



Imagine Canada is a national Charity whose mission is to strengthen Canadian charities and nonprofits to better serve individuals and communities here and around the world. We work to influence the regulatory and policy environment, to create a Canada, where thriving communities are fueled by strong nonprofit infrastructure and engagement, and social, economic, and environmental justice is advanced through collective advocacy and action.

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Acknowledgements

This platform document is a collaborative effort with nonprofits and charities across Canada. Rooted in the belief that **public funds should be invested in the public good**, we've highlighted five key policy areas that align with the priorities of federal political parties. As the government works to shape Canada's future during these challenging times, we aim to inspire and **guide policymakers** to ensure the organizations delivering programs and services in communities across Canada receive the **support they need**.

We strongly believe in the power of the **nonprofit sector's collective voice**. To identify the key policy areas, we analyzed the **most common policy priorities** of federal political parties. We then invited **10 to 15 organizations from each priority area** to participate in discussions. To identify these organizations, we selected organizations that had submitted recommendations to the <u>Standing Committee on Finance's Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2025 Budget</u>. These discussions shaped our targeted recommendations.

While we hope this document provides a snapshot of the key areas the next federal government should prioritize during its first 100 days in office regarding the nonprofit sector, we recognize that it may not fully capture the sector's diverse needs. As this is an evolving process, we hope future editions will be **comprehensive and representative resources** for the nonprofit sector that incorporate insights and direction from a **broad range of organizations and subsectors**.

This document would not have been possible without the contributions of organizations working in critical areas such as anti-poverty, arts and culture, social development, immigration, women, Indigenous Communities, Housing and Homelessness, Environment, Mental Health, Labour and more. For further recommendations and proposals we encourage you to explore the work of organizations and coalitions featured here (please note this list is non-exhaustive): The Green Budget Coalition, The Canadian Mental Health Association, The Equitable Recovery Collective, The Federal Nonprofit Data Coalition, The Canadian Community Economic Development Network.

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Introduction

Every Canadian deserves to thrive in a safe, vibrant, and healthy community. With household budgets stretched and a fragile economic and political landscape, many Canadians may feel uncertain about their future in our rapidly changing world.

Despite those challenges, nonprofit organizations remain the backbone of Canadian communities. Our sector delivers efficient, effective programs that sustain the quality of life for millions of hardworking Canadians and their families. Whether we are fostering a sense of belonging through arts and sports programs or ensuring families have access to nutritious meals through food banks, we stand with Canadians in their time of need.

The nonprofit sector is also an economic powerhouse. Each year, it employs 2.8 million people and contributes \$211 billion in economic activity—representing 8.3% of Canada's GDP. In addition, 13 million volunteers dedicate nearly 2 billion hours annually to building stronger communities.

A healthy nonprofit sector is essential for Canada's social fabric and economic resilience. However, potential threats such as a recession caused by American tariffs, will likely decrease donations to charities, decrease spending at social enterprises and reduce corporate giving



Nonprofit organizations are the backbone of Canadian communities.

and funding from philanthropic foundations. This will result in the sector having less funds to meet demand for service and program delivery.

As the government sets its vision for a stronger Canada, this document outlines key recommendations and areas of focus for the first 100 days, so Parliament can work to foster a resilient, inclusive, and prosperous future for Canadians.

Summary of Recommendations

Enabling Community

Economy and Affordability

- 1. **Improve the Canada Disability Benefit** by raising the benefit amount, simplifying access, and expanding eligibility.
- Increase the Guaranteed Income Supplement by \$500 for single individuals and \$750 for couples starting at age 60 to ensure seniors who are most in need receive financial support.
- Maintain investment in the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP) and CVITP Grant program to support free tax-filing assistance for Canadians with low incomes delivered by community organizations.
- 4. Amend the **Income Tax Act** to implement automatic tax filing for low-income Canadians to ensure greater access to benefits and financial support.

