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Canada's updated border restrictions: What you need to know

Certain travellers will now have an easier time entering Canada as the country relaxes more of the border measures initially put in place to curb the spread of COVID-19.

In effect as of 1 a.m. EDT on April 25, the changes pertain to those who are fully vaccinated, as well as children, regardless of their vaccination status. International travellers will also notice updated requirements on providing a quarantine plan following their arrival in Canada.

Below is everything travellers need to know about Canada's updated border restrictions.

WHO IS IMPACTED AND HOW?

Children aged five to 11 who are travelling with a fully vaccinated parent or guardian will no longer be required to complete a COVID-19 test prior to entering Canada, regardless of whether the child is unvaccinated. This is according to an announcement made by the Public Health Agency of Canada on April 22.

Children under the age of five won't be required to complete a pre-entry COVID-19 test either, and are exempt for vaccination requirements. Travellers aged 12 and older who are either partially vaccinated or unvaccinated will still need to perform a COVID-19 test prior to entering Canada by land, air or water.

WILL YOU NEED TO QUARANTINE OR WEAR MASKS AFTER TRAVELLING?

As a result of the changes, certain travellers are no longer required to prepare a plan to quarantine for 14 days after arriving in Canada. This applies to travellers aged 12 and older who are fully vaccinated, as well as



children aged five to 11 who are travelling with a parent or guardian who is fully vaccinated.

Those with a valid medical contraindication to COVID-19 vaccines won't be required to provide a quarantine plan when entering Canada either. Additionally, if a traveller starts to show symptoms of COVID-19 or tests positive after arriving in Canada, those travelling in the same group will not be required to quarantine, according to the new measures.

The federal government has also dropped its requirement for those entering the country to monitor for and report any COVID-19 symptoms they experience. Those travelling from abroad also won't be required to keep a list of close contacts and places visited for the first 14 days after their arrival in Canada.

Canadian adults and children aged five and older who are fully vaccinated are no longer expected to wear a mask in public spaces for 14 days following their arrival in Canada. However, children aged five to 11 who are either unvaccinated or partially vaccinated must continue to wear masks in public settings, such as school, for 14 days after entering Canada.

All travellers are also still required to wear a mask while travelling on

Ten years ago, Nola Simon caught an unlucky break that gave her an extended preview of the future.

Back then, she was taking part in a pilot project at her workplace, which allowed participants to work from home some of the time.

A foot injury left her unable to drive for a bit, forcing her to do all of her work at home.

"I was actually the only person in the whole company that was working [at home] five days a week," said Simon, a consultant based in Keswick, Ont., who works with businesses on hybrid and remote workstations.

Flexible work would later become the norm for Simon, as it has for millions of Canadians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Yet a growing number of workers are facing a shift in their workplace arrangements, as the lifting of pandemic restrictions permits their return to the office.

At the same time, they're dealing with the impact of inflation, which is making that return more expensive.

Experts say employers should think carefully about what they can do to support their office-bound staff, if they want to hang on to their services in a job market that has a lot of people used to working more independently and seeking to keep up with the increasing cost of living.

"Organizations, more than ever, need these workers," said Sima Sajjadian, an assistant professor in the organizational behaviour and human resources division at the University of British Columbia's Sauder School of Business.

"They should care about organizational commitment, they should care about retaining their talent."

A gradual shift
 In March, slightly more than one-fifth of Canadian workers reported doing most of their work from home,

Finally heading back to the office? It's getting more expensive to do that



according to Statistics Canada's latest Labour Force Survey.

That number was closer to a quarter of workers as of January.

Eddy Ng, the Smith Professor of Equity and Inclusion in Business at Queen's University in Kingston, Ont., said the migration back to the workplace appears to be "slower than what employers had hoped for."

He sees a number of reasons for that, including concerns about the enduring pandemic, as well as family challenges that are more complex to deal with when working outside the home.

There's also the fact that many workers are satisfied to stick to the pandemic-era status quo.

"People are simply not eager to return to a routine that requires more effort to get to work," Ng said via email.

