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INSTITUT DES POLITIQUES
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Care to Share? Helping Our Northern Neighbours during COVID-19

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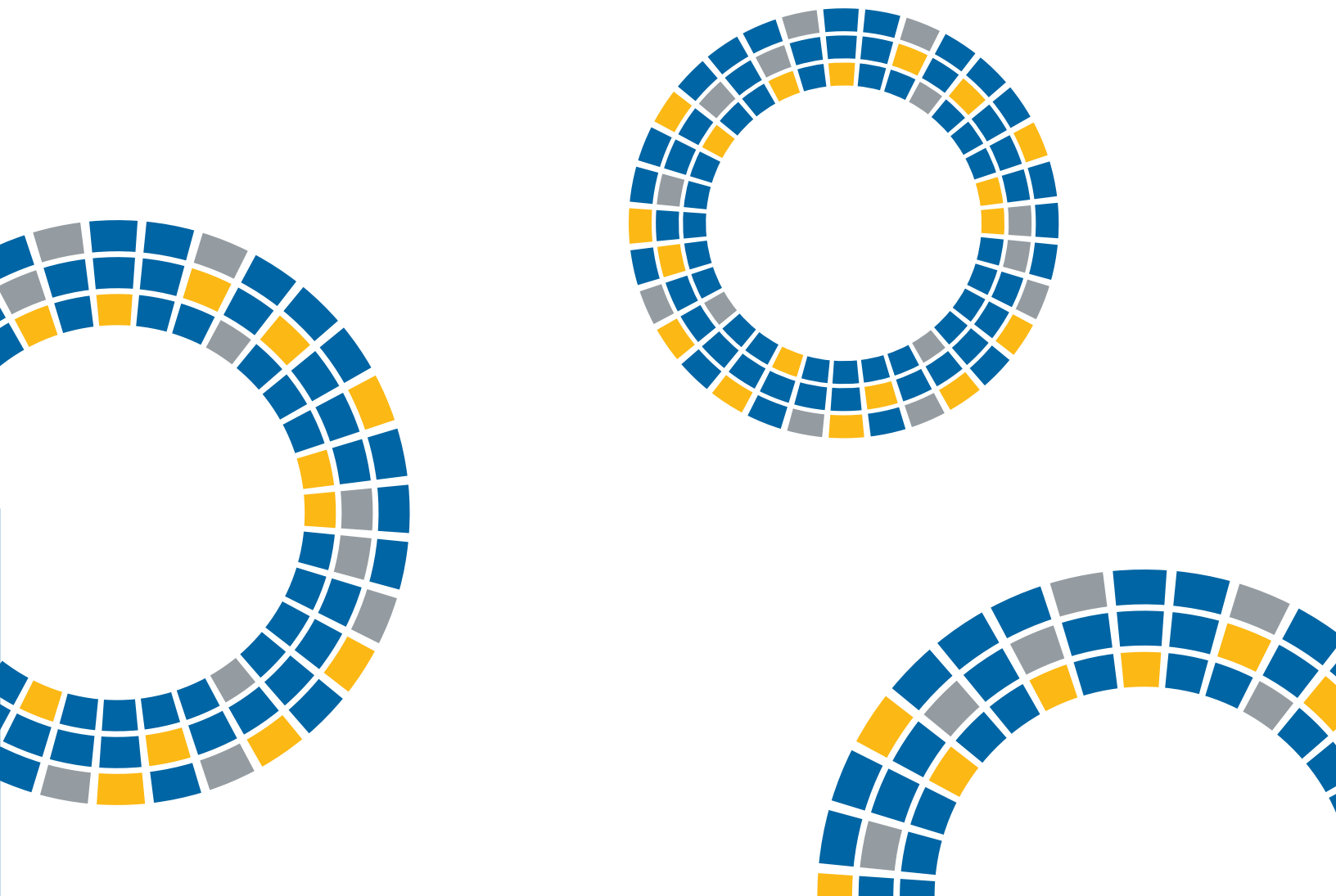
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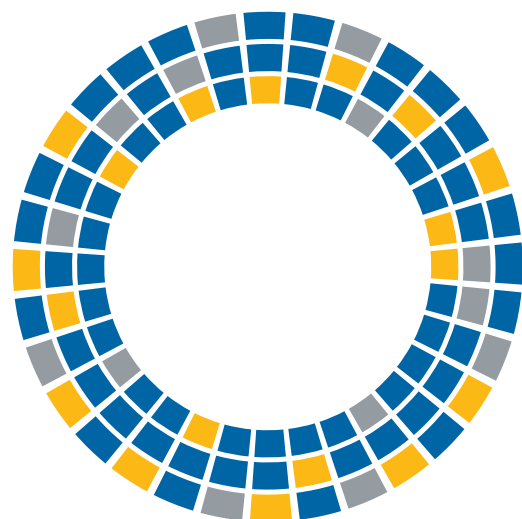


