada are those related to the legislature, including the summoning, proroguing and dissolution of parliament; granting of royal assent to bills; and legislating by Order in Council.

In 2007, Parliament adopted a law to hold federal elections on a fixed date, every four years on the third Monday in October. This law does not affect the prerogative power of the Governor General, including the power to dissolve Parliament at the Governor General's discretion. Since 2007, there have been four general elections: two held on the fixed date (2015 and 2019) and twice the House was dissolved prior to the fixed date (2008 and 2011).

The Committee recommends:

That the federal government commit to not calling a federal election during the pandemic unless it is defeated on a motion of non-confidence.

189 Peter Hogg, *Constitutional Law of Canada*, 5th Edition, Vol. 1, Thomson Carswell, 2010, p. 9-24.



M. Miscellaneous recommendations

In addition to the above recommendations, the Committee recommends:

That Elections Canada ensure a heightened effort to combat disinformation about elections.

That Elections Canada increase resources to respond to voter inquiries.

APPENDIX A

ELECTIONS CANADA COMMUNICATION PRODUCTS IN LANGUAGES OTHER THAN ENGLISH AND FRENCH AND USE OF ETHNIC MEDIA (ANNEX 6)

Voter Information Campaign: Heritage languages

The Voter Information Campaign is a **national multimedia campaign** that provides Canadians with all the information they need on **when, where and the ways to register and vote** during the federal general election.

The campaign will be delivered in **four phases** based on important dates, themes and activities in the electoral calendar:

Phase 1 – Registration (Day 33–24)

Remind electors (Canadian citizens at least 18 years old) that they can check if they are registered, update their address information or register to vote by either using the Online Voter Registration Service, visiting their Elections Canada office or calling Elections Canada at 1-800-463-6868

Phase 2 – Voter Information Card (Day 23-16)

Inform electors that, if they are registered to vote, they should receive a voter information card in the mail telling them where and when they can vote in the federal election. Also inform electors to contact Elections Canada if they did not receive a card or if it contains incorrect information

Phase 3 – Early Voting Options (Day 15–8)

Inform electors of the different options to vote in the federal election, including at their assigned polling station on election day or on advance polling days, at any Elections Canada office across Canada, or by mail

Phase 4 – Election Day (Day 7–0)

Remind electors of the date of the election, operation hours of polling stations, that they can still register at their polling station on election day, and to bring accepted ID when they go to vote

Two new components will be included in the Voter Information Campaign for the next general election:

Recruitment Campaign (enhanced from 2019)

Raise awareness on paid poll worker positions and encourage potential workers to apply online at elections.ca/jobs

Safety Campaign

Provide information on the measures in place to ensure that electors can register and cast their vote safely, and on the safety measures in place for election workers

The campaign includes ads in English, French and Inuktitut and in 30 other Indigenous or heritage languages (depending on the medium). This helps **maintain accessibility to essential information** for people who do not have a strong understanding of either official language. Delivering messages to ethnic and Indigenous communities in their mother tongue can be **perceived as more engaging**.

Investments

Ethnic media: \$1,271,646 (11% of total advertising campaign budget)

Indigenous media: \$543,403 (4.5% of total advertising campaign budget)

Digital

- All four phases
- Target by device and browser languages, as well as user behaviours through programmatic targeting
- Target through heritage language websites and apps
 - WeChat placements to target 100% Chinese-Canadian users
 - Additional heritage language targeting through social media
 - Network buys through EightPlus Media, Ethnique Média, EMTV and Lingua Ads
- In-language ads: Tagalog, simplified Chinese, traditional Chinese, Spanish, Arabic, Farsi and Punjabi

- 20 other languages targeted (serving English or French creatives)

TV

- Increase in programming compared with 2019
- Planned national and regional program-specific, in-language ads
 - Asian Television Network, Fairchild TV, Talentvision, Telelatino (TLN)
 - CHIN TV (Toronto)
 - OMNI Ontario, BC and Prairies (MB/SK/AB), ICI Télévision (QC)
- Three television phases: Voter Information Card, Early Voting Options and Election Day
- 30 languages

Radio

- Increase in stations and available programming compared with 2019
- Planned local stations in 13 cities across Canada, 75% of budget to Toronto, Montréal and Vancouver
- Three ethnic radio phases: Voter Information Card, Early Voting Options and Election Day
- 29 languages

Print

- Running two separate blended message ads:
 - Registration/Voter Information Card/Safety
 - Early Voting Options/ Election Day/Safety
- Selected only daily/weekly papers again for ease of message rotation and those that publish in-language
- Eight languages (same as 2019)

Other Communication Products

Select communication products to be used by community relations officers and stakeholders are developed in multiple heritage and Indigenous languages. The following resources are also available in digital format on the Elections Canada website:

The non-dated *Guide to the Federal Election* is available in 33 heritage languages and 16 Indigenous languages.

The ID tear-off sheet is also available in 33 heritage languages and 16 Indigenous languages.