There are those, however, who

aren't opposed to a change of scenery and a life involving a commute.

Edmonton's Ed Jay has been back at the office since last September, after a year and a half of working from home.

The IT manager said he was glad to make the switch.

"There was no separation between work and home," Jay said.

Higher commuting costs
 For Jay, driving to work is costing more than it used to, but the increase in gas prices is manageable so far.

"It's not been outrageous," said Jay, who spends a half-hour driving to work each day.

Prior to the pandemic, Aimée Terrio of Hammonds Plains, N.S., used to spend twice that amount of time commuting both to and from Halifax.

But that was when gas cost a lot less and she wasn't paying \$90 to fill

Simon said she believes this broader impact of inflation on households is being missed in the conversation about the shift back to the workplace.

"It's not just the individual who happens to work for the company who's returning to [the office]," she said.

"Employers have to consider that there's an impact to the household budget, and employees are going to make decisions about what's actually going to work best for the whole family."

Queen's University's Eddy Ng said employers are under pressure to help employees address these concerns.

This includes demands for support for "daycare, transport or shuttle services, meals, added 'cost of working' compensation," he said, in addition to ensuring that workers have a safe workplace return to work.

Keeping workers happy
 In Canada's most-populous province, the view from the top of the Labour Ministry is that organizations need to do more to ensure their employees are satisfied with their working arrangements and compensation.

"To attract the best workers, businesses need to be prepared to offer bigger salaries and consider perks (like working from home) to retain them," Ontario Labour Minister Monte McNaughton told CBC News in an emailed statement.

Ahead of an election in June, the incumbent Progressive Conservative government in Ontario has been highlighting efforts to improve conditions for workers.

UBCA's Sima Sajjadian said it's clear that many businesses are in a position to pay their workers more - and it is in their interest to do so.

"They can increase the compensation, and in return they are going to save the cost of replacing people who are leaving," she said.

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Children's hospitals under strain in Canada's 6th COVID-19 wave

As Canada's sixth wave of COVID-19 continues, hospitals caring for the country's youngest patients are facing both high patient volumes and high levels of staff off sick.

This time of year, the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO) in Ottawa normally sees up to 150 daily patients in its emergency department, but lately, it can be double that, with hours-long wait times.

Tammy DeGiovanni, CHEO's senior vice president of clinical services and chief nurse executive, said around two-thirds of those kids are coming in with COVID symptoms.

The hospital has also been forced to cancel some surgeries.

"The double whammy for us is that we also have many staff, medical staff and volunteers that are off as well because of COVID symptoms or COVID in the household," DeGiovanni said.

She said that on any given day recently, roughly 10 to 15 per cent of the hospital's workforce has been off

work - with each staff member taking 10 days away to recover.

"It's the cascading effect of the additional pressure on the system right now, as opposed to in previous waves," she said.

According to hospital figures, CHEO's single-day record for the number of staff, medical staff, learners and volunteers restricted from entering for COVID-related reasons was 159 in early January - just as the initial Ontario wave was taking hold after the holiday season.

The next highest day was April 11, at 191, with the facility still experiencing major daily staff shortages.

Children with COVID, other illnesses

In Saskatchewan, health-care facilities are also dealing with a surge of sick kids, alongside record overall hospitalizations - Wednesday's provincial data showed a new all-time high of 417 people in hospital with COVID-19.

"That's creating a lot of pressure on the acute care side, with regards to hospitalizations, as well as ICU

admissions, as well as on the emergency department."

Data provided by BC Children's Hospital in Vancouver shows a mix of both COVID-19 and other respiratory illnesses showing up in young patients in recent months.

In February, 76 children tested positive for COVID-19 in the hospital's emergency department, while another 29 tested positive for other respiratory illnesses. The following month, that ratio shifted, with 37 kids having COVID-19 and 72 having other respiratory illnesses, including one case of influenza. (The hospital did not provide April data.)

Health-care workers at children's hospitals, like their adult counterparts, are "similarly affected by disease spread in their communities," said Dr. Sevinch Murthy, a pediatric critical care physician and infectious diseases specialist with BC Children's Hospital.

