



TORONTO
FOUNDATION

TORONTO'S

VITAL SIGNS

2021 Report



We would like to acknowledge that we are situated upon traditional territories of the Huron-Wendat, Anishinabek Nation, the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, and the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. Today, the meeting place of “Tkaronto” (Toronto) is still the home to many Indigenous peoples from across Turtle Island, and we are grateful to have the opportunity to work in the community, on this territory.

ABOUT TORONTO FOUNDATION

PURPOSE

We aim to create a more fair and just society, where everyone can thrive by mobilizing those with resources and the will to partner with others. The new philanthropy focuses on co-creating a society that fights exclusion and marginalization, creates a sense of wellbeing and belonging, and promotes trust.

MISSION

To connect philanthropy to community needs and opportunities.

VISION

A city of informed, engaged philanthropists accelerating meaningful change for all.

VALUES

Brave, thoughtful action. Humility in our relationships. Public trust above all.

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Since 2006, Community Foundations of Canada has co-ordinated the national and international replication of Vital Signs, which is now being used by 32 Canadian communities and 80 globally.



COMMUNITY
FOUNDATIONS
OF CANADA



A LETTER FROM SHARON AVERY

We opted to forgo a subtitle on this, our 18th *Toronto's Vital Signs Report*. How to sum up 18 months of devastation and despair? There's no simple roundup, no original, insightful, singular analysis that can make sense of all of this. There's little comfort in pretty words in the face of the greatest crisis of many of our lives. Instead, we share a simple message: Let's Get Better.

Also absent from the cover is the word *equity*. Some may see this as an omission. But for us the reality of our city's foundation and advancing inequality is implicit throughout this report. It surfaced in all 10 chapters we track in our attempt to understand the evolving nature of quality of life in Toronto. The facts of the growing divide between who thrives and who doesn't were reinforced time and time again, through the dozens of interviews we did and the almost 250 citations from what is without a doubt the most comprehensive collection of inputs into making sense of our city.

We believe better means more equal. More kind, more fair, more just.

If we've learned one thing during the pandemic, it is that we were not prepared. Our report shows the ramifications of this, and it's not the same for everyone. Those at the bottom of the income ladder were hit the hardest — on all indicators — and this hurts everyone. What we do next will say a lot about who we are and what we value as a society.

We don't have all the answers, but we certainly know now where the problems lie.



**To how many more
generations are we going
to promise equity?**

**If we do not act now,
we never will.**

AGAPI GESSESSE

*Executive Director, CEE Centre
for Young Black Professionals*

Racism, hatred of all kinds, and indifference to the suffering of others have risen to the fore in these months of profound loss and separation.

On our own we have little to offer. But together we truly can learn from this experience. We can imagine a better city and we can build it, too.

In philanthropy we have our own reckoning underway. Our world profited while the death toll mounted, jobs disappeared, depression soared, and we came face to face with our colonial crimes. The very systems that enable wealth to prosper and fuel charity sustain a status quo that propel some forward and hold the rest in the rear. Better for us means stepping up by stepping back. It means questioning everything and following the lead of those whose lived experience of inequality must chart the road ahead.

In each chapter of the report we highlight some opportunities and obstacles to getting better. They are by no means exhaustive, but a place to begin. In the past, Toronto Foundation has refrained from making direct recommendations to policymakers and others, but we believe the unprecedented nature of this pandemic compels us to use our community insights to mobilize others into action. At the end of each chapter you will find some priorities for decision-makers and tips for just about anyone who cares about Toronto and wants to make it the best it can be.

But to close my note, I offer four simple steps to the mix:

JOIN THE 90%

The Globe and Mail said it first. With 90% of the population vaccinated, we stand a chance of defeating this thing and protecting our most vulnerable neighbours.

SUPPORT ADVOCACY

Make space and give money to individuals and organizations who live the realities of inequality and are brave enough to speak up and challenge the status quo.

ALWAYS VOTE WITH AN EQUITY LENS

Imagine what our world could look like if we put others less advantaged first before ourselves.

REMEMBER THAT WE ARE ALL TREATY PEOPLE

With the exception of Indigenous peoples, all of us have benefited from treaties in some way. Now, reciprocity and restitution are the only way forward.



Sharon Avery

President & CEO

Fundholder, Avery Family Foundation

9 TIPS FOR GIVING IN THE PANDEMIC FROM SECTOR EXPERTS



TIP 1

Acknowledge the inherent power imbalances in philanthropy



TIP 2

Apply an equity lens to your giving



TIP 3

Earmark support to the grassroots



TIP 4

Make multi-year funding a regular part of your philanthropy



TIP 5

Consider the health and wellbeing of nonprofit leaders



TIP 6

Give unrestricted funding



TIP 7

Pool your donations to magnify impact



TIP 8

Support advocacy



TIP 9

Remember that a better future is possible

To read more, please see Toronto Foundation's report *Giving in the Pandemic: 9 Tips from Sector Experts* at torontofoundation.ca/publications.

INTRODUCTION

In our 2019 *Toronto's Vital Signs Report* we captured a picture of a city experiencing growing pains — a skyrocketing population, rising GDP, record low unemployment, and yet a disturbing long-term trend toward inequality. An increasing number of residents were falling behind while those at the top were getting further and further ahead.

We pick up that narrative now just 24 months later while the specter of the pandemic continues to haunt us. We wonder: “What will be the long-term effects of this global pandemic? What has been lost through the shutdowns, isolation and despair? And can anything be gained from what has been the greatest public health crisis of our times?”

This report analyzes the impact of COVID-19 on Toronto's quality of life. As with previous *Vital Signs*, including the recent *Toronto Fallout Report*, we focus on the experience of marginalized populations in the city and the community organizations that support them. The virus took its greatest toll here and this is now well-documented. The social and economic ripple effects are wide and deep, and will no doubt lead to years of study. With hope, what will result is a road map for a better, more inclusive and caring future pandemic response that prioritizes the most vulnerable and embraces the wellbeing of all.

Our research does not track the virus spread or the vaccine rollout. Instead, we return to the 10 elements of a healthy city to assess what's changed since we last reported. We are without a doubt a very different Toronto than we were just two years ago. On many indicators things have gotten a lot worse. And yet what we've learned about our divergent experiences of the pandemic should push us to shift the status quo and increase opportunities for those previously shut out.

Data was compiled from numerous sources to inform this report, spanning almost 250 endnotes. We went beyond published reports to analyze secondary data that is not generally available and received a variety of data sources and raw data from key partners representing more than 10,000 survey responses of Toronto residents. We also include findings from the second annual Toronto Nonprofit Survey with feedback from more than 250 nonprofits. Several nonprofits provided service data that offers valuable context for their work. The perspectives of

more than 50 community leaders provide the interpretative analysis, while dozens more were interviewed and helped inform the report. As with our first pandemic report, *The Toronto Fallout Report*, we've highlighted the voices of those we don't hear enough from, but who are essential to tackling the runaway inequality that defines the pandemic.

While there is no doubt that Indigenous communities have been disproportionately affected by COVID-19, there is a marked shortage of quantitative data on this in our report. We recognize the importance of Indigenous communities leading their own research and look forward to the results of the second *Toronto Aboriginal Research Project 2* scheduled for release early in 2022. With this new information we will aim to present a more fulsome picture of the experience of Indigenous Torontonians in subsequent reports.

The combination of quantitative and qualitative inputs runs throughout the report to present quality of life in all its complexity while underlining the intersectionality of issues.

At the top of each chapter we summarize our views on the obstacles still before us, as well as the opportunities to emerge from the pandemic in a better place. And this means putting equity at the centre of decision-making and action.

Closing each chapter are recommendations driven by the report findings. Added to these we include here a note specifically to data gatherers and disseminators. Our mass shift to virtual underlined the importance of open data. Over the course of studying the pandemic fallout in Toronto, we saw a promising shift in the availability of disaggregated data and the willingness of partners to share it. We thank all those who made the information available freely and promptly. We encourage this practice and offer up this report as a reflection of what's possible when our collective experience and insights come together.

While we did our best to accurately convey the content in each chapter, and each of these chapters had both internal and external review, mistakes will inevitably slip through. We sincerely apologize to anyone whose data was misrepresented. If this was the case, please let us know and we'll do our best to correct any mistakes.



The Issue

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

COVID-19 has infected more than one and a half million Canadians and killed over 27,000. Toronto has been one of the epicentres, with more than 177,000 confirmed cases and 3,641 deaths as of September 17, 2021.¹ The number of lives lost here, and the number of people left grieving at a time when gathering limits prevented many from finding solace in traditional funeral rites, is staggering. As of September 16, 2021, 75.1% have had at least one vaccine dose, and 70.0% have had two doses.²

To contain the virus spread, Toronto has had more severe and prolonged lockdowns than nearly any major city in the world.³⁴ The social and economic fallout of this has been more severe than in most Canadian cities, a topic discussed further across all the chapters in this report.

Particularly pronounced has been the role that social distancing has played in declining mental health, food insecurity, and the overall wellbeing of people with disabilities.

While we struggled with the public health crisis, numerous pre-existing health inequities were brought to the fore. The parts of the city with the highest poverty and the highest percentage of racialized people have long experienced much lower rates of life expectancy and higher rates of numerous diseases. In the pandemic, they were hit again, bearing the brunt of infections and deaths. Even as the city began to recover from the pandemic, the slow rollout of vaccines in the places that were most affected highlighted long-time systemic barriers, including an uneven distribution of health infrastructure.



OBSTACLES

- While the entire country has been struggling with mental health issues during the pandemic, reported rates of depression are higher in Toronto than nearly anywhere else in the country. Though there were finally signs of improvement in summer 2021, the rates of self-reported depression in Toronto remain higher than in the rest of the country.
- Young people and lower-income residents have been particularly hard hit by mental health challenges, with 16% of youth aged 18–24 in the Greater Toronto Area reporting they had thought about suicide in the previous three months, in a spring 2021 survey.
- Many health services will remain backlogged, with demand for mental health services surging, but estimates also indicate that other critical health services may face backlogs as long as 22 months to get through pandemic delays.
- Food security continues to worsen with new records being set for food bank usage on a regular basis, with visits to the Daily Bread Food Bank in Toronto 82% higher in June 2021 than the average for 2019.



OPPORTUNITIES

- While the pandemic has been devastating for those with disabilities, the trend of working at home presents new employment opportunities and hope for the widespread adoption of universal design principles.
- There's a broader understanding of the need for a Black- and Indigenous-focused strategy on food sovereignty to help tackle the systemic hunger inequalities in this city.

MENTAL HEALTH AT CRISIS LEVELS

During the pandemic, people in Toronto's perceptions of both their physical and mental health have declined. In data from late 2020, 39% of people reported their physical health was very good or excellent, down from 51% prior to the pandemic (see chart for notes). This equates to about 262,000 fewer Toronto residents over 18 indicating they had good or excellent physical health.

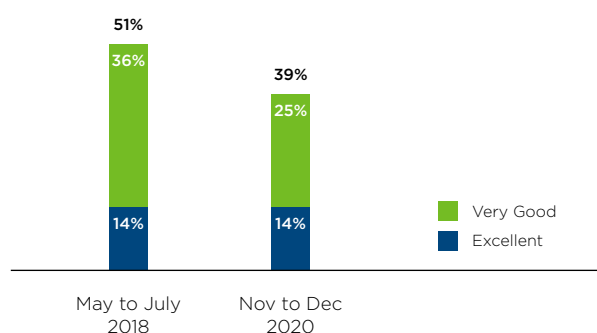
Decreases in mental health were even more stark: the percentage of people rating their mental health as very good or excellent declined from 58% to 40%. This equates to about 410,000 fewer City of Toronto residents over the age of 18 with excellent or very good mental health. The declines in both overall and mental health, including the relationship between the two, will require attention as we emerge from the pandemic.

