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Amazon to hire 15,000 employees across Canada; increase wages

CALGARY -- Amazon Canada is hiring wages as it seeks to fill thousands of new jobs against the backdrop of a labour market that has been dramatically altered by the COVID-19 pandemic.

The-commerce giant said Monday it will hire 15,000 new warehouse and distribution workers in communities across the country this fall to support its ongoing Canadian expansion plans.

Amazon also announced it will increase the starting wage for its front-line, hourly employees in Canada to between \$17 an hour and \$21.65 an hour, up from its current starting wage of around \$16 an hour.

Existing employees will also receive an additional \$1.60 to \$2.20 per hour, starting immediately, Amazon said, regardless of how long they've been with the company.

"We are growing very rapidly in the country," said Sumangha Kumar, director of Canadian customer fulfilment operations for Amazon Canada, in an interview.

"Our business is expanding a lot, and we want to continue to stay focused on our customers, so we obviously have needs around hiring and retaining top talent."

Amazon Canada currently has 25,000 full-time and part-time employees in 25 communities across five provinces. The company is growing rapidly due to the COVID-19 pandemic and the resulting boom in online shopping. Amazon now has 46 warehouse, logistics and delivery facilities in Canada compared with 30 in mid-2020. More growth announcements are expected later this



year, according to the company.

Amazon's expansion plans come amid significant labour shortages in certain segments of the economy. According to Statistics Canada, the country added 90,200 jobs in August, bringing the unemployment rate to 7.1 per cent -- the lowest level since the onset of the pandemic last year.

But not all jobs are being filled. TD senior economist Sri Shanmugasundaram said Friday that labour supply hasn't kept pace with the robust demand for workers in high-touch industries like retail and food service, and that is resulting in staff shortages.

"Career changes, and ongoing health concerns could be possible reasons for the lack of available workers," he said.

Kumar declined to say if Amazon is encountering a labour shortage in Canada, though she acknowledged "there are some places where we have more of an opportunity than others" to fill vacant positions. She said raising wages is one way to ensure the company stays competitive.

"We will always continue to look at how our market is progressing and make the necessary investments in our compensation structure," she said.

Earlier this year, Amazon announced it will boost wages for its

new U.S. hires to US\$17 an hour, as it seeks to add 75,000 new workers in that country.

Other companies south of the border, including McDonald's, Costco and Walmart have also boosted wages to attract more applicants and keep up with a flood of customers as pandemic restrictions ease.

Don Drummond, an economist at the School of Policy Studies at Queen's University in Kingston, Ont., said these employers have no choice but to raise wages. Not only has the risk of catching COVID on the job made people more reluctant to work for minimum wage, but the pool of potential employees is smaller than it might have been due to border restrictions and a decline in international migration during the pandemic.

"A disproportionate supplier of these lower wage jobs is recent immigrants. And that's been basically cut to zero in the last 18 months," he said.

Drummond added employers grappling with labour shortages need to not only look at improving their base pay, but at offering benefits like health and dental coverage for hourly employees.

A number of anti-vaccine demonstrations planned outside hospitals today across Canada are being called demoralizing by a Toronto hospital.

Politicians and healthcare organizations are warning ahead of the planned protests against COVID-19 measures calling the demonstrations "completely unacceptable" and unfair to frontline workers and patients.

An organization calling itself Canadian Frontline Nurses posted notices of "silent vigils" expected to take place in all 10 provinces, saying they're meant to critique public health measures put in place to curb the spread of COVID-19.

Organizers say they want to take a stand against what they call "bureaucratic measures and government overreach," adding that they are not encouraging nurses to walk out on their shifts or abandon patients.

But Ontario Premier Doug Ford, whose province was among those targeted by similar past protests after he announced plans for a proof-of-vaccine system, condemned the latest round on Sunday in a tweet describing such events as "selfish, cowardly and reckless."

The Registered Nurses Association of Ontario and Ontario Medical Association issued a joint statement "strongly condemning" the planned disruptions and calling for designated safe zones around health-care facilities to protect staff and patients -- a proposal the province's New Democrats have also floated.

"Nurses, doctors and other health-care workers have been working around the clock on the front lines of the pandemic for 18 months helping to keep our communities safe," Sunday's joint statement reads.

