

RELATED TERMS

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LESSON LEARNED

Quarantine and Isolation: Offering Income Replacement to Quarantined Citizens

SUMMARY

Quarantine and isolation measures that require citizens to be absent from work for a given period of time may result in the loss of income for affected citizens. During the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) virus outbreak in Toronto, Canada in 2003, the provincial government created a program that compensated individuals who were forced to be absent from work due to SARS-related causes.

DESCRIPTION

In response to the 2003 SARS outbreak in Toronto, Canada, the city's public health officials requested that nearly 30,000 people enter voluntary quarantine. These measures aimed to separate individuals who may have come into contact with the disease from those who had not. Isolation measures were implemented for those who were ill with SARS.

Some Toronto area employers provided sick leave to their employees who were absent from work due to SARS, thus ensuring that they received continued pay. Many employers, however, did not offer paid sick leave. Still other Toronto area residents were self-employed and were not covered by any leave policies. This inconsistency in compensation coverage led many quarantined and isolated Toronto inhabitants to fear that they would not be able to recover any income lost during a period of mandated absence from work due to SARS. In fact, in a post-outbreak survey, quarantined individuals cited fear of loss of income as the primary motive for breaking a quarantine order.

The Ontario government created the "SARS Assistance Program" on June 13, 2003 to guarantee compensation to any employee forced to take unpaid leave from work as a result of SARS. The program offered compensation to citizens who were unable to report to work for at least five days between March 14 and June 30, 2003 due to SARS-related illness or quarantine, as well as to those who needed time off to care for SARS-afflicted family members. The program compensated only those residents who were not already fully compensated by their employer or another source. Eligible full-time employees could receive a lump sum of \$500 (Canadian) in "isolation payment" and could apply for additional assistance worth up to \$6,000. Part-time employees could apply for a lump sum payment of \$250. Self-employed individuals could be compensated for income lost as determined by income reported in past years' tax returns.

The Ontario SARS Assistance Program compensated 845 citizens out of 1006 who applied, disbursing a total of \$684,352 in payments. The program achieved wider compensation coverage for Toronto area employees than would have been attained through employers' policies alone. As a result, it created a financial safety net for area residents adversely impacted by SARS-related quarantine and isolation measures.

CITATION

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