

The Manitoba Public Health Association
c/o Ms. Stephanie Van Haute
2nd Floor- 360 Broadway Ave
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8



September 1, 2020

The Honourable Brian Pallister, M.L.A. Premier of Manitoba
Legislative Assembly of Manitoba
450 Broadway,
Winnipeg, MB R3C 0V8

cc: The Honourable Cameron Friesen, M.L.A., Minister of Health
The Honourable Scott Fielding, M.L.A., Minister of Finance

To the Honourable Brian Pallister:

Re: Outsourcing of Core Public Health Services: COVID-19

The Manitoba Public Health Association (MPHA) was established in 1952 as a volunteer led, non-profit, non-governmental organization that advocates to support and improve the health of Manitobans. We are writing to express our concerns regarding the request for proposals (RFP) to provide COVID-19 contact tracing and case investigation services for the province and hope you can address the urgent questions it raises.

The MPHA recognize the long-standing skills and dedication of Manitoba's public health workforce. A global pandemic brings an unprecedented threat to the health of the public and we acknowledge the extent to which we rely on their unique expertise to lead us through these uncertain times.

An integral part of Manitoba's health system, public health expertise and services were under resourced prior to this pandemic. As noted in the Peachy Report in 2017, "Manitoba lags much of the country in public health funding. It is fair to conclude increasing the funding to public health initiatives will likely yield the greatest return on investment in healthcare in the province, over any other initiative." This reality has created vulnerability within the system most prepared to manage and respond to the demands of this pandemic.

As we see case numbers climbing and the fall respiratory virus season looming, it is evident that more resources are needed to ensure robust capacity for case investigation and contact tracing which are critical lines of defense against COVID-19. Before outsourcing core public health

services, we must consider the cost of missing the opportunity to build public health infrastructure and capacity that can serve us into the future.

While seeking the support of the private sector is well within the legislation of the Public Health Act, the move to privatize core public health services raises concerns. The most significant of these concerns are the need for specialized skills and knowledge required for case investigation and contact tracing; and the integrated efforts of all parts of the public health system where case and contact investigation is inextricably linked. This includes key functions such as testing, data capture, epidemiological analysis, intervention decisions and public health messaging.

Before proceeding with this RFP, we ask that you please pause to consider the critical questions this raises for us. How can an outsourced provider:

- fully integrate with the rest of the public health system which is critical for a competent public health response?
- have the training and experience required for case investigation and contact tracing which is significantly more nuanced than daily monitoring of cases and contacts?
- ensure the privacy of personal health information, particularly given the sensitivity of COVID-19?
- deliver sufficiently competent services at a lower cost to government than augmenting our existing public health infrastructure (presuming proponents work within a profit driven business model)?

What investments have been made to augment the public health infrastructure already in place? What increased resources are you providing to central and regional public health workforces so they can effectively fulfill the core public health functions to protect us and inform you?

It is essential that public health be sufficiently resourced to continue effectively responding to COVID-19 in Manitoba. We are in awe of how resourceful the public health workforce has been to find surge capacity through shifting resources to date. But at this time with case counts climbing and the duration continuing, please reconsider outsourcing COVID-19 case investigation and contact tracing services and first invest in our public health system. Build on what is working. The health of Manitobans depends on it.

Sincerely,



Manitoba Public Health Association

Per: Stephanie Van Haute

Board President