While the impact of the pandemic on physical health will also be significant, the Ontario Medical Association estimates that the pandemic created a backlog of 15.9 million healthcare services, and that clearing the backlog will take more than a year for select medical procedures operating at 120%, including 22 months for knee replacements, 21 months for cataract surgeries, 10 months for cardiac surgery, and 10 months for MRIs.⁵

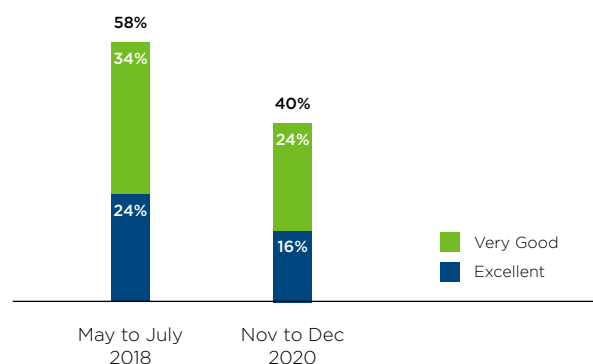
Data provided to Toronto Foundation by Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC) from its ongoing polls of Canadians suggests that self-rated levels of depression have increased throughout the pandemic, both in Toronto and Canada (see chart for notes about the data).

In June 2021, the percentage of Toronto residents who reported feeling depressed dropped to 49%, down from 58% in April 2021, ranking at least a five on a 10-point scale of depression (see chart). This is the first sign of a significant improvement in mental health since polling began, though rates of depression are still up substantially from the 34% of people who reported they had some symptoms of depression before the onset of the pandemic, though this was self-assessed in August and September 2020.

Percentage rating physical health as very good or excellent, City of Toronto, 2018 versus 2020



Percentage rating mental health as very good or excellent, City of Toronto, 2018 versus 2020



Sources: Toronto Social Capital Survey and data provided by the Environics Institute as part of its Survey on Employment and Skills, conducted by the Environics Institute for Survey Research in partnership with the Future Skills Centre and the Diversity Institute.

Notes: The May–July 2018 sample size was 3,207 adults over the age of 18, while the November/December 2020 survey included 487 respondents.

Combining data from five different polls from August 2020 to April 2021 from MHRC, we compared the levels of depression in the 15 largest census divisions.

Note that this time horizon is different from the previous chart, as some additional data for June 2021 came in during the last days before publication.

Toronto had the second-highest rates of self-reported depression among the largest second divisions, with 54% of respondents rating themselves as at least mildly depressed, compared to 39% for the rest of the country.

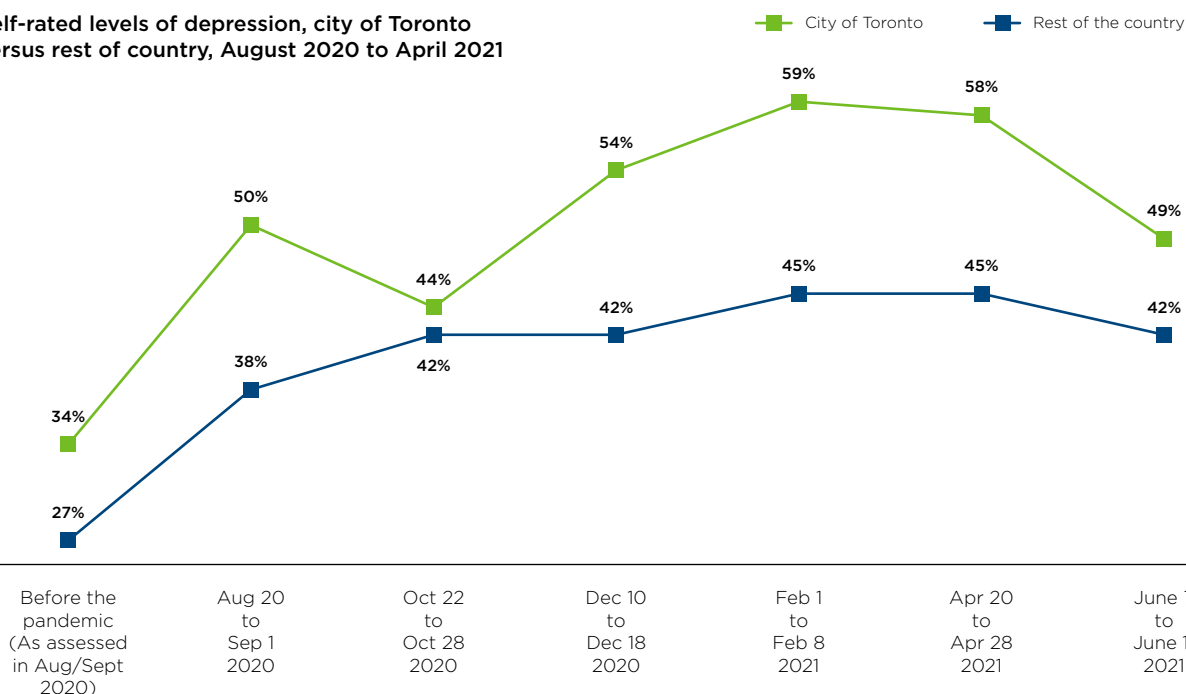
Every city in the top three was in the Greater Golden Horseshoe, highlighting that the combination of economic challenges and lockdowns that this region experienced have

had significant implications on the mental health of residents. Comparable data is not available to see the levels of self-rated depression in these areas prior to the onset of the pandemic.

And as self-reported mental health continued to deteriorate, calls to crisis lines also rose. Data from 211 Ontario — a central resource that refers people to social services — shows that the number of calls for people looking for connections to crisis lines continues to remain high.⁶

January 2021, just after Ontario announced a province-wide lockdown after Christmas day, saw record-high call volumes to 211 Ontario in Toronto, with 181% more callers looking for crisis intervention support than in January 2020.

Self-rated levels of depression, city of Toronto versus rest of country, August 2020 to April 2021



Source: Data provided by Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC). All analysis by the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of MHRC.

Notes: Self-rated levels of depression before the pandemic should be treated with caution since it was first assessed many months after shutdowns commenced. Self-rated depression was rated on an 11-point scale, where 0 was labelled as none and 10 was labelled as extremely high. Anyone rating themselves as a 5 or higher was classified as feeling depressed. This is not a clinical scale and should be interpreted with caution. Sample sizes for Toronto range from a low of 203 to a high of 421 for various survey waves. Across the six survey waves, this includes 1,959 responses from the City of Toronto.

By June 2021, call volumes to 211 Ontario for crisis intervention in Toronto were still 122% higher than in January 2020. Calls for mental health counselling had increased by a lesser, but still significant amount, with call volumes 64% higher in June 2021 versus January 2020.

Calls to Gerstein Crisis Centre — a 24-hour intervention service that has a hotline, as well as care beds and mobile health response units — soared 70% higher in 2020 over the previous year, with isolation being a major driver for many.⁷

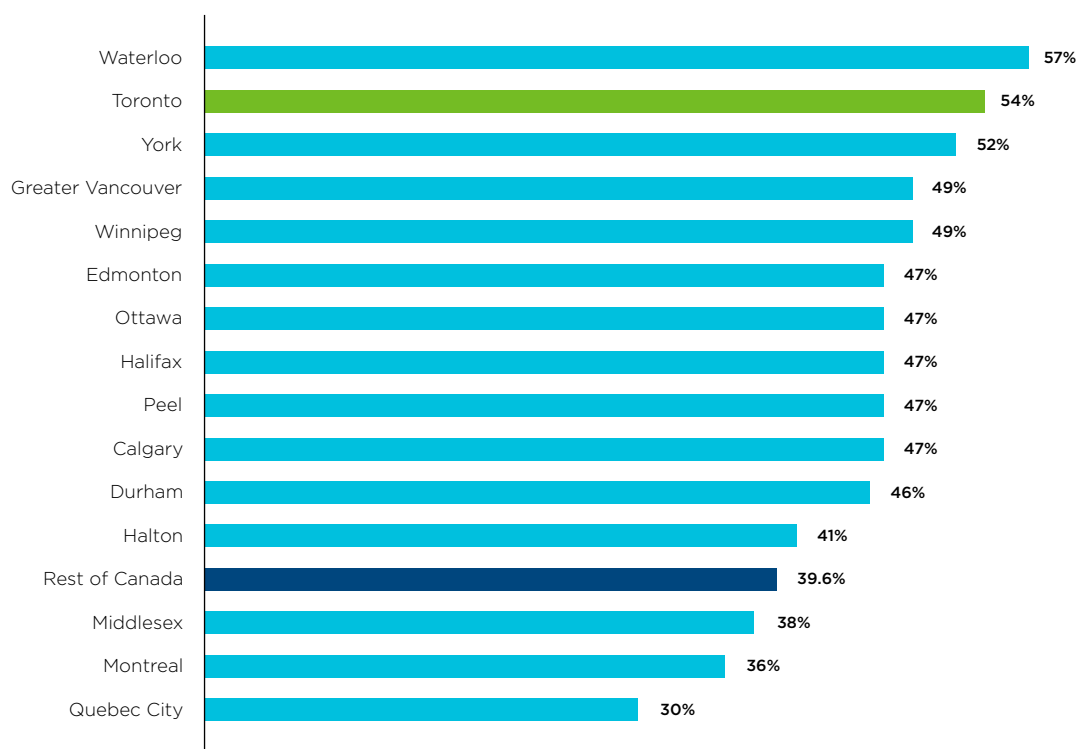
For those on the front lines of overdose prevention efforts in Toronto, these challenges, as well as insufficient investments in access to harm reduction services throughout the pandemic, have also contributed to soaring

death rates within Toronto's ongoing overdose crisis. An estimated 521 people died of opioid toxicity in Toronto in 2020, almost double the death rate in 2019 of 291 and 2.8 times higher than the 137 deaths in 2015. The ongoing opioid crisis and the toll it has played are covered further in the Safety chapter, on page 128.

At the same time as crisis intervention calls soared by 70%, calls to police for mental health issues also increased, though at a fraction of the volume to other crisis lines. Toronto Police Services reported a 12% increase in mental health-related calls during the pandemic. Significant increases in calls to the Assaulted Women's Helpline (AWHL) during the pandemic (up by more than 50% after the onset of the pandemic and through the rest of 2020) is covered on page 124.

Rates of depression in 15 largest census divisions

Aggregated data from August 2020 to April 2021

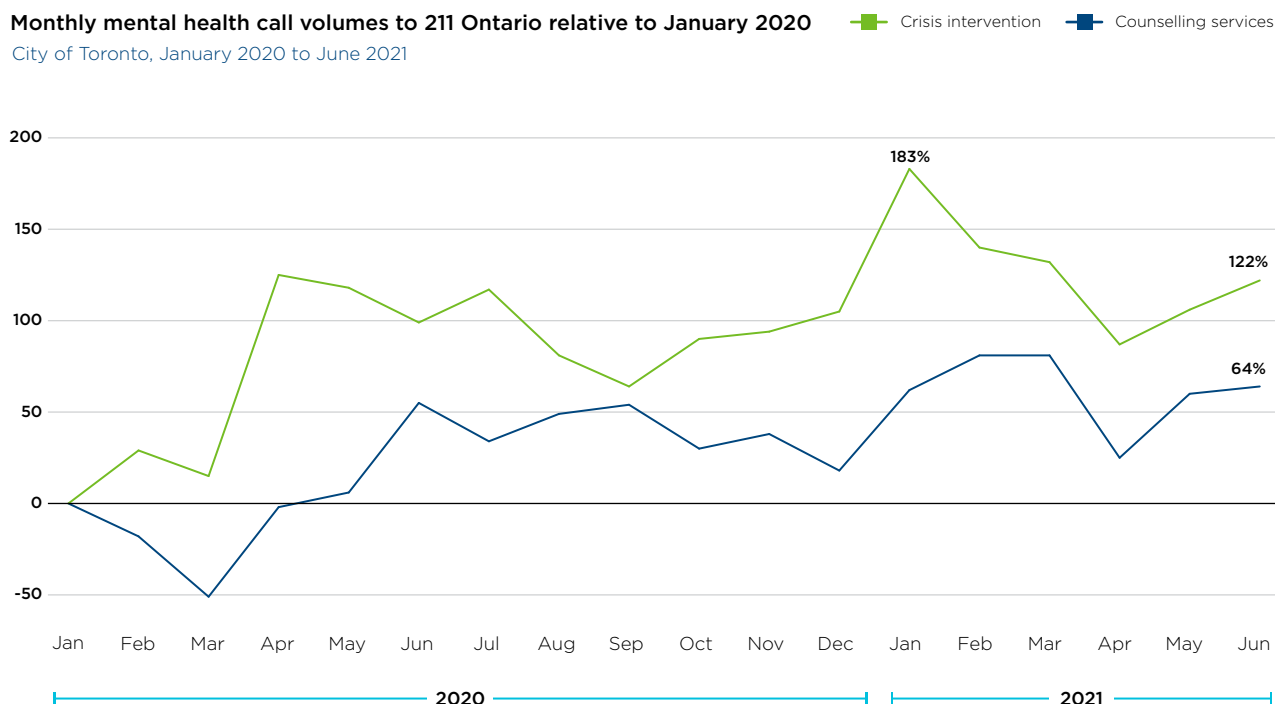


Source: Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC). All analysis by the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of MHRC.

