

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY (CRA)

Follow-up to the appearance before the

House of Commons

Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates (OGGO)

May 11, 2020

The Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

**Follow-up to the May 11, 2020 CRA appearance before the
House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates**
The Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

What follows is the Canada Revenue Agency's (CRA) follow-up response to questions posed by Committee Members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates during the May 11, 2020 meeting on the study of the 'Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic.'

Please note that two additional undertakings made by the CRA require the consultation and input of other federal departments. Once that information has been confirmed, it will be shared with the Committee as soon as possible. We thank the Committee for its patience.

For ease of reference, the relevant excerpts of the *Evidence* have been included to provide additional context.

Question 1

During the May 11, 2020 meeting, in response to a question on the service standards regarding the processing of paper filing, there was insufficient time to respond. The Chair of the committee requested that an answer be submitted in written form.

Mr. Marty Morantz:

Madam Minister, I contacted your agency, and they indicated that delays are to be expected and that they could not provide a concrete timeline. Canadians who file by paper need to have their refunds, particularly to help them during this crisis. Can the minister confirm how long it takes your agency to process a paper tax return and tell us the reason for the delays?

The Chair:

Minister, if I may interrupt, since there are only about 10 seconds left for your answer, I would request that you provide that answer in written form. You can send that to the chair of our committee, who will then be able to distribute it to all committee members.

CRA response

For the almost 90% of Canadians who choose to use one of the available options to file electronically, the CRA is on track to reach its service standard for issuing a notice of assessment and any refund within two weeks of receiving the return. Using direct deposit, some Canadians who file electronically could even receive their refund in as little as eight business days.

The CRA recognizes that Canadians have diverse needs when it comes to return filing. However, it is important to note that COVID-19 measures are currently in place to help ensure the health and safety of its employees, such as limiting the number of employees on-site to support physical distancing in all of its offices, including its tax centres. At the same time, the CRA is taking every opportunity to maximize the use of its physical footprint, such as working in shifts while avoiding desk sharing. The CRA is currently processing paper returns in its tax centres, however due to the reduced staff onsite Canadians can expect significant delays.

**Follow-up to the May 11, 2020 CRA appearance before the
House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates**
The Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

For Canadians who have filed a 2019 tax year paper return that has not yet been processed, the CRA will allow the option to also file a 2019 return electronically. This is a temporary measure which began April 20, 2020, to help prevent delays.

The CRA is aware that this measure will not address all situations since not all taxpayers are able to file their returns electronically. This is why the CRA is focused on processing paper returns on a priority basis, while taking public health directives into account.

It is also important to note that due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the deadline to file individual income tax and benefit returns was extended from April 30, 2020, to June 1, 2020. The deadline to pay any balance due for the individual income tax and benefit return was also extended from April 30, 2020, to September 1, 2020.

Question 2

During the May 11, 2020 meeting, the CRA was asked to share some of the challenges surrounding the mobilization of its workforce to deliver emergency benefits to Canadians. Due to lack of time, a written response was requested.

Mr. Majid Jowhari:

Minister, in your speech that was handed to us, you talked about mobilization and reassignment of a lot of resources within CRA to be able to deliver the programs. With the limited time that is available, can you share some of the challenges, especially with training and technology and the extended hours? How did you manage that process? We had a lot of calls coming in to say the process was slow, but those calls have now almost disappeared. I'd like to know how you managed that process. Could you shed some light on that?

The Chair:

Unfortunately, Minister, we're completely out of time, so once again I would ask that you prepare an answer in writing to our clerk, who will then be able to distribute your answer to all committee members.

CRA response

The CRA is evolving its call centre operations to better serve Canadians over the phone. The CRA has successfully equipped most of the call centre agents to work from home. This has allowed CRA call centres to operate close to full capacity in order to serve Canadians, while ensuring the health and safety of our employees through physical distancing.

After a call out by the Commissioner to CRA employees was made, more than 7,500 CRA current employees, working on non critical files, volunteered to bolster those numbers, taking calls from home. In fact, it was beyond our current needs, meaning we selected the most uniquely qualified based on skillsets, many of whom have previous work experience in our call centres. These temporary call centre agents were trained to respond to general, non account specific, inquiries about the CERB, so that our regular call centre employees could concentrate on more complex account specific questions concerning the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) or pertaining to individual tax and benefit inquiries

The temporary call centre agents on our general CERB, Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy, and Canada Emergency Student Benefit line do not handle, nor do they have access to protected taxpayer information. As a result, these temporary agents do not need the same technical training as our regular agents who handle complex and sensitive inquiries. Temporary agents are given several days to complete the online self-study material, including eligibility

**Follow-up to the May 11, 2020 CRA appearance before the
House of Commons Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates**
The Government's Response to the COVID-19 Pandemic

requirements and how to apply. This is supplemented with a facilitator-led web conferencing session to validate understanding. These agents have access to virtual chat room staffed by experienced CRA employees who assist with any issues and answer any questions the agents might have and continue to support the agents on an ongoing basis. In addition to the training, a procedural guide was designed specifically for them and is updated regularly. Agents have time each day to review and learn any new updates or modifications to the programs.