Thinking Post-Crisis Recovery: Two New Programs for Worker Training and Retention

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Two weeks ago, we published an article on the challenge of retaining your workforce amidst the pandemic. Since that time, two new programs on the subject have been announced by the provincial government. The first is meant to respond to the effects of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) on employee retention, while the second promotes worker training.

Incentive Program to Retain Essential Workers (IPREW)

Although the CERB has been generally well received, it has led to difficulties for certain businesses that provide essential services. This is because the salaries of many workers (particularly those working part-time and those working as cashiers, delivery persons, security guards and maintenance workers) is lower than the CERB. In some cases, employees who were laid off and later recalled to work on a part-time basis felt penalized (unlike the regular Employment Insurance program, the CERB does not allow beneficiaries to keep part of the wages they receive by working). This disadvantage has led to surging rates of absenteeism.

To incentivize essential services workers to remain in their posts, the IPREW provides a taxable bonus of $100 per week up to a maximum of $1,600 over the course of the program. This bonus is retroactive to March 15, 2020. The government estimates that 600,000 workers will be able to benefit from the program. Workers must submit their applications online beginning on May 19, 2020. The first payment is scheduled for May 27, 2020.

To be eligible for the IPREW, workers must:

1. Be working part-time or full-time in an essential service;
2. Be over 15 years of age and living in Quebec;
3. Earn $550 or less per week for an annual income of no less than $5,000 and no more than $28,600 for the year 2020; and

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4. Not be receiving CERB or PATT benefits. Workers whose employers receive financial aid from the federal government are still eligible.

Non-essential businesses may want to consider implementing incentives inspired by the IPREW in order to retain their workforce when they are recalled to work following the gradual return to normal activities scheduled to begin on May 4, 2020. Non-essential businesses will most likely face problems similar to those that led to the creation of the IPREW, most notably because the CERB will be available until October 3, 2020.

Concerted Action Program to Maintain Employment (PACME)

It is reasonable to assume that companies resuming their operations after the province-wide shutdown will need to adopt many new measures, particularly in terms of workers' health and safety and, as we wrote about last week, telework. Training workers will become even more relevant and essential. The PACME offers an opportunity to be proactive in that regard.

PACME offers funding to employers seeking to promote training and best practices, with a special focus on human resource management during the crisis and in preparation for the reopening of the economy. It also aligns well with the federal wage subsidy program.

The PACME is available to businesses whose operations have been reduced, suspended, increased or diversified by the crisis, as well as self-employed workers and organizational partners.

To learn more about the PACME, please see the article published by our colleagues on the subject.

Our Labour and Employment team is available to advise and accompany you throughout the crisis and the reopening process.

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