**Language selection is based on media availability to reach the top heritage languages spoken in Canada based on Statistics Canada.*

APPENDIX B

Table 1—Assisted Living and Long-Term Care Homes: BC Voting Process Options

Voting Method	During Normal Election Conditions	ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS If Election During COVID Pandemic: No Outbreak at Facility	ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS If Election During COVID Pandemic: Outbreak at Facility/Unit
In common areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Available to residents, visitors, staff, BCEHS, and police. Staffed directly by ElectionsBC (EBC). Scheduled to take place during advance voting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must follow guidance in approved Safe Voting Places - COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan. Single-site directive does not apply to voting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation with Medical Health Officer required to determine appropriateness of voting in common areas during an outbreak.
Bedside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voter assisted by small mobile team, staffed directly by EBC. Scheduled to take place during advance voting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must follow guidance in approved Safe Voting Places - COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan and any additional local guidance re: hand washing, use of PPE etc. Single-site directive does not apply to voting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation with Medical Health Officer required to determine appropriateness of bedside voting during an outbreak.

Voting Method	During Normal Election Conditions	ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS If Election During COVID Pandemic: No Outbreak at Facility	ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS If Election During COVID Pandemic: Outbreak at Facility/Unit
By package	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Request process starts when election is called, packages must be returned by close of voting. Voting package requests from residents are collected at the site. Customized voting packages are delivered to the facility by courier; one for each voter who requested Voters complete their voting packages and either return individually by mail or hold for bulk pick-up by DEO. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation with Medical Health Officer required to identify best approach to voting by package during an outbreak.
Assisted telephone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not available. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Voting occurs over a period of approximately two weeks, ending on Voting Day at 4 p.m. Available to voters with a current registration record. Voters call a toll-free number and are walked through the voting process by a specially-trained EBC team (over the phone). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation with Medical Health Officer required to identify best approach to assisted telephone voting during an outbreak.

Table 2—Acute Care Hospitals: BC Voting Process Options

Voting	During Normal Election Conditions	ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS If Election During COVID Pandemic: No Outbreak at Facility	ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS If Election During COVID Pandemic: Outbreak at Facility/Unit
In common areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Available to ambulatory patients, visitors, staff, BCEHS, and police. Staffed directly by EBC. Held only on Voting Day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must follow guidance in approved Safe Voting Places - COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan. Single-site directive does not apply to voting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation with Medical Health Officer required to determine appropriateness of voting in common areas during an outbreak.
Bedside	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Small mobile teams offer bedside voting to patients who are not ambulatory. Some areas of the hospital (e.g. ED, ICU) are not serviced by mobile teams. Staffed directly by EBC. Available only on Voting Day. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Must follow guidance in approved Safe Voting Places - COVID-19 Workplace Safety Plan and any additional local guidance re: hand washing, use of PPE etc. Single-site directive does not apply to voting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation with Medical Health Officer required to determine appropriateness of bedside voting during an outbreak.
By package – if voting in common areas/bedside not possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation with Medical Health Officer required to identify best approach to voting by package during an outbreak.
Assisted telephone voting – if voting in common areas/bedside not possible	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not available 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consultation with Medical Health Officer required to identify best approach to assisted telephone voting during an outbreak.

APPENDIX C

LetterMail (LM) measurement follows similar standards for International as it does with domestic once the item arrives to Canada. Measurement to start the clock is slightly different, however, depending upon when the airline hands the product over to Canada Post.

Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA) has the authority to inspect incoming LM prior to release into our Domestic Network. If CBSA decides to inspect LM, it stops the clock. We have no visibility to the length of time CBSA holds LM mail for inspection. Testing mail with radio frequency identification (RFID) does stop the clock and then it restarts once the mail is turned back to Canada Post following CBSA inspection.

Should LM be delivered to Canada Post from the airline before the Critical Tag time, we consider that to be the day of receipt. In Toronto, our Critical Tag time is 18:30 and in Montreal and Vancouver it is 21:00. Mail arriving after that time would be considered next day arrival.

Once received in Canada, and if not subject to CBSA inspection, we follow the Domestic LM Standard 2- 3-4 days. For example mail received in Toronto would be 2 Days for GTA, 3 Day within the Province of Ontario and 4 days Nationally. Mail with a Critical Tag time on Monday should be delivered in Toronto on Wednesday, Ottawa on Thursday and in all other Provinces on Friday (not including remote locations).

The specific question regarding total length of time for International vs Domestic (how much longer) and naming Hong Kong is also contingent upon the delivery standards for mail listed by that country. Hong Kong is a city state so if induction was made on Monday, processing would occur on Monday evening / Tuesday, with dispatch to the ground handler of the airline. The Ground Handlers typically conduct security screening and build the airline containers for flights next day. Flights from Hong Kong to Toronto or Vancouver depart in the evening and arrive same day into Toronto. Typically they land around 7:30pm and by the time the plane comes to the gate, is unloaded / delivered to Canada Post it would be after our Critical Tag Time. Accordingly, with this example LM would be measured as Thursday arrival – i.e., Day 0.