At McMaster Children's Hospital in Hamilton, Ont., the number of admitted pediatric COVID patients has remained low and relatively stable through the fifth and sixth waves, a

hospital spokesperson said in a statement to CBC News.

However, the volume of kids coming to the hospital's emergency department with respiratory symptoms - some of which are related to COVID - is very high. The spokesperson said that, combined with staffing pressures, has led to the system being "very challenged."

Visits back to pre-pandemic levels

It's a similar situation inside one of Canada's largest health-care centres for youth, Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children (also known as SickKids).

The whole hospital is "under strain," in part because of roughly 10 to 30 per cent of staff being off sick on any given day throughout the two Omicron waves, said Dr. Jason Fischer, SickKids's division head of emergency medicine.

Hospitalizations and ICU admissions remain high across Ontario, just as the number of patients coming to the emergency department at SickKids are expected to return to pre-pandemic levels, hospital data shows.

There were more than 7,000 total emergency visits at the hospital in April 2019, but that tally dipped in April 2020, during the early days of the pandemic, when many health-care facilities experienced a major drop in visits.

Ontario Progressive Conservatives campaigning as if COVID-19 pandemic over, experts say



Ontario's Progressive Conservatives are campaigning as if COVID-19 is over - but experts say the pandemic will most likely colour the election campaign in some way, and it may even give the incumbent party a boost with voters when it comes to unmet promises.

Although the official campaign has not yet started, Premier Doug Ford and his cabinet ministers have been touring the province making a flurry of promises under the banner of "building Ontario," making stops across the Greater Toronto Area, as well as the southwest and the north. Transportation is a major focus, with pledges to build highways, subways and electric vehicles, as is health-care infrastructure like hospital and long-term-care expansion projects.

The Tories appear squarely focused on rebuilding the province from the pandemic and are positioning themselves as the one party capable of doing so ahead of the expected June 2 election.

"They're really trying to proceed as though the pandemic is in the rear-view mirror," said Cameron Anderson, a political science professor at Western University.

That tone, including the move to lift almost all virus-related public health measures in the six weeks before the election campaign, represents a shift for incumbent premier Doug Ford. Anderson noted, as Ford for much of the pandemic

appeared more willing to introduce public health restrictions than other Conservative premiers in Canada.

Tories trying to "change the channel" on pandemic

Susie Heath, a senior consultant with Crestview Strategy and former Liberal staffer, said the spree of funding announcements also appears like a bid to "change the channel" on the pandemic and appease frustrated voters who have been negatively affected by measures like business closures over the last few years.

"They're hoping perhaps that these voters do not have long memories and will look at all the good that they're announcing, maybe in their own minds," she said.

That hope for short memories could also apply to a number of central campaign promises from the Tories' 2018 victory that have still not been met: beer and wine are still not available in convenience stores, and hydro bills haven't been cut by 12 per cent.

Ford's government has also pivoted its stance on major issues over the last year, by raising the minimum wage to \$15 per hour after cancelling a planned wage increase years earlier and supporting electric vehicle infrastructure and manufacturing after halting charging station builds and ending buyers' rebates shortly after sweeping to power.

When it comes to flip-flops and unmet pledges from four years ago,

analysts who spoke to The Canadian Press said the world-altering pandemic could engender some forgiveness and understanding from voters.

"The pandemic will colour much of the evaluation of the government's performance, to the point where it masks over, I'm going to guess, some of the previous promises or policies that maybe were switched or changed or not yet addressed," Anderson said, noting that Ford's government has framed some of those policy shifts on issues as responses to a changed world, which could mitigate potential damage.

"It's going to be a hard fight for Ford"

Shakir Chambers of Earncliffe Strategies, also a Conservative strategist who worked on Ford's 2018 campaign platform, said the pandemic will remain an "X factor" throughout the campaign.

But he said the move to focus on non-pandemic issues like auto manufacturing is a good one for the PCs, as it allows them to connect with people on labour and affordability at a time when much of the party's voter base is tired of pandemic measures and wants to discuss other priorities.

