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Friday April 17 COVID-19 Update

Dear neighbour,

With the spread of COVID-19 through our long-term care homes and shelters, this pandemic is exposing our city's divisions and weaknesses: people of colour, the precariously employed, and our poor and vulnerable are being hit first and worst.

Someday soon the worst of this pandemic will be over. My hope is that when we look back at this time we will remember this period not just for its isolation, anxiety, and grief but also as a turning point where we evolved for the better.

Please stay at home and practice physical distancing when you are outside. Go the extra mile and make it easy for people to stay away from you by walking on the edge of the sidewalk or switching to the other side of the street, if you are able.

Stay safe. We're in this together,

Jessica Bell

Jessica Bell (MPP for University-Rosedale)

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Declaration of Emergency extended, schools closed until May 4

On April 15, Ontario [extended](#) the province's Declaration of Emergency for another 28 days until May 12. Schools will remain [closed](#) until May 4. The Ontario NDP argued the Ontario Government's emergency bill should have included a \$2000 per month emergency basic income for the many Ontarians who are not eligible for federal support, as well as an increase in wages for essential workers. It didn't.

Long-term care homes need help now

98 long-term care (LTC) homes have had a COVID-19 outbreak. This is a crisis that has been exacerbated by multiple governments failing to regulate, fund, and support long-term care. A [CBC investigation](#) released this week found that under the Ford government, inspections at long-term care homes were scaled back. Only nine of Ontario's 626 homes got a full proper inspection, the so-called resident quality inspections (RQIs), which are the detailed unannounced inspections.

We have been working with the care homes in our riding to secure personal protective equipment (PPE) and tests, as well as highlight the issues they are facing. [Here's a letter](#) I sent to the Ministry of Health, calling for a local retirement home with a COVID-19 outbreak to receive the PPE and additional staffing that they desperately need. I am hearing directly from seniors and their family members concerning serious issues at a number of [other long-term care homes](#) as well.

home, but they don't come into effect until April 22 and they allow [temp agency workers](#) to continue working at multiple locations — a huge loophole.

We are calling for the Ontario Government to close the loophole so workers only work in one home, increase wages to \$22 an hour or more, standardize visitor policies, and provide PPE and testing to help people recover or stay safe. More on our demands [here](#). We are also working to get clarity on the Government's rules around temporarily taking a loved one home and then having them return after the pandemic. Contact our office if you need help.

Protecting people experiencing homelessness

The City of Toronto, Toronto Public Health, the InterCity Health Network, the University Health Network, and many agencies and non-profits have been working hard to help, house, and treat the 7000 people in Toronto who are experiencing homelessness during the COVID-19 pandemic.

It is terrible to hear that 30 positive cases of COVID-19 have already been identified in the shelter and respite system. We are racing against the clock.

Many community members and health professionals have asked me to ask the Ontario Government to provide more funding, staff, and equipment to help and house people and stop the spread of COVID-19. The Ontario Government's response has been woefully inadequate.

That is why I, NDP leader Andrea Horwath, and MPP Rima Berns-McGown [wrote a letter](#) to the Minister of Health calling for immediate action. To find out more about this issue and take action please connect with [Health Providers Against Poverty](#).

Post-secondary students need more help

Our office has had many calls from students wondering how they'll pay their rent, put food on the table, and look after themselves and their families. Many are also worried about how COVID-19 will affect the rest of their education and

While both the Federal and Provincial Government have announced 6-month interest free moratoriums on student loan payments, we believe this is insufficient.

We are calling on the Ontario Government to:

- Provide supplementary Student Grants for students who are unable to find summer jobs.
- Eliminate assumed student earnings and parental contributions for any student affected by income loss in their households for the purpose of calculating OSAP.

The Federal Government also recently announced **temporary changes to the Canada Summer Jobs program**. This program will help create up to 70,000 jobs for youth between 15 and 30 years of age. The temporary changes to the program for this year include an increase to the wage subsidy, so that private and public sector employees can receive up to 100 percent of the provincial minimum wage for each employee. You can find more information about the changes to the Canada Summer Jobs program [here](#).

The Federal CERB program is expanding

The federal government has expanded the Canadian Emergency Response Benefit to include all residents of Canada (not just Canadians); [part-time, seasonal, and contract workers](#); those who continue to earn some income, but it is \$1000 or less a month; and people who run out of Employment Insurance. For questions please go to the Federal Government's [Q&A page](#).

Federal wage boost for essential workers

The Federal Government announced that it will be working with the province to cover a portion of temporary financial support for low-income essential workers.

Changes to the Canada Emergency Business Account (CEBA)

The Federal Government has announced that it will be [expanding a loan program](#) for small businesses suffering from the COVID-19 pandemic. The loan program will now be open to businesses that had total payrolls of between \$20,000 and \$1.5 million in 2019.

Advocating for CERB applicants receiving ODSP or OW

We have heard from many constituents about concerns that, for people receiving social assistance, any supports like Employment Insurance or CERB coming into the household would be clawed back from OW or ODSP payments, or cause them to lose access to drug and medical benefits. We, along with advocacy organizations like the [Income Security Advocacy Centre](#), have been calling on the Ontario Government to exempt EI and CERB payments during the pandemic and [cancel all such clawbacks](#).

This week, the Ontario Government responded by sending out an interim directive to social assistance offices saying that for the time being there will be no clawback for recipients who receive CERB. You can read more about it in [this article](#).

Donate to help the City tackle COVID-19

funds in support of the City's pandemic relief efforts.

Today's #COVIDkindness feature



Today I'm thrilled to highlight the work of [Chatting to Wellness](#), a youth run non-profit organization that connects seniors residing in retirement homes to university students in the community to chat through weekly visits. Many of the youth Chatters are University-Rosedale residents, including many U of T students, and a number of retirement homes in the riding have deeply appreciated their support! Seniors can either sign up directly, or have a family member sign up for a call on their behalf [here](#).

Have ideas for acts of [#COVIDkindness](#) I should feature? Let me know! I am also sharing these regularly on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Note that this email and all previous COVID-19 updates are available at: www.jessicabellmpp.ca/coronavirus

As always, if you require urgent assistance from my office, please contact my team at 416-535-7206 or email us at jbelle-co@ndp.on.ca



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