Therefore, mail deposited in Hong Kong on Monday would fly Wednesday and be considered Day 0 to Canada on Thursday (even if it takes 4 days in total at that point). If CBSA does not inspect the mail it would follow our Domestic Delivery Standards. Delivery to Toronto would be Monday, Ottawa Tuesday and other Provinces on Thursday

the following week. It would take almost two weeks for National LM without inspection delays from CBSA.

We have test mail with the United Postal Union that provides measurement performance that receives RFID scan upon arrival to the airports. In 2019, we had 167 pieces of International Test mail from Hong Kong. Our combined 2-3-4 days on-time measurement was 76.4%. If we remove the strike months of 2019 as well as peak period (i.e., March to October 2019) we estimate our Hong Kong performance on- time improves to 87.9%.

Mail going to Hong Kong from Canada would follow the same reverse logic. The other thing to note is that international airline schedules do not have the same frequencies they had prior to COVID. Flights that used to operate daily have been reduced or cancelled all together. This will add time to Leg 2, i.e., the transfer time between posts. Hong Kong also may not utilize the same airline carrier as Canada Post. Flight frequencies or flights requiring connections in order to reach destination would increase the timeline depending upon carrier and airline routing. These schedules have been significantly disrupted for International mail.

APPENDIX D LIST OF ENGAGEMENTS: PHAC AND ELECTIONS CANADA

Last revised: November 6, 2020

DATE	Participants – PHAC	Participants – Elections Canada and OGDs	Notes/Comments
June 4, 2020	Vice President, Emergency Management	Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Electoral Events	Initial contact to establish relationship and discuss roles and responsibilities.
July 1 – July 31, 2020	Vice President, Emergency Management Various staff, Health Portfolio Operations Centre	Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Electoral Events Senior Director, Field Governance and Operational Readiness Acting Director, Voting Operations	A series of communications relating to elections planning and public health measures, as well as sharing of relevant guidance.
August 19, 2020	Vice President, Emergency Management Incident Management System Operations Chief	Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Electoral Events	Discussed updates on election planning and feasibility of Elections Canada presenting to the Special Advisory Committee relating to the COVID response (see entry for September 1) and for the Chief Electoral Officer to call the Chief Public Health Officer (see entry for September 2).

<p>August 26, 2020</p>	<p>Executive Medical Advisor, Infectious Diseases Prevention and Control Branch</p> <p>Health Canada Occupational Health and Safety Program</p> <p>Incident Management System Operations Chief Technical leads from the Incident Management System public health measures group</p>	<p>Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Electoral Events</p> <p>Senior Director, Field Governance and Operational Readiness</p> <p>Acting Director, Voting Operations</p>	<p>General discussion on required public health measures for the safe conduct of an election.</p>
<p>September 1, 2020</p>	<p>Members of Federal/Provincial/Territorial Special Advisory Committee (SAC) (includes Chief Medical Officers of Health for provinces and territories, as well as Canada's Chief Medical Officer of Health)</p>	<p>Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Electoral Events</p>	<p>Presentation to provincial and territorial officials by Elections Canada on electoral context during a pandemic.</p>
<p>September 2, 2020</p>	<p>Chief Public Health Officer</p>	<p>Chief Electoral Officer</p>	<p>General discussion on conduct of an election during a pandemic.</p>

September 22, 2020	Incident Management System Operations Chief Various staff, Health Portfolio Operations Centre	Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Electoral Events Director, General Election Pandemic Intelligence Task Force	Discussion on best practices for engagement of provincial and territorial health officials.
September 24, 2020	Various staff, Center for Emergency Preparedness and Response	Government Operations Centre Various Elections Canada staff	Creation of an Elections Canada and PHAC working group to discuss various issues concerning election planning and public health considerations in the context of COVID-19.
September 30, 2020	Incident Management System Operations Chief	Director, General Election Pandemic Intelligence Task Force	Discussion on personal protective equipment.
October 1, 2020	Various staff, Center for Emergency Preparedness and Response Technical leads from the Incident Management System public health measures group	Government Operations Centre Various Elections Canada staff	Meeting of Elections Canada and PHAC working group to discuss various issues concerning election planning and public health considerations in the context of COVID-19.

October 6, 2020	Various staff, Health Security Infrastructure Branch (Centre for Biosecurity)	Various Elections Canada staff	Early engagement on voting for travellers subject to the <i>Quarantine Act</i> following entry to Canada.
October 6, 2020	Director General, Centre for Emergency Preparedness and Response	Director, Enterprise Security	Courtesy call to provide updates on election planning.
October 8, 2020	Various staff, Center for Emergency Preparedness and Response Technical leads from the Incident Management System public health measures group	Government Operations Centre Various Elections Canada staff	Meeting of Elections Canada and PHAC working group to discuss various issues concerning election planning and public health considerations in the context of COVID-19.
October 9, 2020	Various staff, Health Security Infrastructure Branch (Centre for Biosecurity/Regional Operations)	A/Associate Director, Field Readiness & Event Management	Discussion on voting for travellers undertaking mandatory 14-day quarantine, per the emergency order under the <i>Quarantine Act</i> , including for travellers lodged in federally designated quarantine facilities.