Another potential factor, he said, is the influence of new right-wing parties like the New Blue and Ontario Party that are stoking lingering resentment against the government over measures

like lockdowns and vaccination policies, despite the majority of those policies having ended.

Similar themes are also behind the immense popularity of federal Conservative leadership candidate Pierre Poilievre. Chambers said issues in the federal leadership race and the breakaway parties on the right could spill over and affect Ford's campaign even as he tries to shift focus from COVID-19.

"It's going to be a hard fight for Ford," Chambers said. "How do you manage it so that you don't lose your party base, especially in these kind of contested areas, but at the same time, you don't turn off the majority of Ontarians that need some level of public health restrictions to be safe. It's going to be an interesting walk for him moving forward."

Liberals appear to be gaining ground, polls suggest

Ford is coming into the campaign with the incumbent advantage, and the latest polls indicate the Progressive Conservatives are in the lead over the other parties, though the Liberals appear to be gaining some ground. Chambers noted that even with that apparent lead, Ford is in the fight for a majority, as all opposition leaders have indicated they won't support a PC minority.

The PCs need 63 seats to win a majority. That's achievable for Ford's party, Chambers said, but the Tories are also launching their campaign without a significant number of incumbents, including heavy-hitter cabinet ministers like Health Minister and Deputy Premier Christine Elliott, and several seats in the GTA could be competitive for the other parties.

Jeffrey Rosenthal, University of Toronto statistics professor who analyzes polls, noted that anything can happen over the course of a campaign to shift the picture - including voters on the left responding to early polls.

"There's quite a few voters who probably want the PCs out and they don't care that much if it's the NDP or the Liberals get in. A lot of those voters, you can imagine them being influenced by early polls as the election heats up," he said.

"What I'm watching for the most in the months ahead is what's going to happen to that NDP-Liberal balance. If it coalesces around one party or the other then that'll change everything."

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Abhishek Banerjee's short film Vakeel Babu makes its way to New York Indian Film Festival 2022

Abhishek Banerjee has always seen exploring unique characters in his films. The actor has won the hearts of many with his acting spectacle and has all the potential to shine bright on the global stage. Recently the actor, took to his social media while he shared the joy of his short film Vakeel Babu getting selected for the New York Indian Film Festival 2022. He was seen playing the role of a lawyer. The actor described the narrative of the film in the caption while describing the joy of traveling to the New York Indian film festival for the first time. "Happy to share that our Premier is traveling places???"



Presenting our latest film - Vakeel Babu! We're so excited to share the poster for our recent short film, @vakeelbabu.

The film is directed by Sumit Purohit (Scam 1993, BAFTA Breakthrough Honoree 2020-21) and stars Abhishek Banerjee (Paatal Lok, Mirzapur, Street Dala and more), Bhramini Oza Gandhi (esteemed Gujarati and Hindi TV

and theatre actor) and Lovleen Mishra (Raees, Little Things, Annu and more). The film traces the journey of Shikha Jaisan (played by Bhramini) as she rediscovers her purpose in the judicial system after being distracted with chasing success through his digital video channel. Emerging from in-depth, on-ground research on the legal challenges for victims of gender-based violence (GBV), @vakeelbabu aims to drive conversation on the essential role lawyers play in the lives of clients seeking justice against gender-based violence, specifically domestic violence. Also, absolutely thrilled to share that we are traveling to the prestigious stage of @nyindianfilmfest for USA premiere.

Karan Johar Opens Up About Being Trolled For His SEXUALITY: 'Love Me, Hate Me; Don't Be Indifferent To Me'

Filmmaker and producer Karan Johar is an avid social media user and he often gives a glimpse into his professional and personal life. The popular Bollywood personality is frequently targeted for multiple reasons, sometimes for expressing his views and other times netizens make nasty comments over his sexuality.



