

For Immediate Release

Ontario government's paid sick leave legislation doesn't go far enough and too many workplaces remain open: Workers need protection that provides flexible paid sick leave for illnesses, to self-isolate and to get vaccinated

TORONTO – April 30 – Simply put, this just isn't enough. As well, far too many workplaces are still classified as “essential” in Ontario, putting workers, their families, and the stability of our health system at risk.

While we are pleased to see the Ontario government finally recognized paid sick leave is important to the health and safety of Ontario's essential workers, the Primary Care Collaborative remains concerned that the legislation passed, which gives up to three paid sick days through employers, does not go far enough to protect employees, and may create new barriers to accessing income support benefits. Pressuring people to return to work too soon, and keeping too many businesses “essential” will continue to pressure our health system and lengthen the time it takes to control this wave of infections.

Workers need sufficient time to support and recover from COVID-19-related illness, to self-isolate and to get themselves and their families vaccinated. We concur with the Ontario COVID-19 Science Advisory Table's [Science Brief on the Benefits of Paid Sick Leave from April 28](#) that lays out the parameters for what paid sick leave can do to support people to be able to follow public health measures and to get vaccinated. *“Paid sick leave can support essential workers in following public health measures. This includes paid time off for essential workers ... with guaranteed salary payment regardless of duration of absence (minimum 2 hours, maximum 2 workweeks).”*

The temporary sickness benefit the Ontario government has legislated will only be available until September 25, 2021, to align with the expiry of the federal Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB). As we have [advocated publicly for months alongside our health system partners](#), we are still asking that paid sick leave legislation be made **PERMANENT, universal and accessible**. Never again should people have to make the difficult choice between having to go to work while sick and being unable to pay bills, support their families or risk losing their jobs.

An important first step is recognition of the critical need for paid sick time. However, we can and need to do better for all workers in Ontario. We need a more fulsome plan that will protect everyone, especially essential workers, during this pandemic and beyond as we build back the province stronger than before. And right now, Ontario also needs a narrower definition of “essential workplace” that is limited enough to break chains of transmission and stop further outbreaks.

Both limiting this definition of essential and putting in place a comprehensive paid sick leave program are the keys to slowing the spread, lowering the number of illnesses and deaths, and supporting our health system and health care workers.