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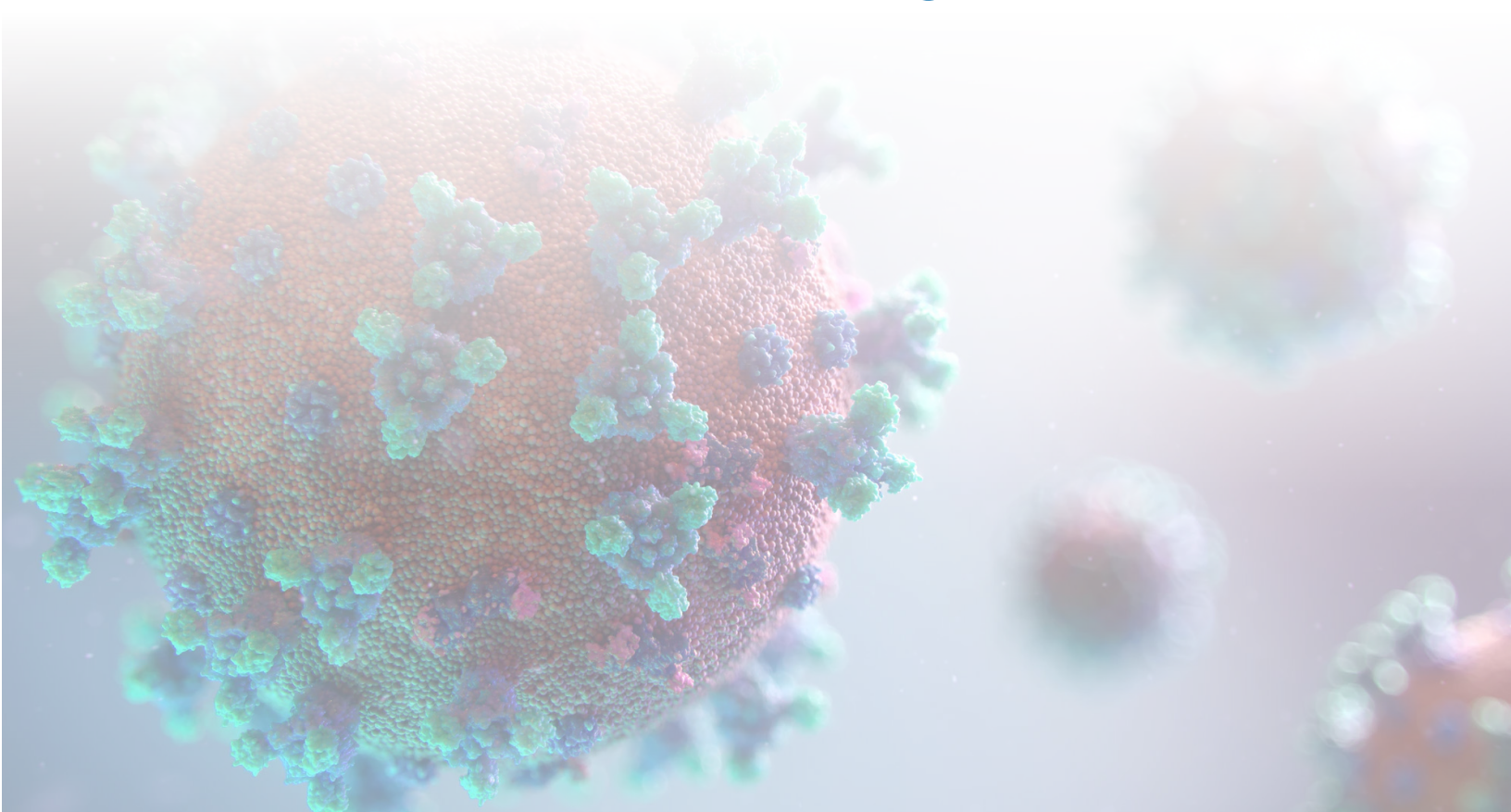


Introduction

The number of positive cases keeps climbing in Canada and Northern Ontario is no exception to that growth. Communities are facing the circumstances given the resources they have and are employing their own unique capabilities to fight COVID-19.

