

Post-lifting PCR test requirement, FDFA talks back-to-back wins



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This morning I joined Congressman @RepBrianHiggins and Mayors @jimdiiodati, Robert Restaino & Michael Bradley to call on the Federal Government to lift the requirement for a negative PCR test to cross the border into Canada.



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As of November 30, the federal government of Canada has lifted the PCR test requirement for fully vaccinated travelers returning to Canada following trips less than 72 hours. Ahead of the restriction lifting, *Global Travel Retail Magazine* connected with Barbara Barrett, Executive Director, Frontier Duty Free Association (FDFA), to discuss this major achievement and the association’s advocacy role throughout the pandemic.

As noted by Barrett, the government’s decision to lift the PCR test requirement was in no small part due to the advocacy work of FDFA. The association worked with US Congressmen and Mayors on both sides of the border to put pressure on the federal government, which resulted in those at the top taking action.

FDFA has led the road to recovery of the duty free and travel retail industry every step of the way. Although land border stores across the country valued the re-opening of the Canada border to fully vaccinated Americans in August, Barrett states this was only a “crack” in the solution. Working closely with Tourism Industry Association of Canada (TIAC), Hotel Association of Canada (HAC) as part of Coalition of the Hardest Hit Businesses, FDFA continued lobbying to generate awareness and protect the travel and tourism sector.

The association released a survey in October that showed despite Americans being permitted to cross the Canada/US land border, Canadian duty free shops were still down more than 80% in sales compared to pre-pandemic. Barrett points out the success of land border stores across the country relies on steady traffic flow; approximately 80% of which is made up of Canadians traveling to the US. Although the re-opening allowed a slight return to normalcy, the PCR test requirement continued to cause hesitancy and reduce travel. When asked about the overall status of the Canadian land border duty free industry in November, Barrett says based on anecdotal evidence it’s improving.

Describing FDFA as a small association with a loud voice, Barrett states the elimination of the PCR test requirement makes logical sense and promotes equity across travel channels. Moving forward,

Canadians can cross the border to attend a sports game, spend a day shopping or visit a loved one without the hassle of locating a COVID testing site in the states or spending money on a PCR test, which can cost anywhere between \$150 - 300 (CDN).

Leading up to this policy change, Coalition of the Hardest Hit, which FDFA joined in fall 2020 and represents Canada's hardest hit sectors including arts, culture, tourism, events and hospitality, called on the federal government to take action regarding three specific measures. The final measure, which asked the Liberal Party to follow through with its promise to extend support of tourism-based businesses and organizations into 2022, was achieved after a long, challenging journey.

Last week, the government not only announced, but also named FDFA as qualifying under Tourism for the new relief benefits. The Liberal government aims to deliver targeted support to businesses still facing significant pandemic-related challenges (Bill C-2). The Tourism and Hospitality Recovery Program would provide support through wage and rent subsidies with a subsidy rate of up to 75%. Considered a lifeline by Barrett, the inclusion of the association ensures no room for ambiguity.

With back-to-back wins in the books, Barrett looks forward to the return of steady traffic and the start of a new take on recovery. Referencing the growing spread of the Omicron variant, she notes FDFA continues to monitor the situation and follow all health and safety protocols and that increasing the vaccination rate - not implementing travel restrictions - is the most effective way to fight COVID.

To learn more, watch the following link, which highlights media coverage from the press conference held by FDFA on November 8: <https://bit.ly/3pbozM4>