Dozens of protesters in Toronto gather for planned demonstrations outside hospitals



The University Health Network, which runs Toronto General Hospital, said staff who have cared for the people dying of COVID-19 are particularly disheartened.

The University Health Network said health-care workers have been caring for COVID-19 patients for 18 months despite risks to themselves and their families.

"Vaccinations offer the best chance of preventing hospitalizations, admissions to ICUs and ventilations to preserve life," the hospital network said in a statement.

"To see protests in front of hospitals is demoralizing for all who work here but particularly for the staff who have cared for the people dying of COVID-19, often without all of their family and loved ones around them."

Several nurses and doctors at The

that does bother me is whatever your protest should be, it shouldn't obstruct care," he said.

"These COVID-19 heroes need the resources and support to continue the battle - now in the thick of a fourth wave. They cannot and must not be distracted, or worse, discouraged by protests at the doorsteps of their workplaces."

At least one Toronto emergency nurse agreed.

"There's been harassment and bullying," said Vikky Leung, a nurse at a Toronto hospital who created a petition over the weekend also calling for the creation of safety zones around hospitals.

"There's been emails telling my colleagues not to wear scrubs or anything that identifies them as health-care workers and I think that's truly upsetting and scary."

Leung is on maternity leave, but said she has felt fear and frustration after hearing from her colleagues about their experiences.

"People [are] stressed out and disheartened and really feeling unsupported," she told CBC Radio's Metro Morning on Monday.

"It's hard to see that when you're going into work and leaving work, these people spending their time and energy to promote that kind of propaganda."

Staff will be protected, Toronto Mayor John Tory also

took to social media to condemn the protests planned for some city hospitals, adding he's been in contact with the local police chief about the events and received assurances that staff would be protected and patients could access the buildings.

"I support police in taking whatever action is necessary to protect the lives of innocent people seeking medical care and all of our healthcare heroes," Tory wrote on Twitter. "We have long passed the time when we can have this tyranny of a few interfere with access to healthcare during a pandemic."

Toronto police say they will issue charges where necessary.

NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh said it is wrong to protest at hospitals.

"No health-care worker, no patient, no one seeking health care should in any way be limited or have a barrier to getting the care they need," he said while campaigning in Sioux Lookout, Ont.

Conservative Leader Erin O'Toole also expressed frustration.

"This type of harassment and protest in front of hospitals is completely unacceptable," he said.

Past protests have centred on both public health measures and the prospect of proof-of-vaccination systems that would limit access to many public settings for those who have not been immunized against COVID-19.

British Columbia's system takes effect on Monday, while Ontario's is set to launch on Sept. 22.

Quebec's rolled out earlier this month, Manitoba began issuing vaccine cards in June, and both Nova Scotia and Yukon have said proof-of-vaccination systems are in the works.

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Nurses who attended anti-COVID-measure rally in D.C. in January helping organize cross-country events in Canada

Cross-country protests rejecting vaccine passports and COVID-19 public health measures are planned for Monday, a series of demonstrations by a group that features among its organizers two Ontario nurses who travelled to Washington on the day of the infamous Jan. 6 riots at the Capitol building.

The protests, scheduled for cities from Victoria to St. John's and organized by a group calling itself Canadian Frontline Nurses, echo those that have rumbled across Canada in recent weeks in response to government announcements that they would initiate some variety of vaccine passport systems, which would limit the access unvaccinated Canadians have to public spaces.

Kristen Nagle and Sarah Chojnjan, two of the organizers for the group, have both been long active in the protests against public health measures during the COVID-19 pandemic and were present at a rally in Washington on Jan. 6, the same day that pro-Donald Trump agitators stormed the Capitol building.

In November 2020, Nagle was charged for organizing rallies in violation of Ontario's public health measures. She was, according to court reports at the time, put on paid leave from her job at the London Health Sciences Centre for actions "not aligned" with her employer's values. An investigation into her conduct wrapped up by mid-January 2021, and she was fired.

"Kristen is passionate about children's health and empowering families to trust their bodies and immune systems, to support and not suppress symptoms and to live a more natural life in harmony with the Earth with full body sovereignty," says her bio on the group's website.