Across the globe social networks have rallied together to overcome the grievances caused by COVID-19. Individuals have reached out to their own networks and strangers to aid in any way they possibly can. Celebrities are reaching into their pockets and donating to organizations that have been impacted by COVID-19 such as food banks, Red Cross, children's aid, and others (Whitehead, 2020). In Northern Ontario there have been many ways individuals have stepped up to help during this pandemic.

"The number of positive cases keeps climbing in Canada and Northern Ontario is no exception to that growth."



Cases from across the North and elsewhere

When a callout is made for help, a response follows shortly after whether it be medical supplies in demand or volunteers. When a plea was made for volunteers to help deliver meals, bikers answered the call. Sudbury's Warriors biker club is stepping up to help deliver meals to seniors that rely on Greater Sudbury's Meals on Wheels (Campbell, 2020b). With more the 400 clients that depend on the delivered meals by the organization, losing 15 volunteers in a single day amidst COVID-19 was devastating (Campbell, 2020b). The charity put out a plea on Facebook and within the first hour of the post being public, the organization had 20 people answer the call to volunteer and now have another 50 people willing to volunteer (Campbell, 2020b).

When a doctor at Health Sciences North (HSN) posted on Facebook about the need for N95 masks, the community responded (MacMillan, 2020). Different organizations have answered the call to provide protective equipment that is critical for frontline medical workers. Vale announced that it will be supplying 500 masks for HSN (NOBS, 2020a). Cementation announced donating respirators, filters, sanitizing wipes and goggles to North Bay Regional Hospital (NOBS, 2020a). Schools in northern Ontario have also contributed by donating protective eye wear to medical professionals. High schools in North Bay have made contributions in their own way by donating over 200 safety glasses and goggles to front-line workers (Taschner, 2020).

Even when a call or plea for help isn't made on social media, some have organized to pitch in on their own. Medical school students at the Northern Ontario School

of Medicine are contributing by volunteering their time to look after the kids of front-line workers (NOSMtv, 2020). They are also running errands and buying groceries for the workers to alleviate the stress after returning from taking care of COVID-19 patients (NOSMtv, 2020). The students are also creating practice N95 respirators so medical professionals can practice the proper use of the equipment without using up the commodities that are so vital and in demand (NOSMtv, 2020). Regional health units have also been approached by the students, and an offer of help to man the crisis support lines and contact tracing of patients has also been made (NOSMtv, 2020).

Corporations are also changing gears and innovating what they usually produce to provide necessary medical equipment. Bauer's stepped up to create face shields for medical professionals directly interacting with COVID-19 patients (Kimelman, 2020). Canada Goose has announced that it will begin making scrubs for healthcare workers and gowns for patients (Reuters, 2020). Corporations that provide essential services such as grocers and pharmacies are also helping by accommodating the needs of their customers and workers. Loblaws, Metro, Canada Post and other chains are designating the first hour of opening for seniors and vulnerable individuals such as those who are immune-compromised (Schintz, 2020; NetNewsLedger, 2020; Patterson, 2020). The employees are also being taken care of with plexiglass installations for cash registrars and closing earlier to sanitize and clean the stores (NetNewsLedger, 2020). Additionally, in showing appreciation for its workers, Metro is increasing pay by



\$2 for those employees coming in providing an essential service from March 8 to May 2 (NetNewsLedger, 2020). Big chains are not the only ones making this change, Rome's Independent grocery store located in Sault Ste. Marie is opening an hour earlier to accommodate vulnerable groups (Patterson, 2020).

In addressing the supply chain, the Government of Ontario has a dedicated webpage for business seeking to help (Ontario, 2020). On the equipment end, anyone with the capability to provide masks, hand sanitizer, gloves, gowns, etc. is being asked to connect (PWSC, 2020). There is also a call out for anyone that can aid in providing the following services: security services, nursing services, laundry services, personal services, IT services, and other (PWSC, 2020). This call for help is being answered by retired nurses and other healthcare professionals.

Hearst-based distillery is among the businesses all over Ontario answering the government's call to help with medical supplies. The distillery, Rheault, partnered with Pepco to produce roughly 35,000 litres of hand sanitizer (Kelly, 2020). The company is currently looking to supply commercial operators such as the OPP and Thunder Bay Regional Health Sciences Centre (Kelly, 2020). The bottles will be sold at the going rate which is priced at approximately \$35 per litre. To comply with government standards hand sanitizer needs to be between 55-65 per cent alcohol – the version being produced by Rheault is 80 per cent alcohol (Kelly, 2020). With global demand for the product increasing, Rheault cites some challenges in acquiring the raw ingredients and products needed (Kelly, 2020).

