

December 11, 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
pm@pm.gc.ca

Dear Prime Minister,

Re: Vaccine Distribution

On behalf of Unifor's 315,000 members, including countless frontline and essential workers, I want to congratulate the government for having the foresight to secure vital supplies of COVID-19 vaccines for Canadians through multiple advance purchase agreements with vaccine makers. With the announcement yesterday by Health Canada that the Pfizer-BioNtech vaccine has been approved for use and will start to be distributed next week, Canadians are significantly closer to seeing a path out of the pandemic in 2021.

However, in light of the pressure being placed on the government for rapid distribution of COVID-19 vaccines, I want to emphasize the need for an orderly vaccination program, effectively coordinated with provincial and municipal health authorities, and administered by public bodies rather than private pharmacies or clinics. Given the fact that we are currently in an unprecedented public health emergency, the private sector does not have the capacity and cannot be relied upon to administer vaccines in a rapid, safe, and equitable way. In order to ensure the most broad-based public delivery of the vaccine, the government must develop plans for vaccination that involve workplaces, schools, community centres, and other public settings.

Secondly, I applaud the government for prioritizing residents/staff of long-term care and shared living facilities, the elderly, health care workers, and those living in Indigenous communities in its early vaccination plans. Unifor also strongly urges the government to mandate the inclusion of residents and staff in all other communal living settings for early vaccination, such as shelters and housing for migrant workers.

It is critical, however, that other groups of workers and Canadians are not overlooked in the early roll-out of the COVID-19 vaccination.

Frontline and essential workers in the service, transportation, energy, aviation, marine, and education sectors, to name but a few, have all played a vital role in keeping Canadians afloat

during the pandemic. These workers have had no choice but to continue working in settings where the chances of infection are high. Many – Unifor members among them – have tragically succumbed to COVID-19. Their sacrifices cannot be forgotten and workers in these sectors must be prioritized for early vaccination.

Ensuring equity in the distribution of COVID-19 vaccines is also paramount. As you know well, racialized Canadians, migrant workers, and those living in lower-income neighbourhoods have been overrepresented in cases of COVID-19. This trend speaks to the inequities that persist in Canadian society: racialized, migrant, and low-wage workers are far more likely to live in densely populated settings, work high-impact frontline and essential jobs, commute by public transportation, and rely on community and public services. Understandably, their exposure to the virus is significantly higher and so these groups and communities must also be given priority for early vaccination.

Prime Minister, I know I speak for all Unifor members when I say that the recent vaccine announcement has given us renewed hope and allows us to see the light at the end of a long, dark tunnel. Throughout this difficult time, it has been the willingness of frontline and essential workers to continue labouring which has sustained our economy and infrastructure, despite the immense risks involved. It is now up to the government to return the favour, by helping public authorities get the vaccine to those who need it the most and ensuring that we overcome this pandemic as quickly as possible.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Jerry Dias".

Jerry Dias
National President

CC: Honourable Minister Patty Hajdu, P.C., M.P., Minister of Health; Lana Payne

JD/klcope343