

PNWER Regional State, Provincial and Territory Leads Economic Recovery Call

Wednesday, August 26 at 11 am PDT

notes have been paraphrased for clarity and brevity

Attendees:

Alaska:

- Tom Koloski

Alberta:

- David Kettles, Senior Director, Provincial and State Engagement, Economic Development, Trade & Tourism
- MLA Richard Gotfried
- Christina Steed
- Quinn Mah
- Dr. Jia Hu

British Columbia:

- Craig Windrim, Manager, U.S. Relations, Government of British Columbia
- MLA Rick Glumac
- Russ Kinghorn
- Alyson Rondeau
- David Bennett

Idaho

- Jon Hanian, Idaho OEM

Montana:

- Susan Fox, Legislative Services

Oregon:

- Stephen Richardson, Business Oregon and ESF 18
- Stan Thomas, OR OEM
- Sen. Arnie Roblan

Saskatchewan:

- Larry Doke, MLA
- Katrina Ackerman, Ministry of Trade and Export Development

Washington State:

- Sen. Bob Hasagawa
- Tristan Allen, Dept. of Commerce
- Rick Anderson, Dept. of Commerce

Yukon:

- MLA Paolo Gallina
- Helen Booth

Northwest Territories

- Jhillian Adams

Misc.

- Assistant Deputy Minister Marc Fortin
- Filo Arrudatian Morey
- Chris
- Andy Janes,
- Megan Graves
- Suresh Soundararajan

PNWER:

- Tara Edens, PNWER
- Brandon Hardenbrook, PNWER
- Betz Mayer, PNWER
- Nate Weigel, PNWER
- Eric Holdeman, PNWER

Notes:

1. Welcome & Introductions

Following roll call, MLA Richard Gotfried welcomed attendees and gave a brief introduction of Alberta's ABTraceTogether program.

2. Contact Tracing Best Practices

a. Alberta's ABTraceTogether

Dr. Jia Hu began the presentation by speaking to the importance of continuing manual contact tracing, using contact tracing apps to improve the process and fill in gaps. ABTraceTogether is modeled heavily off of Singapore's contact tracing app. Mobile tracing uses bluetooth signals to identify nearby phones and take note of the duration of contact. This allows for the app to trace without collecting unnecessary data. The government does not have access to this data, though the Health Authority can access encrypted data for the purpose of contact tracing.

Quinn Mah discussed the data privacy issues that have arisen with these and similar apps. The public perception is that the app is collecting all sorts of data, your GPS location, etc. This app is opt-in and does not collect identifiable data other than the phone number of the person you encountered and duration of contact. The app does not track people's location/GPS.

ABTraceTogether was launched on May 1, 2020. About 5% of the AB population has the app downloaded. Currently, the biggest challenges are apathy and fatigue of the pandemic, and convincing people to use the app.

b. COVID Alert - Canada's Federal Exposure Notification App

Assistant Deputy Minister Marc Fortin spoke next on Canada's Federal exposure notification app which launched July 31, 2020. The app is currently only being used in Ontario. However, there are efforts to activate the app in Alberta and other provinces over the coming months. There have been 2 million downloads of the app so far.

COVID Alert is not a contact tracing app. It is a voluntary exposure notification app to let people know that they have been in contact with someone who has tested positive for COVID-19. It uses bluetooth to communicate with nearby phones using and storing random codes, and does not collect personal information.

The next large hurdle for technology-driven COVID exposure notification is finding a way to reach people who do not have a compatible device. For children and seniors especially, this could mean using wearable technology for exposure notification instead of an app on a smartphone.

c. Virginia's COVIDWISE Exposure Notification App

Suresh Soundararajan from the Virginia Department of Health (VDH) discussed the state's COVIDWISE Exposure Notification app. The app was developed in partnership with VDH, their vendor Spring ML, Apple and Google. It was built with the Google/Apple framework for Public Health Exposure Notification. The app uses bluetooth and does not track location information or other details, similar to Canada's federal COVID Alert app. On August 5, 2020, Virginia was the first U.S. state to release an app using this framework, though a few other states have since followed.

