

Restarting the Economy: What gaming workers need to know

June 19, 2020

The COVID-19 crisis has all but completely shut down Canada’s gaming industry, at least in terms of physical bricks-and-mortar operations, and the overall hospitality and gaming sector has been one of the first hit and among the worst hit by the economic shutdown following the pandemic. According to the Canadian Gaming Association, “In a 72-hour period, almost all of the 114 casinos in Canada closed down, along with more than 200 permanent bingo halls and community gaming centres.”¹

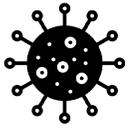
The gaming industry includes more than just gambling operations—hotels, restaurants, theatres, conference centres, tourist attractions, and the full supply chain associated with all these operations have felt the disastrous impacts of the COVID-19 crisis. Provinces are at different stages of their pandemic response and reopening plans, but even as formal government restrictions are lifted, the gaming sector will only fully recover when customers feel safe as they patronize casinos, racetracks, bingo halls, and other related operations.

What gaming workers can expect when returning to work

The gaming sector could take several years to fully recover from the COVID-19 crisis. All stakeholders in the sector will have to work together to develop and implement health and safety plans that keep workers and customers safe. But just as importantly, there will be a need to effectively communicate these plans to assure the public that gaming operations are safe and relatively low-risk.

Workers in the gaming sector face a number of serious challenges. In the midst of the full quarantine stage of the pandemic, the collapse of the industry and ensuing loss of employment is the most obvious negative outcome. The union has been working hard with employers to negotiate the extension of benefits coverage for laid off gaming workers, and there is more work to do in ensuring members and non-union workers have the right to return to their jobs with their previous working conditions intact. In addition, we specifically recognize the urgent need for essential drug coverage for gaming sector workers and others who have lost workplace coverage due to extended layoffs, and we have been fighting to make sure government support

1. <http://canadiangaming.ca/covid-19-and-the-impact-on-canadas-gaming-industry/>



programs address this critical need. This includes the introduction of a universal pharmacare program.

Reopening the sector will take time, and will require significant changes to operations in order to provide needed protections for workers and customers alike. New procedures could be required to address issues like customer contact, contact with gaming accessories (playing cards, chips, tokens, etc.), safe handling of currency, and dealer rotations to allow for adequate handwashing. It will be more important than ever for employers, the union, rank-and-file members, and Joint Health & Safety Committees to work together to develop sound, risk-based health and safety programs in our workplaces.

What gaming workers should expect from their Employers

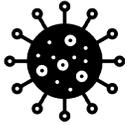
The gaming sector recovery will not occur until the rest of the economy rebounds, government restrictions are eased, and consumers feel enough financial stability to resume their pre-crisis gaming spending. In addition, customers must have confidence that casinos, racetracks, bingo halls, and other related operations are safe and relatively low-risk, and that includes adequate health and safety plans for gaming sector workers. Unifor expects gaming employers to:

- Participate in the federal government's Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) program, to bring workers back on the payroll, and help campaign for a CEWS program extension for sectors like gaming that face a longer ramp-up time for recovery,
- Fully participate with their employees and unions, and their Joint Health & Safety Committees, to develop and implement Return to Work protocols and revised workplace health and safety plans,
- Provide extended benefits coverage (including health and pension benefits) for employees experiencing extended layoffs, for the duration of the crisis, and
- Provide adequate training, PPEs, and health and safety protocols to keep employees safe and protected, and maintain adequate staffing levels to ensure workers have the time to work safely.

What gaming workers need from Government

The gaming sector is a critical part of Canada's economy, employing tens of thousands of Canadians from coast to coast to coast. The gaming sector is heavily unionized relative to other sectors, and—compared to other service work—gaming jobs are more likely to provide good jobs with fair wages, decent benefits, and job security. Unifor expects governments in Canada to:

- Recognize the urgent need for essential drug coverage for gaming sector workers and others who have lost workplace coverage due to extended layoffs, and revise and enhance government support programs to address this critical need - including the introduction of universal pharmacare,
- Develop and implement a universal childcare program to provide high-quality, affordable, public childcare, allowing more members of the workforce to return to work and provide for their families,
- Provide additional and extended supports (like the CERB and CEWS programs) for workers in the gaming sector and others that face extended closures and loss of employment as their sectors face a



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longer ramp-up time for recovery,

- Amend federal and provincial labour laws to provide job security for workers facing extended layoffs, allowing them to return to their previous jobs when the crisis is over.

Additional Resources

Unifor has launched a hub for member information about the pandemic at unifor.org/COVID19 and encourages members to check the site regularly for updates.

Subscribe to Unilink, the union's weekly national newsletter at unifor.org/subscribe and download the Unifor mobile app on your smartphone.

A more detailed reopening tool-kit and checklist will be following shortly, with more specific information on health and safety protocols for reopening the gaming sector.