

MEDIA RELEASE

The early impact of COVID-19 on Greater Sudbury businesses

for immediate release

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Over 300 local businesses responded to a recent survey to assess the impact that COVID-19 is having on their business, their workforce, and the economy. This survey was conducted by the City of Greater Sudbury, Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce and Workforce Planning for Sudbury & Manitoulin to get a pulse on what is happening in our community.

While not a surprise, local businesses reported job losses, financial losses and some are worried about surviving if the mandated closures continue much longer. "At this point, it is impossible to say how much of this will be temporary or permanent" says Reggie Caverson, Executive Director of Workforce Planning for Sudbury and Manitoulin. "However, what we can say is that local businesses are trying to do everything they can to support their workforce, to adjust their business operations and to remain viable during these unprecedented times."

Three hundred and twenty-two Greater Sudbury businesses responded to the survey with an overwhelming majority in the private sector. Although not everyone answered every question, for those who did, 23% worry this could put them out of business and 48% said that this is going to significantly impact on their bottom-line with 87% reporting a range of financial losses.

Since the provincial release of the list of essential services, these companies also reported laying-off close to 2,300 employees in fulltime, part-time, seasonal and contract positions. Caverson points out however that they did not hear from all businesses and many of the publicly funded employers, some of whom have continued to maintain operations and pay staff. As a result, there is no way to know the full impact of job losses at this time.

The COVID-19 Business Impact survey for April 2020 also showed that many businesses have adjusted their operations to increase their online presence, minimize risk of exposure to staff, changed their hours of operation, are working remotely and have increased sanitization protocols. A handful of businesses also reported that they are now contributing to the purchase and in some cases, the production of PPEs and barriers to support workplaces that have essential workers.

Employers are also keeping abreast of government funded initiatives to support their business and their employees. Bryan Welsh, Chair of the Board of Directors of the Greater Sudbury Chamber of Commerce notes that "these survey results are encouraging in that businesses, for the most part, appear to be aware of the COVID-19 related funding streams available to them." However, he adds that "close to a third of businesses report these programs will not be beneficial to them, so many businesses are still falling through the cracks. We've been in constant contact with all levels of government, and will continue sharing such feedback with them to contribute to better policy."

While it is still too early to predict how things will unfold, local businesses expressed the importance of all levels of government continuing to provide funding supports such as rent and tax deferrals and relief as well as wage and rent subsidies. Most businesses also want the community to follow the health guidelines and to shop local for food, and other amenities, including programs, services and online courses even after the pandemic subsides.

"The City of Greater Sudbury together with our partners will always be there to keep our residents safe and support our local businesses as they adapt to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic," says Mayor Brian Bigger. "The results from this survey provide us with valuable information about what our local businesses are experiencing and where we need to focus our efforts as we work together towards economic recovery."

Caverson adds “we know there will be challenges ahead. We know we need to help those who have lost their jobs, retrain those who are ready for new jobs, work with local businesses to regroup and rethink how the future might look and collaborate with all stakeholders to reframe how our economy gets back on track.”

The COVID-19 Business Impact survey will be conducted in May and in June to better understand some of the deeper impacts of this pandemic, identify trends that are emerging and help us set a new course. It is hoped that all local businesses will complete these surveys as we move forward.

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To see a full copy of the COVID-19 Business Impact survey April 2020 results, for Greater Sudbury, Manitoulin District and Sudbury District go to: www.planningourworkforce.ca

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