

LESSONS FROM SARS GUIDE CANADA NOW

It's here.

Recently Canadians learned the lethal virus they have been fearing, the one now spreading across China, has arrived on our shores.

Since the start of this year, Canadian health officials have been bracing the country to withstand an outbreak of this virus. At this early stage, at least, there are reasons to hope Canada is prepared.

This fortunate state of affairs is largely because of another deadly epidemic 17 years ago. In 2003, an outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) claimed 44 lives in Canada, made nearly 400 others ill, overstressed our health care system and cost the economy an estimated \$4 billion.

But the bitter lessons learned from SARS — and that includes from the mistakes made responding to it — are instructing us now.

As it was in the SARS epidemic, today's enemy is a novel coronavirus. This one is called 2019-nCoV. And as it was in the SARS epidemic, the epicentre of the outbreak lies in China, this time in the city of Wuhan.

There is some comfort in knowing China also learned from SARS and is taking extraordinary measures to control the current outbreak. The world has never seen the likes of the lockdown of 18 Chinese cities with 56 million residents that is now going on.

Despite these efforts many people have died in China and thousands of others have fallen ill. And the virus is spreading abroad.

The Toronto man infected with Canada's first case of the coronavirus showed symptoms of being ill on an airplane while returning from China. He called 9-1-1 after feeling ill.

The strategy for coping with this virus is clear — identifying people entering the country who might have the virus, working to stop it from spreading through the general population and treating those who become ill while making every effort to protect health-care workers.

It's good to know the Public Health Agency of Canada — which was created post-SARS — has put up signs at airports in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal instructing travellers from China's Wuhan region to report to border agents if they have flu-like symptoms.

Also reassuring is the fact that doctors and public health officials have been taking specimens from people who have travelled here from anywhere in China, not just Wuhan. Meanwhile, hospitals across the country have been getting ready by stocking supplies and educating workers.

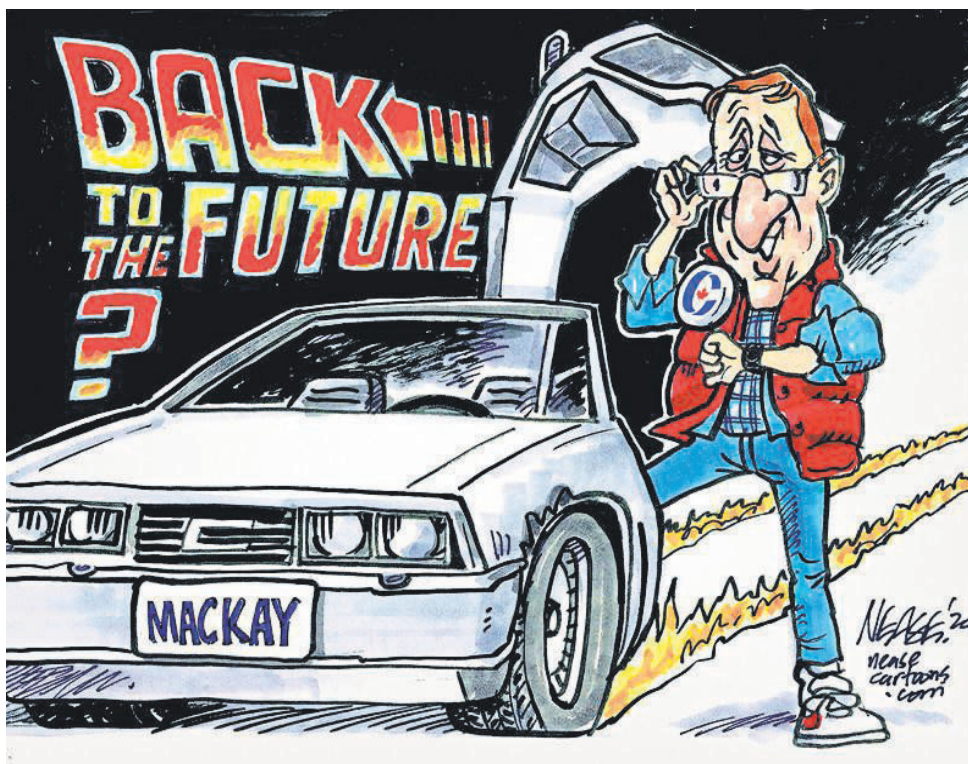
Hospital staff dealing with suspected cases of the virus are protecting themselves by wearing proper face-fitting masks, gloves and gowns. Such precautions are another lesson from SARS, which spread to doctors and nurses and made that crisis even harder to deal with.

But will all this be enough? No one knows. Yet the best way for health officials to allay fears and guide the public is to provide people with comprehensive, understandable and timely updates about the virus, as well as instructions on how to prevent its spread.

There will likely be more cases of the virus. Nor are we invulnerable to another epidemic.

But all those better preparations should leave us better protected.

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HELP US HELP THOSE IN NEED

PLEASE DON'T LET UNITED WAY'S PROJECTED SHORTFALL BECOME REALITY, WRITES BRAD PARK



BRAD
PARK
Column

As we settle into 2020, let's turn our thoughts to our hope for this new decade.

Perhaps you've made New Year's resolutions or goals to improve your health, or you are taking up a new hobby as we move into the new year.

One thing that can truly improve your outlook on life, as well as raise the fortunes of those in need, is the choice to become directly involved in helping others.

You can choose to build the social safety net that allows everyone to have a

sense of belonging, purpose and dignity. Doesn't that feel good?

This year, more than 200,000 people will rely on the programs supported by your United Way.

With community assistance, we are aiming to raise \$11.1 million by March 31 to meet the baseline needs of 129 local programs serving Burlington, Halton Hills, Hamilton, Milton and Oakville.

The need is urgent.

The reality is that funding pressures are enormous.

In the midst of rising need, reductions in both corporate and government funding threaten programs and services.

This is where United Way plays a vital role, helping to offset the financial challenges local programs face.

All told, at our current trajectory, United Way is projecting a shortfall of \$400,000 in the community's campaign goal.

United Way funding is critical to tackling #UNIGNORABLE issues in our community, including

mental illness, at-risk youth, hunger, homelessness, domestic violence and social isolation, among others.

These problems belong to all of us, and will take the dedication and commitment of everyone to help solve them.

Consider the following: one in four children experience a mental health issue by the time they are 18; more than three-quarters of children from low-income backgrounds are unable to read at their grade level by the time they reach Grade 3; and the rate of seniors living in isolation is skyrocketing.

Without targeted interventions, these issues and many others will only grow in scope, holding more children, adults and families back from reaching their full potential.

We know the love and generosity of those living in our community shines bright, and that together we can build neighbourhoods that leave no one behind.

Please donate today.

Brad Park is the president and CEO of United Way Halton and Hamilton.

ABOUT US

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