

# IMPACT: Will COVID-19 government relief be enough for small businesses?

*Sarah Sobanski*

Some Kawartha Lakes businesses won't make it through COVID-19 even with the federal and provincial supports as they stand today.

The city's business community is diverse, from essential-deemed agriculture members to non-essential small business members.

Some are manufacturers who can retool to fit pandemic needs, such as [Dvine Laboratories](#) who is making hand-sanitizer instead of vaping oils. Many rely on summer tourism to make or break their year but pandemic predictions cut further into the summer tourism season every week.

Businesses have had to be innovative, says general manager of the [Lindsay Downtown Business Improvement Association](#), Melissa McFarland.

Restaurants have taken to takeout, fitness providers are offering classes online, and businesses have vamped up online stores offering contact-less delivery and pickup seemingly overnight.

McFarland says, however, businesses are now having to see whether innovation is worth their while.

Laura LeMiere, an owner of [Boiling Over's Coffee Vault](#), was one business owner who tried to innovate in what she calls the "whirlwind" of COVID-19. Boiling Over first tried takeout and pickup before having to lay off their 12 staff and close all but their online store.

"We closed our doors last Monday ... feels like it's been longer," she says. The reality is that all of the coffee shop's overhead bills remain the same and she admits the coffee shop is taking losses.

"Ideally things go back to a normal circumstance, the sooner the better," she says. "It's hard to say any business can sustain current practices. We all hope we can sustain it, but it's so variable."

Business owners like LeMiere and associations across the city are trying to catch the economy as it reels during COVID-19.

McFarland and other economic leaders across the city say there are [some great supports coming down from upper levels of government](#) but there are still some gaps to be filled.

They're focusing on information and advocacy; helping upper levels of government better understand what small businesses need and [helping business owners navigate new supports that are released weekly](#).

“We just want to help our members survive and recover from this,” says Colleen Collins, executive director for the [Lindsay and District Chamber of Commerce](#). She notes many of the provincial and federal supports are on the “starting block.”

“[We’re] trying to get [those programs that are federal or provincial applicable to all of our small businesses](#), because businesses across Ontario, particularly rural Ontario, are facing the exact same thing,” says economic development manager for Kawartha Lakes, Rebecca Mustard.

Heather Breadner, owner of [Aberdeen’s Wool Company](#), says there is a “misconception that small businesses are all going to be assisted.”

“Thus far that doesn’t appear to be the case ... of course things change daily, but at this exact moment if you’re slightly too small, chances are you don’t see this through to the other side,” she says.

Breadner published an open letter to Canada’s upper governmental authorities on Facebook.

In the letter Breadner asks Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, finance minister Bill Morneau, and Ontario Premier Doug Ford to remember small, non-essential businesses. She asks them to force insurance companies to pay non-essential businesses forced to close, lower the requirements for emergency loans, and grant immediate access to emergency funds.

Breadner’s business interruption insurance won’t cover COVID-19. She says she may qualify for the Canada Emergency Business Account — which could provide up to \$40,000 of interest-free loans — but she asks what small business wants to take on debt with no money coming in for who knows how long?

The country’s introduction of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit was seen by some as a response to the outcry for support from those out of work that are self-employed. It could see up to \$2,000 per month to eligible Canadians out of work for COVID-19.

Breadner notes the response benefit won’t cover all the other expenses that go into a small business, especially when small business owners are likely facing bills as homeowners as well.

She adds small businesses already have trouble with banks because they’re considered “too risky.” She’s found her bank isn’t calling her back. She says she suspects more than “half of downtown” businesses will close permanently if COVID-19 lasts to July.

“It’s going to take a while to recover,” Collins says, regardless of where supports ultimately land. She says that recovery may bring about a “new normal.”

People are finding out they don’t need to do face-to-face business, Collins says. She suspects when the economy returns people won’t be running out to throw themselves back in the thick of it.

“As Canadians we tend to be cautious,” she says. She uses the chamber as an example which is switching it’s focus from events as it predicts a severe drop in attendance and revenue.

“The coffers are only so full. I think that [governments are] doing the best they can in this unprecedented time... We’re just looking forward to being able to action these things to put our businesses at ease.”