Chojnjan was the founder of Nurses Against Lockdowns, which has since merged with Canadian Frontline Nurses. She has, according to her bio on the group's website, been fired from both her nursing jobs in Ontario.

Both women travelled to Washington last January for a rally organized by Global Frontline Nurses, an organization that claims there is no evidence that social distancing is helpful in reducing the spread of COVID-19 and that "lockdowns do not work," both positions widely disputed by public health experts.

In Washington, Chojnjan said she was fired from her nursing job for posting online about her beliefs about lockdowns, and said restrictions on visiting nursing homes are "crimes against humanity."

Chojnjan and Nagle are also both under investigation by the College of Nurses of Ontario for their conduct. The college did not respond to a request for comment on Sunday.

The Post reached out to Canadian Frontline Nurses for comment on Sunday, but the organization did not respond by press time.

There have been protests around the country relating to vaccine passports in recent weeks, reigniting a movement that had, previously, held rallies across the country condemning mask mandates and lockdown measures taken in many provinces to curb the spread of COVID-19.

Last week, the Canadian Nursing Association issued a strongly worded statement condemning the protests, saying the protests "have stunned and saddened health-care workers."

"The reckless views of a handful of discredited people who identify as nurses have aligned in some cases with angry crowds who are putting public health and safety at risk," said a statement. "Their outlandish assertions about science would be laughable were they not so dangerous."

On Sunday, Toronto Mayor John Tory also came out against the protests, saying on Twitter "We'll have a right to protest but abusing that right in order to harass people outside a hospital and spreading misinformation about vaccines in the middle of the pandemic is unacceptable and beyond the pale."

Former Liberal MP Celina Caesar-Chavannes throws support behind Tory candidate in election

Speaking in an interview with The West Block's Mercedes Stephenson, Caesar-Chavannes - who left the Liberal caucus to sit as an independent in March 2019 - said she plans to vote for Conservative candidate Malesha Shikhi in the Whitby, Ont., riding she once represented as Liberal.

"I'm very much a Liberal at heart, but I would say that in this particular instance, in 2021, I don't mind voting for my local representative, Malesha Shikhi, who is a Conservative," Caesar-Chavannes said.

"I've never done that in my life. But at this particular time, maybe we have to think about doing things differently."

When asked about Caesar-Chavannes' comments on Sunday, Liberal Party Leader Justin Trudeau said he wishes her "all the best."

"People have a really important choice to make in this election... Mr. O'Toole wants to take Canada back,

take it back to 1951, apparently," Trudeau said.

"We need to move forward, and people will make their choice. But we are unequivocal about standing up for women, standing up to fight climate change, standing for a better future for everyone."

Caesar-Chavannes left the Liberal caucus after comments she made in an interview were published in The Globe and Mail in early 2019. In that interview, she spoke about private conversations she had with Trudeau about her intention to not seek re-election in the 2019 election.

Canada election: Trudeau comments on former Liberal MP's decision to potentially vote Conservative

She said Trudeau greeted the news of her planned departure with "hostility" and "anger." A spokesperson for Trudeau said at the time that while the conversations were "emotional" there was "absolutely no hostility."

Addressing her departure in a tweet at the time, Caesar-Chavannes said that the interview she did with the Globe and Mail "had unintended effects on those I care about," adding that she "no longer" wanted to "distract from the great work my caucus colleagues are doing."

In the months following, Caesar-Chavannes continued her streak as an outspoken critic of Trudeau. She defended former Liberal cabinet ministers Jody Wilson-Raybould and Jean Charest, who she criticized the government's handling of the SNC-Lavalin affair, and regularly issued criticism of the Liberal government's handling of racism issues.

Speaking in her interview with Stephenson, Caesar-Chavannes shared that she "cried" when she read an excerpt from former Liberal cabinet minister Jody Wilson-Raybould's book. That excerpt detailed a tense discussion between Wilson-Raybould and Trudeau centered on the

Face to Face 2021: Erin O'Toole met 4 undecided voters. Here's what happened

The Conservative child-care plan will help the poorest Canadians, leaving middle income families across the country with less support than those in the lowest tax bracket, Conservative Leader Erin O'Toole says.