Housing and Homelessness

- 5. Strengthen and improve the National Housing Strategy.
- 6. **Provide stable long-term funding** for current housing programs such as the Affordable Housing Fund and Rapid Housing Initiative.
- 7. Tackle the national housing and homelessness crisis by **scaling funding for non-profit housing providers** in accordance with inflation and population growth.
- 8. Reduce chronic homelessness by working with the non-profit sector to invest in the creation of transitional and supportive housing supply
- 9. Remove barriers that make it difficult for non-profit and private developer partnership projects.
- 10. Adequately fund the <u>Canada Rental</u>
 <u>Protection Fund</u>
- 11. **Reduce the administrative burden** associated with non-profit organizations attaining long-term funding.

Environment

- 12. Commit to **protecting 30% of Canada's land** and ocean by 2030, and allocate sufficient funding to provinces, territories, Indigenous Nations and civil society, through the Enhanced Nature Legacy Fund and other mechanisms to fulfill this commitment and protect the cultural and ecological value of communities.
- 13. Strengthen the integration of Nature-Based Solutions into federal climate policy instruments including the National Biodiversity Strategy, National Adaptation Strategy, Green Municipal Fund, and Environmental Assessment processes.
- 14. Expand partnerships with municipalities and Indigenous communities to lead on climate action and biodiversity conservation.



Mental Health

- 15. Create a Canada Universal Mental
 Health and Substance Use Health Act to
 accompany the Canada Mental Health and
 Substance Use Health Transfer.
- 16. Create a permanent Canada Mental Health and Substance Use Health Transfer equivalent to 12% of provincial/territorial health care spending (\$6.25B) ramped up over 5 years, with 50% earmarked for community services.
- 17. Continue to expand access to mental health and addictions services

Labour

- 18. **Develop a nonprofit labour force strategy** to strengthen recruitment and retention, ensuring the sector's stability and economic resilience.
- 19. Develop and implement a **National Volunteer Action Strategy**
- 20. Maintain funding to core employment programs that generate employment opportunities in the sector such as the Canada Summer Jobs wage subsidy, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind's Come to Work program, and Innovative Work-Integrated Learning Initiatives.
- 21. Drive job creation and promote business growth by introducing supports for key sectors facing labour force challenges such as a <u>Tax Credit for Live Performing Arts</u>.

Building the Resilience of the Sector

Making Federal Funding for Nonprofits More Effective and Efficient

22. Engage the nonprofit sector in the development of an appendix for the Directive on Transfer Payments and a risk framework that recognizes the unique role and operating models of nonprofit recipients in order to reduce red tape and better serve communities.

Improving Access to Reliable and Comprehensive Data

- 23. Provide Statistics Canada with a mandate to carry out regular updates to the national survey of nonprofit organizations, to be repeated every year, and provide funding of \$500,000 annually for this purpose. The survey should include grassroots (unincorporated) organizations.
- 24. Establish a unit within Statistics Canada whose mandate is to collect, analyze, and share data on the nonprofit sector.



Strengthening The Relationship Between The Federal Government and the Nonprofit Sector

25. Identify and adequately **resource a unit** within the federal government to act as a champion of the nonprofit sector.

How Recommendations Align With Canada's National Priorities

Recommendations	Housing	Health	Economy and affordability	Environment	Community and safety
1,2,3,4			✓		
5,6,7,8,9,10,11	✓				
12,13,14				✓	
15,16,17		✓			
18,19,20,21,22,23,24			✓		✓

Enabling Community

The nonprofit sector is a vital resource for ensuring the vibrancy of Canadian society. On average, 450 nonprofits and charities are in each riding, employing close to 13,000 people. Our organizations are the backbone of Canadian communities. We are also the pulse of the community. We work on the ground, directly in communities, which uniquely positions us to create cultural, social, and economic value making communities safer, stronger and healthier. Nonprofits are also local experts in driving meaningful impact at the community level. We deliver crucial programs and services, address emerging challenges and enhance the quality of life for all Canadians. With over 2.8 million employees and a contribution of \$211 billion in economic activity—representing 8.3% of Canada's GDP. An investment in the nonprofit sector is an investment in the Canadian economy.

The nonprofit sector is a vital resource for ensuring the vibrancy of Canadian society.

Since the work of nonprofits closely aligns with national priorities, Imagine Canada has designed the following platform to highlight those areas and demonstrate how our sector can be a natural partner in efficient and effective program and service delivery. Below are the key priority areas where strong collaboration between nonprofits and government can drive lasting impact in communities across Canada.



