

Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health

RE: Bill C-293 'An Act respecting pandemic prevention and preparedness'

Submitted May 2023

Dear Committee members,

We appreciate this opportunity to submit our concerns and recommendations regarding the proposed wording of Bill C-293. Results Canada is a grassroots advocacy organization committed to ending extreme poverty worldwide, and as such, our remarks will focus on the international dimensions of pandemic prevention and preparedness.

1. Preamble:

The experience of threats from previous diseases shows that Canada's safety is largely influenced by the global capacity to detect and contain outbreaks and share relevant information in a timely fashion. We, therefore, suggest the following addition to the Preamble:

Proposed amendment (addition underlined)

"And whereas this approach requires sustained collaboration among various ministers, all levels of government, Indigenous communities, and international institutions;"

2. Scope of the Comprehensive Review of the COVID-19 Response:

The COVID-19 Response included a significant international dimension, with direct budgetary outlays of \$3.5 billion in official development assistance. Thus, the "exercise of powers" whose effectiveness is to be assessed in paragraph 3(4)(c) should include the provision of official development assistance to detect and contain outbreaks, as well as contribute to limit the spread of infections worldwide (and therefore potentially to Canada).

The global disease detection and response network is only as strong as the weakest link. Article 44 of the International Health Regulations (IHR) 2005, to which Canada is a signatory, encourages states to collaborate "to the extent possible" in detecting and responding to health crises, and to mobilize financial resources to support developing countries in building capacities to respond to public health emergencies of international concern.¹ As a key donor and champion of various global health initiatives, Canada has been a leader in assisting developing countries to build public health capacity. However, it remains unclear whether the international component of Canada's response to COVID-19 was adequate. Specifically, whether an acceleration of the Canada-funded delivery of vaccines to low-income countries in 2021-22 would have saved considerably more lives (including in Canada) and prevented the emergence of new COVID-19 variants and waves.

For greater certainty, we suggest that paragraph 3(4)(c) be amended to make explicit that the international component of the response forms part of the scope of the review.

Proposed amendment (additions underlined):

3(4)(c): “...assess the effectiveness of the exercise of powers under any applicable federal laws, including in respect of international assistance, before, during and after the pandemic...”

3. Pandemic Prevention and Preparedness Plan

COVID-19 has demonstrated that diseases do not recognize borders. For disease surveillance systems to be most effective, Canada must work with low- and middle-income countries to strengthen their public health and disease surveillance monitoring systems, while ensuring interoperability with Canadian and global systems.

Canada’s International Assistance Envelope (IAE), which administered CAD 5,909.08 B in international assistance in 2020-21, is co-managed by the ministers of foreign affairs, international development and finance. These ministers work in close collaboration to shape Canada’s global health investments. These investments include initiatives that directly relate to pandemic prevention and response such as access to vaccines, diagnostics, and treatments. The Minister of International Development, with input from the Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Finance, is also responsible for critical public health systems investments that have an important supportive role in preventing and responding to pandemics. For example, setting up a strong cadre of front-line health workers and building systems that respond to existing infectious threats like polio and tuberculosis, which can be repurposed to deal with emergent pathogens.

The Minister of Finance has an important role to play in defeating pandemics, and this is acknowledged in the most recent Communiqué of G7 Ministers.ⁱⁱ First, as a member of the G7, as well as the G20, Canada’s Minister of Finance is co-responsible with other finance ministers in G7 and G20 countries for finding “surge financing”, to ensure that funds are available globally to take necessary action immediately when health emergency of international concern is declared. Canada’s Minister of Finance is also the Governor of the World Bank, the largest development institution in the world. The World Bank is currently evaluating its options to become a major (if not the largest) funder of pandemic prevention and preparedness. Finally, the Minister of Finance is one of the governors of the International Monetary Fund, which houses the Resilience and Sustainability Trust (RST). At \$30 billion, the RST is designed to support countries with their plans to address climate change and pandemic preparedness.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, International Organizations also showed the critical role they play in fighting pandemics and in keeping the world safe. The current wording of 4(2)(n) mentions the invaluable work of intergovernmental bodies, but key non-governmental and private-public partnerships also played an equally important role in accelerating the world’s access to critical tools. The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria, and the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND) were critical in ensuring access to reliable, affordable diagnostics was not reserved to wealthy countries. The Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations (CEPI) and GAVI, The Vaccine Alliance, were tasked by the international community to make vaccines

available to all countries, including low-and-middle income ones, on a timely and affordable basis.

Finally, while paragraph 4(2)(n) refers to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, the responsibility for the international component of the pandemic prevention and preparedness also rests with the Minister of International Development.

In view of the above, we suggest the following amendments:

Proposed Amendments (additions underlined and deletions in-strikethrough)

4(2)(g) “provide for the establishment and ~~interlinking~~ strengthening of surveillance systems for infectious diseases in Canada and for infectious diseases of concern outside Canada, and ~~inter~~ ensure their inter-operability”;

4(2)(n) “a summary, to be provided by the Ministers of International Development and Foreign Affairs, of the measures that that ministers intend to take to support global health equity, including measures to increase public health capacity around the world and to ensure equitable access to vaccines, testing equipment and treatment;”

4(2)(n.1) “a summary, to be provided by the Minister of Finance, of the measures the Minister intends to take to support the availability of surge financing, as well as the funding of pandemic preparedness and response by the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and other relevant international organizations;”

4(2)(o): “set out, in consultation with relevant ministers, a summary of key cooperative measures or agreements on disease outbreak prevention and preparedness between the Government of Canada, other foreign governments, ~~and~~ key international-intergovernmental organizations, including the World Health Organization, the United Nations Environment Programme, the World Organization for Animal Health and the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, and key non-governmental organizations including the Global Fund against AIDS, TB and Malaria, the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND), the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations, and Gavi, The Vaccine Alliance;”

Results Canada is a grassroots advocacy organization with a mission to generate the political will to end extreme poverty.

ⁱ World Health Organization, ‘International Health Regulations,’ 2005, Third Edition, <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789241580496>.

ⁱⁱ G7, ‘G7 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors Meeting Communique,’ 13 May 2023, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/64307/g7-communication-20230513.pdf>.