Notes: This aggregates data across five waves of surveys from August 2020 to April 2021. Respondents were allocated to communities based on the first three digits of their postal code. For additional notes on how depression was calculated, see previous chart. This chart includes responses from more than 15,000 respondents across the five waves of surveys including more than 1500 from the City of Toronto

Monthly mental health call volumes to 211 Ontario relative to January 2020

City of Toronto, January 2020 to June 2021



Source: 211 Ontario. Note: Calculations by the author.

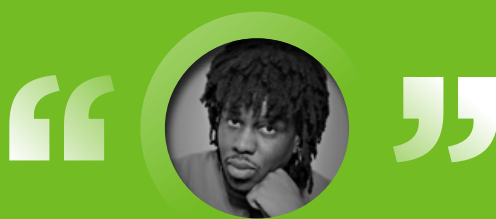
History suggests that even years following COVID-19, we may be suffering the consequences with mental health issues. The Ontario Medical Association recently issued a press release referencing how elevated rates of mental health challenges persisted for at least six years following the 1919 pandemic.⁸

According to MHRC, post-traumatic stress disorder, as one example, often does not exhibit until months after the end of an event.⁹ With 28% of the Canadian population showing persistent levels of high anxiety during the pandemic, it cautions that there is significant risk that more people will be diagnosed and suffer the consequences.

“There are now more people who, over the course of the year, had emotional turmoil. That’s going to be a big issue for us,” says Cheryl Prescod, executive director of the Black Creek Community Health Centre, which serves an area of the city that experienced disproportionate COVID-19 impacts. “I think

related to that is having culturally appropriate and culturally safe services for people, especially related to mental health. We’ve always had an issue with there not being enough services to deal with the diversity of our populations. And now, throughout the pandemic, we’ve also all had to witness so much racial violence around the world. I think a lot of people are scared, they’re heartbroken, they’re traumatized. So, having some work around trauma not only induced by the pandemic, but also by all of the other world events that have been happening concurrently is important. I think the priority has to be addressing people’s mental health and wellbeing,” she says.

“When a whole lot of people have been forced into isolation for a significant amount of time, you have to think about the impacts in terms of mental health and loss of connections,” says Asante Haughton, co-founder of the Reach Out Response Network.



“How are people coping? And what’s it going to be like when we start back to routines? I think some people will transition better than others. We need to be prepared for the fact that additional, long-term mental health problems will pose a big challenge.”

ASANTE HAUGHTON

Co-founder, Reach Out Response Network

The Reach Out Response Network has been playing an important role in alternatives to police responses to mental health crises, which have led to a number of fatal outcomes and also often do not connect people to necessary supports. For Haughton, better crisis responses are just at the top of the list of things that need to change to create better mental health outcomes for racialized people. “For me, the big thing is looking at how racism and discrimination impact mental health directly... There’s a lot of stress and pain and suffering associated with racism, and people treating you differently or badly,” he says. Further discussions on mental health crisis responses are covered in the Safety chapter, on page 130.

Low-income residents have also disproportionately experienced mental health challenges during the pandemic: 69% of those with less than \$20,000 in annual income reported depression, compared to 40% of those with annual household incomes above \$150,000, according to aggregated MHRC data from August 2020 to May 2021.

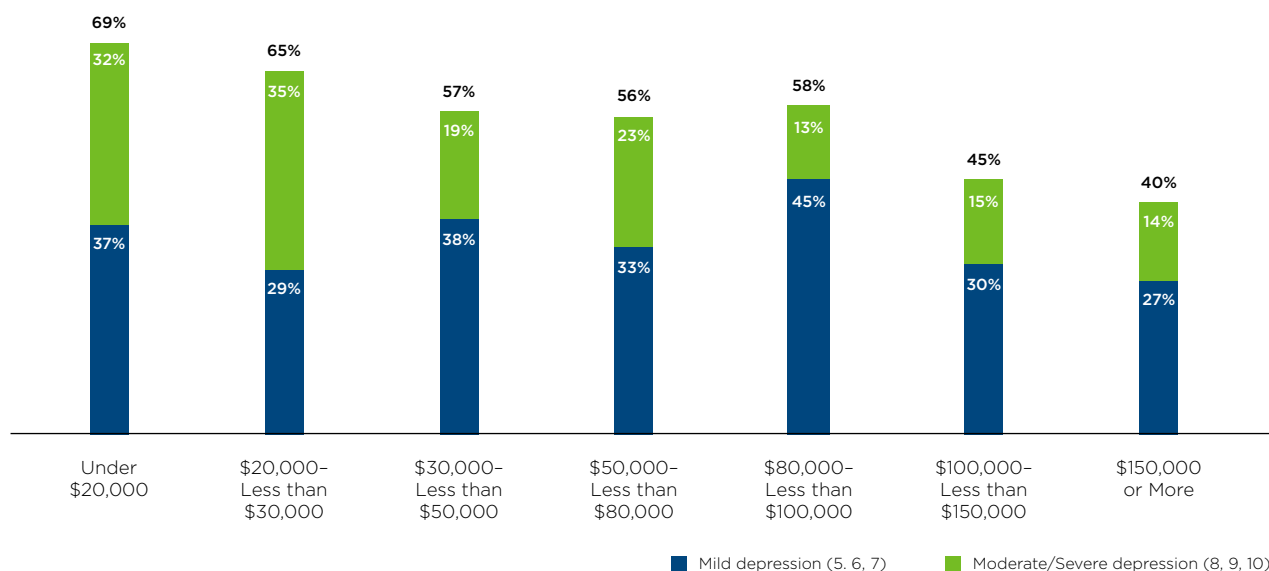
For moderate and severe depression, the relative disparities are even greater, with 32% of those with household income under \$20,000 reporting moderate or severe depression, compared to only 14% of those with household incomes greater than \$150,000.

SUICIDAL IDEATION IS UP SIGNIFICANTLY, PARTICULARLY AMONG YOUNG PEOPLE

MHRC data from April 2021 shows that 10.9% of Toronto residents had thought about suicide in the previous three months, compared to 6.6% in the rest of the country. These staggering levels are significant increases from 2019 Statistics Canada survey results showing that 2.5% of Canadians had thoughts of suicide within the year pre-COVID-19.¹⁰

Percentage of residents reporting depression, by income

City of Toronto, August 2020 to April 2021



Source: Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC). All analysis by the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of MHRC.

Notes: This aggregates data across five waves of surveys from August 2020 to April 2021. Unlike previous charts, this data is separated by mild depression (those who score themselves a five, six, or seven on an 11-point scale of depression) versus more severe levels of depression (those rating themselves an eight or higher). Some numbers do not add up due to rounding.

Researchers caution that much is still not yet understood about the pathways between suicide ideation and completion. Care when reporting on suicide is also required, as there is a risk that increased coverage of suicide will lead to more suicides. Crisis line information is included in the callout box if you or anyone you know needs support.

While this increase is thought to demonstrate the severe psychological toll of the COVID-19 crisis, it is important to note that initial studies in several Canadian provinces have not yet found any evidence of increased suicides,¹¹ though one study in Japan suggested early in the pandemic that suicide decreases are followed by a subsequent increase.¹² A national U.S. study concluded that there was a 22.3% increase in emergency room visits for potential suicide attempts for children aged 12 to 17 years of age in summer 2020 versus summer 2019, which increased even further into winter 2020, with the biggest risks among young girls.



DISTRESS CENTRES OF GREATER TORONTO

This organization provides emotional support, crisis intervention and suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year to at-risk and vulnerable individuals in Toronto and their families.

Phone: 416-408-4357

Website: www.dcogt.com

For youth, nationally, 13% of those 18 to 24 years reported considering suicide in the previous three months in April 2021 in the MHRC data, compared to 9% of those aged 24 to 44 years, and 7% of those 45 to 54 years of age.

In the Greater Toronto Area, 15% of youth reported considering suicide in the previous three months. Given the chronically underfunded nature of youth mental health, with Children's Mental Health Ontario noting that even before the pandemic, it had rapidly growing wait-lists for services, and many were waiting years for intensive counselling, these numbers show the need for significant increases in support for youth.

The disproportionate financial difficulties of youth during the pandemic are covered on the section starting on page 32 noting two-thirds of youth in Toronto were worried about making ends meet during the pandemic, while the disproportionate unemployment challenges for youth, and particularly racialized youth, are covered further on page 49.

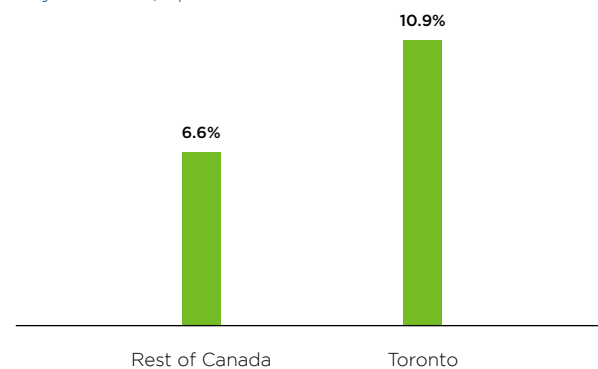
The extent of the mental health challenges for school-aged children and youth is covered in more depth in the Learning section on page 95, showing alarming increases in mental health challenges in this population.

While sample sizes were too small to analyze in Toronto, national data for LGBTQ2S+ respondents to MHRC's April 2021 poll showed particularly high rates of thinking about suicide in the previous three months (16.8% of LGBTQ2S+ respondents nationally thought about suicide in the previous three months versus 6.3% of non-LGBTQ2S+ respondents), revealing the disproportional burden the pandemic has placed on this community.

Self-reported self-harm and substance use have also soared as result of mental health challenges,¹³ and this is coinciding with an unprecedented surge of overdose deaths. The opioid crisis is covered in more depth on page 128.

Percentage that have thought about suicide in the last three months

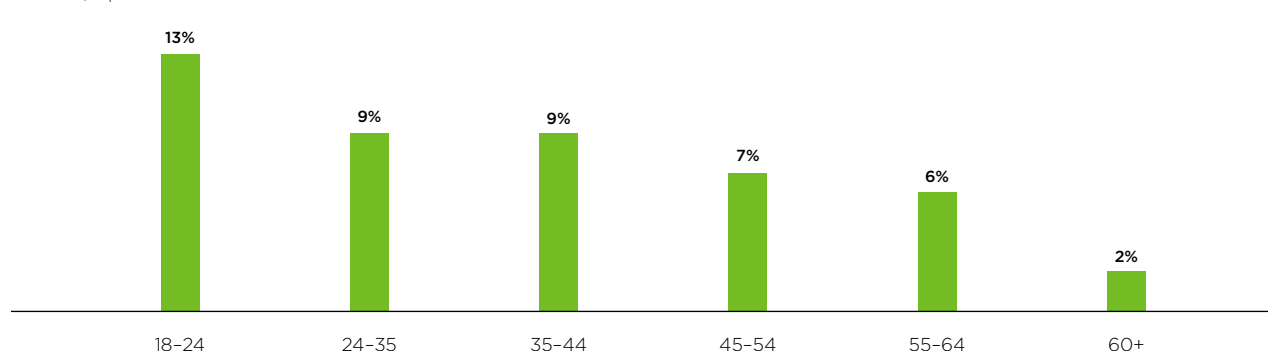
City of Toronto, April 2021



Source: Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC). All analysis by the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of MHRC.

