

UNPRECEDENTED

2020

To say 2020 was an unforgettable year is an understatement.

The events of the year challenged our profession to adapt to unexpected changes, learn quickly and support one another like never before. While the effects of 2020 are going to last for many years, we wanted to reflect on this unprecedented year.

This ebook was put together to capture the historic nature of the past year. We want to recognize how the medical laboratory profession rose above uncertainty and fear, and moved forward as a key part of Canada's pandemic response.

Use your CSMLS membership to log into the website to access the exclusive content and get a deeper dive on the stories that changed our lives.

A STORM ON THE HORIZON

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In early January 2020, a cluster of cases of “viral pneumonia of unknown cause” was identified in Wuhan, China. On January 9, the World Health Organization reported that Chinese authorities had determined that the outbreak was caused by a novel coronavirus.

“At the time, we had flagged the novel coronavirus simply as a story of interest for our members. We recognized that if the outbreak spread, access to reliable information would be key. Much like our response to the most recent Ebola epidemic, we decided to start curating resources and guidance from reputable sources like PHAC and WHO.”

– Christine Nielsen

On January 25, a man in his 50’s who had arrived in Toronto from Wuhan became the first presumptive case in Canada. After calling 911, the man was placed in isolation in Toronto’s Sunnybrook Hospital. Two days later, the National Microbiology Lab in Winnipeg confirmed the diagnosis. **Canada’s battle with COVID-19 had begun.**

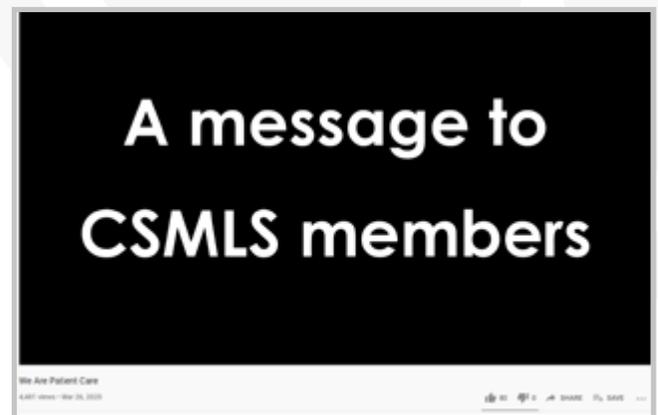


**COVID-19 :
Member Support Page**

MEDICAL LABORATORY PROFESSIONALS GO TO WORK

By early March, news of the novel coronavirus was taking over media as reports from across the globe painted a dire picture. As schools began to close across the country and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau advised Canadians to stay home, medical laboratory professionals went to work as a key part of the nation's pandemic response.

This video, a message of gratitude and solidarity, was one of the last tasks completed before the CSMLS office was temporarily closed. Even though the doors were closed, the work of the Society was accelerating to meet the evolving needs of the community.



The primary issues facing the profession in the early phases of the pandemic were:



Personal safety/concerns around contracting the virus



Exacerbated staffing shortages



Not enough PPE



Increased physical and mental burden

NAVIGATING A NEW NORMAL

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The pandemic affected everyone differently.

Depending on your role, you may have had increased workload, or decreased. Maybe you were deployed to new areas or on the very front lines. Regardless of where you were, you felt the change and everyone had to get used to a new normal.

Supporting your information and learning needs was vital. Quality education from reliable sources was a focus for the Society during the first wave, providing targeted content, subject matter experts, and free resources for members:



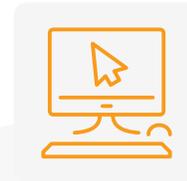
Dealing With The New Normal:
Three Perspectives on the
Global Pandemic



Calming the Panic:
New Organisms in Health Care
by Jim Gauthier



**To Mask or Not to Mask...
That is the Question:**
PPE in the Age of a Pandemic and
Beyond by Tom Walus



NML and the Covid19 Outbreak:
Dynamic emergency response,
innovative research, effective
diagnostics by Guillaume Poliquin



