



Office of the Auditor General of Ontario
Bureau de la vérificatrice générale de l'Ontario

November 23, 2020

Mr. Christopher Tyrell, Committee Clerk
Standing Committee on Public Accounts
Room 1405, Whitney Block
99 Wellesley Street West
Toronto, Ontario
M7A 1A9

Dear Mr. Tyrell:

Subject: Auditor General of Ontario *Special Report on COVID-19 Preparedness and Management.*

Please notify the Members of the Standing Committee on Public Accounts that I expect to transmit a Special Report on COVID-19 Preparedness and Management containing three chapters for tabling in the Legislative Assembly on Wednesday, November 25, 2020: *Chapter 1: Emergency Management in Ontario – Pandemic Response; Chapter 2: Outbreak Planning and Decision-Making; and Chapter 3: Laboratory Testing, Case Management and Contact Tracing.* The Speaker will be tabling the Reports at approximately 10:30 a.m.

I will conduct a briefing on the Reports to the Members of the Committee on the morning of tabling, from 9 to 10:15 a.m. Attached is a copy of the enclosed summary, which provides brief descriptions of the Reports.

Sincerely,


Bonnie Lysyk
Auditor General

c. Ms. Catherine Fife, Chair, Standing Committee on Public Accounts

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Auditor General of Ontario *Special Report on 2020 COVID-19 Preparedness and Management*

The Auditor General will be releasing a Special Report on COVID-19 Preparedness and Management on Wednesday, November 25. Below are brief descriptions of the three chapters of this Special Report.

Emergency Management in Ontario—Pandemic Response: Emergency management focuses on protecting lives, infrastructure, property and the environment; helping to ensure the continuity of government operations and critical assets; and recovery (assisting individuals, businesses and communities to return to a state of normalcy). In 2017, our Office audited emergency management in Ontario, which involved the then Ministry of Community Safety and Correctional Services (now the Solicitor General) and four other ministries whose emergency management programs we chose to examine. While we were conducting our continuous follow-up of that audit earlier this year, the COVID-19 pandemic hit Ontario. Our objective in preparing this special report was to expand our follow-up work to assess the involvement of the Provincial Emergency Management Office in the province's response to COVID-19. This included looking at any additional factors that may have contributed to problems specifically related to the pandemic and lessons learned that can be applied to prevent or minimize them in the future.

Outbreak Planning and Decision-Making: To effectively manage the COVID-19 pandemic, it is essential to have a clear command structure, with strong public health leadership, in which the roles and responsibilities of all parties involved are well-defined and understood. Only this will enable timely, appropriate and effective decision-making. This is all the more imperative in light of the speed at which the pandemic's first and second waves spread in regions of Ontario and the potential for subsequent waves. The purpose of this report was to present information to help interpret what happened provincially with regard to health-related pandemic outbreak planning and COVID-19 decision-making, in order to improve Ontario's preparedness and COVID-19 decision-making going forward.

Laboratory Testing, Case Management and Contact Tracing: Key to containing the spread of COVID-19 are three activities: collecting and testing specimens from individuals to identify if they have COVID-19 (laboratory testing); contacting individuals who test positive to advise them regarding their condition and isolating, and to try to determine how they contracted COVID-19 (case management); and identifying and contacting the close contacts of individuals who have tested positive to advise them regarding testing and isolating (contact tracing). This audit assessed whether, when COVID-19 impacted Ontario, the Ministry of Health had co-ordinated, effective systems and procedures in place that could easily be adjusted to perform timely COVID-19 laboratory testing, case management and contact tracing.