Alongside Rheault, Crosscut Distillery in Sudbury also announced producing small batches of hand sanitizer which it will be given away to community members in need (Kelly, 2020). Crosscut produced 100 bottles of 100ml sanitizer which it gave away for free to community members until supplies ran out (NOBS, 2020b). The distillery is looking into producing more products which it plans to release to health-care centres (NOBS, 2020b). The company is also giving away a free bottle with every purchase while supplies last (NOBS, 2020b). The distillery is currently in need of financial help getting chemicals, packages and labels to continue producing hand sanitizer and made a call out to local businesses (NOBS, 2020b).

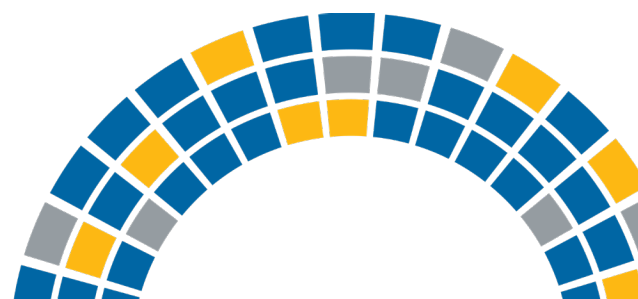
In addition to the equipment and services call out by the Ontario government, on March 21 the Ontario Government "put out a public call for the manufacturing sector to prepare to retool its productions capacity

toward making 'essential equipment like ventilators, masks, and swabs'" (Ross, 2020). Plastic is a critical material needed for items such as masks, gloves, ventilator parts, etc. and some entities in the North are looking into ways they can produce these essential parts (Ross, 2020). North Bay Plastic Molders is an interested manufacturer saying it can produce between 50,000 to 100,000 parts per day depending on the part required (Ross, 2020).

Businesses that are unable to answer the specific public calls by the Ontario Government, are still helping in their own way. Local businesses are pitching in by giving away necessities when residents can't get a hold of them elsewhere. High Life in Sudbury gave away toilet paper rolls in pre-packaged quantities by their staff to anyone that needed them (Roberts, 2020a). Local Sudbury mixed martial studio is offering online classes while the business remains closed in accordance with Ontario's pandemic measures to allow only essential businesses to remain open. The studio is currently offering classes for kids and families, offering 5 different time slots during the week from Monday to Thursday, and hosting a class 6pm to 11am on Saturday (Roberts, 2020b). Being shut down and shut in doesn't mean you can't be connected. Recognizing the importance of social connections, some businesses are offering online connectivity.

