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August 2, 2021

Jeff Zients
White House COVID-19 Response Coordinator
1600 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. Zients-

I remain very concerned that the Administration has not provided Congress with a plan for how to re-open the northern border with Canada. I write today to request that the Administration ensure that border communities across the country have the COVID-19 testing capacity necessary to meet the new requirements imposed by the Canadian government for Americans traveling to Canada.

As you know, Canada recently announced that beginning August 9th, American citizens and permanent residents in the United States who have been fully vaccinated against COVID-19 may enter Canada for non-essential travel.^[1] However, travelers must also show proof of a negative COVID-19 test taken within 72 hours of travel. While the opening of the border for vaccinated travelers is welcome news, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends that fully vaccinated individuals do not need to undergo COVID-19 testing unless they show symptoms of the disease or have had a known exposure to someone with COVID-19, making obtaining a COVID-19 test prior to traveling to Canada a potentially costly and unnecessary barrier.^[2]

According to the United States Census Bureau, nearly 75 million Americans live in states that share a border with Canada. It is crucial that pharmacies, health centers, and other providers in border communities have sufficient testing capacity to handle any increase in testing as a result of this travel requirement going into effect. Given the recent increase in COVID-19 cases across the country, it is especially important now that our nation has the ability to provide quick test results for those traveling without sacrificing testing capacity for those showing symptoms of or with a known exposure to COVID-19 in order to track and prevent further spread of the disease. I appreciate the work the federal government has been doing to implement policy enacted by Congress to facilitate partnerships with the public and private sectors to offer free COVID-19

^[1] <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/news/2021/07/government-of-canada-announces-easing-of-border-measures-for-fully-vaccinated-travellers.html>

^[2] <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/vaccines/fully-vaccinated-guidance.html>

diagnostic testing to Americans. I urge this administration to work closely with northern border states to ensure that border communities are prepared and able to meet the sharp increase in molecular COVID-19 testing demand which can reasonably be expected to begin on August 6th or 7th as a result of Canadian policy changes to take effect on August 9th.

- Can you confirm that the task force has prioritized testing capacity at communities along the northern border to ensure that no shortages exist?

In addition to advocating for the provision of adequate testing infrastructure in northern border communities in the face of impending Canadian policy changes, I further write to seek clarification on some specific points regarding payments for testing. It has been conveyed to my office that some participants in the COVID-19 Self-Swab and Point-of-Care Testing Public-Private Partnership and/or other federally funded testing initiatives are not charging U.S. travelers for testing to facilitate their travel, while others are charging patients for this service.

- Is testing provided for travel purposes eligible for reimbursement to providers so that co-payments or other patient payments are not required?

Further, we have been made aware of instances where Canadian persons returning to Canada and requiring a test to fulfill a mandate of the Government of Canada have availed themselves of free testing in U.S. pharmacies paid for, ultimately, by the U.S. government.

- May Canadians access testing sites and have access to free testing through these testing programs?

Thank you for your attention to this issue, and I look forward to working with you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brian Higgins". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Brian Higgins
Member of Congress