Economy and affordability

From food banks and shelters to child care, nonprofits provide essential support for Canadians struggling with the rising cost of living. In recent years the need for these services has grown significantly.

Poverty is a significant issue in Canada. In 2022, approximately 3.8 million Canadians, or 9.9% of the population, lived below the poverty line. Poverty in Canada disproportionately affects marginalized communities, highlighting persistent inequalities across the country. For example, in 2022, racialized persons were more likely to live below the poverty line (13.0%) than nonracialized persons (8.7%). Similarly, persons with disabilities are almost twice as likely to live in poverty than persons without disabilities. Approximately, 27% of Canadians aged 15 and older, or 8 million people, have at least one disability, with 1.5 million people with disabilities living in poverty.

In 2024, almost half (45%) of Canadians reported that rising prices were greatly affecting their ability to cover daily expenses.

The nonprofit sector plays a vital role in supporting Canadians through economic challenges. We urge the government to address these pressing policy priorities so we can continue to provide the critical services Canadians need to ensure life is affordable.



In Canada, food insecurity has also reached alarming levels. Many low-income Canadians report spending over 80% of their disposable income on food and housing. Among those accessing food banks, 18% are employed while 40% rely on social assistance such as disability supports. In spring 2024, more than one in five Canadians (23%) said that they would be somewhat or very likely to use a community organization for food or meals in the next six months. Consequently, food bank usage has surged by 90% since 2019. In 2024, there were over 2 million monthly visits to food banks -the highest number ever recorded. As costs continue to increase, more people will be forced to turn to food banks.

This strain extends beyond food bank usage. Canada's shelter system has also faced growing pressure. In 2023, approximately 32,660 individuals experienced chronic homelessness, a 4.4% increase from 2022 (31,476). Additionally, the proportion of shelter users who used a shelter for more than six months has increased from 9.0% in 2017 to 14.1% in 2023.

Even as inflation trends downwards, affordability remains a challenge for many Canadians. Over the past year, one-third (35%) of Canadians had difficulty meeting their financial needs related to transportation, housing and food.

Recommendations for the first 100 days:

- Improve the Canada Disability Benefit by raising the benefit amount, simplifying access, and expanding eligibility.
- Increase the Guaranteed Income Supplement by \$500 for single individuals and \$750 for couples starting at age 60 to ensure seniors who are most in need receive financial support.
- Maintain investment in the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP) and CVITP Grant program to support free tax-filing assistance for Canadians with low incomes delivered by community organizations.
- Amend the Income Tax Act to implement automatic tax filing for low-income
 Canadians to ensure greater access to benefits and financial support.



Housing and Homelessness

The nonprofit sector plays a critical role in meeting Canada's housing needs through the development and management of affordable housing, providing supportive housing and wraparound services to bolster individual and community wellbeing. This includes access to mental health and employment services and health care providers.

Whether renting or owning, finding a place to call home is becoming increasingly difficult. From 2016 to 2024, housing demand grew by 16% while the available housing stock grew by 11%. Due to rising costs, nearly half (45%) of Canadians are deeply concerned about their ability to afford housing. In 2022, one in five Canadian households lived in unaffordable housing, spending 30% or more of their income on shelter. In addition to the high costs, red tape, restrictive zoning rules and administrative delays have made it harder to build new housing. Canadians need a housing plan that addresses these barriers and ensures access to secure, affordable housing.

Access to affordable housing is about more than just shelter. It has cascading effects on health, well-being and community satisfaction. Canadians experiencing housing challenges are less likely to feel connected to their communities, satisfied with their surroundings or hopeful about the future. Stable, affordable housing reduces household stress, improves access to healthy food and fosters family stability.



For every affordable housing unit built, 2.5 new jobs are created.

The federal government must commit to maintaining and expanding nonprofit and social housing across Canada. Investing in affordable housing is an investment in the economy. Research shows that for every affordable housing unit built, 2.5 new jobs are created. Additionally, investments in housing improve social and educational outcomes for individuals and communities. As Canada tackles the housing and homelessness crisis, maintaining and expanding access to these nonprofit services will require strong government collaboration and investment to expand their reach and impact.