Percentage that have thought about suicide in the last three months

Canada, April 2021



Source: Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC). All analysis by the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of MHRC.

Note: Due to small sample sizes by age, this data reflects Canada-wide data.

FOOD BANK USAGE AT RECORD HIGHS

June 2021 was the busiest month for food bank usage in the history of the Daily Bread Food Bank, with a staggering 124,200 visitors to the Daily Bread Food Bank in Toronto, an 82% increase in visitors over the average monthly visitors in 2019, when visits were about 68,000 (see chart for additional details).¹⁴ Daily Bread supports 200 food service organizations in Toronto.

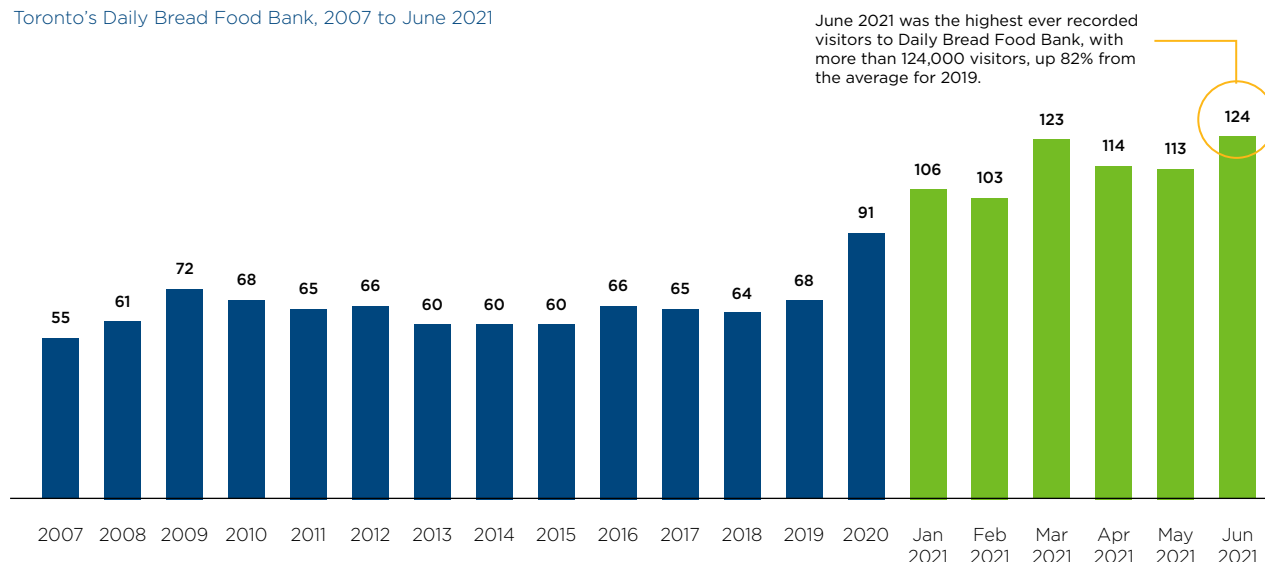
Despite the sense that things are getting better and returning to normal, new records for food bank visitors keep being set during the pandemic, with January 2021, March 2021, and June 2021 each setting new records for the number of visitors.

“Food poverty is something that is very, very much in our face and it’s very impactful in negative ways when people are hungry,” emphasizes Jacqueline Dwyer, founder and farmer at Toronto Black Farmers and Growers Collective. “Food is a problem for everybody in our community — that’s the reality.”

With no recent studies available estimating food insecurity, food bank statistics remain the most accurate way to understand the extent of hunger in the city. Statistics Canada did study the broader food insecurity topic early in the pandemic and found food insecurity increased by 40% in May 2020 versus its previous estimate.¹⁵

Average food bank visitors (thousands)

Toronto's Daily Bread Food Bank, 2007 to June 2021



Source: Daily Bread Food Bank via City of Toronto's Progress Portal.¹⁶

Notes: Calculations by the author. This data excludes information from North York Harvest Food Bank, which is included in food bank user calculations reported in the annual Who's Hungry Report, the next of which will be published in November 2021, but was not available through the portal. Data from the Salvation Army network of food banks is also excluded.

“It’s hard to predict, but I am absolutely concerned that food bank visits and food insecurity are not going to go down,” says Talia Bronstein, vice-president of research and advocacy at Daily Bread Food Bank. “We know from the last recession that food bank usage didn’t actually peak until two years later, because people have other coping mechanisms before they turn to emergency food banks, like tapping into savings and borrowing from friends and family...or turning to predatory loans and credit cards.”

Combined data from Daily Bread Food Bank and the North York Harvest Food Bank also underscores the long-term consequences of economic disruptions.¹⁷ Across Toronto, the level of food bank visits increased significantly after the 2008 recession and never decreased back to the pre-recession level.

Disruptions to school nutrition programs also played a key role in driving hunger across the city, with certain school districts experiencing alarming rates of food insecurity, a topic covered further on page 102.

COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS PLAY A KEY ROLE

Charities and nonprofits often provide front-line mental health support, but funding changes (discussed further on page 67) are presenting challenges for some important organizations: “Proven non-clinical mental health interventions and community-building programs like ours are in great need, but the crisis has suspended, delayed, or diverted support and put organizations like ours at risk,” says a respondent from one organization who asked to remain anonymous.

“Our mobile clinic has been an amazing tool during the pandemic to help support our community throughout the city,” adds Harvey Manning, director of programs at Anishnawbe Health Toronto, an Indigenous health centre. “Our mobile health clinic has been going to buildings, and out in Etobicoke and Scarborough bringing a doctor to people in the community. And there’s a big push right now on youth vaccination, and Anishnawbe Health is a big part of that and the mobile clinic has been instrumental to reach those who need it.” Anishnawbe Health Toronto has also been raising funds for a new hub to locate all of its services in one place, in concern with other Indigenous agencies, a topic discussed further on the section starting on page 67.

The spiralling food crisis in Toronto has affected countless nonprofits in the city. Money that used to be allocated to programming has been redirected to ensure that people have enough food. Utcha Sawyers, executive director of the Boys & Girls Club of East Scarborough, explains how this affected her organization: “Our board of directors recently adopted a new framework that makes food security one of the service pillars that they will provide on an ongoing basis.”

The ability of the nonprofit sector to adapt in responding to the increased demand for food was a constant theme in interviews. Throughout the pandemic, libraries, community centres, recreational hubs, and offices were converted into emergency food hampers, while many organizations organized delivery services to ensure their homebound participants had the food they needed.

INCREASED INCOME SUPPORTS NEEDED TO REDUCE LONG-TERM FOOD INSECURITY

While the work of charities has provided much-needed emergency food support, the sector experts we spoke to routinely referenced this as a “Band-Aid solution.”

Proof, a leading research authority on food insecurity, explains in an article on its website: “Policy decisions further entrench food charity as Canada’s main response to this serious public health problem despite there being no evidence that food charity can move households out of food insecurity.”¹⁸

According to Proof, income support is the only way to address the broader food insecurity problem. As evidence of the potential, Valerie Tarasuk, one of the lead researchers involved with Proof, published a study in December 2019 showing that the Canada Child Benefit program reduced severe food insecurity by about one-third. She concluded that “our findings also indicate that food insecurity may be affected by even modest changes to economic circumstance, speaking to the potential of income transfers to help people meet their basic needs.”¹⁹ Income transfers include any program that provides support from the government to individuals.

The rising cost of housing in Toronto is also a factor in the ever-growing reliance on emergency food assistance. Bronstein says that “until we have affordable housing options for folks, we are always going to be falling further and further behind on food insecurity.” The affordability crisis in Toronto is covered further in our chapter on Housing, on page 151, but it is essential to note the findings of a Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) survey of landlords that found that 11% of units were behind on rent as of October 2020, up from what some estimate is about 1% normally (see page 148), while the same chapter notes increases in homelessness in the first two months post the eviction ban lifting in early June 2021 (see page 148).

“Our government on all three levels — federal, provincial, and municipal — need wiser food sovereignty plans,” says Dwyer of the Toronto Black Farmers and Growers Collective. “We need to see planning. We need them coming into the communities and seeing what the impacts are when people don’t have access to healthy, affordable, culturally relevant, seasonal, locally grown food.” The organization works with local leaders to ensure that food-poor and food-insecure individuals have access to fresh, locally grown produce.

Bronstein describes the current rate of support for Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability program as “unconscionable.” She explains that “individuals are already behind on their budget the day the month starts, just paying their rent.”

Nearly 30% of Black (29%) and Indigenous (28%) households are food insecure, almost three times higher the rate of white households (11%), according to the Household Food Insecurity in Canada 2017/2018 report.

“If you come and join me for one day, one week, you will definitely change the way you think about the world” says Keith McCrady, executive director of 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations, an organization that has delivered groceries to people throughout the pandemic, in addition to providing their core services. “We know that people don’t have access to healthy food, so we make sure that they have healthier options. We know that people don’t have access to the simple things that so many of us take for granted.”

As organizations like 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations address challenges such as hunger and availability of culturally appropriate and healthy food for the 2-Spirited community, long-time advocate Kenn Richard is trying to build out the broader idea of sovereignty for Indigenous community members in all aspects of their wellbeing. Richard, lead consultant of the *Toronto Aboriginal Research Project* study 2, says “there’s been tremendous growth in the Indigenous community over the past decade in terms of growth, not just population-wise, but also the Indigenous structures to maintain and sustain community with the belief that control over some of the institutions that dominate our lives is one of the prerequisites of establishment of a viable and sustainable community. So, we’re resting on broader principles, going forward. And one of them is sovereignty. And I don’t mean that in a ‘we’re going to raise our own flag,’ but [there’s] a lot more autonomy than has generally and historically been provided in terms of the development of the community.”

Anan Lololi, co-founder and executive director of Afri-Can FoodBasket, feels some optimism that the attention paid to food-security issues will lead to progress on these racial gaps. He says that “we are now having conversations on Black food sovereignty and are proud to see young adults stepping forward to be more involved in the food movement in Toronto.”

Lololi talks about the organization’s demands for Black food sovereignty, which include support, recognition, and prioritization of the leadership of Black people, Indigenous peoples, and people of colour in the food sector to reverse resource inequities.

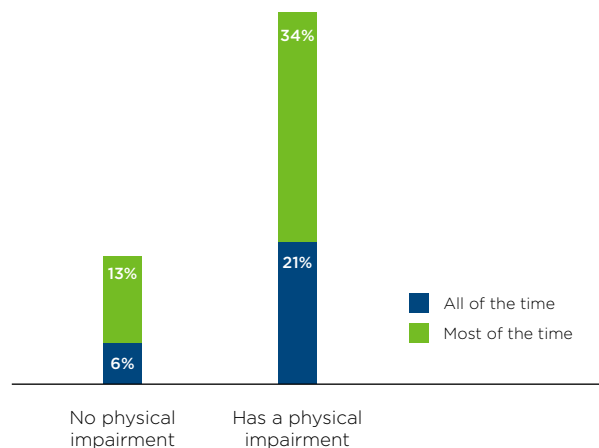
“The only reason why we focus on our own people is because we are always at the bottom of the ladder,” says Noel Livingston, also a founding member of the Toronto Black Farmers and Growers Collective. “We’re the last to be hired and first to get let go, and every funding opportunity open to us is also open to everyone else.”

