

**\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\***

**June 5, 2020 - Press Release**

**“Not one more preventable death. . . We will not forget Bonifacio Eugenio Romero”  
Migrant worker health experts dedicate new website in worker’s honour**

On Saturday May 30th, Bonifacio Eugenio Romero lost his life. Working near Windsor Ontario, this man of 31 years of age, with no pre-existing health conditions, was one of the [youngest people to die of COVID-19 in the region.](#)

After reporting symptoms to his boss, Bonifacio was taken to the hospital on May 21st, testing positive for the virus on May 23rd. Yet after being placed in self-isolation in a nearby hotel, Mr. Romero’s condition continued to deteriorate. That Saturday, Bonifacio was taken to hospital due to trouble breathing. Thirty minutes after his arrival, he died.

A newly formed [Migrant Worker Health Expert Working Group](#), made up of researchers, infection control and occupational health experts with decades of experience working with migrant workers in the agri-food sector, reject any easy explanation of this tragedy they believe “punches down, and places blame on migrant agricultural workers.”

“There are so many details that have not been published about this man in the media. Unlike those of permanent residents who we have lost, we have not heard first-hand accounts from his family about what made him easy to love. We have not been told of his hobbies and interests. We do not know about the ways that he made others laugh, or, what motivated him to be so far away from his country of origin, and his family, to fight for a better life amidst difficult and [isolating circumstances](#),” says Dr. Caxaj, one of the coordinators of the Migrant Worker Health Expert Working Group and Assistant Professor at Western University.

“What we do know is old news. We know that Bonifacio was one of tens of thousands of migrant agricultural workers who make it so we have food on our tables here in Canada. That this young man represents the struggles of so many workers who face extreme isolation, [discrimination](#), [language barriers](#), and crowded and poorly regulated [working and living conditions](#) that represent real health hazards to workers even before the COVID-19 pandemic struck.”

“Bonifacio’s death was avoidable”, reflects Dr. Hennebry, a fellow coordinator of the expert working group and Associate Professor at Wilfrid Laurier University.

“We ask that federal and provincial agencies, and public health units, address the larger barriers faced by this population. We have been diligently sharing and developing recommendations for government agencies, liaising with public health units, and we are growing impatient.”

“We need action now -- [including inspection of farms that engage migrant workers](#) to ensure adherence to occupational health safety requirements and provincial and territorial labour standards,” says Dr. Leah Vosko, a member of the expert working group, labour standards enforcement expert, and Professor of Political Science at York University -- to address the gaps and challenges faced by this population as well as public safety. This action must include in-person and unannounced inspections on farms, without supervisor/employer involvement; live and ongoing-translation and accompaniment for workers who become sick; and larger changes to temporary migrant programs, that make it easier for workers to refuse unsafe work and safeguard their health and livelihood.”

“Under typical circumstances, migrant workers face challenges in accessing health care, including language and cultural considerations, but also fear of losing income, employment or the ability to stay in Canada. These challenges are only [amplified during the pandemic](#)” says Janet McLaughlin, Associate Professor of Health Studies at Wilfrid Laurier University and a member of the expert working group. “We must ensure that we overcome these barriers by providing truly accessible health care as well as making structural changes to temporary foreign worker programs that promote workers’ empowerment and job security.”

The Expert Working Group has launched a new website, [migrantworker.ca](#) to support and share information and recommendations about migrant agricultural workers' health during the COVID-19 pandemic. The site builds on their two decades of research with migrant agricultural workers, and features vital information for workers in English and Spanish, key resources for other stakeholders, as well as detailed [policy recommendations](#) and information about a newly formed group of researchers, medical practitioners, occupational health specialists and community organizations that have come together to form a national level Migrant Worker Health Expert Working Group.

The objectives of the group are to provide evidence-based guidance to both federal and provincial government agencies so that they can ensure the health and safety of migrant workers within the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and to provide support to all stakeholders to improve coordination and standardization of health service provision for this at-risk population across jurisdictions.

The expert group have dedicated their newly-launched [website](#) to the memory of Bonifacio, stating:

“We will not forget Bonifacio Eugenio Romero. May this tragedy serve as a constant reminder of how Canada has failed agricultural migrant workers, and a commitment, that we will not repeat the same mistake again. Our sincere hope is that the information and recommendations we have

compiled will help to inform and spur action, and work to prevent future tragedies.”

The group’s full list of healthcare recommendations are [available here](#).

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