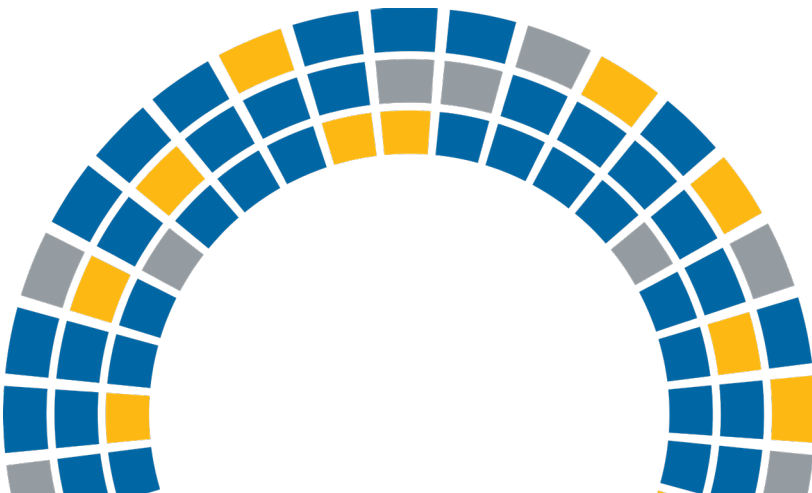
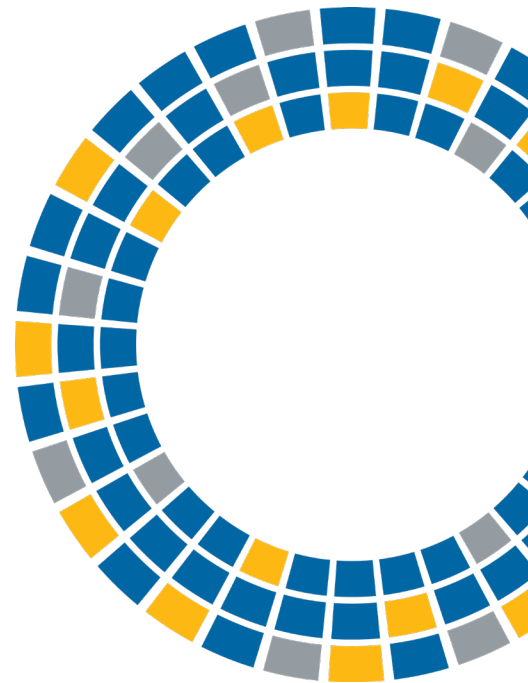
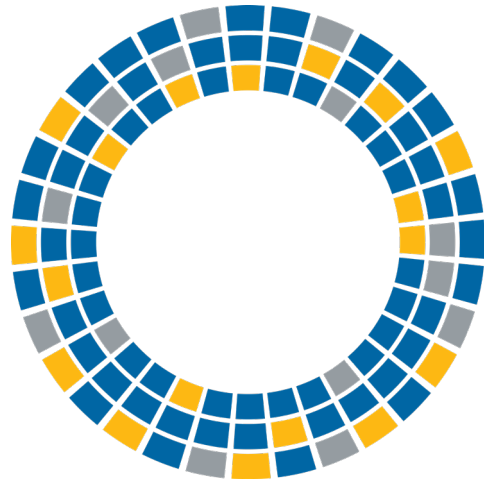
Social media is a means by which seniors are staying connected while practicing social distancing. Residents at Wikwemikong Nursing Home posted photos of them holding up messages to update those on the outside on how they were doing amid the COVID-19 pandemic. The following are some of the messages: #itsnotaboutyou and "don't worry we have toilet paper" (Campbell, 2020a). The nursing home was thrilled when they received a couple hundred likes, but now it has gotten 1.1 million (Campbell, 2020a). The power of social media and staying connected is evident in this jump in online activity. The residents also posted positive messages to promote safe practices to reduce the spread of the virus such as "wash your hands, self-isolate and don't go in crowds" (Campbell, 2020a). The nursing home is encouraging anyone who wishes to Facetime or Skype, or they can become a pen-pal (Campbell, 2020a). Staying connected is a means by which individuals can stay healthy mentally.

Mental health in times of hardship and uncertainty can be at risk, which is why it's important to practice and engage in helpful habits. Alberta Health Services has established a mental support for individuals seeking advice stemming



from concerns surrounding COVID-19 (Pearson, 2020). The Text4Hope program allows residents to text COVID19HOPE to the number 393939 and receive a daily message promoting healthy thinking and words of encouragement to manage moods and emotions (Pearson, 2020). The mental health and well-being of individuals in isolation is a concern and reaching out to healthcare professionals can provide some ease in dealing with the stress and anxiety.

The need for mental health supports surrounding COVID-19 in northern Ontario can be observed in the increase in clients using the services of Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA). CMHA Sudbury-Manitoulin has witnessed an increase in the demand for supports during the pandemic, with mental health experts dealing with clients feeling anxiety, stress, fear and depression stemming from COVID-19 (CBC News, 2020). Experts are advising individuals to reach out to people using the power of technology: phone calls and Skype (CBC News, 2020). CMHA's online peer support tool called Big White Wall has also witnessed a spike in users. The platform is an online forum moderated by trained health care professionals where individuals support one another dealing with mental health concerns (CBC News, 2020). Although the physical offices of CMHA are closed, the healthcare providers continue to support clients via phone and online services. CAMH is also encouraging anyone and everyone currently coping with COVID-19 to do the following: practice relaxation, stay connected and get active (CAMH, 2020).



Conclusion

The lesson to be learned from the various actions being undertaken is this: we all can play a role in being innovative, and in an incredibly short amount of time too. And why not keep that spirit of innovation and experimentation going in the North? Both in practice and in policy (see Cirtwill, 2016 and 2018).

Another lesson is that is the power of social networks and creating connections. Indeed, continuing to connect with individuals after COVID-19 will be important to efforts such as creating welcoming communities. Whether it is a First Nations individual moving to a new community or an international student coming to study at one of our northern post-secondary institutions, a welcoming community can aid in the retention of individuals and contribute positively to new arrivals' well-being (British Columbia, n.d.).

COVID-19 is testing the abilities of communities and governments to come together and respond to something unprecedented. It is in these times that contributing in any way you possibly can makes all the difference. Even if all you do is practice social distancing and simply stay home, because that too shows that you do care. In the words of The Lorax, "[u]nless someone like you cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It's not." (Dr. Seuss, 2012).



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