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## Sector News Digest: May 19, 2020

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In this week's Special News Digest: more data on the pandemic's impact, foundations step up, and the roller-coaster policy response.

### **New national, regional, and rural survey data**

Imagine Canada's [Charities & the COVID-19 Pandemic Sector Monitor report](#) contains much-anticipated data on how the pandemic has affected the charitable sector. According to the survey, 35% of respondent organizations have experienced increased demand for services, while 37% are seeing decreases. More than half say they've transitioned in-person programs to online platforms; 42% say they've developed completely new programs in response to need.

Despite widespread evidence of operational pivots, almost seven in 10 charities report reduced revenues, with an average loss of 30.6% since the pandemic began. Overall, Imagine Canada estimates that charities have already laid off between 37,000 full-time and 46,400 part-time paid staff across the country.

More regional surveys are filling out the picture. The Vancouver and Victoria Foundations released [No Immunity: BC Nonprofits and the Impact of COVID-19](#) last week in partnership with the City of Vancouver and Vantage Point. The report finds that 23% of the 1,119 organizations surveyed fear they may not be around in six months, while 15 to 19% have closed down or expect to close down.

With BC charities reporting unstable revenues, many also say they're dealing with funders who have cancelled granting opportunities, shifted their funding priorities, or delayed decisions. Other fiscal challenges include rent stress.

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The impact has been felt in rural Canada as well as in larger urban centres. In [a new series of papers](#), the Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation is documenting how the pandemic is affecting rural Canadians in 113 communities across nine provinces. The greatest areas of concern are access to adequate healthcare, support for economic recovery, and lack of broadband access. Of the non-profit and voluntary organizations surveyed, 93% report service disruptions.

### **Foundations take action**

The [#Give5 campaign](#) continues to pick up steam, making progress toward its goal of recruiting 100 foundations to pledge to disburse 5% of assets in 2020. By mid-May, 64 foundations had signed up. Organizers say that if all private foundations in Canada disbursed 5%, approximately \$700 million more could flow into the charitable sector on an annual basis.

Philanthropic Foundations of Canada is conducting a data-mapping project to track what, where, and how much foundations are funding during the COVID-19 crisis, and to pinpoint gaps in funding. They invite foundations to complete [their online survey](#) before Wednesday, May 20.

Also last week, [The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada](#) launched [the #Other95 campaign](#) to invite Canadians to imagine how foundations can put the other 95% of their assets to work in support of reconciliation and systemic change. “With a spirit of curiosity, hope and a bit of mischief,” the organizers say, “we’d like to invite our peers in the grass roots, nonprofit and philanthropic sector to tap into their boldest dreams for what can be done.” Videos, tweets, short notes, or even anonymous suggestions can be emailed to [shereen@circleonphilanthropy.ca](mailto:shereen@circleonphilanthropy.ca).

### **Public opinion and NGOs during the pandemic**

The pandemic has caused faith in governments and institutions to soar. A [new poll by Frank Graves at EKOS](#) released on May 12 shows that more than 70% of Canadians think the country is headed in the right direction, compared to less than 40% a year ago. Almost three in four expect broad societal transformation as a result of the crisis, with 70% expecting Canada to become more socially focused, with renewed emphasis on health and well-being.

The non-profit sector has also seen a jump in trust, along with other institutions. According to the [2020 Edelman Trust Barometer](#), confidence in NGOs rose to 61%, while faith in media is close behind at 58%. Fully 60% of respondents feel something must be done to reduce inequality in Canada, and 64% feel lower-income Canadians are being unfairly burdened by risk and sacrifice during the pandemic.

### **Calls for more targeted policy action**

Senator Ratna Omidvar [has called on the government to remove barriers that limit the ability of charities to work with non-qualified donees](#). In a Future of Good webinar on April 28, she said: “We need to accept and understand that in today’s world, empowerment, equality, and equity are actually not reflected in the laws of the Ministry of Finance and the guidelines that the CRA [uses to] administer those laws too. It’s overly constraining. Unlike the UK, the US, Australia, and all others who have modernized their laws, we take a paternalistic top down approach that if you are going to work with me, and I’m talking about a new organization or a civil society

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movement that is not charitable, then I control everything.” She is urging the sector to support her call.

Meanwhile, sector lobbyists are still pushing Ottawa for more relief for the thousands of charities that are staring down the barrel of more service and revenue disruption than they may be capable of managing. Some financial assistance is available, however, through broader supports such as wage subsidies, commercial landlords, and the arts.

Applications for the federal government’s Emergency Community Support Fund opened on Monday, May 18. Funds are being disbursed through the Canadian Red Cross, United Way Centraide Canada, and Community Foundations of Canada. More information on the fund and application process can be found [here](#).

(More detail on the rapidly changing public policy environment can be found at [First Policy Response](#), a handy news aggregator tracking responses to COVID-19 from Canada’s policy community. The site is a partnership between the Ryerson Leadership Lab, the Brookfield Institute and Matthew Mendelsohn.)

### **Longer-term health projects**

While COVID-19 is taking up much of the sector’s attention, some organizations are looking further down the road. The [LEAP | Pecaut Centre for Social Impact](#) has launched a [call for applications to Healthy Futures](#), a five-year accelerator that will allow 11 organizations to scale projects that prevent chronic disease and improve health outcomes for Canadians. The organization is hosting an information webinar on May 28 at 12 p.m. EST. Register at [leap-pecautcentre.ca/hf-launch](#).