Dwyer, also a member of the Collective, sees the lack of access to fertile arable land for Black people in Toronto as a “gravely unfair” systemic inequality that leaves her “travelling on Ontario highways across the province, criss-crossing, growing here, growing there, to bring food back to the city.” The Collective’s goals to become a sustainable organization are very specific: “We want access to five acres of arable land and long-term funding, so we can put it in a proper structure and infrastructure, and purchase the right tools and equipment, so we can develop a safe space to feed ourselves and our community. This is a right to our development under the United Nations International Declaration for People of African Descent (2-15-2024).”

DISABILITY A MAJOR FACTOR IN THE PANDEMIC FALLOUT

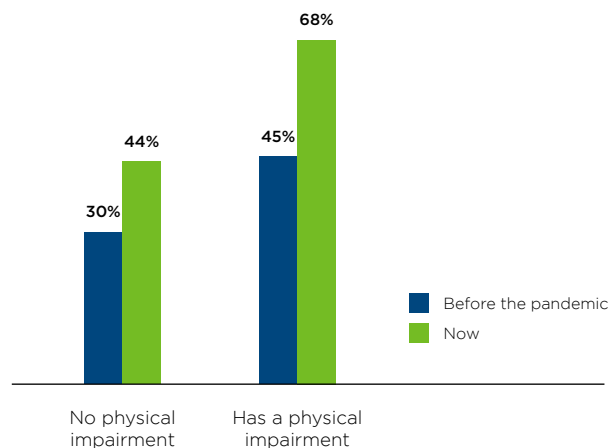
Frequency of feeling depressed in last four weeks

Greater Toronto Area, aggregate data from December 2020 to April 2021



Percentage that worry about making ends meet

Greater Toronto Area, April 2021



Source: Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC). All analysis by the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of MHRC.

Notes: Those with a physical impairment represent 58 respondents for levels of depression and 32 respondents for financial difficulties and should be interpreted with caution. Results are statistically and broadly consistent with national trends for those with physical impairments. Respondents were asked whether they identify as someone with a physical disability, which represents only a fraction of those with a disability.

Data provided by Mental Health Research Canada highlights just one aspect of the challenges faced by people with disabilities.

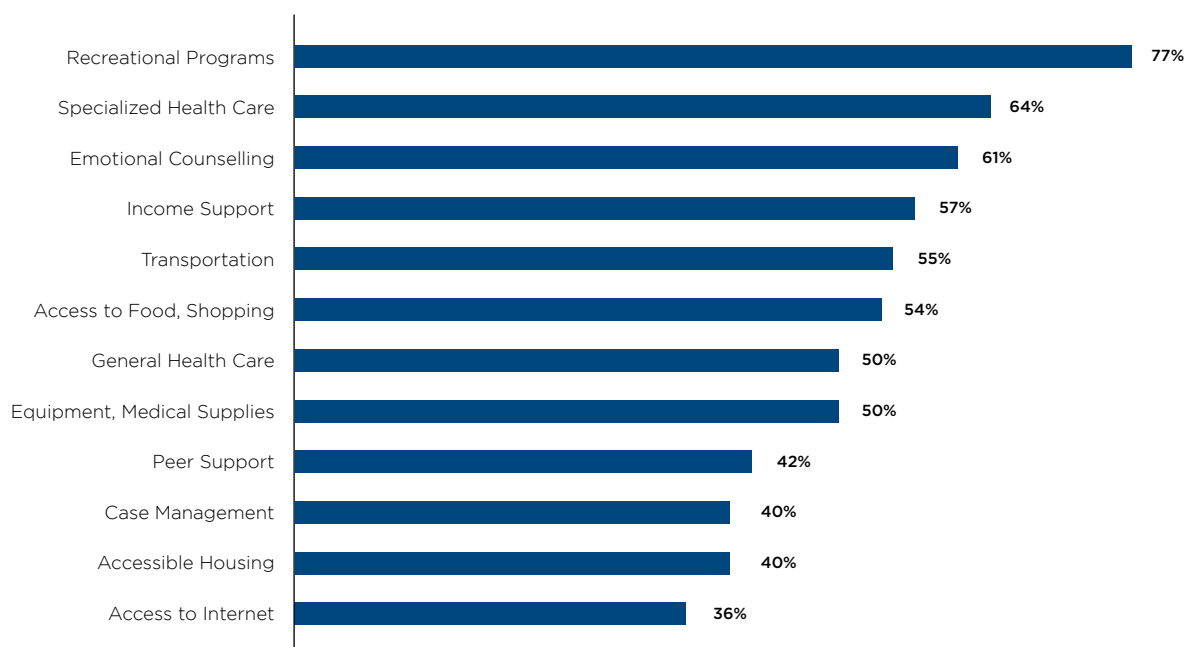
Those with physical disabilities were much more likely to report worrying about making ends meet, both before and after the pandemic. Of those with a physical disability in the GTA, 68% reported worrying about making ends meet after the pandemic, up from 45% before the pandemic (see chart for additional notes). Building off the previous section on mental health, the results show that the mental health challenges for those with physical disabilities are also stark: 55% of those who identified as having a physical disability reported feeling depressed all or most of the time in the previous four weeks in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA), compared to 19% of those without a physical disability from August 2020 to April 2021.

“Even with all of the diversity and inclusion work being done right now, accessibility and disability are often left out,” says Stuart McReynolds, president and CEO of the Abilities Centre, a charitable organization that supports community capacity building in accessibility and which delivers sport and recreation, health and wellbeing, employment services, and other supports to those with and without disabilities.

The Abilities Centre and its partners have recently launched a national initiative to collect ongoing data on people with all types of disabilities. McReynolds explains the need for this work: “About a quarter of the population has a disability, but there is a distinct lack of quality data. We’re finding ways to collect quantitative and qualitative information we can base policy and investment decisions on.”

Needs of people with disabilities

City of Toronto, December 2020



Source: The Abilities Centre provided data from its COVID-19 Disability Survey for respondents in Toronto.

Note: Sample sizes are small (N = 59), so interpret results with caution.

From the survey, the top six most commonly identified needs for people with disabilities were increased access to recreational programs, including those for therapies, specialized healthcare, emotional counselling, income support, transportation, and access to food and shopping.

At least one-third of people with each of these needs reported they were unmet during the pandemic.

The research found that the most common need among those with disabilities was access to recreational programs, identified by 77% of those with disabilities. Just under half felt that this need was met not at all or very little.

McReynolds uses this insight as an illustration of why data is so important: “We used some of the findings from our survey to influence a government decision to permit recreational facilities to open for the purpose of therapy during lockdown.”

“We made use of that and we were able to have people come in and use the facilities for therapeutic purposes. Many of the people we serve who weren’t able to stay active due to lack of supports and access experienced significant negative effects on their overall health and wellbeing during the pandemic. We had folks who could walk three or four laps of our track before the pandemic, who were no longer ambulant when they returned. Recreation and physical activity are actually about health and wellbeing, and the ability to move is critical in positively contributing to quality of life,” he says.

None of this is surprising to Liza Arnason, founder and board chair of the ASE Community Foundation for Black Canadians with Disabilities. “I am sitting here as a woman of colour. And I’ve done the struggle from welfare all the way up to working at the best institutions in Canada and I’m still struggling as a person with disabilities. I worry about the younger people and people my age who don’t have the voice that I have and aren’t getting what they need to be whole.”

The ongoing need for income supports for people with disabilities is another item flagged in the Abilities Centre survey.

In Toronto, a single individual receiving the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) base rate has an income that is 35% below the poverty line.²⁰ Based on current costs, the \$1,169 someone received monthly in 2020 for ODSP was not adequate to rent a vacant bachelor apartment, let alone buy food, transportation, medicine, or other essential accommodations. The topic of income supports for those with disabilities is further explored on page 39.

Similarly, with 54% of people with disabilities struggling with access to food and shopping, as noted in the chart from the Abilities Centre data, both due to income and transportation challenges, it should be unsurprising that, in 2020, the Daily Bread Food Banks survey of users found that 38% of food bank users were receiving ODSP, more than 10 times the rate you'd expect in the population (3.6% of Ontario's population receives ODSP).

Even as the pandemic has been devastating for communities with disabilities, both McReynolds and Arnason see a faint silver lining.

"For many individuals with disabilities, the labour market has opened up due to remote work opportunities and improved technology," says McReynolds. "Tools like Zoom and Microsoft Teams that embed captioning free of charge or at a small cost make it easier for many persons with disabilities to participate in new environments."

"Before COVID-19, most of us with disabilities were denied working from home. But it makes working easier. It makes a big difference," says Arnason. "Now we can work and we can plan our own schedule all day, all the things that we needed in the first place."

But Arnason also thinks the unwillingness of employers to provide this accommodation to people with disabilities prior to this is emblematic of a broader lack of focus on the needs of those with disabilities.

"Throughout the early months of the pandemic we have witnessed organizations restructure entire business models and staffing arrangements that fast-tracked new policies and procedures that allowed employees to work remotely," says Luke Anderson, executive director of the StopGap Foundation, an organization whose mission is to help communities discover the benefit of barrier-free spaces and providing support to create them. "It is incredibly important that organizations build on this restructuring in an effort to empower people with disabilities that have been left out of the employment market because of antiquated organizational systems and processes. To revert back to old ways of doing things would be detrimental to giving a very talented and untapped group of people the opportunity to reach their full potential."

“



”

"It's frustrating for people with disabilities who have been fighting for accommodations for decades. Now that able-bodied people need it, everybody's got it."

LIZA ARNASON

*Founder and Board Chair, ASE Community Foundation
for Black Canadians with Disabilities*

For philanthropists and funders, Arnason adds that “it would be great if money can be set aside for people with disabilities, like it has been for Black-led organizations.” She points to the need for supports for awareness building and opportunities to grow, too, through leadership opportunities. “We can manage, we can sit on boards, we can run boards, but there’s no money for us to be accommodated.”

McReynolds offers advice relevant to all organizations across sectors: “When it comes to new strategies or programs, start with accessibility. We cannot let people with disabilities be an afterthought. If we start our design with accessibility and build up from there, that’s not just for disabled people, it’s a universal design approach with universal benefits for everyone. If we can influence key accessibility principles in the design of projects, facilities, programs, and services, this is going to get so much further than we’ve ever been in the past.”



5 KEY FINDINGS LINKING DENTAL SERVICES TO QUALITY OF LIFE

1. Dental care has seen greater inflation than nearly any other category of good or service: in the last 20 years, dental care has been growing at twice the rate of inflation (81% versus 41%).
2. Employment status drives dental insurance: 75% of full-time employees, 58% of part-time employees, 43% of the self-employed, and 29% of the unemployed have access to dental insurance. Only 16% of seniors over the age of 80 have coverage.
3. The working poor fall between eligibility cracks: less than a third of those with household income in the 10th to 20th percentile of income have any form of dental insurance, with incomes too high to qualify for social assistance, jobs too precarious to receive dental coverage, and incomes too low to afford dental care. Almost one in five (18%) of severely food insecure Ontarians report finding it often uncomfortable to eat due to problems with their mouth, a rate five times higher than food-secure individuals.
4. Many marginalized populations have lower rates of dental coverage, and those include new immigrants, seniors, racialized individuals, low-income residents, food-insecure individuals, residents in certain neighbourhoods (particularly in the northwest and northeast), and Indigenous peoples.
5. Low rates of coverage for Indigenous residents are highly concerning: only 54% of Indigenous adults in Toronto rate their oral health as good, very good, or excellent, compared to 85% of Canadian adults. About half of Indigenous adults have seen a dentist in the last year, compared to three quarters of Canadian adults. Poor oral health in Indigenous populations is concerning considering the link between poor oral health and other health issues such as diabetes, heart disease, and respiratory ailments that disproportionately impact Indigenous communities.

Toronto Foundation partnered with Green Shield Canada to research access to dental care in the city and its impact on overall wellbeing.