Now, in a recent interview with Janine Spector, the Kochi Kaha Hai! HAI director opened up on the same and even gave an indirect message to the trolls. Johar talked about limiting his presence on social media and only using it for promoting his films. The 49-year-old director said, "Eventually, it's a platform that you are leveraging to build a connection with the world outside and it's my job. I'm not here to dissociate myself from my filmmaking or from my storytelling

narrative which is the most crucial part of who I'm." Upon being quizzed about the excessive social media trolling, the Dharna Productions head hocha said that he doesn't give a damn as he has stopped caring about the negativity and has started focusing on love. When Johar was asked about the excessive social media trolling, the Dharna Productions head told that he

Malaika Arora REACTS TO 12-Year Age Gap With BF Arjun Kapoor: 'It's Considered A Sacrilege For A Woman To Date Younger Man'

Malaika Arora and Arjun Kapoor are one of the most and hottest couples in Bollywood. Be it any occasion, they never fail to leave us in awe of their sizzling chemistry. Malaika-Arjun's love story has indeed proved that when it comes to love, age is just a number. Both the actors have a 12-year age gap and are often trolled because of this huge age difference between them. The couple has been quite vocal about their age gap and said they both remain unaffected.

Now in a recent interview with Hello magazine, Malaika has opened up about her age difference with Arjun. The Chaiyya Chaiyya girl mentioned that it's considered a 'sacrilege' for a woman to date a younger man in Indian society. She also spoke about the impregnable for women to have a life after a breakup and divorce. Malaika was quoted as saying, "It's very important for women to have a life after a breakup or a divorce. There's a misogynist approach to love relationships. It's often considered a sacrifice for a woman to date a younger man." The actress also called herself a 'strong' woman and that she is a reflection of her mother. "I work on myself to ensure that I'm stronger, fiercer, and happier every day. I'm a reflection of my mother, as I embody her strength and grit, and mirror her life subconsciously. She always told me to live life on my terms and be independent." Malaika further explained. In 2019, lovebirds Arjun Kapoor and Malaika Arora made their relationship official when the actress wished Arjun on his 34th birthday with a mushy Instagram post. The couple has been dating for several years now and has never shied away from expressing their love to public.

IPL 2022: SRH skipper Kane Williamson credits his bowlers for thumping nine-wicket win over RCB

Sunrisers Hyderabad captain Kane Williamson credited his bowlers and batmen for the thumping nine-wicket win over Royal Challengers Bangalore on Saturday. Sunrisers Hyderabad chased down a 69-run target in just eight overs to register a spectacular nine-wicket win over Royal Challengers Bangalore at the Beasome Stadium. Marco Jensen and T Natarajan bagged three wickets each to build on RCB for 68 runs and pave way for a comprehensive win for SRH. "The guys bowled beautifully and we caught well. It was an outstanding performance. But for us it's about looking forward to the next challenge. The ball is swinging a lot more this season, so we have been taking wickets in the powerplay," said Kane Williamson in a post-match presentation. "He (Jensen) is always up for a laugh off the field, but he is very focused. He has got the skills to do that, he is a treat for us. You would not lose any early wicket. Skipper Williamson was happy to play a sheet anchor role and



allowed Abhishek Sharma to attack from the other end as the 2016 champions crossed the 50-run mark in 5.5 overs. Harshal Patel finally broke the 64-run partnership dismissing Abhishek Sharma for 47 but it was too little too late for RCB as Hyderabad chased down the 69-run target in just 8 overs winning the match by nine wickets. Coming to the match, chasing a poly 69-run target started off steadily as openers Kane Williamson and Abhishek Sharma ensured that their team did not lose any early wicket. Skipper Williamson was happy to play a sheet anchor role and