Asked which income bracket would get the most under the Conservative child-care plan, O'Toole said: "It's very low. It would be in the \$30,000 range."

O'Toole made the remarks during the first installment of The National Presents: Face to Face with the Federal Party Leaders, in which four undecided voters got five minutes to ask one of four federal party leaders about an issue close to their hearts.

The Conservative leader took the first of his questions from Jason Hawkins of Toronto. Both Hawkins and his wife are school teachers with newborn twins.

Facing a looming child-care costs of \$3,200 a month, Hawkins said he is not sure if both parents can return to work, and he asked O'Toole whom his plan is designed to help.

"It would be the folks that are in the lowest income tax bracket, which I don't think, in your case as a teacher, would be you, Jason," O'Toole said. "I'm just being honest with you. What we are doing is trying to help folks there; [with] seventy-five percent of the cost."

If O'Toole is elected prime minister, he is committed to scrapping the Liberal's child-care plan, which is designed to cut the cost of child care in half immediately and work toward having \$10-a-day child care nationally within five years.

Eight provinces and territories have already signed cost-sharing agreements on child care with the Trudeau government.

O'Toole's plan would be to offer parents a tax credit that would make up for low-income families at \$6,000 a year, \$500 a month. Those payments would be spread out over the year to help parents keep up with bills rather than having to claim the full amount back at tax time.

Asked how a tax credit would help



Erin O'Toole speaking at a podium during a press conference.

"I've been very honest as a leader, there's some areas in the last couple of elections we haven't met the expectations of Canadians, climate change being one, reconciliation, perhaps being another," O'Toole said.

When Canada first signed the Paris Agreement, it committed to cutting emissions of greenhouse gas by 30 per cent below 2005 levels by 2030. Earlier this year, the Liberals raised Canada's target to between 40 and 45 per cent.

O'Toole was pressed by CBC chief political correspondent Rosemary Barton on why his climate plan will revert to the earlier 30 per cent target and not remain as ambitious as the Liberal plan.

The Conservative leader explained that he is not going to try to out-target his opponents just to get elected but was proposing a plan that he felt his government could hit without damaging the economy.

"What we have to do is make sure we deliver," he said.

O'Toole on fighting discrimination

Taylor Lakhyst, a transgender woman from Winnipeg, brought up the issue of discrimination against people in her community, asking O'Toole how he would improve on the reality that she and people like her face daily.

"I'm very proud to say I was chosen to lead our party as someone with a clear record, being pro-choice and

being an ally to the LGBTQ community. And I want to make sure all Canadians know, as prime minister, I'll fight for their interests," O'Toole said.

Lakhyst responded that while O'Toole may share her belief that something has to be done to fight discrimination and acts of hatred against the trans community, there are people in his party who do not feel that way.

"You also don't speak for everybody in your party, and that's a conflict of interest, a significant one, as a matter of fact," she said.

O'Toole explained that when he won the leadership contest for his party, he was clear that he "wanted the Conservative Party to represent more Canadians, regardless of what community, including the LGBTQ community, and I'll fight for that," he said.

Barton pressed O'Toole on why, if discrimination is an issue he wants to tackle and improve for Canadians, he does not list it as one of the priorities in the campaign platform: Canada's Recovery Plan.

"Canada's Recovery Plan is largely based on getting people back to work, working on shoring up our health system," O'Toole said, "but that doesn't mean we don't want to be part of fighting back against intolerance, which I've called sort of shadow pandemic within COVID-19."

O'Toole on maintaining commitments to Afghans

Amal Ghomi, a 22-year-old from Vancouver who is originally from Iran, said he has friends in Afghanistan and is concerned about their safety. He said that Liberal Leader Justin Trudeau has promised to continue to help all the remaining Afghans who helped Canadian troops fight against the Taliban and that he would bring in 40,000 eligible Afghan refugees, up from the 20,000 originally promised.

"I'm wondering if you would maintain that commitment and whether you would expand on that commitment to make sure those to whom we've made promises, and those who are vulnerable in that country, get the help that they deserve from a country like Canada," Ghomi asked.

O'Toole responded simply that "yes" he would maintain the commitment. When pressed on it by Barton, he said he would "absolutely" maintain the effort to help those left behind.

