



Giving
Hope
Today

**PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE**

FEBRUARY 2021

Recommendations

1. Continue to invest in a full spectrum of supports for people experiencing homelessness and those at risk of homelessness. In particular, we recommend:
 - a) ongoing cost-shared investments that include both capital contributions to the construction or acquisition of affordable housing and operating dollars to permit coordinated and integrated support services for people exiting homelessness and at risk of relapsing into homelessness as a result of addictions, mental health symptoms or both; and
 - b) investing in a range of homelessness prevention measures such as the Canada Housing Benefit (CHB), emergency rent assistance for those who do not qualify for the CHB, or housing stability banks to assist households that are currently housed and at risk of homelessness.
2. Continue to invest in income security and food security for households that have already been affected by COVID-19 and that continue to face economic uncertainty in the near- to medium term.
3. Invest in the charitable and non-profit sector, which, like the private sector, has both adapted and struggled through COVID-19 to maintain existing jobs and create new ones, meet growing community needs, and generate the revenue that will be necessary to support community needs over the near- to medium-term post-pandemic.

What we have seen

People experiencing homelessness

As one of the largest emergency shelter and transitional housing providers in the country, we have long noted both a shortage of supply of affordable housing in many communities – large and small, as well as urban, rural and remote – and a need for greater investment in both immediate and longer-term supports for people experiencing homelessness in addition to addiction or mental health symptoms, or both.

As CMHC noted in a [December 2020 press release](#), “The COVID-19 crisis has made it clear that affordable housing is key to Canada's recovery as major cities across the country ... are dealing with the devastating impacts of rising levels of homelessness and housing need.”

While governments at all levels have worked with community-based organizations to ensure physical distancing in emergency shelters, provide temporary accommodation in leased hotels and motels, and, more recently, to create additional permanent affordable housing, our frontline staff consistently confirm that longer-term investments will be necessary as Canada emerges from the pandemic.

More specifically, our frontline staff have reported a need for greater and more consistent investments in coordinated supports for people currently experiencing homelessness, addiction and/or mental health symptoms and looking to exit homelessness. We encourage the federal government to continue to work with provinces, territories and indigenous governments to invest, not just in bricks and mortar, but also in a full spectrum of recovery-oriented mental health and addictions supports so that people may access such supports in a timely way, if, when and as they wish to access them.

People at risk of homelessness

As Nick Falvo wrote in his [December 2020 Report](#) titled “The long-term impact of the COVID-19 Recession on homelessness in Canada: What to expect, what to track, what to do,” the COVID-19 recession *may* contribute to rising homelessness, however, the longer-term impact of a recession on households and communities is neither straightforward nor immediate.

Anecdotally, as a frontline, community-based organization that supports lower- and middle-income individuals and families in 400 communities across Canada, we would agree with that assessment. To date, we have observed diverse impacts of COVID-19 across the country throughout the past 11 months.

In our more than 250 community and family services centres, 200 Thrift Stores and other settings across the country, and particularly in Atlantic Canada and the Prairies, we see ongoing financial uncertainty for a growing number of households, an increase in food insecurity, and a growing risk of homelessness among households that are currently housed.

In our [2018/19 Annual Report](#), for the fiscal year ended March 31, 2019, we reported that we had served:

- 1.6 million people, including 1.18 million who received food, clothing and other practical support

One year later, in the [fiscal year ended March 31, 2020](#), mere weeks into the pandemic, we reported that we had served:

- 1.9 million people, including 1.32 million who received food, clothing and other practical support

Although we do not yet have final numbers for households that received food assistance in 2020/21, year-over-year, from January to September 2019 compared to January to September 2020, we saw a 10% increase nationally in the number of households served by our food bank and community meal programs, and 67% and 135% increases in food assistance provided through our community and family services centres and emergency shelters respectively.

Among existing food bank clients, we saw an increase in the number of visits per household, suggesting households that were struggling pre-pandemic experienced even greater challenges during the pandemic. Among households accessing our food banks for the first time, a significant number reported requiring food assistance because of job loss.

Although there are important non-economic benefits to community-based food security programs, such as greater social cohesion, the ability to offer or provide referrals to a range of supports that may be impacting a household's financial stability, the ability to give back to one's community as a peer support worker with lived experience of poverty or as a more affluent member of the community, we also recognize that a number of households continue to struggle financially and will continue to struggle financially for the near-term.

As such, we applaud the federal government's ongoing support to address food insecurity in the short-term and recommend further investments in both income security and homelessness prevention initiatives in the near- to mid-term.

Invest in the charitable and non-profit sector

As [Imagine Canada](#) has reported, the charitable and non-profit sector employs more than 2 million Canadians and typically benefits from the generosity of 13 million volunteers. Further, as Imagine Canada has written, "Charities play an essential role in communities across Canada, providing expertise and support to every aspect of our lives, such as healthcare, education, alleviation of poverty and the environment, among many others."

As a national charitable organization that benefits from generous public support from donors, both individual and corporate, and governments at all levels, we have weathered the pandemic storm much better than many charities.

Our frontline staff and volunteers have worked courageously, creatively and tirelessly to adapt in-person and place-based support and service delivery to virtual and mobile models wherever possible. They have provided spiritual care, support for families with children, seniors, and people in rural and remote communities who have been concerned about or unable to leave their homes. Our long-term care, emergency shelter and housing support worker staff have likewise adapted to new realities, and have worked diligently, passionately and compassionately to continue to support some of the most vulnerable and marginalized people in our communities.

That said, we like many other charities and community-based organizations, are not immune to the impact of COVID-19. As a result of important and necessary public health measures including lockdowns in many parts of the country over the past year, we have closed Thrift Stores either temporarily or permanently, temporarily laid off some employees while placing increased demands on others, reduced emergency

shelter and day shelter capacity in many communities and cancelled or adapted signature fundraising events to ensure the health and safety of our employees, volunteers and the donor public.

In many of our more rural settings, Thrift Stores provide a consistent and predictable form of funding for our community and family services operations. Pandemic closures have disrupted the ability of these stores to generate a profit due to the closures or hours of operation reduction and volunteer base disruptions. Likewise, where both in-kind and monetary donations, as well as our local volunteer base, have decreased, our community and family services centres will be pressed to meet ongoing community need with potentially reduced resources for the foreseeable future.

While we do not have a specific spending or policy prescription as it relates to the charitable and non-profit sector, we simply note that, just as small businesses and individual households are facing an uncertain future, so is the charitable sector. We encourage policy makers at all levels to be mindful of the impact of the sector on the health, resilience and vitality of our communities, and to ensure the sector is included in COVID-recovery initiatives as they are developed and rolled out.

About Us

The Salvation Army is a Christian organization that gives hope and support to vulnerable people in 400 communities across Canada and in 131 countries. The Salvation Army exists to share the love of Jesus Christ, meet human needs and be a transforming influence in the communities of our world. Last year, we served more than 1.9 million people in Canada, providing 3.3 million meals at emergency shelter and meal programs, Christmas hampers and toys to nearly one quarter of a million households, food, clothing and other practical assistance to more than 1.3 million people, and 5,500 emergency shelter, addictions treatment and mental health beds.