

COVID-19 Lessons Learned

Terms of Reference

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected all aspects of the BC government and the broad BC public sector throughout 2020, 2021 and into 2022. The provincial government intends to undertake a review of government's operational response to the pandemic to capture lessons learned to date. Not only will this help to inform preparations for and the response to the next pandemic, which will inevitably occur in the future, but also contribute to planning and operational readiness for responses to the full range of risks of disasters and emergencies, which include earthquakes, climate change-induced extreme weather and wildfires, and many other situations that may affect large areas of the province.

Scope

The objective of this review is to improve the provincial government's ability to respond to future emergencies of all kinds.

This review is focussed on operational response to the pandemic by the BC government since January 2020. The term "operational response" is chosen to focus the review on cross-government efforts to identify the implications of the pandemic, to make timely and informed decisions, and to implement those decisions in accordance with public health guidance and government policy direction.

The scope of the review excludes an assessment of economic recovery and public policy decisions made by government to deal with the consequences of the pandemic and decisions made by the independent Provincial Health Officer. The review will, however, look at how these decisions were made.

The review seeks to find what can be learned from how provincial government agencies responded and worked together to directly address the effects of a public health emergency that affected everything, changed rapidly, and created a high level of uncertainty. And what aspects of preparedness, engagement, communication, and execution worked well, what changes were made to enhance operational effectiveness as the pandemic evolved, and what improvements can be made to be better prepared for the next emergency.

Structure

The review is a cross-government initiative. A senior external project team will conduct the review and prepare the public report. They have extensive experience in government operational management and knowledge of how public sector service delivery is structured in BC. The client for the report is the Deputy Minister to the Premier. The consultants will be supported by Emergency Management BC, which will be the lead agency in government for this initiative.

There are three aspects to the review:

- How were the implications of the pandemic identified?
- How timely and informed were decisions made in response to the pandemic?
- How were those decisions communicated and implemented, consistent with public health guidance and government policy?

The project team will research best practises and engage extensively, including:

- Reviewing internal assessments of the operational response undertaken by all ministries and select provincial government agencies. These will build upon any lessons-learned reviews already completed to avoid duplication of effort and be guided by a common statement of scope, objective, and questions to be addressed.
- Engaging First Nations, Indigenous organizations, external stakeholders, partners, and independent regulators that played a role in delivering the response or were affected by the response. These engagements will ensure input on the operational response by government agencies is considered in identifying lessons learned. Appendix A is an initial list of groups that will be engaged, with additional groups added as necessary during the process. MLAs from all parties will also be engaged.
- Engaging the public through an online portal where individuals and organizations will have the opportunity to submit written input.

Other Reviews

Given the scope of the COVID-19 response, and the number of public organizations and agencies that contributed to the overall response, there will likely be a variety of reviews undertaken by independent entities. The report will be informed by these reviews and best efforts made to avoid duplication and overlap.

Timing and Report

The final report to be submitted to government by September 30, 2022.

The final report will be a comprehensive summary of findings developed from best practices research, the internal operational assessments and stakeholder/public input and is intended for public release. It will not make recommendations.

Appendix A

Groups to be engaged by the project team are:

- Indigenous representative and service delivery organizations
- Health authorities and health service delivery providers
- Social service providers, including those for vulnerable populations and childcare providers
- Education providers and representative organizations in both the K-12 and post-secondary sectors
- Public sector unions and employee representative organizations
- Industry associations and representative organizations across the full range of economic sectors
- Provincial Crown corporations, public sector service providers and regulatory organizations
- Local governments and representative organizations

Additional groups to be engaged will be identified as the review proceeds.