

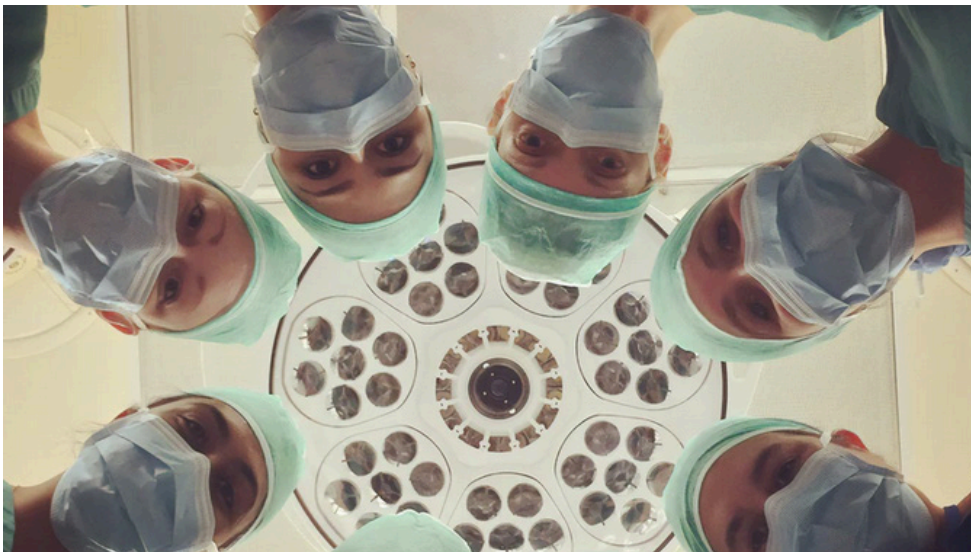
Fast

FACTS

CANADIAN CENTRE FOR POLICY ALTERNATIVES - MANITOBA

February 8, 2021

The government of Manitoba is failing Manitobans every step of the way in their pandemic response and needs to do better.



No one in the world has or had all the answers, and there are bound to be mistakes and missteps. But the chronic lack of preparedness, slow responses and a legacy of austerity has resulted in more suffering in uncertain times. Without adequate investment in public health care now and into the future, Manitoba will continue to lag behind other provinces in COVID response and vaccine roll-out.

Manitoba escaped the first wave in large part due to luck. Once the virus reached Manitoba the province was able to shut down before spring breaks for public schools. With already lower population

density, in addition to national, provincial travel bans, early days guaranteed a grounded population, restricted movement resulting in the slowing of the transmission of the virus.

This grace period afforded to Manitoba was squandered by our government. The government failed to put key structural pieces in place to deal with a predicted far worse second wave. Instead, it focused on an ill-fated campaign to restart the Manitoba economy.

COVID19 and the ability to manage the virus within our population is dependent on a number of key pieces as identified

there is an alternative.

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by experts, such as the World Health Organization (WHO), to protect the population including but not limited to, testing, tracing, clear communication to the community to not only provide pertinent information but to ensure buy-in with public health measures, and swift lockdowns when necessary, access to personal protective equipment and planning for equitable health access and vaccine distribution.

However, our government elected to shutter the doors of the command centre for a total of 151 days. Front line workers struggled for PPE. The cuts to the health care system proceeding the pandemic continue with Manitoba failing to properly fund health care responses during the pandemic. This resulted outsourcing with less transparent and accountable services to private for-profit providers, instead of expanding the public system through measured and direct investment.

The confidential contract with private, for-profit provider Dynacare is one example of public funding for private health care. Dynacare's capacity to serve the public is put into question when they are also providing services to private industries itching to get back to work. The ability to ramp up and ramp down accordingly is ideal within a public system, with the properly trained staff, and Manitoba certainly has the ability to expand within our own system.

It must be pointed out that contact tracing was inadequate and impacted the forecasting and handling the second wave. The consequences of which was a second wave out of control as it ravaged personal care homes and still government has not added sufficient resources to long term care and the public health system. Offers from the Federal government to provide assistance via Statistics Canada for contact tracing were not accepted. A contract was awarded to Red Cross, with supplementary call centre support from another private business 24/7 InTouch call centre.

The promise of a return to normal is far away given the slow pace of Manitoba's vaccination roll out. Manitoba's has had

the lowest or near-lowest vaccines used as a percentage of those delivered of Canadian provinces. The contracting out of management and distribution of vaccines by PetalMD has resulted in the wrong address for the vaccine supercentres sent twice. Manitoba still has a significant portion of our allotted vaccines chilling in the freezers and distribution sites still waiting to become operational. The director of the immunization plan was just hired. Has this government learned from the lack of preparation for the second wave? Without full information about plans now, public trust is eroding.

With the slowing of additional vaccine deliveries, now is the time for the government to remedy errors coming from immunization super sites. And ensure already trained nurses and other health care professionals have an easier pathway to apply to help as opposed to being ignored or giving misinformation and ensuring proper training of incoming staff. And while it is positive the roll out has begun across personal care homes in the province, the horrific scenes at the Maples and Parkview Manor will not be forgotten. The government must fix seniors care now and part of that is ensuring older Manitobans are able to access the vaccine.

The pandemic continues to point to the necessity and critical role our public health care system. There must be meaningful investment in public health care, a willingness to correct missteps and proceed with the utmost caution and with full scientific and founded medical data to substantiate any lifting of restrictions or more lives will be lost needlessly.

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