**What's All the Fuss About Mass
Spectrometry?**
by Curtis Oleschuk



**An Educator's Perspective
on Virtual Teaching:**
Just-in-Time Ideas for Engaging
Students Online by Jennifer O'Leary



**The Many Faces Behind
the Many Masks:**
How PPE Has Changed Forever
by Tom Walus

SPOTLIGHT ON THE LAB

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The first wave of the pandemic brought media interest like we have never seen before, creating a public dialogue on lab testing. It was important to be an active participant in this dialogue and to use this forum as a way to advocate for our members and the issues important to them.

“Initially, all reporters wanted to talk about was the test itself. So our key message was to focus on the importance of the people behind the tests. As several provinces struggled to keep up with the demand for testing as the pandemic grew, we had to keep emphasizing the use of certified and licensed laboratory professionals to conduct COVID-19 testing. Whether in a pandemic or not, it’s always important that the right professionals are performing the right tasks.”

— Christine Nielsen



As the media stories evolved from testing capabilities to backlogs, staffing shortages to the efficacy of government initiatives, we strove to remain a source of credible information for the media and the public.

Where your voice was heard:



Overview - **Why is it taking so long to sift through testing results for COVID-19?**

COVID-19 Testing Capacity on the Mike Farwell Show



Laboratory workers are essential workers – and not just during a pandemic

Why Canada's COVID-19 'war-time' response could be derailed by a swab on a stick

Ontario is sending COVID-19 pharmacy swabs to California lab for processing



Is rapid testing the solution to Canada's 2nd wave?

Ontario's coronavirus testing backlog decreases



**Long waits for COVID-19 test results reveal
Canada's shortage of lab workers**

**Federal government has limited ability to ramp
up COVID-19 testing nationwide, say officials**

**Showing the steps behind
COVID-19 testing**

**Union says not enough lab techs for SHA
to meet COVID testing target**

**Families brace for school, work disruptions
as cold and flu season nears**

**Rapid test kit recall underscores importance
of Canada's lab technologists**

**False-positive COVID-19 test results rare
despite recent scares, experts say**

**Nearly 20 per cent of COVID-19 infections
among health-care workers by late July**



**Labs struggle to keep up with COVID-19
testing surge**

VOICES RAISED

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Government relations is an essential part of advocating for the medical laboratory profession. Throughout 2020, CSMLS was busy connecting with policymakers helping to inform decisions when it came to health human resources. We also used our position to raise the concerns of members and lobby for resources.

Some of the results of our advocacy work are highly visible, such as:



**Prime Minister's statement
on Lab Week:**



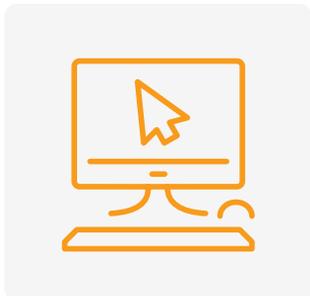
**Alberta Government announces
\$15 million in laboratory
infrastructure**



Often, this work is less visible, regional or behind the scenes. Here are just a few examples of the advocacy work that took place during the pandemic.

