

# Life, health and financial security

From mobilizing pandemic response to mapping out a way forward



## INSURANCE INDUSTRY PLAYING CRITICAL ROLE IN KEEPING CANADIANS HEALTHY AND WORKING

The global coronavirus pandemic has brought an array of health and economic challenges, which have been felt to various degrees in every corner of the world. In Canada, the life and health insurance industry, governments and employers have been working together to lessen the impact of the crisis by ensuring access to health benefits, virtual care and financial support.

"The insurance industry touches the lives of many Canadians, both customers and employees, and it has played a leading role in addressing emerging problems when COVID-19 hit," says Stephen Frank, president and CEO, Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association, a voluntary association whose member companies account for 99 per cent of Canada's life and health insurance business.

Like many Canadians, employees in the sector had to find a way to work at home, he notes. "There are about 156,000 people who administer health and drug benefit plans across Canada, and over 90 per cent of them are now working remotely."

What's more, this shift had to happen when "call centres were overwhelmed with inquiries about a myriad of issues," says Mr. Frank. "We needed to sustain our services through the crisis, and we had our hands full helping employers and ensuring people's claims and questions were serviced without interruption."

At the same time, health authorities encouraged Canadians to refrain from non-essential person-to-person contact, thus creating new challenges for patients to access health services. "Insurers have been working with health-care providers to adapt to virtual care and to continue to provide emergency dental and paramedical coverage for people requiring urgent care," he says. "And we've taken steps so that Canadians can continue to access prescriptions for rare disease treatments or biologic drugs without interruption, with insurers temporarily extending renewals without the need for new physician information or lab tests."

In order to help Canadians recovering from COVID-19 gain access to income support from day one, insurers waived the usual waiting period for short-term disability benefits as well as waiving requirements for doctor's

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**Stephen Frank**  
President and CEO, Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association



notes and lab tests in favour of self-declarations.

Another area of focus is mental health, with a recent Ipsos poll (conducted on behalf of Sun Life) revealing that as many as 59 per cent of Canadians indicate that their mental health has been negatively affected by COVID-19. "We know that people are worried about contracting the disease. They are worried about their families and about their jobs," says Mr. Frank. "There has been a huge investment by the industry to improve access to mental health support as well as increasing the capacity to offer some of the services virtually."

The industry is redefining how health benefits are provided for Canadians and what types of online versus in-person supports allow for best outcomes, he says. "It has been exciting to see the application of virtual health care

in a number of areas. This is a very positive development not only for times when physical distancing is required but also for enhancing access to care going forward."

Canada's life and health insurers also stepped up efforts to mitigate the economic impact when businesses were forced to shut down due to COVID-19-measures. "We've worked closely with employers to provide financial support to help them continue to provide health and dental benefits, often even to laid off employees," says Mr. Frank. "Insurers have proactively provided premium refunds and other forms of premium deferrals to reduce costs for employers to help them and their employees get through the crisis."

Paired with government measures, this support led to millions of dollars being reinvested, he says. "It's important that

businesses remain solvent so they can play a role in our economic recovery."

The ability to mount a timely response to the pandemic came from a "groundwork laid by planning and investments from the industry over the years, which enabled us to roll out some critical actions within a week," says Mr. Frank. "COVID-19 has forced us to accelerate certain practices that allow the industry to interact with Canadians and health-care providers in a more efficient way. And there is no doubt that this will lead to new products and innovation that can help us adapt to the new normal."

However the pandemic will shape our future, "we know that Canada's life and health insurers have a critical role to play in helping to keep Canadians healthy and stabilizing the economy," says Mr. Frank.

### INTERVIEW

## DIGITAL CAPABILITIES ENHANCING ACCESS TO SERVICE



**Q&A with Doug Grant, Partner at Insurance-Canada.ca**

**Please give a bit of background on how the insurance industry has embraced a digital transformation.**  
Digital technologies – including data analytics, machine learning, AI and voice – have long contributed to a more efficient workflow for the insurance industry, but a key goal for deploying them has always been to enhance the engagement with customers.