October 9, 2020	Various staff, Infectious Diseases Prevention and Control Branch	Director, General Election Pandemic Intelligence Task Force	Discussion regarding self-assessment of election workers.
October 22, 2020	Various Staff, Center for Emergency Preparedness and Response	Government Operations Centre Various Elections Canada staff	Meeting of Elections Canada and PHAC working group to discuss various issues concerning election planning and public health considerations in the context of COVID-19.
October 30, 2020	Vice President, Emergency Management Director General, Centre for Emergency Preparedness and Response	Deputy Chief Electoral Officer, Electoral Events Director, General Election Pandemic Intelligence Task Force	Courtesy call to provide updates on election planning.

APPENDIX E LIST OF WITNESSES

The following table lists the witnesses who appeared before the committee at its meetings related to this report. Transcripts of all public meetings related to this report are available on the committee's [webpage for this study](#).

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Elections Canada Anne Lawson, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer Regulatory Affairs Stéphane Perrault, Chief Electoral Officer Michel Roussel, Deputy Chief Electoral Officer Electoral Events and Innovation	2020/10/22	4
Elections New Brunswick Kimberly Poffenroth, Chief Electoral Officer	2020/10/27	5
Elections Prince Edward Island Tim G. Garrity, Chief Electoral Officer	2020/10/27	5
Government of British Columbia Dr. Bonnie Henry, Provincial Health Officer Ministry of Health	2020/10/29	6
Public Health Agency of Canada Dr. Barbara J. Raymond, Executive Medical Advisor Vice-President's Office, Infectious Disease Prevention and Control Branch	2020/10/29	6
Elections British Columbia Anton Boegman, Chief Electoral Officer	2020/11/03	7
Elections Saskatchewan Dr. Michael Boda, Chief Electoral Officer	2020/11/03	7
Government of New Brunswick Dr. Jennifer Russell, Chief Medical Officer of Health Ministry of Health	2020/11/05	8

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Government of Saskatchewan Dr. Saqib Shahab, Chief Medical Health Officer Ministry of Health Dr. Denise Werker, Medical Health Officer Ministry of Health	2020/11/05	8
Assembly of First Nations Amber Potts, Director of Policy and Research Coordination	2020/11/12	9
Canadian Association for Long Term Care Jason Lee, Treasurer	2020/11/12	9
Canadian National Institute for the Blind Diane Bergeron, President CNIB Guide Dogs, Vice-President, International Affairs, CNIB Foundation	2020/11/12	9
Council of Canadians with Disabilities Jewelless Smith, Past Chairperson	2020/11/12	9
Ontario Long Term Care Association Donna Duncan, Chief Executive Officer	2020/11/12	9
Métis National Council Marc LeClair, Senior Advisor	2020/11/24	12
Canada Without Poverty Emilly Renaud, National Coordinator	2020/11/26	13
Canadian Federation of Students Nicole Brayannis, National Deputy Chairperson	2020/11/26	13
Immigrant and Refugee Community Organization of Manitoba Dorota Blumczynska, Executive Director	2020/11/26	13
People First of Canada Kory Earle, President Shelley Fletcher, Executive Director	2020/11/26	13
As an individual André Blais, Professor, Department of Political Science Université de Montréal	2020/11/26	13

Organizations and Individuals	Date	Meeting
Canada Post Corporation Louise Chayer, General Manager Customer Experience	2020/12/03	15
CIVIX Taylor Gunn, President and Chief Election Officer	2020/12/03	15
Open Democracy Project Sabreena Delhon, Open Democracy Fellow DemocracyXChange	2020/12/03	15
Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities Raymond Orb, President	2020/12/03	15
Government of Ontario Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health Ministry of Health	2020/12/10	17

MINUTES OF PROCEEDINGS

A copy of the relevant *Minutes of Proceedings* ([Meetings Nos. 4 to 9, 12 to 17, 19, 21, 22 and 24](#)) is tabled.

Respectfully submitted,

Ruby Sahota
Chair

SUPPLEMENTARY REPORT FROM THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY OF CANADA REGARDING THE CONDUCT OF A PANDEMIC ELECTION

Introduction

Canadian elections are among some of the freest and fairest in the world. Our democracy works optimally when every elector is enabled to make their voice heard. Ensuring that Canadians have access to the resources needed to inform and cast their vote is a large task that must be accomplished simultaneously with the installation of necessary election infrastructure. However, just as the COVID-19 pandemic has temporarily changed how Canadians do their jobs, shop for groceries and interact with neighbours, it has also changed how Canadians vote in elections. As demonstrated in British Columbia, Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, and currently, in Newfoundland and Labrador, these challenges must be accounted for when planning for an election during the pandemic.

