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case 8-735-379  
August 23, 2021

## Dr. Bonnie Henry: Contending with COVID-19 in Visible Minority Communities

Dr. Bonnie Henry, provincial health officer of the Canadian province of British Columbia (BC), had proven to be one of the most effective public health officials in the world.<sup>1</sup> Her decisive action to impose strict guidelines early on during the deadly COVID-19 pandemic and her calm demeanor that coaxed British Columbians “to be kind, be calm, and be safe” led her to become the face of BC’s COVID-19 pandemic response.<sup>2</sup> Dr. Henry’s actions initially helped to flatten the curve of COVID-19 in BC. Indeed, at one point, BC had had the lowest number of per capita deaths worldwide.<sup>3</sup> But all too soon, as the number of cases and deaths surged in parts of BC—far exceeding the rates seen during the first wave of the virus—it became clear that BC had entered the second wave of the deadly COVID-19 pandemic.

By October 30, 2020, among more than 800 reported new cases of COVID-19 in BC, 81% had occurred in the Fraser Health region of BC.<sup>4</sup> However, the region was home to only approximately 40% of BC’s population.<sup>5</sup> Dr. Henry had to determine why the Fraser Health region had such a disproportionately high number of cases. As she began researching, she came across a recently released report by Canada’s national statistical office.<sup>6</sup> The report found that neighborhoods in BC that were visibly at least 25% minority were nearly ten times more likely to have COVID-19-related deaths than neighborhoods that were visibly less than 1% minority.<sup>7</sup>

BC was the most ethnically diverse province in Canada, with nearly one quarter of British Columbians being visible minorities.<sup>8</sup> Yet, as some medical professionals had commented, BC employed a uniform and standardized communications approach even though many BC communities—notably the Fraser Health region—had large numbers of minority residents.<sup>9</sup>

Members of BC’s visible minority communities began using Twitter to express their frustration over the province’s seemingly Anglo-centric public health messaging, which appeared to overlook the realities of the lives of members of visible minority communities (e.g., large families residing in small dwellings, non-

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*Published by WDI Publishing, a division of the William Davidson Institute (WDI) at the University of Michigan.*

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