

12 February 2021

Dear BIA,

As you are doubtless aware, the Government of Ontario recently extended the stay-at-home order and enhanced public health and workplace safety measures for the City of Toronto until at least 23 February 2021. You can read more about these measures and how to reduce virus spread on the [City of Toronto website](#).

We are writing to you today as City Council has asked us to encourage businesses to implement programs to help Toronto's most vulnerable populations cope with the COVID-19 pandemic. This was adopted by [City Council on 27 October 2020](#).

While there is no single definition of vulnerability, we currently recommend using the federal guidance on [populations more vulnerable to COVID-19](#). For your convenience, some of this guidance is appended to this letter.

Please take some time to consider how your business might serve or accommodate the unique needs of populations more vulnerable to COVID-19. Some examples are given below, but they are not exhaustive and you should think about how your business operates and what might be appropriate for your workplace. If your business is currently closed then these should be considered as part of your plan for reopening.

Examples of ways to help vulnerable populations include:

- Implementing early shopping hours for seniors or other people more at risk of severe disease outcomes, so that they can shop with fewer people around.
- Alternatively, implementing personal or virtual shopping hours by appointment, rather than dedicating specific hours to specific groups.

- Implementing online ordering and local home delivery, or group delivery to congregate settings such as care homes and apartment blocks.
- Clustering frequently-required items close to the store entrance/exit so that people with limited mobility can spend less time gathering things.
- Permitting access to non-public washrooms for people with mobility needs.
- Reviewing building access and navigation options for people with mobility needs.
- Prioritizing serving the needs of the local community, given that vulnerable populations are less likely to travel by car or have access to technology.
- Working with designers to ensure that products and services are designed for inclusion and to meet the actual needs of vulnerable populations. The Design Industry Advisory Committee (DIAC) has a [call for proposals](#) on this.
- Thinking about how to help connect vulnerable people to their communities, through technology or joint programs. This also includes access to technology and online/digital services.
- Adding or altering street furniture so that people who need to rest frequently, especially when waiting outside a store, can distance while doing so.
- Being available to discuss an individual's needs, and flexible to alter working practices to accommodate those needs.

You can also help vulnerable populations indirectly by:

- Being flexible with employees' work hours and arrangements, particularly if they are required to care for family members or use transit.
- Ensuring that staff are able to take paid time off if they are sick, or if they are required to self-isolate.

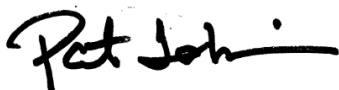
In an effort to support Toronto Public Health and our essential employers, we at the Economic Development and Culture Division at the City of Toronto also wanted to use this opportunity to see if there's anything else we can be doing to support you. We know

that this is an unprecedented and trying time, with months more to come. Our priority has been to help our local businesses re-open and do what we can to support economic recovery. Over the last year, we have been helping the businesses within our community with various [resources on the City of Toronto website](#) and have worked to support companies reopening through the dissemination of public health guidelines and by offering tailored advice for those who need it. We want to make sure that you were aware of these resources during this difficult and challenging time.

Please keep in mind as well that during the province-wide declaration of emergency everybody who is able to work remotely must do so, and every operating business must prepare and make available a safety plan, per the Reopening Ontario (A Flexible Response to COVID-19) Act, 2020. Toronto Public Health has developed a [COVID-19 Safety Plan Checklist](#) to help you with this process.

We hope that we can work together to ensure that essential businesses remain open and safe during the provincial shutdown. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact your local [Economic Development Officer](#) and for the most up-to-date information on COVID-19 please visit the [Toronto Public Health website](#) or subscribe to the [BusinessTO Newsletter](#).

Yours truly,



Patrick Tobin
Acting General Manager, Economic Development & Culture

Appendix

Vulnerable populations may include:

- Individuals who are at risk of more severe disease or outcomes, including:
 - Older adults (increasing risk with each decade, especially over 60 years).
 - People of any age with chronic medical conditions (for example, lung disease, heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, kidney disease, liver disease, stroke, or dementia).
 - People of any age who are immunocompromised, including those with an underlying medical condition (for example, cancer) or taking medications which lower the immune system (for example, chemotherapy).
 - People living with obesity (BMI of 40 or higher).
- Individuals who may be more likely to be exposed to the COVID-19 virus because:
 - Their jobs or occupations require them to be in contact with large numbers of people, which increases their chances of being exposed to someone who has COVID-19.
 - They live in group settings where the COVID-19 virus may transmit more easily (for example, long-term care facilities, correctional facilities, shelters, or group residences).
 - They face barriers that limit their ability to access or implement effective public health measures (for example, individuals with disabilities who encounter non-accessible information, services, and/or facilities).