Recommendations for the first 100 days:

- Strengthen and improve the National Housing Strategy.
- Provide stable long-term funding for current housing programs such as the Affordable Housing Fund and Rapid Housing Initiative.
- Tackle the national housing and homelessness crisis by scaling funding for non-profit housing providers in accordance with inflation and population growth.
- Reduce chronic homelessness by working with the non-profit sector to invest in the creation of transitional and supportive housing supply.
- Remove barriers that make it difficult for non-profit and private developer partnership projects.
- Adequately fund the <u>Canada Rental</u> Protection Fund.
- Reduce the administrative burden associated with non-profit organizations attaining long-term funding.



Work in partnership with the nonprofit sector to implement housing solutions that keep Canadian communities affordable, enabling families to thrive and build a better future.

Environment

Whether driving change through forest and land conservation efforts, ocean and water protection or sustainability initiatives, nonprofit organizations across Canada play a crucial role in ensuring future generations have access to a healthy environment.

Across Canada, every region is experiencing an increased frequency of extreme weather events. From heatwaves and droughts to more frequent hurricanes, these extreme weather events damage our natural landscapes and create severe challenges for the Canadian economy. According to the Red Cross, 90% of their assistance goes to Canadians at home. As extreme weather and patterns become more frequent they will begin to undermine Canada's economic growth placing additional strain on government budgets.

For every dollar spent on climate adaptation, there is a return of \$13-\$15 in direct and indirect benefits.

While many families and businesses in Canada are already experiencing the impacts of climate change, proactive investments in adaptation measures can reduce costs. For every dollar spent on climate adaptation, there is a return of \$13-\$15 in direct and indirect benefits making it a sound investment for Canada's present and future.



Addressing climate change must also focus on reducing biodiversity loss. Forests, wetlands, and grasslands are critical in combating the effects of climate change. They slow the rate of climate change by absorbing carbon and releasing oxygen back into the atmosphere, preventing droughts and reducing the risk of flooding. Indigenous Nations and local communities almost always lead these initiatives in Canada. Their work must be resourced. Preserving biodiversity loss is not only essential for mitigating the effects of climate change but also for driving Canada's long-term economic resilience and ability to foster thriving, sustainable communities for future generations.

Recommendations for the first 100 days:

- Commit to protecting 30% of Canada's land and ocean by 2030, and allocate sufficient funding to provinces, territories, Indigenous Nations and civil society, through the Enhanced Nature Legacy Fund and other mechanisms to fulfill this commitment and protect the cultural and ecological value of communities.
- Strengthen the integration of Nature-**Based Solutions into federal climate** policy instruments including the National Biodiversity Strategy, National Adaptation Strategy, Green Municipal Fund, and Environmental Assessment processes.
- **Expand partnerships with municipalities** and Indigenous communities to lead on climate action and biodiversity conservation.



resilient and sustainable Canada.

Mental Health

From helplines and peer support programs to counselling, crisis intervention, outpatient care, research and training, and prevention and awareness campaigns, nonprofits play a vital role in delivering comprehensive mental health, addiction, and substance use health services across communities.

Each year, mental health costs Canada an estimated \$51 billion in terms of health care costs, lost productivity and decreases in quality of life. It is estimated that 50% of Canadians will be touched by mental illness before the age of 40. The prevalence of poor mental health is exacerbated by economic stressors including lack of access to affordable housing and to affordable and nutritious food. Canadians with poorer mental health are more likely (15.8%) to live in inadequate housing.

Each year mental health costs Canada an estimated \$51 billion in terms of health care costs, lost productivity and decreases in quality of life.

Unfortunately, one-third of Canadians don't have access to the mental health care they need. Despite the high prevalence and cost to the economy, only 7.2% of Canada's health budget is dedicated to mental health care. Continued underfunding of mental health has been most pronounced in community-based mental health services.



"Community mental health organizations remain a vital part of their communities, and of the local healthcare system, but without adequate funding and support from governments, their impact will be unduly limited, and they cannot operate at their full potential. Supporting these organizations will only make our healthcare system better and benefit more Canadians."