We know that oral inflammation is associated with heart disease, growing evidence links tooth pain and depression, and employment outcomes are worse for those with poor oral health. Further, tooth pain can reduce productivity, educational outcomes, and general quality of life. Read the rest of the report at: torontofoundation.ca/publications.

PRIORITIES FOR DONORS, FUNDERS AND POLICYMAKERS

01

Expand community-led crisis and peer-support services to help with the long-term mental health consequences of the pandemic.

02

Invest in a resilient food infrastructure (food hubs, co-ops, community gardens, etc.) that allows communities to have more sovereignty over food growth and access, particularly Black and Indigenous communities.

03

Ensure ongoing and sufficient income supports that could reduce or eliminate food insecurity.

04

Support sustainable community-driven programming that will facilitate connection and community building as the pandemic subsides.

05

Advocate for the broader adoption of universal design principles into program and project creation and improvement.

06

When funding programs, provide additional resources to support the cost for accommodations to include people with disabilities within a broader, intersectional framework aimed at reducing systemic barriers to participation.

TIPS FOR ENGAGED TORONTONIANS

01

Prioritize donating money to food banks rather than non-perishable items, so they can determine what culturally appropriate food is suitable and in demand and can allocate their resources best on additional programming and/or advocacy.

02

If you want to support mental health and wellbeing, remember that community organizations offering peer-to-peer support, as well as recreational, cultural, and holistic programming, are an important component of the supportive healthcare system, particularly for Indigenous communities.

03

Some of the most effective community-based health organizations recognize the intersectionality of health, meaning that they work at the crossroads of health and other issues, i.e., gender, sexuality, race, immigration status, disability, etc. A varied approach that accounts for the unique needs of different population groups is critical to positive health outcomes.



2

The Issue

INCOME AND WEALTH

Income inequality has long been a dominant theme in *Toronto's Vital Signs* reports. The experience of the pandemic has taken this pre-existing condition to places never before imagined.

Headlines from 2021 about unprecedented growth in housing prices and that “Canadians built a \$2 trillion ‘wall of wealth’ during the pandemic: and it’s not just housing” are intermingled with stories about how 11% of Toronto residents are behind on rent, and food bank usage at Daily Bread Food Bank has soared to the highest level ever, as of June 2021. During the pandemic, the gap between the richest and the poorest has intensified in new ways.

When the Government of Canada introduced the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) in March 2020, the press release stated: “No Canadian should have to choose between protecting their health, putting food on the table, paying for their medication or caring for a family member.” Sadly, this aspiration has fallen short when it comes to many Toronto residents living on social assistance and low income.

The unequal impacts of the pandemic underlined the racialization of poverty in Toronto. Low-income workers who are more often racialized have not yet recovered their pre-pandemic working hours, and the situation is worse in Toronto than the rest of the country. And for those on social assistance and unable to work, there was no relief. On the other hand, the pandemic was only a blip on the income levels of wealthy and mostly white Canadians, who quickly recovered any lost hours and have seen the value of their stock portfolios and houses soar.



OBSTACLES

- Total hours worked by those making less than \$17.25 per hour in Toronto were still 20% lower in August 2021 versus February 2020, while workers making more than \$35.65 were working more hours, contributing to widening inequalities; this reflects a lack of significant progress for low-income workers recovering pre-pandemic working hours from decreases earlier in the pandemic.
- The pandemic led to the highest-ever increase in net worth of Canadians, with more than \$1.8 trillion in net worth added from the beginning of 2020 until the first quarter of 2021, but \$1.7 trillion of the increase went to homeowners, leaving renters falling further behind.
- About a quarter (26%) of adult Toronto residents said their income was insufficient in late 2020, representing about 650,000 people, up from 21% in 2018.
- Social services charities have seen huge surges in demand, and while revenue has increased slightly leading to somewhat higher capacity, that capacity has not increased anywhere near as fast as demand for services.



OPPORTUNITIES

- Government emergency financial assistance raised the floor for income redistribution and sets a standard that can be applied to ensuring that the needs of those who are being marginalized the most are better addressed going forward, a subset of the population virtually ignored through CERB and Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS).
- The pandemic time has meant unprecedented growth in wealth for some, sparking a rethink of social policy and philanthropic norms.
- COVID-19 economic recovery plans are calling for an overhaul of the financial systems that have resulted in significant and growing inequality.

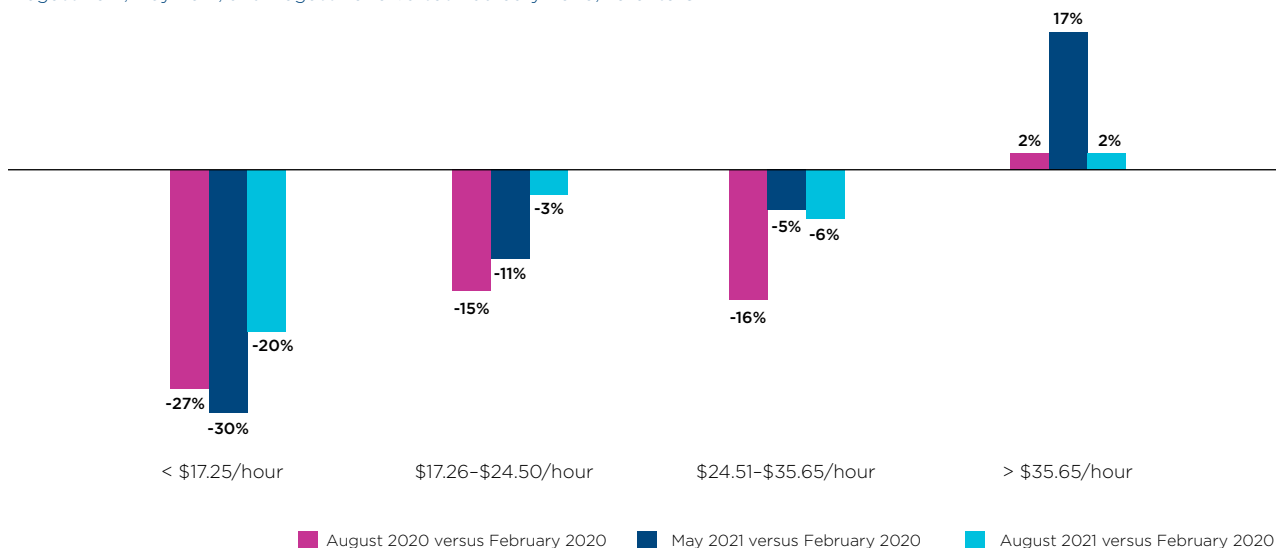
LOW-INCOME WORKERS HARDEST HIT

As of August 2021, lower-wage hourly workers in Toronto are still working significantly fewer hours compared to February 2020. People making less than \$17.25 per hour worked 20% fewer hours in August 2021 compared to February 2020. This is an improvement from May 2021 and August 2020, when they had lost 27 to 30% of their total hours. Workers earning between \$17.26 and \$35.65 per hour have seen bigger improvements since earlier in the pandemic, though hours remain slightly lower than versus February 2020.

Higher-wage earners (making more than \$35.65) had already recovered all the hours they had lost by August 2020. As of August 2021, these workers were working 2% more hours than in February 2020, down from 17% more hours in May 2021, possibly signalling increased holidays over the summer or reduced overtime required due to the pandemic. It is possible that at least some of this impact is due to increased a relatively small group across the population based on the distributions.

Change in total actual hours worked, by usual hourly wages

August 2021, May 2021, and August 2020 versus February 2020, Toronto CMA



Source: Labour Force Survey Public Use Microdata File.

Notes: The hours are total hours worked at all jobs, and the numbers are not seasonally adjusted. Calculations by the author.

The situation for low-income workers in Toronto is worse than in the rest of the country. Whereas low-income workers in Toronto worked 20% fewer hours in August 2021 compared to February 2020, low-income workers in the rest of the country worked only 1% fewer hours.

Middle-income workers in Toronto are doing slightly worse than the rest of the country with larger declines in hours but the difference is small versus the lowest income workers. Higher-income workers in the Toronto CMA have increased their hours slightly more than the rest of the country.

It is worth noting that Toronto has experienced much higher unemployment rates than the rest of the country (see page 46).

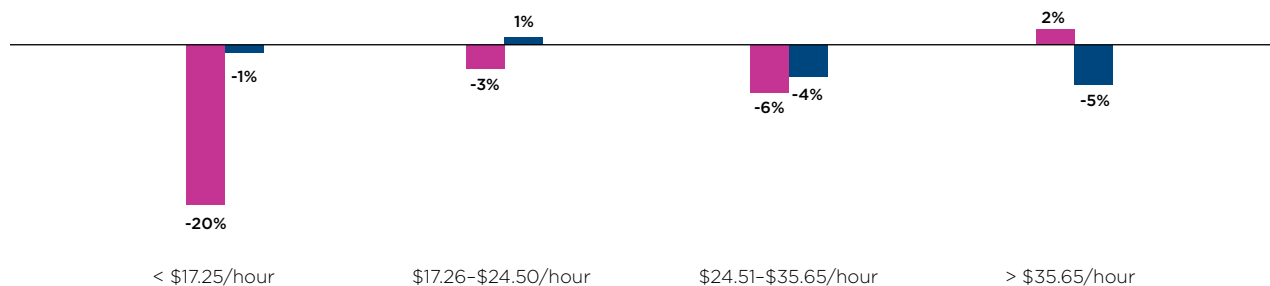
Self-reported levels of depression were also particularly high for low-income households in Toronto during the pandemic, a topic covered further on the section starting on page 12.

Higher-income workers in Toronto are the only group doing better than the rest of the country, which again highlights the city's inequality.

Change in total actual hours worked, by usual hourly wages

Toronto CMA versus Canada, August 2021 versus February 2020

Toronto CMA Rest of Canada



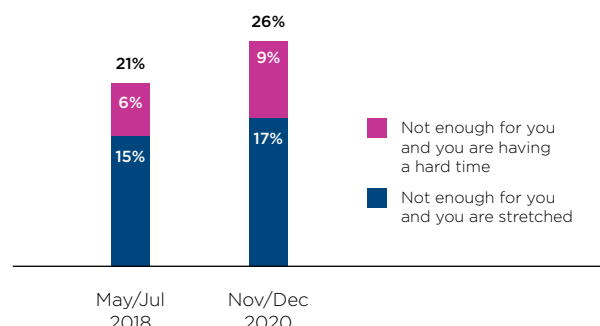
Source: Labour Force Survey Public Use Microdata File.

Notes: The hours are total hours worked at all jobs, and the numbers are not seasonally adjusted. Calculations by the author.

GROWING DIFFICULTY MAKING ENDS MEET DURING THE PANDEMIC

Perceptions of income inadequacy among residents

City of Toronto, 2018 versus 2020



Sources: The 2018 Toronto Social Capital Survey and 2020 data from the November/December 2020 Survey of Employment and Skills, by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, the Diversity Institute, and the Future Skills Centre.

Note: The May–July 2018 sample size was 3,207 adults over the age of 18, while the November/December 2020 survey included 487 respondents.

In 2018, Toronto Foundation and partners released the first survey of social capital in the city. At that point, 21% of Toronto residents reported that their income was not enough. By November or December 2020, data provided by the Environics Institute, the Future Skills Centre, and the Diversity Institute showed that 26% of Toronto residents reported their income was not enough, a five-point increase, with the majority of the increase coming from those struggling the most.

This represents about 650,000 adult residents in the city of Toronto in late 2020 saying their income was inadequate, an increase of about 140,000 from 2018.

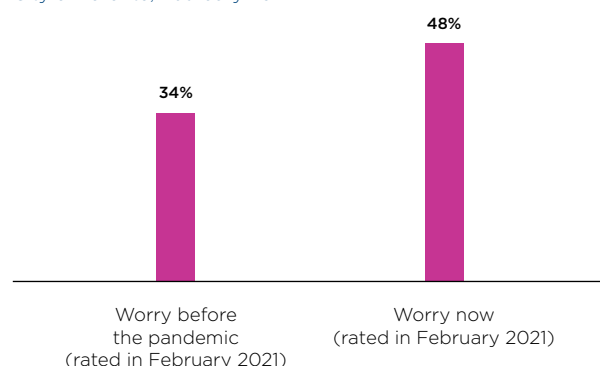
While government support programs were significant, many unemployed were not eligible for CERB governments support programs.

