

- *The Hairway to a -*

# PANDEMIC RECOVERY PLAN

## KEY HIGHLIGHTS

- In June 2021, hairstylists were unemployed for **7 consecutive months**
- Hairstylists play a pivotal role in society through providing **emotional support**, aiding the **self-confidence** of society members, and **diagnosing particular medical conditions**
- Despite rigorous training in sanitation and completing a lengthy apprenticeship, hairstylists have been lumped in as a "**personal care service**" even though they are a certified trade
- **A female-dominated trade**, hairstyling has been shut down by the Ontario government while male-dominated trades such as construction and engineering have remained open despite high transmission rates
- Many hairstylists state that provincial **financial assistance has not been enough** to cover their expenses while being unemployed
- Our suggestions to help empower Ontario's hairstylists:
  - Governmental **revision** of reopening policies
  - Ambitious **paid sick leave** program
  - Increased governmental support towards salon owners in **marginalized communities**



## I. HAIRSTYLING IN ONTARIO: COVID-19



As government-mandated closures have prompted the shutdown of various businesses to curb the spread of COVID-19, the consequences for hairstylists in Ontario have been detrimental.

As of June 2021, Ontario hair salons were closed for a total of 7 consecutive months, subsequently compelling many hairstylists to undertake heavy debts for survival. While salons were closed, multiple obligations still persisted for salon owners and hairstylists; they were expected to pay their rent, utilities, bills and household expenses, while simultaneously coping with the psychological strain of unemployment, career progression, and job insecurity.

Further interesting to note is the highly feminized nature of hairstyling. With women composing 80% of the hairstyling industry in Ontario, the provincial government has consistently pushed for the protection of male-dominated trades, including construction. However, unlike other registered trades which were considered essential, hairstyling has been lumped into the category of "personal care services" despite rigorous hours of training and apprenticeship which hairstylists must undergo to become registered within the province.

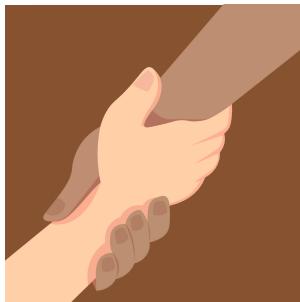
As countless hairstylists have permanently shut down their salons and renounced this trade, they must be empowered and uplifted by the government and recognized as employees of an official trade.



## II. WHY IS HAIRSTYLING IMPORTANT?

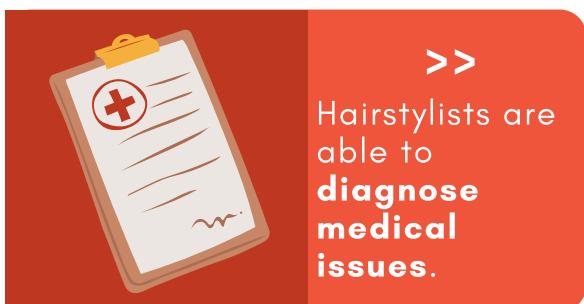


It is imperative to consider the importance of hairstyling. As evidenced in our research, hairstylists aid society by providing a sense of **emotional support** to clients, **diagnosing medical illnesses**, and helping individuals **develop self-confidence**.



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Hair salons provide clients with social and **emotional support**.

Hairstylists often act as caregivers within society due to the deep relationships that they build with clients. As customers frequent a salon, their hairstylist is often considered a familiar friend with whom they can discuss pertinent issues within their lives, including "moderate to [their] most serious problems" (Cowen et al, 1981, qtd. In Garzantini et al, 2011, p.671). Additionally, for many women, the hair salon is a place where they can discover a sphere of social support and empathy (McLaren et al, 2010, p.236).



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Hairstylists are able to **diagnose medical issues**.

While hairstylists are able to aid clients with their grooming needs, it must be noted that many are also able to identify medical issues which may otherwise go unnoticed. According to Allten (2020), they can even diagnose "melanoma of the scalp, head, and neck" (Allten, 2020, p.1).



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Through salon services, clients develop a **heightened self-confidence**.

The COVID-19 pandemic has additionally left a detrimental effect on the self-esteem and body image of many individuals as social media use has increased, thus sparking insecurity with regards to body image (Vall-Roqué et al, 2021, p.1). Through hairstyling, clients are able to gain a sense of support while simultaneously being groomed, ultimately allowing for the development of a heightened sense of self-confidence.



### III. THE ONTARIO GOVERNMENT AND HAIRSYLING DURING COVID-19: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS



Currently, the Ontario Government has implemented stringent policies for **personal care** services to prevent the transmission of COVID-19. However, they contain some discrepancies and can be refuted with regards to hair salons. In particular, the government has failed to protect hairstylists by lumping hair salons in as a **personal care service** rather than as a registered trade, providing a **lack of financial assistance** to hairstylists, and **promoting male-dominated trades** while the feminized trade of hairstyling is disregarded.

#### 'Personal Care' Services



Unlike many professions which are classified as personal care services, hairstyling is a registered trade which requires considerable training in sanitation procedures, rigorous schooling, and a lengthy apprenticeship.

*"We are licensed professionals in health and safety. Half of my curriculum in aesthetics was to keep the clients safe with sanitation. I know which disinfectants to use and how to disinfect between every guest - this is what [hairstylists] have always been doing and are trained in. Other personal care services do not receive the same schooling that we do."*

-Debbi, Ottawa

#### Lack of Financial Assistance



For many hairstylists, provincial monetary assistance has not been sufficient to cover salon expenses. While salons in wealthier neighbourhoods can raise prices upon opening, those located in vulnerable communities lack this option.

*"I need to pay back \$20,000 to the [federal] government by 2022, but I also have to pay for rent and utilities – with no income coming in ... It takes years to establish a business with loyal clients, and only a minute for them to leave [if I raise my prices]."*

-Rajvinder, Toronto

#### Skilled Trades and Women



Ontario's Labour Ministry is encouraging women to enter the skilled trades yet there is a gendered distinction of reopening policies within the trades. Male-dominated trades have been permitted to continue work despite increasing COVID-19 cases. In contrast, the trade of hairstyling was halted for 7 consecutive months despite low transmission rates.

*"Monte McNaughton has totally endorsed skilled trades. [Hairstyling is] a Red Seal skilled trade, and yet we're being completely ignored by this government. He's been focusing on other big trades like construction and electricity. Is that because 80% of [hairstylists are] women? Is that why it is? I don't know. I cannot figure out why we are such a large trade, yet are being completely ignored."*

-Tanya, Ontario Professional Hairstyling Association



## V. POLICY RESPONSE: CALL TO ACTION



In order to support and uplift the hairstyling industry within the province, the government must employ a **collaborative** approach wherein the concerns of hairstylists are understood. Hence, to better protect this trade, we recommend a number of solutions for the Ontario government to employ:

### ***Revising Ontario's reopening policies***



Due to low COVID-19 transmission rates in salons and the thorough training given to hairstylists through the OCOT, it is clear that they are qualified in practicing their trade safely. Furthermore, it is important to protect this largely feminized profession. Thus, salons should be permitted to open earlier.

### ***An ambitious paid sick leave program***



Currently, the Ontario government has only allotted **3 paid sick days** to workers. Although the federal government has also instituted the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit for employees, this has not been enough. The importance of health must be emphasized, and paid sick leave should be more universal for workers.



### ***Invest to support marginalized salon owners***

For salon owners in low-income communities, it can be difficult to gain knowledge in accessing governmental funding. Moreover, they cannot significantly raise their prices upon reopening due to the fear of losing clientele. Thus, the government must invest in these communities & recognize these differential impacts.

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