Importantly, the Committee's majority report recommends that the government not call a federal election during the pandemic unless it is defeated on a motion of non-confidence. Unfortunately, the Liberal government has already indicated their desire to recklessly send Canadians to the polls at whatever time they deem to be the most advantageous for the Prime Minister. In addition, the government has already introduced legislation outlining their own personal ideas of how to make a pandemic election safe, completely separate from the work of the Committee, and therefore informed by none of its evidence.

Canadians know that they cannot trust the word of the Prime Minister, who has already failed them on vaccines, rapid testing, and border security. Conservatives are committed to working collaboratively and taking steps that secure the safety of an election, while ensuring the Prime Minister remains accountable every step of the way. However, as expressed in the above report, it is the opinion of this committee that the government has a moral obligation to refrain from triggering an election or orchestrating its own downfall, as the Prime Minister has already tried to do.

The Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs' (The Committee's) report detailed above, in tandem with [the interim report tabled on December 11, 2020](#) provides helpful guidance to the government on how this process may be faithfully executed while safeguarding the health and safety of Canadians. While the report contains informative feedback from provinces, health officials, elections officers and key stakeholder groups, the Liberal members of the committee have chosen to pursue several questionable ideas that are not backed up by the evidence. This supplementary report is designed to clearly outline where the government may be overstepping in ways that hinder efforts to keep our elections free and safe.

Length of a Pandemic Election and Protecting Seniors in Long-Term Care

All political parties are committed to protecting Canadians' health in the event of an election during the pandemic. However, committee members disagree on the best ways to do this. Conservative Members of the committee believe that a longer election period would be helpful for the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) to have maximum flexibility to conduct appropriate consultations with health officials and install effective public health measures to protect voters. The CEO himself affirmed this when he appeared before committee, saying that he "strongly recommended the longest possible election period" and that it was "the most important factor in achieving success."¹

The main objection to a longer writ period seems to be that it would unnecessarily endanger those living in long-term care homes. However, witnesses confirmed that, with appropriate consultation with facilities and public health officials, these fears can be alleviated. Jason Lee from the Canadian Association for Long Term Care indicated that his organization was "less concerned about the duration of the actual election campaign than we are about what we're doing here now, which is the pre-planning to make sure that we have thought of all the scenarios and that we have a plan in place, that, hopefully, is communicated clearly in advance from Elections Canada across the country. If that's the case, then we could probably manage an election campaign of any of [the usual] durations."²

Conservatives share the concerns of witnesses, and many Canadians, who wish to keep vulnerable populations safe from possible contact with COVID-19. These witnesses indicated that the key to keeping our seniors safe would be to limit, to the greatest degree possible, the number of individuals entering long-term care homes and the length of time they spend in the home. Ms. Donna Duncan from the Ontario Long Term Care Association said that "having more people come into the home creates fear when you're in a hot spot."³ That is why we are recommending that the number of individuals tasked with conducting the vote in long-term care facilities be limited to a single individual. This will enable residents of long-term care facilities to remain safely in their home to vote, while limiting their contact with those from outside their residence.

Mr. Lee testified that rapid tests could contribute to overcoming the challenges of administering the vote in long-term care homes, without overburdening staff. This could be achieved by admitting a single Elections Canada official, who tests negative for COVID-19 into a single long-term care home to help conduct the vote.⁴ We believe that options like this ought to be explored in consultation with experts. To that end, Conservatives are pleased with the Committee's recommendation to ensure that rapid tests are secured for Elections Canada in

¹House of Commons, Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 4, October 2020, 1105 (Mr. Stéphane Perrault, Chief Electoral Officer).

² House of Commons, Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 9, 12 November 2020, 1140 (Mr. Jason Lee, Canadian Association for Long Term Care).

³ House of Commons, Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 9, 12 November 2020, 1135 (Ms. Donna Duncan, Ontario Long Term Care Association).

⁴ House of Commons, Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 9, 12 November 2020, 1120 (Mr. Jason Lee, Canadian Association for Long Term Care).

the event of a pandemic election. We sincerely hope the government has learned its lesson from its previous failures on the procurement of these tests during the first wave of the pandemic and prepare accordingly to ensure the safety of Canada's seniors if an election is called.

This suggested measure and the corresponding testimony received from witnesses is in direct opposition to the government's decision in C-19 to allow polling stations to open in long term care institutions as many as 13 days before the end of the writ period. This is in fact the opposite of what long-term care providers want. Instead of creating a system that would be, "more condensed and more defined" the government's suggestion will require more election workers to enter long-term care homes more frequently.⁵ Clearly, the government should have listened to the experts who appeared at the committee before prematurely drafting their flawed legislation.

Mail in Ballots

As Conservatives indicated in our [Supplementary Interim Report](#), we disagree with the Chief Electoral Officer's recommendation to allow the receipt of mail-in ballots after the close of polls during the voting period.⁶ Similarly, we believe that the Committee should have included a recommendation that ensured ballots received after the close of polls should not be counted. The election should end on Election Day and Canadians deserve to know the results without delay.