For example, the Environics Institute data provided to us shows that only 34% of Canadians who said they were unemployed indicated that they had received the CERB or the Canada Recovery Benefit in November and December 2020, and 51% of the unemployed said they received none of the government's emergency support benefits.

We discuss in the Health and Wellness chapter how the Daily Bread Food Bank has reported record visits to its food banks (page 19), with June 2021 having more than 80% more visitors than the average across 2019.

Worried about making ends meet

City of Toronto, February 2021



Source: Data provided by Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC).

Note: All analysis by the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of MHRC. People rated their worry before the pandemic in February 2021 and may not be accurately recalling their previous situation.

Considering that the labour underutilization rate (unemployment and those who are working less than half their normal hours or who have given up looking for work) doubled from about 10.6% of the population in February 2020 to 20.9% of the population in May 2021 in the Toronto Region (see discussion on page 46), this shows how important government supports were at keeping more people from struggling. It is important to note that surveys like these are often deficient in capturing the experience of marginalized populations and as a result tend to underestimate how many people are struggling.

Other data provided by Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC) from February 2021 shows that many are worried about making ends meet, including 48% of those in Toronto, up from 34% who said the same prior to the pandemic.

Statistics Canada tracked the percentage of people who reported it was “difficult” or “very difficult” to make ends meet through the Labour Force Survey each month from the onset of the pandemic. In April 2020, 21% of respondents indicated it was difficult to make ends meet. By February 2021, the most recent month with data, 20% of people said it was difficult to make ends meet. The indicator never went above 22% and never went below 20%.²¹ It does not break out data for Toronto, so it difficult to directly contrast this data with the other surveys, which do have information for Toronto.

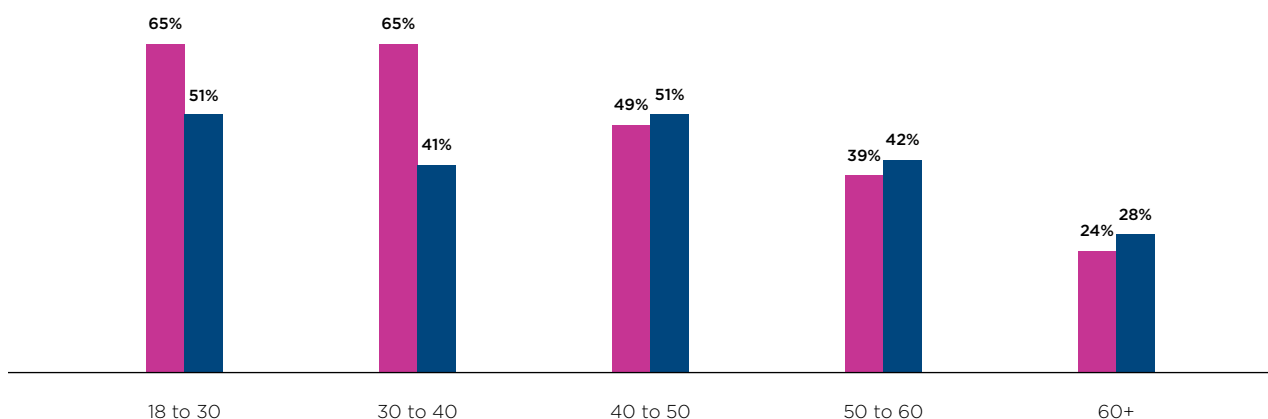
Anna Victoria Wong, executive director of Community Family Services of Ontario, describes the challenges for many in their community: “A typical newcomer ethnic family would be a multi-generational household. The sandwich generation would be the money-making generation, so they need to take care of the seniors and they need to take care of those school-aged kids, when their youth are children. They have a maximum two jobs covering the whole family. During the pandemic, one of them might have lost a job, the other might have had hours reduced. So, you have half a job to sustain a whole family of three generations.”

Confusingly, despite skyrocketing unemployment rates, increases in rental arrears (see page 148), increased food bank usage, and huge decreases in working hours for the lowest income households, Statistics Canada released estimates saying that the lowest income households across Canada saw a substantial increase in disposable income in 2020 versus 2019 (17%).²² The predominant explanation was an increase in government transfers that was larger than lost wages. It is entirely possible that those who received government benefits ended up with much more income than they would have earned in a typical year, while those who did not receive the benefits ended up in a much worse financial situation, though clearly more exploration will be needed to understand the financial consequences of the pandemic. Still, it is worth keeping in mind insights like those from the Environics Institute survey data provided to us and noted earlier in the chapter, where about half (51%) of the unemployed in November and December 2020 reported they did not receive any of the government’s emergency support programs.

Worried about making ends meet

City of Toronto versus rest of Canada, February 2021

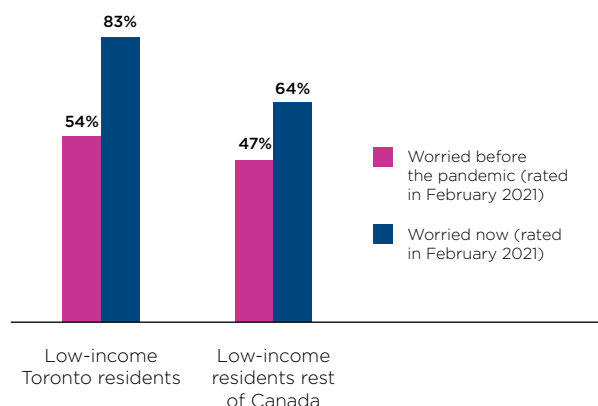
City of Toronto Rest of Canada



Source: Data provided by Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC). All analysis by the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of MHRC.

Worried about making ends meet now versus before the pandemic, residents with income below \$30,000

Toronto versus Canada, February 2021



Source: Data provided by Mental Health Research Canada (MRHC). All analysis by the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of MHRC. Note: Sample sizes are small so differences should be interpreted with caution.

Many people (83%) living in Toronto making under \$30,000 annually are worried about making ends meet according to data from MHRC for February 2021, up from 54% before the pandemic (see chart; note that they were asked to rate their worry about making ends meet before the pandemic during the February 2021 survey). In the rest of Canada, 64% of low-income residents are worried about making ends meet, up from 47% from before the pandemic. This is another indicator of how low-income residents in Toronto have been hit hard by the pandemic, and that the high costs of living in the city mean they are struggling more than people in the rest of the country.

Nearly two-thirds of people under the age of 40 (65%) are worried about making ends meet in Toronto, according to MHRC data, which is higher than young people in the rest of Canada (51% for those 18 to 30 and 41% for those 30 to 40). On the other hand, people over 40 in Toronto are not more worried about making ends meet than people over 40 in the rest of Canada, which shows that Toronto is becoming an increasingly unaffordable and inhospitable place for young people.

Talia Bronstein, vice-president of research and advocacy at Daily Bread Food Bank, spoke to us about the strategies the organization's clients are using to get by: "We know that our clients are using credit cards and payday loans, which is hugely concerning because payday lenders charge enormous interest rates. And that's going to make the recovery a lot harder and slower for these individuals who already have low incomes, and if you add debt into the equation, it's going to make that road to recovery all the longer."

According to the MNP Consumer Debt Index, more than half (53%) of Canadians were within \$200 of financial insolvency in April 2021, up 10% since December 2020 and reaching a five-year high.²³

Adriana Beemans from the Metcalf Foundation also told us of how low-income workers have needed to use their savings during the pandemic: "One of the things I've heard from our community partners is that a lot of low-wage workers have spent all their savings to hold down the fort. There's no going back, and this has dramatically changed their lives. And, so, they will not just return back to normal, they will be in new, uncharted territories."

UNPRECEDENTED WEALTH CREATION FOR SOME CANADIANS

While many Canadians have clearly struggled, others did phenomenally well.

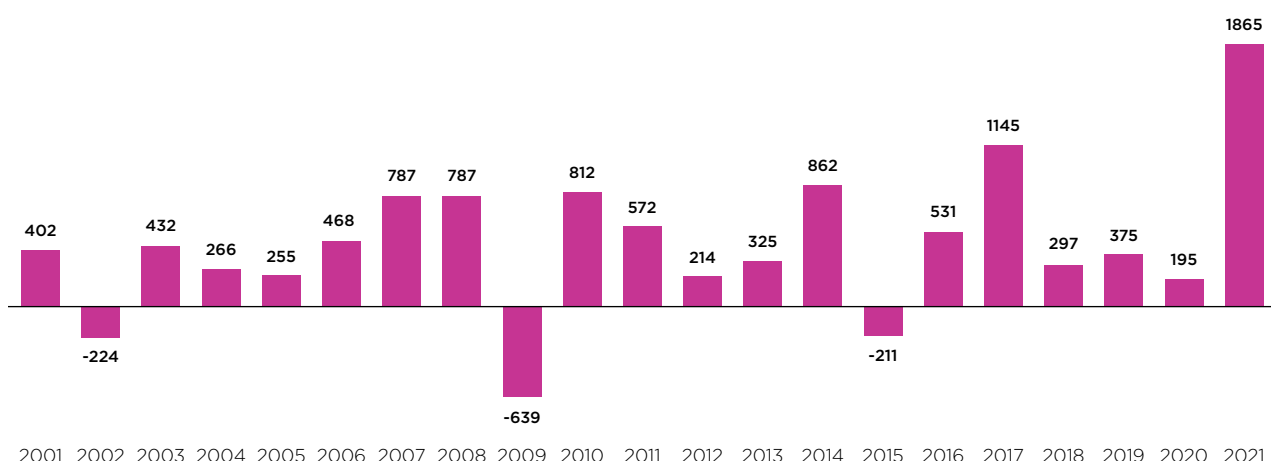
Statistics Canada data shows that the year-over-year change in Canadian net wealth increased more during the one year ending in the first quarter of 2021 than in any year previous, with a \$1.86 trillion increase in net wealth, a 16% increase year over year, the biggest single increase in at least the last 20 years.

The reasons for this are varied, including the easing of COVID-19 restrictions, stock market appreciation, real estate appreciation, low interest rates, and large-scale asset purchases by the Bank of Canada. The increase in the stock market has helped further reinforce inequality both in Toronto and across Canada, as lower-income Canadians are far less likely to be invested in the market and therefore have missed out from the recent gains. As of writing in July 2021, the TSX had increased by 30% since before the pandemic, which has helped the rich get richer.

Homeowners, comprising about 63% of Canadian households, who are also far more likely to own all sorts of financial and non-financial assets reaped almost all of the pandemic-related increase in wealth, with net worth increasing by about \$1.7 trillion over the full year 2020 and the first quarter in 2021 (see chart for notes). Renters, comprising about 37% of the population, added about \$130 billion in net worth over the same time period. The typical household that owns their home added about 10 times more net worth than the typical household that is renting, leaving many younger, immigrant, and racialized Canadians behind.

Year-over-year change in Canadian net wealth (\$ billions)

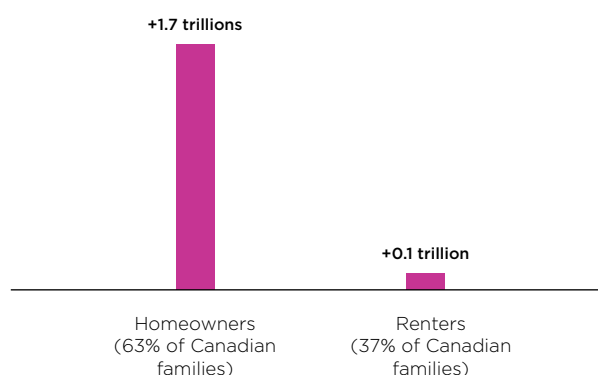
Canada, Q1 2001 to Q1 2021



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 36-10-0580-01 National Balance Sheet Accounts (times 1,000,000). Notes: Wealth is calculated for the year-over-year change in Q1 in each year versus the previous same quarter to get comparable data for the one year of pandemic wealth growth. Calculations by the author.

