

To the Editor:

As the rest of Canada continues to emerge from their COVID-19 restrictions, the Northwest Territories is laboring under a plan that is already out of date. Although only 3 weeks old, Emerging Wisely 2021, for all its data-driven benchmarks and progressive steps to the new normal, needs to be binned.

Even as Canada sits at around a 31% vaccination rate, case counts have plummeted. From a peak of over 8,000 per day in April, we'll soon be seeing fewer than 500 cases per day across Canada. That's amazing. And that's only with 31% of the population fully vaccinated.

Emerging Wisely 2021 will only see all restrictions lifted when 66% to 75% of Canadians have been fully vaccinated. We will also need to see 75% of NWT residents 12 and over fully vaccinated. The Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce is doing its part with our Crush Covid Incentive Program and Draw – 458 fully vaccinated NWT residents have entered so far. However, seeing the current rate of vaccinations flat line, these targets seem simply unachievable. Indeed, the rest of Canada has determined to move on without us.

As of July 5, fully vaccinated international travelers returning to Canada with an unvaccinated child no longer need to self-isolate. Emerging Wisely 2021 won't see that restriction lifted until mid- to late fall (if we can reach those 75% targets by then). The federal government has decided that this restriction on families travelling is no longer supportable.

It is only a matter of time before the OCPHO sees its decision to keep this restriction challenged in the courts. It is no longer a reasonable and demonstrably justified restriction on our Charter mobility rights. And it's could be found to be discrimination based on family status under human rights legislation. If the OCPHO isn't getting legal advice on this, it should be. If it is and it's ignoring it, that gives rise to unnecessary litigation risk and hardships. Hardships which fall disproportionately on essential workers who cannot work from home. Just ask the hardworking owners of Savannah's Family Restaurant who [had to cut their hours](#) twice due to their daughter's medical travel. The Premier must know this. What terrible and regressive policy.

The first clue that Emerging Wisely 2021 would need to be binned was when we stumbled up the first two steps. The restrictions on indoor gatherings were set to be eased before the easing of self-isolation requirements. Turns out, the Canadian case counts dropped so quickly, it happened the other way around. That's fine. But it shows that this plan was being overtaken by events from the outset. There is no shame in redoing the plan in the face of new circumstances.

The Premier and her Minister of Health need to take the reins back here and get the Northwest Territories back to normal like the rest of Canada.

Tim Syer
President
Yellowknife Chamber of Commerce