 Dave Gallson, National Executive Director, Mood Disorders Society of Canada

With the prevalence of mental health disorders on the rise, the federal government must ensure continued commitments are made to address mental illness in communities. Canadians deserve access to a continuum of publicly funded mental health and addictions services that are integrated and coordinated at the community level to promote and enhance their quality of life. Investments in mental health yield substantial returns for the economy. For every dollar the government spends on mental health, there is a return of \$4-\$10 to the economy. Improved access to treatments for anxiety and depression also have the potential to boost the economy by \$17.3 billion and \$32.3 billion each year.

Recommendations for the first 100 days:

- Create a Canada Universal Mental **Health and Substance Use Health Act** to accompany the Canada Mental Health and Substance Use Health Transfer.
- Create a permanent Canada Mental Health and Substance Use Health Transfer equivalent to 12% of provincial/territorial health care spending (\$6.25B) ramped up over 5 years, with 50% earmarked for community services.
- Continue to expand access to mental health and addictions services



health services to Canadians who need them the most. With sustained investments in mental health services, the nonprofit sector will continue to work with the government to ensure communities across Canada remain healthy and strong.

Labour

From training and upskilling programs to employment support for marginalized Canadians, the nonprofit sector plays an active role in getting Canadians into the job market.

The nonprofit sector is the largest employer in Canada. Collectively nonprofits employ 2.5 million people, making it larger than the top three for-profit industries construction, manufacturing and retail trade. Nonprofit employees work in various industries including healthcare, arts, universities and colleges, social services, culture, sports and recreation, housing and development. These workers account for 12% of the total workforce. In addition, 13 million volunteers dedicate nearly 2 billion hours annually to building stronger communities.

Our workers account for 12% of the total workforce.

Despite our critical role, nonprofits have faced mounting pressures over the past several years. Demand for services has grown dramatically due to the affordability crisis and inflation, while donations have declined. The nonprofit sector also has low wages; the average nonprofit worker makes 13% less annually than the average for all jobs economy-wide. The gap is even lower for those working in community nonprofits where the annual wage is 31% lower.



In 2021, the average wage for employees in community nonprofits was \$43,020 annually, compared to \$62,459 across the broader economy. These low wages have created significant recruitment and retention challenges as nonprofits must compete with other sectors when recruiting talent. This has led to widespread labour shortages.

This is extremely troubling given that the nonprofit workforce is heavily dominated by women, who account for two-thirds of our workforce. Overall, women employed in the nonprofit sector earn 18% less than those outside of the sector.

Much of this strain stems from the reliance on short-term, project-based funding, which has led to precarious working conditions, such as low wages, reduced benefits, and limited job security. These systemic issues threaten the sector's ability to meet rising demand.

Recommendations for the first 100 days:

- Develop a nonprofit labour force strategy to strengthen recruitment and retention, ensuring the sector's stability and economic resilience.
- Maintain funding to core employment programs that generate employment opportunities in the sector such as the Canada Summer Jobs wage subsidy, the Canadian National Institute for the Blind's Come to Work program, and Innovative Work-Integrated Learning Initiatives.
- Drive job creation and promote business growth by introducing supports for key **sectors** facing labour force challenges such as a **Tax Credit for Live Performing Arts**.



Building the Resilience of the Sector

Canadian charities and nonprofits are an essential to Canada's social fabric. We strengthen and uplift vulnerable populations, and make life better for Canadians and the world. Yet, despite our undeniable social and economic contributions, the federal government often overlooks the sector's needs.

Nonprofits frequently divert time and charitable resources to explain the unintended consequences of new bills to MPs and officials because new legislation is often passed without considering the impact that it will have on charities and nonprofits.

Additionally, rigid federal funding agreements create inefficiencies. Many project-based funds fail to cover the full cost of service delivery, leaving organizations struggling to maintain

essential programs. Administrative burdens, restrictive funding conditions, and short-term funding cycles further threaten the sector's ability to meet increasing demands.

We urge the federal government to work collaboratively with nonprofits, to ensure organizations can remain strong, agile, and equipped to meet the needs of Canadians today and in the future. To do so, we ask that the federal government invest in the resilience of the sector by:

- Making federal funding for nonprofits more effective and efficient
- Improving access to reliable and comprehensive data
- Strengthening the relationship between the federal government and the nonprofit sector



Making Federal Funding for Nonprofits More Effective and Efficient

Nonprofits are nimble, innovative, and have subject-matter expertise and deep connections to their communities. In today's complex world, the federal government relies on nonprofits to deliver on many critical social and health services that the government would otherwise need to provide and to do so in a cost-effective manner.