From "anytime and anywhere" communications and self-service to better product development, pricing, underwriting and rating, and digital marketing automation for broader product awareness, the customer experience has been central to the industry's efforts to advance technology capabilities.

However, all the related planning, investments and innovation have cre-

ated a foundation from where insurance organizations were able to adapt to new conditions shaped by the coronavirus pandemic and continue to deliver their essential services with little interruption.

**What are some of the impacts of COVID-19 on the insurance industry?**  
First of all, it meant that everybody had to work from home. The majority of insurance organizations had already been working with collaboration and communication platforms, which offer functions like video meetings and support tools to improve teamwork, but the shift to remote work was still a monumental effort that had to be done in very quick order.

An important consideration was the safeguarding of customer data, and insurers had to make sure adequate protection was in place, for example, when employees were using their own laptops or home computers, which increases the potential for introducing cyber issues into the network.

**How are digital capabilities helping customers during the pandemic?**  
Even before COVID-19, the deployment of AI, data and

technology has supported efforts to make it better, faster and easier for consumers to get and manage their insurance. What used to be a 30-page paper form that people had to complete to qualify for health insurance now is likely a digital – or even a smart – form with significantly fewer questions, with both data from other sources and predictive analytics informing the underwriting.

All the digital tools – including paperless communications, e-signatures and tele-interviews – eliminate the need for person-to-person interaction while enhancing the adviser's role, which meant customers can access insurance-related services even when physical distancing advisories are in place.

**Can you please give an example of an innovation enhancing health outcomes for Canadians?**  
There are many examples, such as insurance organizations collaborating with their health-care partners to create resources for patients like comprehensive and up-to-date directories of care providers. Other efforts include

improving access to mental health supports – and making some of them accessible virtually.

Crowdsourcing tools have also found their way into the insurance space and can be used to evaluate medical and dental service providers, with customer feedback potentially influencing recommendations from insurers and increasing the value for users. When I recently submitted a dental benefit claim, for example, I was asked to rate my experience with the dentist.

**How will some of the changes inform the way forward?**  
The capacity of the insurance industry to rapidly adapt to new conditions bodes well for its ability to meet the changing needs of Canadians, and many analysts expect that digital transforming will advance at an ever-faster pace.

For the people employed in the industry, we will see how many of them will go back to working in an office in a traditional way and what that office will look like – this is a question to which we may not know the answer for a while.

## PANDEMIC STRESS TESTING CANADIANS' FINANCIAL, PHYSICAL AND MENTAL WELL-BEING



**By Jeff Macoun, President and Chief Operating Officer, Canada, for Canada Life**

The COVID-19 pandemic has posed many challenges for Canadians physically, emotionally and economically. While countries across the globe have mandated social distancing measures, businesses have also faced new and distinct challenges. Along the way, there has been a tremendous impact on mental health, with concerns over the virus itself and the impact it has had on so many aspects of life.

As an essential service and organization committed to the well-being of Canadians, Canada Life remains focused on supporting customers, communities, advisers and employees by providing financial protection and insurance and investment solutions that can help.

### SUPPORTING CANADIANS' FINANCIAL WELL-BEING

Every Canadian has been affected differently by COVID-19, which means they need unique guidance and advice. We're proud to offer flexibility in our individual products in circumstances where they need it, like helping Canadians with their need for mortgage payment deferrals or offering customer payment options to our affected clients.

At Canada Life, we'll try to find a solution that works for Canadians who report a specific financial impact due to COVID-19. For example, if a customer has personal insurance but can't afford to pay the premiums, they can work with



Over 95 per cent of Canada Life employees across the country have been able to work from home. The organization deployed thousands of laptops, monitors and other necessary hardware and software to facilitate the shift, including cloud-based communications and collaboration technologies. SUPPLIED

us to try to find an option that helps them keep their coverage in place.

