

## **‘Gradual, Staged’ – Ontario Government Releases Framework for Re-Opening the Economy**

This afternoon, the Ontario government issued important information about the eventual, gradual lifting of restrictions on the economy and public spaces due to the pandemic and on the plan for economic recovery.

In the government’s terms, these laid out the plans for the next two phases of Ontario’s fight against COVID-19: Phase 2 “Restart” and Phase 3 “Recover.”

### **Phase 2 - Restart**

As the Premier stressed in his press conference, “*A Framework for Reopening our Province*” is a roadmap, not a timeline, for the re-opening of the economy. Public health and safety will continue to be the top priority, with all steps toward re-opening based on the guidance and advice of the Chief Medical Officer of Health. Ontario’s re-opening will take place in 3 stages:

- Stage 1: Opening select workplaces that can immediately meet public health guidance and occupational health and safety requirements through regular or modified operations. Opening some outdoor spaces like parks and allowing for gatherings of more than 5 people for specific events, like funerals. Hospitals to begin offering some non-urgent and scheduled surgeries and other health care services.
- Stage 2: Opening more workplaces, base on risk assessments, including some service industries and office and retail workplaces. Continued opening of public spaces and allowing more gatherings of (somewhat) larger crowds.
- Stage 3: Opening the remainder of workplaces responsibly. Further relaxing restrictions on public gatherings. However, concerts and sporting events will continue to be restricted for the foreseeable future.

No date has been set yet for the implementation of Stage 1.

Where feasible, the government asks that remote work arrangements continue. It is important to note the Framework does not specifically identify any businesses that will be able to re-open in any of the stages. Based on comments made by the Premier and Minister Fedeli at the press conference, the businesses allowed to re-open at each stage will be on an industry-by-industry basis, based on their ability to satisfy public health and workplace safety guidelines, as well as the advice of the Jobs and Economic Recovery Committee.

The Framework notes that protections for vulnerable populations, as well as social distancing and hand washing hygiene will continue to be in place for all of the stages above. In fact, these measures are likely to become Ontario’s “new normal” and are likely to remain in place until a vaccine or treatment for COVID-19 is available.

Each stage will be in place for at least 2-4 weeks and will be monitored according to 4 sets of criteria:

- Virus spread and containment: This criterion is largely focused on the actual number of COVID-19 cases. Specifically, the overall number of cases (consistent 2-4 week decline); a decrease in the rate of cases that cannot be traced to a source; and a decrease in the number of new COVID-19 cases in hospitals.

- Health system capacity: This criterion focuses on the ability to respond to a potential surge, including acute and critical care capacity (including access to ventilators) and the availability of the needed PPE.
- Public health system capacity: This criterion is focused on the public health ability to respond to a potential surge, including that approx. 90% of new cases are being reached by public health officials within a day so that new outbreaks can be traced and contained.
- Incidence tracking capacity: This criterion is focused on testing and ensuring there is sufficient capacity to conduct appropriate testing to effectively contain any outbreaks that emerge.

After 2-4 weeks of assessment at each stage, the Chief Medical Officer of Health will advise whether Ontario can move to the next stage, whether relevant stage needs to continue for a further period of assessment or whether certain public health measures need to be strengthened or re-applied.

All workplaces will be expected to adhere to heightened public health and safety measures. The government will provide further guidance to companies on these measures and how to achieve them. The declaration of a state of emergency will remain through this period.

### **Phase 3 - Recover**

The Province also provided greater information about the outreach strategy to be employed by the recently-announced Jobs and Economic Recovery Committee (chaired by Finance Minister Rod Phillips and vice-chaired by Minister of Economic Development, Job Creation and Trade Vic Fedeli).

This Cabinet Committee is charged with developing a plan for the economy moving forward. Today's information makes clear that local MPPs, as well as the Cabinet members on the Committee, will play important roles in the economic recovery plan. Ultimately, government officials are seeking to gain first-hand knowledge of the impacts COVID-19 is having in each region of the province and on each industry. Officials are also seeking guidance on the measures needed to succeed in contributing to Ontario's economic recovery. Consultations will be starting in the coming days.

Government officials will be reaching out to stakeholders to gather this information. However, if you or your organization want to help shape this economic recovery plan, it is important to be proactive in this regard by reaching out to your local MPP and relevant Minister. We would be pleased to support your efforts in this regard.

### **For more information, please contact:**

Joseph Ragusa, Principal  
[jragusa@sussex-strategy.com](mailto:jragusa@sussex-strategy.com)

Brian Zeiler-Kligman, Vice President  
[bz-k@sussex-strategy.com](mailto:bz-k@sussex-strategy.com)

Naomi Shuman, Policy and Research Lead  
[nshuman@sussex-strategy.com](mailto:nshuman@sussex-strategy.com)