Unfortunately, red tape creates inefficiencies and negatively impacts the availability and quality of federally funded nonprofit programs and services. Short-term funding and gaps between funding renewals lead to frequent staff turnover, costing organizations in terms of recruitment and training costs in addition to the loss of institutional memory and relationships. Federal funding often comes with excessive administrative burden and organizations who are funded by more than one department are often required to report similar information in slightly different formats on slightly different timelines, creating hours of redundant work for staff who would otherwise be serving their communities. Nonprofits often aren't given the autonomy to adjust their spending plans as they learn or the context changes, making it difficult to continuously improve programs and services or meet new needs.



Canadians can't afford to have federal dollars used inefficiently.

As Canadians continue to grapple with intersecting housing and affordability crises and skyrocketing demand for services like food banks, they can't afford to have federal dollars used inefficiently.

Creating a tailored approach to funding nonprofits would enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of federal grants and contributions, ultimately ensuring that taxpayer dollars are used for maximum community impact.

Recommendations for the first 100 days:

Engage the nonprofit sector in the development of an appendix for the **Directive on Transfer** Payments and a risk framework that recognizes the unique role and operating models of nonprofit recipients in order to reduce red tape and better serve communities.

Improving Access to Reliable and **Comprehensive Data**

High-quality disaggregated data is crucial to designing policies, planning interventions, anticipating changes and forecasting the needs of the nonprofit sector. Due to decades of irregular data collection, the government has failed to release comprehensive nonprofit sector data. Consequently, our sector lacks basic information on many aspects of our composition, finances, workforce and operations and must rely on outdated data. When data on the nonprofit sector is available it is often not easily accessible or in a usable format.

A strategic approach to nonprofit data will provide the insights necessary to support the sector's resilience, innovation, and continued contributions to Canada's social and economic well-being.

Currently, there is a lack of coordination and communication across teams collecting data on our sector within Statistics Canada. Siloed approaches have produced data products that scope and define the sector differently, resulting in data sets that are not comparable, which paint different pictures of our sector. By implementing these solutions, the government can reduce inefficiencies, improve coordination, and maximize the return on existing investments in data collection.



Recommendations for the first 100 days:

- Provide Statistics Canada with a mandate to carry out regular updates to the national survey of nonprofit organizations, to be repeated every year, and provide funding of \$500,000 annually for this purpose. The survey should include grassroots (unincorporated) organizations.
- Establish a unit within Statistics Canada whose mandate is to collect, analyze, and share data on the nonprofit sector.

Strengthening the Relationship Between the Federal Government and the Nonprofit Sector

The nonprofit sector is a natural partner in program and service delivery. We deliver on many government priorities. While the nonprofit sector intersects with several areas of federal governance, no single ministry or department is tasked with improving its policy environment or economic landscape.

We urge the government to implement and resource a dedicated government unit for the nonprofit sector that will work to drive efficiency, reduce redundancies, and deliver significant cost savings by:

- Enhancing cross-government collaboration: Streamlining communication and coordination on issues affecting nonprofits and charities to avoid duplication and improve outcomes.
- Fostering innovation and accountability: Ensuring public policy supports a robust, efficient, and results-driven nonprofit sector, maximizing the impact of every dollar spent.
- Leveraging data for smarter decisionmaking:

Collecting and sharing high-quality, accessible data about the nonprofit sector to inform evidence-based policymaking and resource allocation.

Advocating for cost-effective policies:
 Acting as an internal champion for the

nonprofit sector, ensuring that policy decisions consider their impact on charities and nonprofits, preventing costly unintended consequences.

Addressing systemic inequalities:
 Tackling inequities within the sector that fall under federal jurisdiction to create a fairer and more effective nonprofit landscape.

By strengthening the relationship between government and the nonprofit sector through a centralized unit, the government can optimize its relationship with the nonprofit sector, ensuring resources are used more efficiently while delivering greater value to Canadians.

Recommendations for the first 100 days:

 Identify and adequately resource a unit within the federal government to act as a champion of the nonprofit sector.

