



18 February 2022

Hon. Blaine Higgs, Premier  
Province of New Brunswick  
Chancery Place, P. O. Box 6000  
Fredericton, NB  
E3B 5H1

Via email: [blaine.higgs@gnb.ca](mailto:blaine.higgs@gnb.ca)

Dear Premier Higgs:

**Re: Economic Reopening and Recovery in New Brunswick**

With New Brunswick's move to Level 1 of the COVID-19 Winter Plan on February 18 and your government examining the possibility of ending the province's emergency order and lifting related restrictions by the end of March, it appears that we are nearing the end of the pandemic stage of COVID-19. It has been a long haul for businesses, government and individuals and while there is plenty of optimism and enthusiasm, there also remains uncertainty, anxiety and trepidation after two full years of living and working abnormally.

Businesses across the province are taking a hard look at the state of their operations after two years of living and working through the pandemic and are making decisions and plans as best they can in the current environment. Businesses also have the added challenge of dealing with employees, customers, suppliers and other individuals/organizations that are also experiencing the spectrum of emotions described above. While we may be moving towards the endemic stage and "living with COVID" - businesses will continue to deal with the effects of the pandemic (and associated Public Health restrictions) for some time to come. In short, businesses will continue to have rights, obligations and needs - it is important that both government and the public understand that reopening and recovery are not synonymous.

**Reopening**

Of course, reopening fully as soon as safely possible has been everyone's goal since March 2020 and businesses remain eager to do just that. However, as the recent and current protests across the country have clearly demonstrated, there is broad and deep disagreement amongst individuals regarding the



speed and order with which restrictions should be lifted. For businesses, this will continue to present a challenge to operations as employees and customers (and owners themselves) are on a broad spectrum of comfort levels with ending all restrictions and mandates next month.

We therefore ask that as part of the reopening process the government clearly communicates and encourages businesses and individuals to voluntarily continue with the Public Health practices of choice in their business and daily lives.

Specifically, **we are asking for** public statements from the government that confirm businesses' right to continue to enforce masking and vaccination rules. After mandatory proof of vaccination rules are lifted by government, it should be reiterated that business has the choice to voluntarily continue such a policy. We hope that clear language from the government will help avoid situations like those described in [this news article](#) in Saskatchewan and Alberta.<sup>1</sup>

## Recovery

Business recovery is obviously closely related to reopening, but is actually a complicated topic for several reasons:

- The uneven nature of the effects of the pandemic on various sectors. Some businesses will never recover, some started recovery before reopening and some don't need to recover at all
- The overall and general positive GDP and growth numbers which may obfuscate the severity of the past two years on individual businesses or industries
- The relativist nature of New Brunswick's economic position. i.e. while we may have fared better relative to other provinces during the pandemic, the economic hole that we started from (including demographics) means that it will take a lot more than two years to truly be on a sustainable path to recovery
- The unknown effects of reopening on the virus as well as individual responses and comfort levels with reducing restrictions

There are many unknowns, but what we do know is that business recovery won't be smooth or linear as we exit the pandemic. We should not have a false sense of economic strength based on relatively strong overall numbers. Some sectors had their best two years ever, while others have been nearly wiped out – it is not safe to assume that these will naturally bounce back once restrictions are lifted (nor to assume that sectors affected positively will continue to see record growth). This means that the province will continue to require government leadership – we cannot assume that simply lifting restrictions and reopening are enough.



We hope that we can continue to count on your government to provide leadership and whatever support is necessary to ensure that New Brunswick and our small businesses continue on the path to recovery and prosperity.

Sincerely,

Krista Ross, CEO, Fredericton Chamber of Commerce

John Wishart, CEO, Chamber of Commerce for Greater Moncton

David Duplisea, CEO, Saint John Region Chamber of Commerce

Cathy Pelletier, Executive Director, The Chamber of Commerce of Edmundston Region.

Julie Pinette, General Director, The Chaleur Chamber of Commerce.

Cheryl McGraw, General Director, La Chambre de commerce et du tourisme du Grand Caraquet

cc: Hon. Dorothy Shephard, Minister of Health, Province of New Brunswick

cc: Hon. Ted Flemming, Minister of Public Safety, Province of New Brunswick

cc: Dr. Jennifer Russell, Chief Medical Officer of Health, Province of New Brunswick

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<sup>i</sup> [https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/provincial-vaccine-mandate-business-1.6354502?cmp=rss&fbclid=IwAR0Ixi2pCvw\\_uL5Or29L5Vh\\_DwAZIWdkeSHBMAsgs-WeTSgMiew02N6TfC8](https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/provincial-vaccine-mandate-business-1.6354502?cmp=rss&fbclid=IwAR0Ixi2pCvw_uL5Or29L5Vh_DwAZIWdkeSHBMAsgs-WeTSgMiew02N6TfC8)