



February 17, 2021

Mayors and Regional District Chairs of British Columbia
Attendees of January 2021 Regional Calls with Minister Josie Osborne

Dear Mayors and Chairs,

Thank you for taking the time to join Minister Josie Osborne and UBCM President Brian Frenkel for the first round of regional calls in the new year. Hearing from UBCM directly on some of its key interests and issues was very much appreciated. As Minister Osborne and President Frenkel said during the calls, these calls continue to be a great opportunity to hear from you about the key issues and opportunities you are working on in your communities for 2021 (in addition to COVID-19).

There were a number of themes that came up during the calls including connectivity, reopening of BC parks in the spring and roll out of vaccine distribution. This email sets out links and resources on some of the topics raised.

As well, on specific issues such as grant applications or questions particular to your community, please remember that your staff can reach out to Ministry of Municipal Affairs staff for assistance (see the [Local Government Division staff finder](#) for the appropriate staff person for your area).

COVID-19 update

The [state of emergency](#) is extended to March 2, allowing health and emergency management officials to continue to use extraordinary powers under the Emergency Program Act. On February 5th, Minister Dix and Dr. Henry announced that the [province-wide restrictions](#), put in place to significantly reduce COVID-19 transmission related to social interactions and travel, would continue until further notice based on direction from the PHO.

Although the COVID-19 immunization plan is in effect, Dr. Henry reminded us that gatherings of any size, in our homes or elsewhere, are high risk and non-essential travel should not be happening right now. Please stay tuned for more announcements from Dr. Henry and check the provincial government [COVID-19 website](#) regularly for updates.

Vaccine distribution

The Provincial Health Officer appreciates the willingness of local governments to support vaccine distribution at the local level and has informed those planning vaccine distribution logistics about the potential for local governments to assist in this regard. The organizers of the immunization roll out recognize the important role that local governments have in this process and are aware that the earlier local governments are involved in the planning, the better the outcomes will be.

Currently, it is planned that vaccinations for the general population will run March to September 2021 and will start in March with people over the age of 80, who will be receiving information in the weeks ahead on when and how to get their vaccinations. The vaccination roll out hinges on vaccine availability and may be subject to change. Immunization clinics are being organized in 172 communities in BC and will be overseen by local health authorities.

The clinics will be held at large centres, including school gyms, arenas, convention halls and community halls. Mobile clinics will be available for some rural communities and for people who are homebound due to mobility issues. More information about the roll out and registration process will be available in late February.

The best source of COVID-19 vaccine information is the [BC Centre for Disease Control \(BCCDC\)](#).

Home Owner Grant Centralization

Effective 2021 all home owner grant applications must be submitted directly to the BC provincial government through a secure online application. **Municipalities no longer need to and should not accept any applications.** As of February 16, 2021, homeowners can apply for their current year or their retroactive home owner grants online at gov.bc.ca/homeownergrant. Homeowners can find information about this change at gov.bc.ca/homeownergrant or they can call toll free: 1-888-355-2700 to speak with an agent. **We encourage you to share this information with your residents.** Should you have any questions, please reach out to Kally Khaira, Director, Property Taxation Branch, Ministry of Finance, by phone at 778 698-9536 or email Kally.Khaira@gov.bc.ca.

Local Business Support - Launch Online Grant Program

The recently announced new Launch Online Grant Program will provide business owners, including those in hard-hit sectors such as retail, tourism and restaurants, with up to \$7,500 to build or strengthen their online store and promote BuyBC at a local, national and international level. The Province is contributing \$12 million to support about 1,500 eligible BC businesses to build, maintain and market their products and services online. The grant will pay for up to 75% of eligible expenses up to \$7,500 per business to develop or enhance their online store. Applications for this program are now open and businesses can visit launchonline.ca to apply. **We encourage you to promote this opportunity** directly with your business communities and Chambers of Commerce.

Strengthening Communities Funding

The Strengthening Communities Funding is a component of the Safe Restart Fund that will provide support to local governments to address the needs of vulnerable populations. This funding program is currently in development. More information will be available in the coming weeks and we will reach out with these details as soon as we can.

Infrastructure Funding

Local governments can access **infrastructure funding** through a variety of grant programs. If you have questions about local government infrastructure grants, you may also contact the Ministry directly by email at: infra@gov.bc.ca. **At this time, intakes are closed and programs are moving into reviews of the applications submitted.**

Community Economic Recovery Infrastructure Program (CERIP): The application window for CERIP is closed; **notifications will occur in February 2021**. If you have any specific questions about this program, contact the Ministry by email at: infra@gov.bc.ca. See <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/economic-recovery/cerip> for more details.

Investing in Canada Infrastructure Program – British Columbia – COVID 19 Resilience Infrastructure Stream (CVRIS): The application window for CVRIS is now closed. **Notifications are planned for this Spring**. Program details can be found at: www.gov.bc.ca/Investing-in-Canada-Infrastructure-Program

Adaptation, Resilience and Disaster Mitigation Program (ARDM): The application window for ARDM is now closed. **Notifications are planned for this Spring**. Program details can be found at: www.gov.bc.ca/Investing-in-Canada-Infrastructure-Program. Questions can be emailed to EMBCDisasterMitigation@gov.bc.ca.

Infrastructure Planning Grant Program: Intake is open year-round. Local governments can apply for grants that support projects related to the development of sustainable community infrastructure through the Infrastructure Planning Grant Program. The program is open for applications year-round with regular processing deadlines. See <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/local-governments/grants-transfers/grants/infrastructure-planning-grant-program> for more details.

BC Parks

BC Parks is finalizing plans to open camping reservations for the 2021 season. An announcement will be coming soon that will provide details for the upcoming camping season and information related to the Discover Camping reservation service. BC Parks will be working with partners and stakeholders to ensure the season is a safe and successful one.

Connectivity

Minister Osborne appreciates you raising the issue of connectivity in the recent calls, recognizing that working to connect all people in BC – regardless of where they live – is a priority for our government. The Internet is embedded into all aspects of our day-to-day lives as it enables a broad spectrum of possibilities including healthcare, education, culture, public safety, and economic activity. Providing the same level of access, quality and affordability in rural areas as seen in urban areas is a key priority for the Province.

Provincial connectivity work is led by the Ministry of Citizens' Services, and Minister Osborne has an upcoming meeting with Minister Lisa Beare on the province's ongoing work on this file, in conjunction with the federal government.

The next regional calls will be at the end of February and the topic will be on COVID-19 and mental health, as this is a topic that many of you have raised. Minister Osborne will be joined by her colleague, Honourable Sheila Malcolmson, Minister of Mental Health and Addictions, on these calls. Invitations for this meeting were sent February 12, 2021 from Minister Osborne's office.

As Dr. Henry said recently, we are making progress in our efforts to push back on the COVID-19 virus and get to days of fewer restrictions. We can keep this positive, forward momentum going and help keep our province safe through the small efforts we make every day.

Thank you for your continued leadership and collaboration. Staying connected and supporting one another are still important priorities in these challenging times.

Sincerely,



Okenge Yuma Morisho
Deputy Minister



Tara Faganello, CPA CGA BA Ec.
Assistant Deputy Minister

pc: Chief Administrative Officers
Gary MacIsaac, Executive Director, UBCM
Nancy Taylor, Executive Director, LGMA
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