Ultimately, Conservatives recognize that regardless of when the deadline to submit ballots occurs, there will be some votes that arrive too late. We trust that the majority Canadians are capable of planning ahead and mailing their ballots within the appropriate timeframe. We believe that Elections Canada, working with Canada Post and political candidates, should be able to advise Canadians of the necessary timelines for submitting their mail-in ballots, to ensure they arrive in time to be counted. We support the Committee's recommendation for the government to enable Elections Canada to increase awareness about the process.

Elections Canada, Canada Post, and political candidates all share the responsibility of equipping Canadians with the information they need to ensure their ballot arrives in time. This responsibility includes taking steps to reduce the occurrence of late ballots. For example, ensuring the final day of the voting period is on a Monday allows Canada Post to deliver mail accumulated over the previous voting day(s) where mail is not collected or delivered. Conservatives support the Committee's recommendations that reflect this kind of flexibility, however, we believe that Canadians deserve to know the results of an election on Election Day itself. The anxiety and uncertainty that would be caused by a delay of election results is

⁵ House of Commons, Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 9, 12 November 2020, 1140 (Ms. Donna Duncan, Ontario Long Term Care Association).

⁶ <https://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/43-2/PROC/report-7/page-342>

unacceptable, and unfortunately, these concerns are not given appropriate consideration in this report and its recommendations.

We also recommend that Canada Post and Elections Canada replicate the work of Elections BC to provide as many options for voters to return their ballots to a returning office at any time. This could include the potential installation of secure, monitored ballot drop boxes that would enable voters to cast their ballot without entering a returning office or other facility. This would also ensure that those who wait too long to send their ballot through the mail will have an alternative option to ensure their vote is received.

CEO Adaptation Power

While we agree that the CEO should have some flexibility with regards to certain elements of conducting the vote in an unprecedented pandemic election, Conservatives are not satisfied that the limits of this expansion of power have been adequately explored or communicated. Conservatives will be looking for the government to better outline the exact powers given to the CEO and how political parties can play a part in ensuring any changes are fair across the board. We also believe that any recommendations made in this report or in the forthcoming legislation ought to have a set expiration date. Our suggestion is that any temporary provisions should expire after the COVID-19 pandemic is deemed over by Health Canada, or after two years, whichever is sooner.

Accountability cannot be sacrificed when it comes to something as important as Canadians' fundamental democratic rights.

New Voting Methods/Procedures

Some witnesses discussed how new methods of voting could be introduced in order to ensure all electors have the tools they need to vote. This testimony reflects the real needs of many Canadians and should be given appropriate consideration. However, in the case of a pandemic election, the logistical burdens that would be placed on Elections Canada would dramatically increase. Finding new polling locations, hiring election staff to work directly with the public at a time of heightened risks, and managing consecutive voting days would require rapid, large-scale changes to the existing election infrastructure. To consider sweeping new methods of voting, such as vote-by-phone, seems irresponsible in the face of an already-complex transition. As the Chief Electoral Officer said to the Committee, "A national election is a logistical feat in the best of circumstances, and these are not the best of circumstances."⁷

The ongoing challenges in the Newfoundland and Labrador elections are demonstrating in real time the difficulty of managing such significant alterations to the system. Election administrators are struggling in their tasks of safeguarding poll workers, managing the

⁷ House of Commons, Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, [Evidence](#), 2nd Session, 43rd Parliament, Meeting 4, 22 October 2020, 1110 (Mr. Stéphane Perrault, Chief Electoral Officer).

collection of mail-in ballots, ensuring the public has confidence in the election results and keeping poll locations open.

To introduce untested infrastructure on a national scale in the midst of other pressing challenges such as securing adequate numbers of poll staff and polling locations would undoubtedly strain our already overburdened public service. That is why Conservatives disagree with the recommendation to add the research, development, and administration of a phone-voting option as additional tasks to Elections Canada's list of concerns for a pandemic election.

Conclusion

Conservatives are pleased that the Committee has spoken unanimously on many of the issues contained in this report. Particularly, we are thankful that the Liberal Members of the Committee have taken a stand against the whims of the Prime Minister, who has been eagerly pressing towards an election for the last few months. By recommending that the government not call a federal election during the pandemic unless it is defeated on a motion of non-confidence, all members of the committee have affirmed the need to protect our parliamentary democracy from the political games of the PMO. Conservatives look forward to maintaining this kind of accountability from the government, and collaboratively discussing how best to safeguard Canadians, if the Prime Minister decides to trigger an election.

Supplementary Recommendations

1. Any election called during the COVID-19 pandemic last for the maximum duration.
2. Elections Canada only receive ballots until the close of polls on election day and that any ballots received after the close of polls on election day not be counted.
3. Any temporary provisions in this Report shall expire after the COVID-19 pandemic is deemed over by Health Canada, or after two years, whichever is sooner.
4. Elections Canada should extensively consult with Long-Term Care Homes to determine a safe and mutually-agreeable way to conduct the vote in Long-Term Care Homes, and that this discussion include a consideration of how rapid-testing of Elections Canada employees may increase the safety of residents of Long-Term Care Homes.
5. That the government amend C-19 to reflect witness testimony and ensure that the length of time during which Long-Term Care Homes have contact with election workers is limited, and that the number of individuals entering Long-Term Care Homes is kept to an absolute minimum.

