

CONSUMER CHOICE CENTER

CONSUMER INNOVATION MANIFESTO

May/2020

The Consumer Innovation Manifesto lays out a comprehensive plan for revamping consumer policies post-Coronavirus.



www.consumerchoicecenter.org
info@consumerchoicecenter.org



CONSUMER INNOVATION MANIFESTO

The Consumer Innovation Manifesto lays out a comprehensive plan for revamping consumer policies post-Coronavirus. As the crisis unfolds, consumers are faced with a multitude of challenges, ranging from the daily commute (transport) to connectivity (digital), access to fast-moving consumer goods (lifestyle & trade), as well as the acquisition of life-saving drugs (health & science). The Consumer Choice Center has made these four areas its core principles for the defence of consumer choice.

The Consumer Innovation Manifesto suggests key regulatory changes that improve consumer well-being post-Coronavirus, partially by cementing in those rules that have been temporarily disabled. Overall, we believe that all rules and regulations that have been put on hold temporarily need to be opened for review.

Here you will find an overview of the specific policy changes that we suggest to relaunch consumer confidence, boost the economy, and to usher in a new age of consumer choice. We urge policy-makers to get on board with these vital changes, and offer our support when it comes to making changes precise and effective.

"RELAUNCH CONSUMER CONFIDENCE, BOOST THE ECONOMY, AND TO USHER IN A NEW AGE OF CONSUMER CHOICE"

- Fast-tracking regulatory approvals of medicine and legalizing telemedicine;
 - Reciprocity of professional licenses across national and provincial borders;
 - Key policy changes for improved broadband connection, through competition and incentivised innovation;
 - Securing cybersecurity rules in a more connected professional and personal world;
 - Improving supply chains with eased rules for retail;
-
- Guaranteeing free trade even in times of crisis;;
 - Revolutionising medical research through incentivised gene-editing tools;
 - Modernising and fast-tracking agriculture in times of need (agro-technology);

- Making food, beverage, alcohol and cannabis delivery present and established tools for consumers and businesses;
- Relaunching the airline sector with revamped regulatory measures;



FAST AND EASY ACCESS TO MEDICINES

(non-prescription drugs in retail and delivery, prescription medicine with online prescription through delivery)

COVID-19 has exposed the need for quicker regulatory approvals of medicines. This has been a systemic problem within the drug approval process for years but also applies to medical devices and supplies in some cases. In Canada, it is well known that new medicines take a long time for approval, it takes more than 450 days for a new drug to be reimbursable, while that number is only 180 days in the United States.

We need an urgent audit of all drug, device, and supplies approval procedures, with the explicit aim of more agile approval frameworks. Mutual recognition of all OECD regulatory approval bodies would lead to faster access for patients globally. Those regulations that were shown to be harmful during the Coronavirus crisis should be completely reviewed.

In addition to that, provinces should maintain patient access to physicians via telemedicine. Across Canada patients can now book appointments with a physician and have that consultation done via virtual conferencing. This is permitted because provinces have allowed doctors to bill for these virtual calls. These types of virtual appointments should remain available for patients, and billable for doctors, moving forward.





RECIPROCITY OF PROFESSIONAL LICENSES

across national and provincial borders

Occupational licenses exist for a whole host of professions. These licenses are intended to demonstrate competence, education, and skills. Excessive occupational licensing is itself an issue that should be examined by legislatures. One major issue for standard professional licenses (medical professionals, educators, electricians, etc.), however, is that these licenses are issued by provincial jurisdictions, and are thus not generally recognized in other provinces.

High barriers to entry for professionals who hold licenses in other jurisdictions are unreasonable, raising costs for consumers and limiting the mobility of highly educated and trained people.

We would recommend the reciprocity of professional licenses first across provincial borders. Beyond that, the federal government, and provincial governments, should evaluate international reciprocity for licensed professionals, like when Ontario approved foreign trained doctors to practice during the Covid-19 crisis.

A graphic featuring the text '5G' in large white letters. The background is a blurred city street at night with blue and purple light trails. A network of white nodes connected by lines is overlaid on the scene.

5G

KEY POLICY CHANGES FOR IMPROVED BROADBAND CONNECTION

through competition and incentivised innovation

As soon as heightened internet use had been an occurrence during the COVID-19 crisis, internet users found out that their networks were not up to speed. Many consumers who were already dissatisfied with their existing network speed, soon found themselves in problematic professional situations due to slow connectivity. In order to improve broadband connection and foster innovation, changes are necessary. Some of these issues are due to the old regulations which restrict the spectrum licences from being really developed giving them the best broadband possible.

We suggest the following:

- *A universal, market-based mechanism for spectrum allocation. Restrictions on who is allowed to bid on spectrum should be removed for trusted vendors, and cross-border investment should be encouraged as to prevent legacy operators from dominating spectrum markets in their respective nations.*

SECURING CYBERSECURITY RULES

in a more connected professional and personal world

A large number of hacker attacks during the COVID-19 crisis need to put us on alert. Public and private services should not be subject to online fraud and data theft because of a lack of cybersecurity, and consumers should feel comfortable browsing the net and using financial services without fearing for their hard-earned income.



