



National Citizens Inquiry

Witness Guidelines

<https://nationalcitizensinquiry.ca/>
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1. Introduction

Thank you for your interest in sharing your story about what happened to you during the Covid-19 pandemic because of governments' health-protection measures. This document explains how to give your testimony at the National Citizens' Inquiry. **Testimony** is the formal word used to describe the information you share at an inquiry. When you tell your story—also called 'giving testimony'—you are called a **witness**.

The National Citizens' Inquiry (the **Inquiry**) is being held to give you and other Canadians the opportunity to talk about how government actions and decisions during Covid-19 affected you. The goal is to better understand what happened to people, why decisions were made, what happened as a result, and learn how we can do better in future. You can testify about the actions of any level of government, including federal, First Nations, provincial, territorial or municipal governments.

Eight Inquiry **hearings** are being held in eight locations across the country: Truro, Toronto, Winnipeg, Saskatoon, Red Deer, Vancouver, Quebec City and Ottawa. You can tell your story in person at one of those hearings, or you can tell it virtually (online) at a hearing through a live videoconference.

You will be telling your story to Commissioners and lawyers will help you do that by asking you questions. **Commissioners** are the people who direct the Inquiry. They will hear testimony from witnesses and then prepare a report, with recommendations, about what they heard.

Members of the public will be invited to attend the hearings in person. The hearings will also be broadcast live online for anyone who wants to watch them, and then recorded and posted online afterwards. This means your story will be part of a permanent record of the testimony provided at the Inquiry.

2. Offering to be a Witness

The Inquiry website (www.nationalcitizensinquiry.ca) has an online form you can use to offer to be a witness. The form will let you choose which hearing you would like to speak at, and what you would like to talk about. Some of the hearings may focus on certain topics. Your story could be about:

- How the pandemic health measures affected you financially
- How your business was affected
- How your job was affected
- How your education, or that of your children, was affected
- The effects on your family or friends
- The effects on your health
- Your experience with the medical system
- Your experience with the vaccine
- The impact on your ability to do your usual activities, such as travel or see loved ones
- Something else that happened

Everyone who testifies will be encouraged to recommend how Canada could do better in future, based on the experience they had.

The Inquiry will hear from two type of witnesses:

- **The public**, who share personal stories of what happened to them
- **Experts**, such as medical professionals, lawyers, researchers, or government staff, who provide their professional opinion of something

You will also have the choice of:

- Providing your testimony **in person** at a hearing event
- Providing your testimony **online**, during a hearing event, if you can't join in person

Due to the time available at each hearing, and the anticipated number of people interested in speaking, there may not be time to hear from everyone who wants to testify. There may still be other ways to share your story; check www.nationalcitizensinquiry.ca for more information.

3. What to Expect

Before the Hearing

You will be contacted by someone from the local organizing team about the testimony you have offered to provide. If you are chosen to testify, you will speak with a lawyer who is part of the Commission counsel. The lawyer **will help you prepare your testimony**. At the hearing, all you have to do is answer the lawyer's questions.

You may not read your testimony or refer to notes. If you want to read your testimony you will NOT be selected as a witness.

At the Hearing

You will be called when it is your turn to speak. Before you provide your testimony, you will be asked to affirm that you will only tell the truth and you must agree to do so. . After that, the lawyer who helped you prepare your testimony will ask you questions; you just need to answer them. When you are finished, the lawyer will ask the Commissioners if they have questions about your testimony. Answer the questions honestly and to the best of your ability; if you don't know something, it is okay to say so.

Sharing your story might be hard. You may have lost a job, or your business, or friendships You may have lost a loved one to Covid or been unable to see someone in hospital before they died. You may have missed celebrating an important milestone in your life or someone else's life, such as a graduation, wedding or anniversary. Your health, or the health of someone you love, may have been affected. If you feel upset when answering the lawyer's questions, it is okay to stop, take a break, and start again when you can. The Commissioners will understand.

a. Testimony Time

Personal witnesses may have as little as 15 minutes to provide their testimony, but it may be more depending on the hearing location and what you want to say. Expert witnesses will likely have longer to testify. If you are chosen as a witness, you and the lawyer who will be asking you questions will be told how much time you'll have to testify.

b. Providing Testimony in Person

- Be sure to arrive at least 60 minutes before you're scheduled to speak. You may be asked to speak before the time you were told.
- Someone will greet you when you arrive and show you where you can wait.
- You will be called to testify when it is your turn.
- Answer the questions the lawyer asks you. Remember you will **not be allowed to read your testimony or use notes**.
- Come early if you want so you can hear other people speak. You can also join the audience after you testify, to hear what others have to say. Each event will have different procedures for the in-person audience, so check with the organizers for your hearing location.
- If you want, bring someone with you when you testify, so you're not alone. They can sit with the audience when you speak. If you do bring someone, let the local organizing committee know.

- If you had to travel to the hearing to testify in person, you may be eligible to have reasonable travel costs (up to \$300) reimbursed by the Inquiry. Please check the website for more information: www.nationalcitizensinquiry.ca.

c. Providing Testimony Online

- You will get information prior to your hearing date about how to testify online. Please test your computer based on the information you receive, to make sure it works. Each hearing location may differ in how the video links will work. You will get information about the process for your location in advance, so you have time to prepare.
- Find a quiet location with a secure Wi-Fi connection so you will be able to speak without distractions. Use a headset with a microphone if you can, to help ensure good sound quality.
- On the day of the hearing, be sure to log in at least 45 minutes before you're scheduled to speak. This gives time to sort out any connection difficulties before it is your turn. This also helps because you may be asked to testify earlier than the time you were told.
- You will be called when it is your turn; don't forget to unmute your computer before you testify.
- Answer the questions the lawyer asks you. Remember you will **not be allowed to read your testimony or use notes**.
- Stay online after you testify so you can answer any questions.
- After you're finished, you can stay and watch online.

4. Final Tips

- Confirm the location, day and time of the hearing at which you will speak with the organizers for your hearing location.
- Remember, all you have to do is answer the lawyer's questions.
- If you have any questions, reach out to your contact from the regional team where you'll be testifying.

5. Notes



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