For customers with disability insurance, benefits may be available if they've tested positive for COVID-19 and the symptoms prevent them from working beyond the policy's waiting period.

Businesses of all sizes are facing challenges. It's with these in mind that Canada Life was first to lower group health insurance premiums in support of 26,000 small and medium-sized businesses.

Up until July 31, plan sponsors (employers, associations, etc.) also had the ability to extend short-term and long-term disability coverage from 31 days to 60 days and up to six months for all other benefits for

temporarily laid off plan members. We're also temporarily waiving "minimum hours worked" requirements for plan member eligibility. The bottom line is we want to make sure every customer can stay covered.

In May, the unemployment rate reached 13.7 per cent – more than double what it was in February (5.6 per cent) and officially marking the highest figure on record in Canada since data became available in 1976, according to a recent Statistics Canada's Labour Force Survey.

Now more than ever, people need guidance and advice. Mostly, they want to know, "Will I be okay?"

If someone is unsure if their existing coverage is enough, an adviser

can help. A Policyadvisor.com survey revealed 90 per cent of Canadians are underinsured. By speaking with an adviser, a customer can gain insight into how market conditions might impact their investments. And if they haven't done it yet, an adviser can help them create a financial plan to suit their current situation with an eye to the future or help them apply for coverage through non-face-to-face tools like SimpleProtect.

### SUPPORTING CANADIANS' PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

Access to health-care providers has become limited as clinics implemented physical distancing measures. Many patients continue to be anxious about physically attending a clinic due to potential exposure to COVID-19.

Many Canadians whose group benefits plans are provided by Canada Life have access to virtual paramedical services so they can maintain physical distancing while connecting with a quality medical team, including doctors, nurses, care co-ordinators, psychologists and dietitians for non-urgent care.

### SUPPORTING CANADIANS' MENTAL WELL-BEING

The need for mental health support has never been greater. Those who continue to work from home often juggle work duties with caregiving, homeschooling and other responsibilities without access to their usual supports. With school closures, students face uncertainty about the coming school year. Teachers have offered virtual lessons with varying success. Those with family living in retirement homes no longer see their loved ones and may feel isolated. The right support can make a big difference in our communities.

### ENSURING EMPLOYEE WELL-BEING

Canada Life is here to support all Canadians – that includes our employees, too. Over 95 per cent of our 11,000 employees across the country have been able to work from home. We deployed thousands of laptops, monitors and other necessary hardware and software to facilitate the shift, including cloud-based communications and collaboration technologies.

To safely reintegrate 25 per cent of our workforce into the office by October, we've modified our work environments, introduced COVID-19 sanitation protocols and will give reusable masks to employees working in our offices. Our goals are to keep employees and their families safe, and to keep our business moving forward and growing for advisers and customers. We've created new ways of working, some of which will continue to be part of our lives long after COVID-19 has gone.

### A SECOND WAVE?

No one can predict what will happen next, but Canada Life will continue to focus on what matters most – the safety of Canadians. Continuing to support the financial, physical and mental well-being of Canadians is how we can do our part.

On behalf of Canada Life, I want to sincerely thank the health-care professionals and essential workers who are keeping our communities safe and strong. And to advisers and group plan sponsors, thank you for keeping coverage in place when it matters most and your continued hard work to support the well-being of Canadians.

Finally, to our more than 13 million customers across Canada – thank you for your trust. We'll always be here for you.



To better support physical distancing during the pandemic, Canada Life plan members had virtual access to a quality medical team, including doctors, nurses, care co-ordinators, psychologists, dietitians, and work and life coaches, for non-urgent care. SUPPLIED

## BRINGING CANADIANS HOME AND PROTECTING TRUCKERS ABROAD

When the coronavirus pandemic started to sweep the globe, thousands of Canadians were advised to return home from overseas.