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Visitors in Canada continue to have access to work permits

IRCC announced the extension of a temporary policy introduced a year ago to help employers find workers and allow temporary residents to enter the workforce.

Canada announced that it is extending until February 28, 2022, a coronavirus-related measure allowing visitors to obtain work permits.

Since August 24, 2020, temporary residents who are in Canada with valid visitor status have been able to apply for an employer-specific work permit from within Canada.

This is a temporary regulatory change as normally foreign workers who are in Canada on a visitor's visa cannot change status without leaving the country.

When it was introduced, the measure was intended to help employers who were having difficulty finding workers and to allow visitors facing visa status challenges due to the pandemic to enter the labor market. With limited air travel worldwide, some visitors were unable to leave the country, and some foreign workers had to change their status to

"visitor" because their work permits had expired and they could not apply for new ones due to lack of employment.

Initially, the policy allowed all visitors who arrived in Canada before August 24 and were still in Canada with valid temporary resident status to apply for a work permit. Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) has since expanded the eligibility criteria to include all visitors, regardless of when they arrived in Canada.

To be eligible for an employer-specific work permit, those with visitor status must:

- "be in Canada with valid temporary resident status as a visitor, which includes maintained status, at the time of their submit the work permit application;
- "have submitted an employer-specific work permit application;
- "remain in Canada with a valid status;
- "submit the application no later than February 28, 2022.

The policy also allows foreign nationals who meet the above criteria and who have held a valid Canadian work permit in the previous 12 months to apply for interim work authorization for their new employer while their application is pending. In order to apply for interim work



authorization, applicants must:

- "have valid temporary status when they submit their application and remain in Canada with status;
- "intend to work for their employer and in the occupation specified on their work permit application;
- "complete an IRCC Web form.

This extension will benefit visitors who have been able to come to Canada despite travel restrictions caused by the coronavirus. Since August, travel restrictions have begun to ease, with the border reopening to U.S. citizens and, as of September 7, 2021, to all fully vaccinated international travelers.

While Canada is in a better position than many countries, it continues to face significant economic and social impacts from the pandemic. As a result, the country is redoubling its efforts to strengthen its workforce by enabling people already in the country as well as new immigrants to help drive economic recovery and strengthen the Canadian labour market.

According to the latest labour market figures, there were a total of 81,800 job openings in June - the highest rate of job openings since Statistics Canada began collecting data in October 2020. In the coming months, the labour shortage could continue to worsen, according to a recent BCG report.

Documents obtained by CBC News through a freedom of information request reveal that the provincial cabinet office was getting polling reports as often as weekly through 2020.

The results of the surveys suggest that overall support for the government's handling of COVID-19 dwindled as the pandemic's second wave built in Ontario last fall.

CBC News obtained 35 polling reports spanning a period from March 2020 until January 2021.

"Compared to last spring, Ontarians are much more likely to believe that the government has not moved quickly enough to stop the spread of COVID-19," said the most recent polling report obtained, dated Jan. 8.

"There has been steady increase in the perception that the government 'could have acted differently' in dealing with the pandemic," the report continued.

The numbers behind that analysis showed a particularly striking change late last year. The percentage of respondents saying the government was doing a good or excellent job of handling the second wave dropped sharply in the space of just a few weeks. It was 51

Doug Ford's government polled Ontarians about its COVID-19 response. Here's what the numbers reveal



The Ford government has kept a close eye on how Ontarians feel about its response to COVID-19 by steadily commissioning opinion polls on pandemic-related topics.

Documents obtained by CBC News through a freedom of information request reveal that the provincial cabinet office was getting polling reports as often as weekly through 2020.

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per cent in early November, then bottomed out at 32 per cent in mid-December.

On a similar question about managing the pandemic, opinion was evenly split. In the second week of November, with 47 per cent of respondents saying the government "has done all it can reasonably be expected to do," while 49 per cent said the government "could have acted differently."

By the end of December, the number saying the government could have acted differently had shot up to 67 per cent, more than double the 31 per cent saying the government did all that could be expected.

In the late December polling, 60 per cent of respondents said the provincial government had not moved as quickly as it could to try to stop the spread of COVID-19. Polling in May 2020 put that figure at 40 per cent.

