



**Re: Letter from DLSPH faculty regarding Work and Health Inequities at the University of Toronto during COVID-19 pandemic**

July 9, 2020

Dear Colleagues,

Thank you for your letter dated June 29, 2020. We deeply appreciate your efforts in scholarship and knowledge dissemination regarding COVID-19. The present pandemic has emphasized the importance of research-informed and fact-based approaches to public health decision-making. Your scholarship and service as well as that of so many other colleagues in other academic divisions has served to highlight the incredible depth and profile of U of T experts in guiding and supporting the city, province, country, and world-at-large through the current crisis.

We would like to address your three main concerns. First, with regard to employee consultation on workplace health and safety measures, we can confirm that we have been consulting on a regular and ongoing basis with the affected groups about the University's response to COVID-19. All faculty members and managerial administrative staff can access the University's [General Workplace Guidelines](#), a 41-page document that lays out in detail the extraordinary health and safety measures being implemented across our three campuses. These Guidelines were rolled out to the entire U of T Community in various ways, including posting on the COVID-19 Roadmap page, on the new Human Resources & Equity website, and through the launch of the UTogether2020 website. They have also been distributed to every division's Chief Administrative Officer for implementation in Faculties and departments.

Regular and meaningful consultation with unions and other employee groups has been ongoing since the start of 2020 when we anticipated the current situation and invoked the University's crisis and emergency framework. The Division of Human Resources & Equity and their office of Labour Relations has been in regular contact with the leadership of labour unions, working closely and collaboratively with them. We are also having regular and meaningful discussion with the U of T Faculty Association, and consulting with divisional committees that include many faculty colleagues. The Dean of the Dalla Lana School of Public Health, along with all the health science Deans, have participated in decision-making and have identified relevant faculty from their units when specific expertise has been required. We thank all faculty members who have provided input on the development of guidance documents.

Second, you raise concerns about the employment security of U of T workers. The University has issued various memos, including on April 21, April 30, and May 19, communicating that we have worked diligently to limit the scope and number of temporary layoffs and to support affected employees. Most of our staff are working at home remotely and some individuals perform critical roles that require them to be on campus. Notice of limited pandemic-related temporary layoffs began to occur in May for a June 1<sup>st</sup> effective date. Those layoffs are linked to areas that lost significant revenue and were completely or partially shut down as a result of the pandemic and unable to operate remotely, such as food services and athletics. The University is continuing benefits coverage at no cost to impacted employees during the temporary layoffs, as well as supplementing their Canada Emergency Response Benefit.

Third, you raise concerns about gender equity and the University's work-at-home policies related to childcare and elder care. The University has developed and shared several guides for employees and managers that encourage flexible work arrangements including telecommuting and flexible hours due to the impacts of COVID-19, including school closures and cancellations of childcare. See, e.g., [Memo re: impact of caregiving responsibilities on faculty and librarians](#); [Temporary Special Telecommuting Work Arrangements Guideline](#) and document with [Best Practices for Leading & Managing Remotely](#). The University also rolled out a new absence reporting tool for staff who must self-isolate or who become sick with COVID-19, and a new category of sick leave related to the pandemic for staff. The health and well-being of our employees and their families continues to be of utmost importance to us, and we are well aware of the burdens caused by the current pandemic, particularly on women caregivers, and we continue to offer many supports to them through the Family Care Office and the Employee Family Assistance Program.

Thank you again for your thoughts. We are proud of U of T's leadership as an employer during COVID-19 and the extraordinary work of our faculty colleagues and administrative staff to support the health and safety of our students and employees, and to continue fulfilling our mission of world-class teaching and research.

Sincerely,

Vivek Goel, Special Advisor to the President & Provost

Kelly Hannah-Moffat, Vice-President, Human Resources & Equity

Cheryl Regehr, Vice-President & Provost