Privacy is a top priority. VDH uses PIN authentication to ensure that information is reported correctly and to prevent false reporting. The app supplements ongoing contact tracing efforts by VDH. Mr. Soundararajan cited an [April 2020 Oxford study](#) which suggests that if ~55% of the population uses an exposure notification app, it could significantly help in suppressing the pandemic.

The app is available in both English and Spanish, as Spanish speakers in Virginia are disproportionately affected by the pandemic. VDH used extensive marketing efforts to get as many people as possible to download and use the app so it will be more effective. They are engaging with companies, non-profits, schools, and universities - some of whom have mandated the use of the app. Outreach efforts have also been made to faith-based organizations and social media influencers. There are weekly webinars about the app, what it does, and how it works. VDH partners with multiple organizations and uses their logos as outreach partners.

Around 450,000 people had downloaded the app at the time of the presentation, with a 4.5/5 rating on app stores. VDH is committed to taking into account the comments and ratings to improve the product. They try to have consistent messaging to build trust, and plan to integrate the app with neighboring states to be more effective. Virginia's COVIDWISE will be part of a pilot project with a national Google contact notification app.

3. Brief round robin updates from states, provinces & territories

WASHINGTON:

Sen. Hasegawa gave an update on an innovative pilot in Yakima in Washington. Yakima is a more rural/agrarian city with the highest rates of COVID-19 in Washington and the region. Test results were taking too long to get back to infected patients, resulting in high rates of community spread. This program connected patients at testing sites to case managers so that testing, tracking, and care coordination was all in the same place, which also helped people access self-isolation resources, financial resources, and local resources. They contracted with local businesses and pharmacies, trusted community advocates, health workers, and care coordinators in the region.

Washington state provided the program with \$10 million in funding through the CARES Act.

OREGON:

Sen. Arnie Roblan reported on reopening of schools in Oregon. To re-open, the state and county has to be below 5% infection rate. Currently 14 of 36 counties reach the qualifications. As soon as the state is below 5%, these counties can re-open schools. More information is available [here](#).

ALBERTA:

MLA Richard Gotfried also commented on the issue of school reopening. Many are anxious to get back to school, but there are also lots of risks associated with that. Alberta's Chief Medical Officer has put together valid and reasonable protocols for going back which can be found [here](#).

Currently, a big concern is seniors facilities. They are trying to open up visitation, but there are lots of risks. Currently 2 visitors allowed indoors, and 4 outdoors. There is lots of concern among seniors facility administrators.

Tourism and hospitality is pushing hard to do limited distance meetings/conventions. Lots of discussion on hybrid conferences to help revamp these industries.

4. Next Call?

MLA Doke suggested that the next call have jurisdictions report on school reopenings and how they are going.

The topic has since been changed to

5. Questions from the call

Eric Holdeman: When we consider the challenges of getting people in the USA to wear a mask, how does that inform the messaging on people using one of these apps?

- Suresh Soundararajan: The biggest challenge is the constant messaging. You have to partner with other organizations so that they hear it from trusted sources rather than just the government. The challenge is reaching the rural communities and vulnerable populations. Getting faith-based organizations to partner with is crucial to reach these groups.

Eric Holdeman: Basically we are living in an era that has little trust in institutions. What "trust building" actions have been used to get people to "trust" the app and what government is saying about privacy, etc.

Paolo Gallina: Are any of these apps designed to track someone who is required to

Self-isolate?

- Quinn Mah: They are not tracking people. It is important to let people know that they are not being tracked, and their privacy is not being infringed otherwise people will not use the app.

Eric Holdeman: Singapore has much more of a civic commitment to one another, where individualism is a very high value in the USA. Call it self-centeredness or...?

- Quinn Mah: Hi Eric, regarding Singapore that is a good question. Even with their civic commitment their adoption isn't over 20% (I believe). It's leading me to wonder whether smartphones are the right approach and whether a wearable not linked to your smartphone is a less invasive privacy approach

MLA Richard Gotfried: I think the "branding" as "exposure notification" sounds way less invasive than "tracing app". Good positioning!