

**Follow-up Responses to the House of Commons Standing Committee on
Government Operations and Estimates (OGGO)
Minister of Digital Government
November 30, 2020**

1. Additional details of applications being developed by the government (CDS/SSC)

(LPC) Mr. Majid Jowhari: Can you shed some light on what tools and services your department is rolling out in support of Canadians? Often users find these very difficult to be able to navigate. We are becoming accustomed to tools such as innovation.canada.ca, where you can go in and talk about your business story, and it gives you all of the options. Are we thinking about something like that, such that if you have a COVID story, you could tell it and they'll give you all of the programs that might be available for you and automatically connect you to the CRA and other services? Can you shed some light on that?

Minister of Digital Government: Yes, I can talk about the things we've done already, and they're very much focused on people—very much customer focused, as you're alluding to. CDS put together “Get Updates on COVID-19”, along with Service Canada, so that individuals could go to one place and put in some non-identifying information and get everything they might be eligible to receive and how to apply for it. That's just one. Another one is a simple way for ministries to notify people quickly, easily and securely of updates of what's going on and what they need to know. I think there have been over five million updates that have been sent out, many of them from the health ministry. This is a program they update called Notify, found at notification.canada.ca. It's being used by provinces and other organizations, because it just makes it so much easier. **There are other ones I could mention, but I think I will turn it over to Marc Brouillard briefly to add his context.**

The Chair: Thank you, Minister. Once again, six minutes goes by very quickly, **so if we could ask someone to follow that up with a written response**, we would appreciate if you sent to the clerk.

Response

The Canadian Digital Service (CDS) and Shared Services Canada (SSC) are helping Canada respond to the COVID-19 crisis by working with departments, other jurisdictions, and sectors to build new open source tools and services and leverage existing ones.

To support the Canada Revenue Agency, Shared Services Canada is building a redundant Secure Remote Access solution which will be ready in late January 2021. Going forward, Shared Services Canada will support the 2020 Tax filing Season in February 2021 while continuing to support all the underlining infrastructure to support the aforementioned three (3) new benefits released in October 2020.

SSC has delivered significant infrastructure upgrades to support the unprecedented load (one day record in April 2020 with over 270,000 Employment Insurance applications) on ESDC's Employment Insurance systems due to COVID-19.

SSC implemented Secure Cloud Enablement and Defence connectivity on a fast track schedule and supported ESDC's implementation of the Multi-Benefit Delivery System. This allowed ESDC to deliver to the Department of Fisheries and Ocean, the Fish Harvester and Grant Program.

Additional details of applications being developed by CDS:

- **COVID-19 Benefits Finder:**

- CDS worked with ESDC to build and launch "Find financial help during COVID-19", a web-based tool that helps users find the benefits that best suit their needs.
- The COVID-19 Benefits Finder has helped over 1 million Canadians navigate new pandemic-related support through its online questionnaire and personalized "ways to get help" page since it was launched on May 22.

- **GC Notify:**

- The GC Notify allows government departments to easily send emails and SMS messages to subscribers.
- As of January 11, there are 78 live services currently using GC Notify and over 8.2 million notifications have been sent using the platform.
- Nearly 7 million of those notifications have been sent since March 2020, largely as part of the Government's response to COVID-19. Nineteen of the services using GC Notify, or 50% of those added since March 2020, are in direct response to COVID-19.

- **COVID Alert:**

- COVID Alert, a national exposure notification app, was announced June 18, 2020. It was launched July 31, after approximately 45 days of design and development efforts.
- As of January 10, COVID Alert has been downloaded over 6 million times, with 14,866 one-time keys claimed in the app across eight provinces and 1 territory.
- COVID Alert was developed by the Canadian Digital Service, using open source code developed by volunteers from Shopify, as well as Bluetooth exposure notification technology co-developed by Apple and Google. It received security reviews from the Office of the Chief Information Officer at the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, the Canadian Centre for Cyber Security and BlackBerry.
- On October 30, an update was introduced to send notifications based on a more precise timeline. With this update, users who have tested positive for COVID-19 and have entered a one-time key from their respective public health authority will now have the option to enter the date of their symptom onset or their testing date.
- In December 2020, Apple announced that they would be making their exposure notification framework and low energy Bluetooth available on iOS 12.5 and above, meaning people with iPhones 5S, 6 or 6 Plus can now use exposure notification services like COVID Alert that run on that framework. After conducting testing, the

COVID Alert app was made available on these devices on January 5, 2021. With this new update, COVID Alert is now compatible on 97.5% of all smartphones in Canada.

- Engagement with the Office of the Privacy Commissioner (OPC) began June 11, led by Health Canada. Draft recommendations were received from the OPC on July 10 and acted upon in subsequent weeks.

2. Additional information on the PBO request to SSC for the amounts used for cyber security, call centres and health centres for First Nations People (SSC)

(BQ) Mrs. Julie Vignola: Thank you very much, Mr. Brouillard. On November 13, 2020, the Parliamentary Budget Officer sent an information request to SSC asking about the dollar amounts spent on cybersecurity, the CERB, the CRA call centres, and on health measures for first nations. Did you supply this information by November 27 as requested? If not, when do you expect to do so?

Minister of Digital Government: This is about openness and transparency, which are very core principles for me and for our department. Yes, our department has been in communication with the Parliamentary Budget Officer. We are working through the answers that the PBO is looking for. I'm happy to have Marc answer in more detail if the member would prefer.

Response

Shared Services Canada (SSC) provided the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer with all requested data on November 27, 2020.

In order to better align the frequency of response to this request with the monthly reports to TBS on the COVID-19 expenditures, SSC has committed to providing the Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer a monthly update on the requested figures.

3. Procurement Audits (SSC)

(NDP) Mr. Matthew Green: I think it could be said that in IT sometimes there's a culture that people may be a little preferential toward one system or service. I'm just wondering if there have been any instances that you know of related to the recent modernization that perhaps are not under investigation now but were within recent memory.

Hon. Joyce Murray: I'll let Paul answer that again, because I'm not aware of any.

(NDP) Mr. Matthew Green: Sure.

Mr. Paul Glover (SSC): I would echo the minister's comment. I'm not aware of that. The vast majority of our procurement is done through competitive processes or through mini-competitions through pre-qualified vendors. It might not be open each and every time. We do over 10 or 11 contracts a day every day, so oftentimes we go to pre-qualified....

(NDP) Mr. Matthew Green: How often are you audited on that?

Hon. Joyce Murray: Again, I'll ask Mr. Glover to answer that.

(NDP) Mr. Matthew Green: That's fair.

Mr. Paul Glover (SSC): Mr. Chair, I will have to provide an answer in writing. I'm not sure off the top of my head.

Response

Since the creation of Shared Services Canada, the following audit has been carried out on procurement practices:

- An independent audit of Project Initiation and Procurement by Deloitte in November 2018.