"Our industry had a unique contribution to make, since the majority of travellers – if not all – had some form of travel insurance," says Stephen Frank, president and CEO, Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association (CLHIA). "We teamed up with the Government of Canada to get in touch with them, and helped them return home safely and in a timely manner, especially when borders started to close."

Mr. Frank sees the success of bringing Canadians home as a result of a close partnership with the government and "a good example of the whole system working together."

Closed borders not only affect tourists – they also impact essential supply chains. "A significant amount of goods is crossing the U.S. border, for example – and that includes food, medicine, construction materials and other supplies that are important for our economy," he says. "Much of it depends on the people driving commercial vehicles. They have to be confident that they have medical coverage in the event they get sick in the U.S."

Since individual out-of-country travel insurance policies typically contain a specific exclusion for "avoid non-essential travel" federal travel advisories, the insurance industry stepped up to ensure



Closed borders not only affect tourists – they also impact the people driving commercial vehicles. The insurance industry has worked to ensure Canadian truckers have medical coverage in the U.S. even when national "avoid non-essential travel" advisories are in effect. ISTOCK.COM

Canadian truckers have health coverage – even for COVID-19 related concerns – while working abroad, says Mr. Frank.

The CLHIA is also collaborating with industry working groups to map out travel health insurance models for a changed environment. "As the world is starting to open up to travellers, it's becoming evident that there are differences between countries and regions in containing the virus," he says. "I believe providing travel protection will depend

on the destination and the state of readiness of each jurisdiction."

Insurance providers are working to adjust their offering to these new realities and explain to Canadians – including retirees who habitually plan lengthy stays in warmer regions – what they're covered for in different countries, says Mr. Frank. "There is a lot of uncertainty about how this pandemic will unfold, and we have to evaluate carefully which products are the best fit for different people and destinations."

### FINANCIAL WELL-BEING

#### COMMUNITIES:

- **Canada Life, IGM Financial and Power Corporation** announced a joint \$1-million contribution to help support local and national food banks; support seniors, youth and Indigenous peoples; and help address small businesses' long-term needs.

- **Canada Life** also joined the **Canadian Chamber of Commerce** and the **Government of Canada** as presenting supporter of the Canadian Business Resilience Network to help businesses get through COVID-19. We'll continue to partner with governments, regulators and industry to support small businesses.

#### RESOURCES:

- **Credit Counselling Society (West | East):** An award-winning, non-profit service offering confidential, one-on-one credit tele-counselling and financial education.
- **Value of advice:** We offer digital tools advisers use to do business while sticking to physical-distancing protocols. To connect with an adviser, visit [www.canadalife.com](http://www.canadalife.com).

### PHYSICAL WELL-BEING

#### HEALTH RESOURCES:

- **Consult+:** Canada Life is first to make virtual health care a standard benefit for groups with fewer than 400 individuals with Consult+. Access medical professionals via a secure mobile app or browser for non-urgent health conditions.
- **Health Connected:** Health and wellness platform linked from GroupNet for plan members. It has COVID-19 resources, a Health A-Z library and digital tools to help you keep active.

### MENTAL WELL-BEING

#### RESOURCES:

- **WorkplaceStrategies forMentalHealth.com:** Free and available to all Canadians, this website has information and tools to support mental health, psychological health and safety in the workplace. It also includes a series of short videos and blogs about managing the emotions that COVID-19 has prompted for so many Canadians.

- **AbilitiCBT:** Professional therapists guide members through internet-based cognitive behavioural therapy tailored to address anxiety symptoms related to the pandemic, including uncertainty, isolation, caregiver burnout, information overload and stress.

- **Morneau Shepell Toolkit:** Get help coping and building resilience – from talking to children about physical distancing, managing a team during COVID-19 and more.

# Help with what's needed.

**For 25 million Canadians, workplace health insurance makes prescription drugs and health services like dental care, physiotherapy and eyewear, affordable.**

**By providing premium rebates and deferrals, insurers are helping employers keep these benefits working during this crisis**

Learn more at [clhia.ca](http://clhia.ca)