Rashid Khan becomes second overseas spinner to bag 100 wickets in IPL

Gujarat Titans (GT) leg-spinner Rashid Khan on Saturday became the second overseas spinner in the history of the Indian Premier League to reach the milestone of 100 wickets. The Afghanistan spinner achieved this incredible feat when he bagged his first wicket of the innings against the Kolkata Knight Riders in match number 35 of IPL 2022. Rashid reached the triple figure mark after removing KKR's Venkatesh Iyer. Iyer was dismissed after the left-handed batter holed out to the deep off Rashid's bowling and Abhinav Manohar took a sharp catch in the outfield. With this, Rashid became the third fastest player in the history of the tournament to reach the 100-wicket mark. When KKR required 50 off the final five, Rashid Khan caught Shivam Mavi to claim his second wicket of the match. The 23-year-old also became just the 2nd overseas spin bowler after West Indian Sunil Narine to pick 100 wickets and overall 4th overseas bowler. The others are Lasith Malingara and Dwayne Bravo. Rashid took his 100th league wicket in his 83rd match, equalling Indian leg-spinner Anant Mishra for the record of the fastest spinner to reach the feat (100 wickets) in IPL history. Rashid went past Yuvrajendra Chahal (84 matches) and Sunil Narine (86 matches) for the milestone.

India to play five-match T20I series vs South Africa from June 9

India will play a five-match T20 International series against South Africa at home later this month after the conclusion of the ongoing Indian Premier League, with the opening match scheduled in New Delhi on June 9. The five matches will take place across 11 days, concluding with the final game at the M. Chinnayyan Stadium in Bengaluru. This will be India's third T20I series in 2022 at home; they swept both West Indies and Sri Lanka 3-0 earlier this year. And with the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2022 in Australia just a few months away, it will be a good opportunity for the hosts to experiment with their bench strength. India has a slightly better record against South Africa in the shortest format, having won nine out of their 15 matches, with the Proteas winning six of those. "We are excited to add these fixtures to the Proteas men's itinerary for the season. It is a massive



white-ball season for our team, with an ICC Men's T20 World Cup in Australia later this year and the ICC World Cup taking place in India next year," said Cricket South Africa CEO Phisoiso Mosale. "It goes without saying that game time is vital for our team as they look to get their combinations right. We look forward to supporting our men in a few weeks' time in what promises to be an explosive and highly competitive series." The schedule: 1st T20I: June 9, New Delhi; 2nd T20I: June 12, Cuttack; 3rd T20I: June 14, Vizag; 4th T20I: June 17, Rajkot; 5th T20I: June 19, Bengaluru.

Overall, Sri Lanka's former premier Lasith Malinga holds the record for the fastest to reach 100 wickets (in 70 matches). Rashid Khan made his IPL debut in 2017 for Sunrisers Hyderabad and is now the vice-captain of the new franchise Gujarat Titans.

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MATRIMONIAL
My brother 31, 5'8, Canadian citizen, Sunni Muslim, BSc from Pakistan working in Toronto. My sister 32, 5'4, Canadian citizen, BSc from Manitoba University, medical student Caribbean School.
Contact #204-963-9830

MATRIMONIAL
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Service Canada warns of long wait times due to 'unprecedented surge' in passport applications

The federal government is warning that a massive surge in the number of Canadians applying for passports is causing long wait times at Service Canada locations across the country. The demand for passports is said to be driven by the fact that many Canadians put off international travel for much of the pandemic.

With pandemic restrictions being eased in Canada and around the world, Canadians looking to travel have been turning up in massive numbers at passport offices.

The government says it is receiving more than 200,000 calls per day for passport requests at Service Canada. That's about 40 times more calls than Service Canada typically received prior to the pandemic, when the agency handled about 5,000 passport requests daily.

"This unprecedented surge in demand has resulted in appointments filling up quickly," said a statement from Employment and Social Development Canada, which operates Service Canada locations.



"The Government of Canada recognizes that during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, Canadians had other things on their minds and planning to renew their passports was not a priority. However, this decrease in passport applications would by necessity result in higher-than-normal surge rates later on."

Figures provided to CBC News show that requests for passports continued during the first year of the pandemic. From April 1, 2020 to March 31, 2021, Service Canada issued 363,000

passports. A year later - between April 1, 2021 and March 31, 2022 - the agency issued 1,273,000 passports.

Service Canada also points to ongoing health and safety restrictions, which limit the number of staff allowed to work at a given location, as a factor in long wait times.