IMPROVING SUPPLY CHAINS WITH EASED RULES FOR RETAIL

Retailers have been faced with challenging times during panic-buying moments, but also through border closures throughout the world. In an effort to prevent such problems in the future, countries should commit to immediate lane separation in times of crisis (on land and sea borders) between people and trade goods, in order to prevent supply chains from being interrupted.

Additionally, we have experienced that draconian price controls have not managed to provide better distribution of essential goods (such as hand sanitizers) - they have in fact produced the opposite result. Thus governments should introduce legislation preventing onerous price control legislation.

We see similar necessity in the range of price gouging legislation, which instead of bringing down prices, impose scarcity on consumers. While uncomfortable, price hikes guarantee a supply chain and competition on the consumer marketplace. Preferring hoarding to price gouging amplifies the problem of panic-purchases.

Private sector players such as retailers and online shops have reacted independently and without government intervention by focusing on delivering essential products and limiting the quantity of how much one household can buy at once of certain products.

"draconian price controls have not managed to provide better distribution of essential goods - they have in fact produced the opposite result".



GUARANTEERING FREE TRADE EVEN IN TIMES OF CRISIS

The COVID-19 situation has revealed that a number of essential goods, such as ventilators or medical-style face masks had previously been burdened with tariffs. Removing many of these trade barriers has been helpful during the crisis, yet these measures are equally unnecessary outside the realms of the novel Coronavirus. We ought to endorse both mutual trade agreements, as well as unilateral trade liberalisation. Tariffs are burdens not only on companies wishing to export, but also on consumers in the country that imposed them, as they are required to buy for an arbitrarily higher price. Cooperation through trade remains important in both crisis times and regular economical flow. A commitment to free trade without exception would be most beneficial to consumers and society as a whole.

"A commitment to free trade without exception would be most beneficial to consumers and society as a whole."

REVOLUTIONISING MEDICAL RESEARCH

through incentivised gene-editing tools

Synthetic biologists have started using CRISPR to synthetically create parts of the coronavirus in an attempt to launch a vaccine against this lung disease and be able to mass-produce it very quickly. In combination with computer simulations and artificial intelligence, the best design for such a vaccine is calculated on a computer and then synthetically created.



This speeds up vaccine development and cuts it from years to merely months. They can also rapidly approve new testing and vaccination procedures which usually require years of back and forth with health regulators.

CRISPR also allows the 'search' for specific genes, also genes of a virus. This helped researchers to build fast and simple testing procedures to test patients for Coronavirus. In the long term, gene editing might allow us to increase the immunity of humans by altering our genes and making us more resistant to viruses and bacteria. This won't be the last crisis, thus allowing for medical research and use of genetic engineering is key to advance human health.



MODERNISING AND FAST-TRACKING AGRICULTURE IN TIMES OF NEED

(agro-technology)

In order to give farmers and consumers food security after COVID-19, modern agricultural technology deserves to be given a boost. Unfortunately, many countries have blocked innovation in crop science by restricting certain technologies of genetic engineering.

By applying the precautionary principle to entire technologies, as opposed to evaluating results on a case by case basis, consumers are being limited from the innovation that systems such as CRISPR-Cas provide (gluten-free wheat, allergen-free nuts, etc.). Adding to that, genetic engineering has the ability to reduce water and land use, helping the efforts in the fight against climate change.



MAKING FOOD AND BEVERAGE DELIVERY PRESENT AND ESTABLISHED TOOLS FOR CONSUMERS AND BUSINESSES

Delivery services have proven essential to provide consumers with food, and give businesses the opportunity to generate income during a lockdown situation. However, restrictions on such services have left consumers and restaurants hanging -- a result of overregulation of the free-lance sector.

In reality, consumers love the sharing economy, and workers are provided the choice to pick and choose from different employers, as long as the environment is competitive. Innovations such as “no-contact delivery” have shown that these platforms have the ability to flexibly respond to environmental changes. Rule-makers should see the sharing economy as a vital part of consumer choice.

Certain delivery restrictions have been lifted, for instance with regards to alcohol and cannabis. This falls under the category of #NeverNeeded, and ought not to be reintroduced. Age verification tools help prevent youth access, and the delivery options are safer for consumers during a pandemic. The convenience of deliveries is also a part of consumer choice.





RELAUNCHING TRANSPORT SECTORS

with revamped regulatory measures

To relaunch the airline sector Canada should get rid of outdated foreign ownership restrictions.

In the realm of aviation, we need to allow non Canadian investors to become majority shareholders of an airline that has domestic routes, as well as allow for mergers of Canadian airlines, in order to create companies which are able to compete in a new aviation market after the crisis. Additionally, ownership restrictions on domestic routes should be eliminated, allowing for global carriers to serve Canadian consumers domestically.

Lastly, Airports should reduce slot fees for the next 3 years in order to help airlines serve consumers in airports which might not be immediately profitable.

CONSUMER INNOVATION MANIFESTO

by Consumer Choice Center
All rights reserved. Copyright 2020.



info@consumerchoicecenter.org
www.consumerchoicecenter.org