- Many provinces on the East Coast continued to battle lab closures and amalgamation. CSMLS met with Ministers of Health to ensure conversations about closures included a lab voice.
- CSMLS submitted recommendations for the British Columbia and Ontario Pre-budget 2021 Consultations. We recommended addressing the issue of a decreasing workforce by increasing capacity in training programs, creating sustainable bridging programs for internationally educated technologists, and incentivizing technologists to relocate to rural and remote areas.
- In Saskatchewan, a shortage of licensed medical laboratory professionals was made more apparent by the province's increased COVID-19 testing goals. CSMLS representative Michael Grant spoke with the Saskatoon StarPhoenix supporting the role of licensed MLTs. "These staffing decisions should not be taken lightly. It's important to respect the experience and skills of Saskatchewan's medical laboratory technologists. They cannot simply be replaced by anyone with a science degree."
- CSMLS advocated for medical laboratory professionals to receive Ontario's "Pandemic Pay," working directly with Premier Ford's office to ensure recognition of the role medical laboratory professionals played in Ontario's response.
- In New Brunswick, CSMLS CEO Christine Nielsen met with officials from the provincial ministry, health critic Jean-Claude D'Amours and NB Liberal Party leader Kevin Vickers to discuss the challenges facing laboratory services in the province.
- CSMLS was part of the Organizations for Health Action COVID-19 task force, a coalition of 40 national health organizations, which worked directly with the federal health ministry and made recommendations on the national response to the pandemic.

Check out our press releases:



From the CSMLS website:
Learn about our advocacy efforts

From the CSMLS website:
Improving education

From the CSMLS website:
Learn how we responded to staffing issues

From the CSMLS website:
Regulating Health Professionals



From the Government of Alberta:
Investing in Alberta's laboratories



From CBC:
COVID testing and labour shortages

A NEW SYMBOL IS BORN: THE INDIGO LAB COAT

This national campaign was originally conceived to launch post-pandemic, highlighting the contribution our members make each day, not just in COVID times. However, COVID had different plans.

Initial public health measures over the spring and summer months had calmed the number of active cases across the country, hitting a low of 4,141 on July 17, 2020. Unfortunately, the feared second wave began to take shape in September.

“The combination of the resumption of non-urgent procedures and spiking numbers of COVID tests were putting a lot of pressure on labs and lab professionals. With workloads hitting new highs almost daily, we felt the profession could use something positive.”

— Christine Nielsen

We took the profession’s most recognizable symbol — the lab coat — and used it as an educational tool.



Printed on the coat in microscopic indigo type are the names of the 1.2 million lab tests done each day in labs across the country. The small print invites the public to take a closer look at the work done by medical laboratory professionals.

We specifically chose indigo for the colour as it represents confidence, intelligence, ambition, and devotion – all characteristics of the hard-working lab professionals that you are.

The campaign included outdoor advertising and social media promotion, leading to the website: IndigoLabCoat.ca. We even sent a few coats to influential Canadians.



See how Canadians reacted to the Indigo Lab Coat:

MOVING FORWARD

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At the time of publication, we find ourselves firmly entrenched in the second wave, with over 60,000 active cases nationwide. You are now, as you've always been, at the very heart of our nation's pandemic response. We are proud of the contributions you have made in 2020.

Issues facing the profession in the second wave:



Financial:

Approx. 36% of members' households are feeling a financial impact.



Release Time & Support for PD:

The fiscal and HR strain of COVID further tightens access to learning opportunities.



Staff Shortages:

Increased workload has exacerbated the shortage of MLTs.



Stress & Burnout:

The prolonged duration of the pandemic will have a detrimental effect on the mental health of the profession.

In recognition of the unprecedented experience our members are living through, we have made three important commitments for the year ahead:

- CSMLS membership rate freeze
- Providing nearly 900 hours of free education with membership
- Supporting the mental health of our members

Canada's projected recovery from COVID-19 has been described as having a long tail, meaning we will continue to feel the effects of the pandemic for a significant period of time.

FINAL THOUGHT

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We need your help to continue serving this profession to the best of our ability. When it comes to advocacy, numbers matter. Please add your voice.

If you haven't already, I encourage you to renew your CSMLS membership for 2021.

If you have, I ask that you encourage others within your medical laboratory network to also become a member of CSMLS.

As a community, we have weathered this storm, but there is so much left to face. Now is the time to be united. Together, we can make significant change for our profession.

— **Christine Nielsen,**
CEO



Renew My Membership:

CSMLS  SCSLM

Canadian Society for Medical Laboratory Science
Société canadienne de science de laboratoire médical

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