SUPPLEMENTARY OPINION OF THE BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS¹

The Bloc Québécois would first like to thank all the individuals and groups who participated in the Committee's study by submitting a brief or making a virtual presentation, particularly Stéphane Perrault, Chief Electoral Officer, as well as the various chief electoral officers from Canadian provinces and abroad.

As we are currently in the second wave of the COVID-19 pandemic and are seeing the arrival of new variants, we feel it is important to express our concerns about the possibility of a federal election being called. The Bloc Québécois has the interests of Quebecers at heart and is concerned about the possible impact on the public of holding a federal election in the coming months.

Clearly, if an election were to be held, it would have to be conducted safely, following the public health rules and guidelines in place in Quebec and the provinces, and in a way that protects the health of electors and their fundamental right to vote.

The example of the Newfoundland and Labrador provincial election, the results of which will not be known until 12 March 2021, was unable to be studied by the Committee. However, due to an increase in COVID-19 cases, election day had to be cancelled and voting will now be by mail. The concern about having voter turnout of only 51% is very real, given that in the last election it was 61%.² In a federal election, such a scenario could significantly affect voter turnout. In addition, mail-in voting across Canada could pose serious logistical challenges and potentially interfere with the exercise of the right to vote.

Accordingly, we believe it is necessary to restate all the measures that we have proposed throughout the study, both those that were accepted by the Committee in the interim report and in this report, and those outlined in our supplementary opinion on the interim report. The Bloc Québécois therefore proposed that the following measures be put in place as part of the temporary legislative amendments:

¹ For a sense of the key points of the amendments to be made to the *Canada Elections Act* and everything that must be considered in order to conduct federal elections safely and successfully during the pandemic, refer to the Committee's Seventh Report, *Interim Report: Protecting Public Health and Democracy During a Possible Pandemic Election*, adopted by the Committee on 8 December 2020 and presented to the House on 11 December 2020.

² <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1772775/elections-terre-neuve-labrador-taux-participation-vote> [in French only]

- 1) Replace the polling day fixed on a Monday by a two-day polling period, corresponding to a Saturday and a Sunday, and increase the voting hours by reducing them from a 12-hour day to 16 hours spread over two days;**

In our view, it is important to replace Monday as the polling day with two 8-hour days, a consecutive Saturday and Sunday, in order to spread out the number of electors coming to polling stations. We believe that this temporary change to the Act offers a number of advantages:

- (a) it makes available a greater number of facilities large enough to observe physical distancing between electors and between electors and poll workers, such as schools and any facilities and community centres not usually available on weekdays; and
- (b) it makes it possible to recruit enough election workers available to work at polling stations, thereby preventing the risk of a shortage of workers given that individuals over 60 are likely to be unavailable to volunteer for work during the pandemic, and that younger and less at-risk individuals in the workforce are more likely to be available on weekends.

That said, we believe that the Committee’s recommendation in the interim report to hold the election over a three-day period is somewhat excessive. Adding Monday as the third voting day seems inappropriate since, according to a survey of voters by Elections Canada, between 4 and 5 million voters could opt for mail-in voting rather than in-person voting if a federal election were to take place during the pandemic.³ Electors can also vote on advanced polling days, normally taking place over four consecutive days, which would provide the option to vote during the week. This is in addition to giving electors the option to vote at any time during the election by visiting their respective returning office, depending on their schedule.

In addition, we believe it is important to add that, given the additional voting day, there will need to be an amendment to the *Canada Elections Act* prohibiting the release of new polls or election advertising during the entire voting period. On this point, Jean-Marc Léger of the Leger polling firm said that normally when there is one-day voting period on Monday, “40% of voters make up their minds over the weekend. During the last election,

³ <https://www.rcinet.ca/fr/2019/10/16/vote-anticipation-record-elections-federales/>

8% said they did so in the voting booth, that is, when they voted,”⁴ which demonstrates the need for such a legislative amendment.

2) Authorize the Chief Electoral Officer to determine when and how the voting will take place in long-term care facilities;

In the interim report, the Bloc Québécois recommended tightening the parameters for voting in long-term care facilities by considering local circumstances and the rules in place in Quebec and in the provinces. We also believe it goes without saying that such measures can also be applied in private seniors’ residences. Enabling long-term care residents to exercise their right to vote without risking their health or being the victim of irregularities is a priority for the Bloc Québécois. That is why we strongly recommend that Elections Canada-trained staff be on site to collect the ballots and ensure that voting guidelines and health measures are followed to ensure the safety of electors. The Bloc Québécois is therefore pleased that the Committee has accepted this recommendation.

3) Modify the power of the Chief Electoral Officer so he can adapt the Act when an emergency situation arises in order to give him greater leeway in facing the pandemic.