All the polling was conducted by research firm The Strategic Counsel. The company declined a CBC News request for an interview to provide context on the findings.

"Polling is a common tool that all governments use to get a better understanding of the public's opinion on important policy issues facing the province," said Ford's director of media relations, Ivana Yelich, in an email to CBC News.

The polling was extensive and the questions on COVID-19 were

wide-ranging, said Sam Andrey, director of policy and research at the Ryerson Leadership Lab, a think-tank at Toronto's Ryerson University focused on public policy and democratic engagement.

"You can tell that [the government] is paying close attention to how the public feels about the various measures that they're taking through the COVID pandemic, which I think is a good thing," said Andrey in an interview.

He said it's extremely important for governments to have the public's confidence during a crisis, and polling is a way to measure that.

"You want to make sure that as you're making decisions, that that confidence is holding," said Andrey. What's less clear is how the findings influenced the government's decisions.

"I don't think it's a big stretch to say that this government has clearly been following public opinion closely, and many people have said they were acting too late because they were waiting for the public mood to reach a breaking point," Andrey said.

He pointed to one particular polling question that he believes may have prompted the government to delay a province-wide lockdown.

Respondents were asked which of the following views best reflects their own:

"Some people say that Ontario will have to go back to a severe lockdown

in all regions, even if this significantly damages the economy.

"Other people say, we should deal with it by outbreak on a community-by-community basis, and not province wide so the economic recovery can continue, even if there is a risk of more infections."

These are the weekly findings from one question in COVID-19 polling commissioned last fall by the provincial government, obtained by CBC News through a freedom of information request. (The Strategic Counsel Ontario-Cabinet Office)

Support for the "severe lockdown in all regions" averaged 33 per cent over the course of the fall, and never exceeded 40 per cent in any of the weekly polls.

Andrey believes the question was somewhat leading, making the respondents more likely to say they opposed province-wide lockdown.

"I do wonder, if that was a key metric that [the government] was using, if that influenced how they proceeded," he said. "Sometimes you don't want a government to only do what's popular and not what is needed at the time."

The government has yet to publish what it spent on polling in 2020-21. Publicly available figures show the provincial Treasury Board paid The Strategic Counsel \$499,422 in the 2019-20 fiscal year, before the bulk of the COVID-19 polling was conducted.

The reports track the results of one particular polling question since 2018, when the Ford government took office: "Overall, do you feel that the Ontario provincial government is on the right track or the wrong track, in terms of how it is governing the province?"

This graph comes from polling commissioned by the Ford government, obtained by CBC News through a freedom of information request. It tracks public perceptions of whether the government is on the "right track" or the "wrong track," (Ontario Cabinet Office/The Strategic Counsel)

That polling shows how the government's "wrong track" numbers rose steadily through 2019, hitting around 60 per cent in early 2020, then dropping way down to 20 per cent after the pandemic hit.

In January 2021, the polls found that one-third of those surveyed believed the government was on the wrong track and two-thirds on the right track.

Afghan families move through mountain pass into Pakistan on their journey to Canada

TORONTO / ISLAMABAD -- Canada's immigration minister said Sunday the country has now helped more than 140 Afghans make their way overland to Pakistan, one of the few routes that is open to those who want to leave the country and have special Canadian visas.

A spokesperson for Immigration Minister Marco Mendicino added that those refugees will be on their way to Canada within "days or weeks."

The Khyber Pass, a mountain pass on the border of Pakistan and Afghanistan, is currently a jammed jumble of trucks, people, goods, Pakistani soldiers and now Taliban gunmen.

Until a few weeks ago, it was the Afghan army that controlled their side of the border, but now it's Taliban fighters giving the orders.

Under the white flag of the Taliban, border guards from both countries stand just steps apart, controlling the



mass of trucks going back and forth, as well as the crush of Afghans desperate to leave.

A Taliban fighter said that those who have a visa can leave or come whenever they want, but most Afghans waiting in line will be turned back as only those with travel

documents for another country will make it across.

After hours on the road to make it this far, there is an excruciating wait to get that previous approval to pass from Afghanistan to Pakistan.

Paperwork needs to be exact, and it's all been complicated by testing for



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