

# Ontario's charities in dire need of help, industry experts say

*Megan DeLaire*

Ontario's charities are in distress.

Across the board, surveys of charities and non-profit groups by organizations like the [Ontario Non-Profit Network](#) and [Imagine Canada](#) have revealed office closures and program cancellations, human resource challenges and an abrupt loss of revenue from the cancellation of fundraising events this spring due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In March, [150 charities wrote a letter](#) to the federal government asking for a \$10-billion stabilization fund to avoid the collapse of the sector due to the pandemic. In mid-May, 15 health charities in Ontario called on the provincial government for relief and long-term aid [in a letter](#) to health minister Christine Elliott.

“The COVID-19 pandemic has posed a fundamental threat to our continued ability to fundraise successfully and therefore, to deliver on our core missions,” read the letter, signed by the heads of organizations such as the Canadian Cancer Society, the Canadian Lung Association, Diabetes Canada and Heart and Stroke. “Many of our organizations have already been forced to lay off significant numbers of employees — up to 70 per cent in some cases.”

Imagine Canada, which works to strengthen Canadian charities through research and advocacy, projected in March that the economic downturn associated with COVID-19 could cost charities in Canada between \$9 billion and \$15 billion in revenue.

Charities generate revenue through auctions, fundraising events, campaigns and galas as well as earned income from service fees and other forms of online and in-person gift-giving. A report published by Imagine Canada in May revealed charities in the country have experienced declines in revenue from all sources, with arts and recreation organizations and charities that rely on earned income hit especially hard.

The organization's director of research, David Lasby, based the report on the results of a late-April survey of 1,458 heads of charities in Canada. Lasby told Torstar trends in Ontario, which has the largest non-profit sector in Canada, mirror what he has seen across the country.

“Fundraising is a very personal endeavour, and there's actually very little of it that doesn't, in some way, at some stage of the process, track back to face-to-face contact,” he said. “Physical distancing affects much more than you might think. If you think this is just about the cancellation of event-based fundraising, actually, it's more than that.”

While Ontario's charities have lost revenue in previous economic downturns, like the 2008-09 recession, Lasby said losses were usually limited to a few revenue streams, allowing charities to compensate in other areas. Lasby said the broad losses across all