Ottawa credits simplified renewal process. Any expired passport issued within the last 15 years can be renewed with fewer documents, which include two photos, two references, a completed application form and fees.

their passports within typical processing times.

Ottawa says the turnaround time for people applying at one of Service Canada's 55 specialized passport sites is five business days. The government's "service standard" for those locations is 10 business days.

People applying at other Service Canada locations, or through the mail, are waiting an average of 25 business days to have their applications processed - slightly higher than that standard of 20 business days.

The government credits its introduction of a simplified passport renewal process with keeping processing times under control during the wave of new applications.

But some people applying for passports have told CBC News about days-long wait times. One family in Greater Vancouver reported making five unsuccessful attempts to submit an application at various locations around the city.

Under the updated guidelines, applicants are no longer required to have a guarantor or to provide original documents, such as proof of citizenship.

Any expired passport issued within the last 15 years can be renewed with fewer documents, which include two photos, two references, a completed application form and fees.

Ontario NDP unveils 2022 election platform with big promises for health care and affordability

Andrea Horwath's NDP unveiled its platform for the 2022 election campaign on Monday, with health-care and pocketbook-related commitments forming the core of a sweeping set of promises.

"So many folks are working day in and day out, while the cost of living keeps going up and your wages aren't," Horwath told a crowd of supporters and NDP candidates at an event in downtown Toronto.

"For far too long, government just hasn't been working for people, and COVID really exposed that," she said. "The good news is that we know it doesn't have to be this way. We can fix what matters most to people."

Among the NDP's central promises is a plan to provide prescription drug coverage for all Ontarians, as well as the accelerated implementation of a dental care program and a freeze on income tax for low and middle-income residents if the party forms government after the June 2 election.

The pitch to voters on universal pharmacare emphasizes affordability, particularly for people who don't have drug benefit plans and have to pay for their medications. It would at first cover a baseline of 125 medications, including birth control as well as cancer drugs.

Horwath repeatedly tied health-care issues to the rising cost of living, which various polls suggest will be a defining issue in the upcoming Ontario election. She described the election as a "high stakes" contest for the future of the province.

"Too many Ontarians must choose between filling their prescriptions or paying the bills," reads a portion of the party's platform.

"The Ontario NDP will act immediately to accelerate pharmacare ensuring all Ontarians have prescription drug coverage faster," says the platform, which puts the net cost of the program at \$475 million.

At least 2.2 million Ontarians have no prescription drug coverage, according to provincial government figures, with out-of-pocket spending



on medications totalling \$2.5 billion annually.

Currently, the province's Ontario Drug Benefit program covers the cost of prescription medications for all seniors, regardless of income, as well as for people receiving Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program funding.

The previous Liberal government brought in prescription drug coverage for everyone under 25 back in 2017. Premier Doug Ford's government rolled that back in 2018 shortly after taking office, so the province's coverage for children and young adults now only applies to those without private insurance benefits.

The NDP is the first of Ontario's political parties to release its campaign platform. It did not come with an estimated price tag, but the party said one is coming before election day. Party officials said they need to see the government's updated budget - set to be released on Thursday ahead of an expected election call - before finalizing their own financial plan.

Pandemic exposed weakness of health-care system, NDP says. The NDP's platform frequently criticizes the Ford government's

independent inquiry into COVID-19, expand available sick days for workers and establish a plan for business supports in the event of future public health restrictions.

There's also a promise to support Ontarians who are experiencing long COVID by ensuring they are supported by primary care providers and funding research into the condition.

NDP promises \$20 minimum wage by 2026. Monday's platform release also updated a previous NDP announcement on housing, and now targets building 100,000 social housing units for \$493 million annually, and 60,000 supportive housing units for \$100 million annually.

The New Democrats also committed to introducing a speculation and vacancy tax as part of a broader plan to make housing more affordable in the province, as well as a promise to reintroduce control for apartments.

There's also a pledge to freeze income taxes on low-income and middle-income households for four years - though there were few details on that aspect of the platform. Horwath said that high-income earners and corporations would also be asked to "pay their fair share."