With respect to measure 3), the Bloc Québécois is pleased that the Committee accepted its recommendation in the final report that the government make amendments to the *Canada Elections Act* so that the Chief Electoral Officer can make the necessary changes should an election be held during the pandemic, including amendments to provisions relating to the Register of Electors and the nomination process, in order to ensure the safe conduct of the election campaign and to protect the health of electors, election workers and candidates. We are also pleased that the Committee accepted our recommendation to allow signatures in support of a nomination paper be collected by candidates electronically so as to avoid knocking on doors or soliciting signatures in public spaces, in order to minimize the risk of spreading the virus and to protect the safety of both electors and candidates.

The Bloc Québécois is also pleased that the Committee decided to dismiss the proposal made by those who called for mail-in ballots to continue to be counted up to 24 hours after the polls close. In our opinion, such an extension of the deadline for accepting mail-

⁴ <https://www.lapresse.ca/actualites/elections-quebec-2018/201809/21/01-5197507-les-quebecois-votent-pour-les-individus-plutot-que-les-partis-dit-jean-marc-leger.php> [in French only]

in ballots would delay the election results, which would fuel voter suspicion and undermine confidence in the electoral system, which is obviously undesirable.

However, the Bloc Québécois wishes to make clear its strong disagreement with the Committee's proposal to recommend that Elections Canada examine solutions to allow the option to vote by telephone. In our opinion, telephone voting poses considerable challenges for properly verifying the identity of electors who vote this way. It also opens the door to fraud, something important to consider especially in light of the theft of data and personal information over the Internet in recent years, and more recently in connection with the various emergency assistance programs rolled out by the Liberal government during the pandemic.

In conclusion, the Bloc Québécois reiterates its disappointment with the Liberal government's decision to move forward with Bill C-19 without considering the interim or final reports prepared for this study. We believe that by doing so, the government has disregarded an entire toolbox before proposing legislative amendments that may prove to be inadequate or inappropriate, such as the one allowing the voting period to be extended by up to 16 days in long-term care facilities, which could increase opportunities for contact between residents and election workers at a time when physical distancing rules are necessary to prevent the spread of COVID-19. In closing, the Bloc Québécois would like to raise a strong concern about the potential impact of Bill C-19 as tabled by the government in December. Bill C-19 does not include any legislative amendment to prohibit the release of new polls or election advertising during the entire voting period, while the bill increases this period to three consecutive days from Saturday to Monday. The Bloc Québécois intends to raise all of the important points in this supplementary report during the upcoming parliamentary proceedings on the government's Bill C-19.

SUPPLEMENTARY OPINION OF THE NEW DEMOCRATIC PARTY OF CANADA

The threat to the public interest of holding an election during the pandemic is at least twofold. On the one hand, door-to-door canvassing, rallies and large numbers of people congregating in polling stations to vote can create opportunities for virus transmission and threaten public health.

On the other hand, a pandemic election also has the potential to undermine the health of our democracy. The administrative and logistical challenges of a pandemic election may present barriers that make it unreasonably difficult or impossible to vote for those who want to. These same challenges, coupled with Canadians' own perceptions of the election process and the risk it presents to their personal health, may cause some voters not to want to vote at all.

Beyond these threats to voter participation, a pandemic also has the potential to undermine our democracy by calling into question the legitimacy of the election. As the recent example in Newfoundland and Labrador shows, an outbreak late during the election can cause delays, confusion and unforeseen barriers to voting, which in turn may cause some people to feel that the election does not properly reflect the will of the voting public.

Elections Canada has made it clear to the committee that it has the ability to delay elections on a riding-by-riding basis and cannot rule out the possibility of having to exercise that power during a pandemic election. In an election where the right to govern may hang on only a handful of seats, the exercise of this unilateral power may determine who is invited to form a government following an election where several seats, or more, remain vacant.

This raises the specter of a government whose political legitimacy is openly challenged. The next federal election in Canada will very likely determine who holds the reins during the critical early period of the country's pandemic recovery. The last thing the country needs is a political crisis layered over the concurrent public health and economic crises we are already facing. The events in Washington, D.C. on January 6, 2021 show the very real risks to democracy that this kind of crisis can pose.

For these reasons, the NDP wholeheartedly endorses the committee's recommendation that the government should commit to not calling an election during the pandemic, unless the House of Commons itself decides it no longer has confidence in the government by defeating the government on a motion of non-confidence.

We recognize that this requires parliamentarians to work hard to find acceptable and appropriate compromises. It requires a government that recognizes it does not have a majority, that it must compromise to make progress and that opposition members have an important and legitimate job to do in holding the government to account. It requires opposition parties to not only criticize, but provide constructive proposals for moving forward, and to avoid some of the more extreme forms of hyperbole that often come with politics.

While New Democrats are committed to doing our part to make this parliament work, we recognize that many of the variables in that equation are beyond our control. We must be prepared for the possibility of an election during the pandemic.

To that end, we support the recommendations of the committee and reiterate our commitment to the recommendations in our supplement to the committee's interim report that were not taken up by the committee in its final report.