Other aspects of the NDP's platform have been slowly being detailed in the lead-up to the campaign, including plans to cover mental health care under OHIP; phase out for-profit long-term care ownership; cancel Highway 413 and the Bypass and scrap Bill 124, which capped wage increases for public sector workers.

The party also promised to raise the minimum wage to \$16 per hour in 2022, rising to \$20 in 2026.

On the issue of electoral reform, the NDP is proposing to create a "mixed member proportional voting system" that will be designed by an independent group and supported by experts from other provincial parties.

None of the other parties have indicated when they will release their full campaign platforms, although Steven Del Duca's Liberals and Mike Schreiner's Green Party have each unveiled several key promises.

Meanwhile, Ford and his cabinet ministers have made billions of dollars worth of government announcements in recent weeks, and many of them can be expected to form part of the Ontario PC Party's re-election platform.

Russian sanctions proof that Canadian military mission had impact in Ukraine: commander

The most recent commander of Canada's military training mission in Ukraine says the fact Russia has sanctioned him and several of his predecessors alongside dozens of other prominent Canadians is proof the mission had an impact.

Lt. Col. Leo-Frederic Gilbert is one of six former commanders of the training mission known as Operation Unifiler sanctioned by Russia last week at Moscow added 61 Canadians to the list of those now banned from entering the country.

"I'm really proud of what we accomplished," Gilbert told The Canadian Press in an interview when asked about his inclusion on Russia's list of sanctioned Canadians. "And this is a great measure of effectiveness."

Among the other former Operation Unifiler commanders sanctioned were Lt. Col. Sarah Heer and Lt. Col. Melanie Lake, who also described the addition of the six senior Canadian

officers as a sign of the mission's worth. Canada first established Operation Unifiler in 2015. The move was in direct response to Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula and its provision of weapons, ammunition and even troops to pro-Russian separatist forces in eastern Ukraine.

The purpose of the mission, which evolved several times before being suspended ahead of Russia's invasion, was to help Ukraine transform its post-Soviet military into a modern fighting force capable of defending the country.

The federal government says more than 31,000 Ukrainian soldiers were trained by Canada before the mission was suspended less than two weeks before Russia launched its full-scale invasion in February.

Gilbert was on the ground when the order came down from Ottawa for his 250 troops to pack up and leave Ukraine for Poland prior to Russia's

attack. He says while he understands the order to leave, it was nevertheless "a bit weird for us."

"Once we were relocated in Poland, this is where we went: 'That just happened,'" Gilbert recalled. "The feeling is a bit weird for us because this is against our nature... We're trained to (fight), we are not supposed to leave in those types of situations."

Canada and its allies said in the lead-up to Russia's invasion that they would not deploy troops into Ukraine, fearing such a move would escalate the conflict and lead to an all-out war between Russia and the NATO military alliance. Western countries have instead been providing financial and military support to Ukraine and imposing sanctions on Russia.

While planning for the withdrawal of Canadian troops started in November, when Russia first massed of thousands of troops on Ukraine's border, Gilbert said it wasn't until the end of January that everyone realized

the threat was real. Even then, however, there was uncertainty. Gilbert recalled his last meeting with a Ukrainian military officer before departing the country in mid-February, in which the Ukrainian National Guard commander dismissed the threat of a Russian attack.

"He said: 'We're going to see each other soon because this is not going to happen,'" Gilbert said. "I was at that point convinced that something was going to happen. He was still confident this was not going to really happen. Unfortunately, I was right."

Gilbert and his troops spent about a month in Poland, during which time finished packing in preparation for their eventual return to Canada. They were also put on standby in case they were needed to provide humanitarian or other assistance.

Russia-Ukraine conflict: Canada announces protective aid for Ukraine - Feb. 27, 2022. All trainers under Gilbert's command have since returned to Canada, though another group of 130 Canadian Armed Forces members recently headed back to Poland to help some of the millions of Ukrainians who have fled Russia's invasion.

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