Increase in Canadian net worth (\$ trillions), by homeownership status

Canada, 2020 through Q1 2021



Sources: Statistics Canada National balance sheet and financial flow accounts,²⁴ fourth quarter 2020 and first quarter 2021.²⁵ Homeownership rates. The 2016 Survey of Financial Security.²⁶

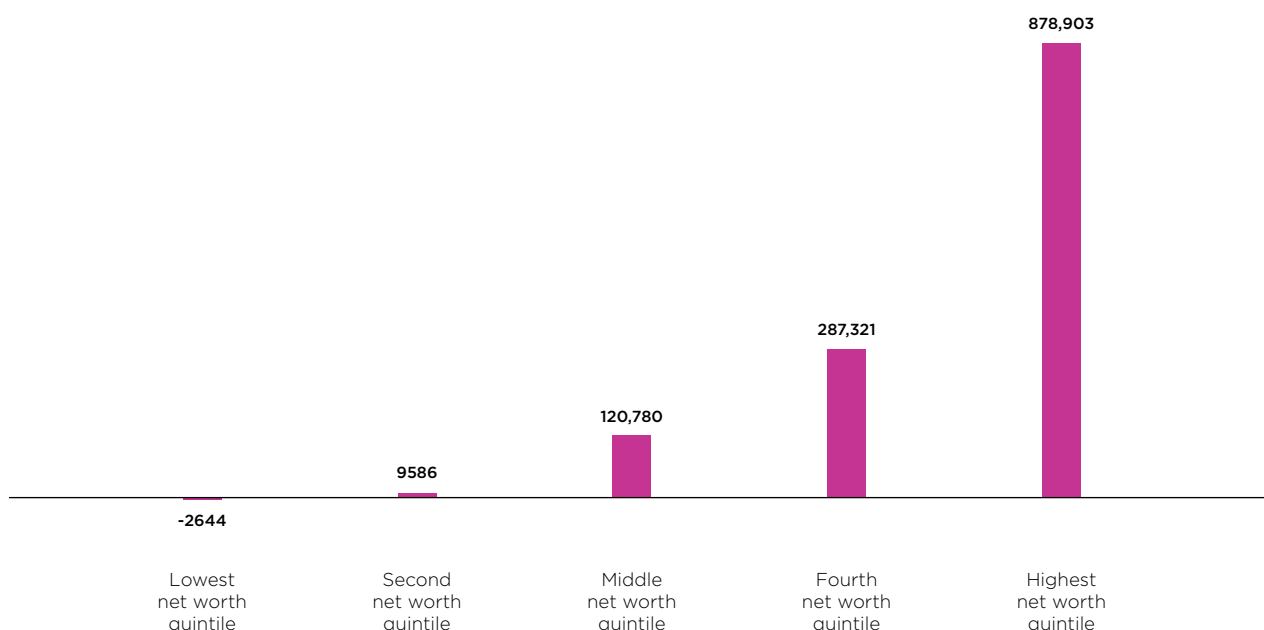
Note: Calculations by the author.

This growing wealth inequality just continues a long-time trend in Toronto. The bottom 20% in Toronto saw their net worth in constant dollars decrease from 2005 to 2019, while those in the top 20% of wealth saw their net worth increase by almost \$900,000 over the same time period (see chart).

With all the focus on inequality in the last year, there has not been enough attention on how recent decades of wealth increases have left certain racialized communities behind. For example, 28% of Black households live in a dwelling owned by a member of the household, compared to 66% of non-racialized residents. In this way, Black residents are significantly less likely to have built real estate wealth.²⁸ This has led to many racialized residents being left out of the wealth boom over the last decade.

Change in average net worth, by wealth quintile, 2019 constant dollars

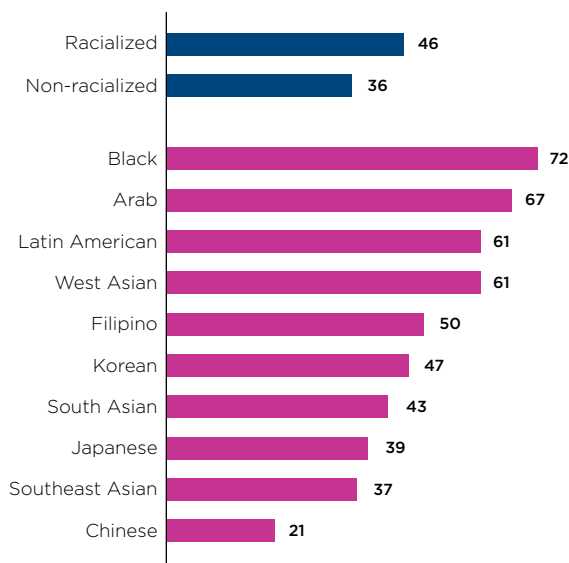
Toronto CMA, 2005 to 2019



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 11-10-0049-01 Assets and debts by net worth quintile, Canada, provinces, and selected census metropolitan areas, Survey of Financial Security (times 1,000,000). Note: Calculations by the author.

Percentage of population living in rented dwellings, by racialized status

City of Toronto, 2016



Source: Spaces and Places of Exclusion: Mapping Rental Housing Disparities for Toronto's Racialized and Immigrant Communities.²⁷

At the same time, those who do not own their home also cannot afford to save for the future. Data from the 2016 Census shows that among households spending less than 30% of their income on housing in Toronto, 93% have a household member who contributed to some form of registered savings plan, either a Tax-Free Savings Account (TFSA) or a Registered Retirement Savings Plan (RRSP), compared to only 39% of those spending 50% or more on housing.²⁹ Clearly, the cost of housing is a major factor in both wealth accumulation and in the ability to build other financial assets.

INCREASED DEMAND EXCEEDS CAPACITY FOR SOCIAL SERVICE NONPROFITS

Most charities across sectors experienced revenue decreases since the pandemic, but many have seen some improvements in 2021 compared to 2020 (as discussed in the Civic Engagement and Belonging chapter).

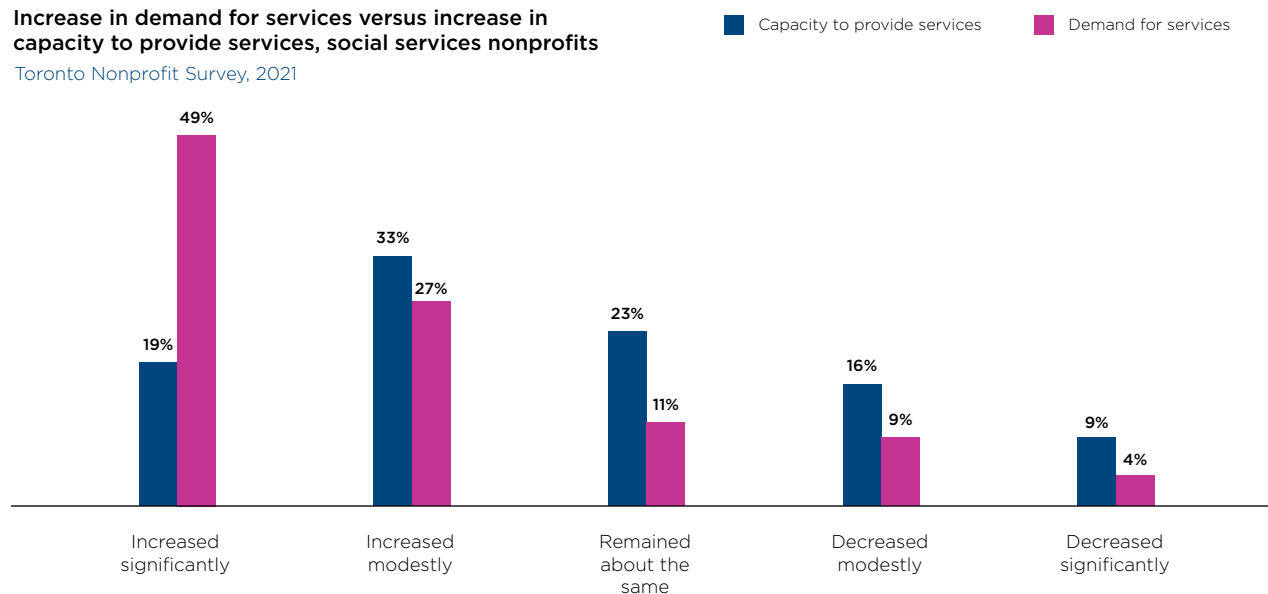
The problem for many social service organizations is that demand for their services has increased far faster than their capacity. Three-quarters (76%) of social service respondents to the Toronto Nonprofit Survey conducted by Toronto Foundation said that demand for their services had increased, and less than half (44%) had seen their revenues increase. Of even more concern is that almost half of respondents (49%) had seen demand increase significantly, but only 19% reported that their capacity had increased significantly.

The increased demand will likely persist for months as low-income workers slowly recover their pre-pandemic hours, if at all, and the unemployed continue to suffer the consequences of pandemic restrictions. Front-lines service agencies will require more resources to scale up their organization to meet pressing needs.

Wong of Community Family Services of Ontario describes the second order effects of the pandemic as a “shadow pandemic,” with “exacerbated mental health, domestic violence, and addictions issues, along with the poverty that comes hand in hand with all of these. What is worrying me is that these issues won’t go away in a few months. The issues will probably last two to three years, at least. But, our resources will go away or may not last as long as the shadow pandemic effects do. So, that puts some families at risk, that puts individuals at risk, and that ties the hands of service providers. There isn’t enough new money coming in. So, that’s what I’m worried about.”

Increase in demand for services versus increase in capacity to provide services, social services nonprofits

Toronto Nonprofit Survey, 2021



Source: The 2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey, conducted by Toronto Foundation. For more details, see the Appendix.

DEFICIENCIES IN PRE-EXISTING INCOME SUPPORTS HIGHLIGHTED BY CERB

A single person considered employable in Toronto receives \$733 per month in social assistance, while a person with a disability receives \$1,169.³⁰ These are both below Toronto's poverty line of \$1,804 and also below the deep poverty line of \$1,353.

On an inflation-adjusted basis, a single person with a disability receives 19% less support than they would have received in 1994, while a single person considered employable receive 28% less than they would have in 1994 despite drastic increases in the cost of rent and housing in Toronto, particularly in recent years (see a further discussion starting on page 151).³¹

CERB and its employment insurance successor, on the other hand, provided people with \$2,000 a month, which kept people above the poverty line. Many CERB recipients were middle-class Canadians with savings, and they were also able to earn up to \$1,000 a month, while still receiving the full CERB payments.

"As someone who received ODSP for a few years following a spinal cord injury, I became familiar with some of the issues related to this important yet problematic program," says Luke Anderson, executive director of the StopGap Foundation, an organization working to create barrier-free spaces. "From my experience the program was not helpful in elevating me to a position of self-sufficiency. I was given a basic monthly income that covered the subsidized housing unit that I was living in at the time, a very limited budget for food, and my medical supplies. I am grateful for the financial support that I received over the four years on ODSP, but I never felt as though the program was intended to help me unlock the gifts that I wanted to contribute to the world. I never felt as if my disability was an asset to society and valued, primarily the opposite.

He adds: "I think that the differences in support payments that we have witnessed throughout the pandemic indicates that not much has changed since I received ODSP support." The severe economic and mental health consequences of the pandemic on those with disabilities is covered further on page 23.

Maytree's Garima Talwar Kapoor explains how those at the bottom of the income spectrum were left out of the pandemic income supports. "The situation that's playing out in Toronto, and the province and in the country writ large, is a story again of inequity. People living in deep poverty, many of whom rely on access to social assistance benefits, have received almost no top-up supports over the past year and a half."

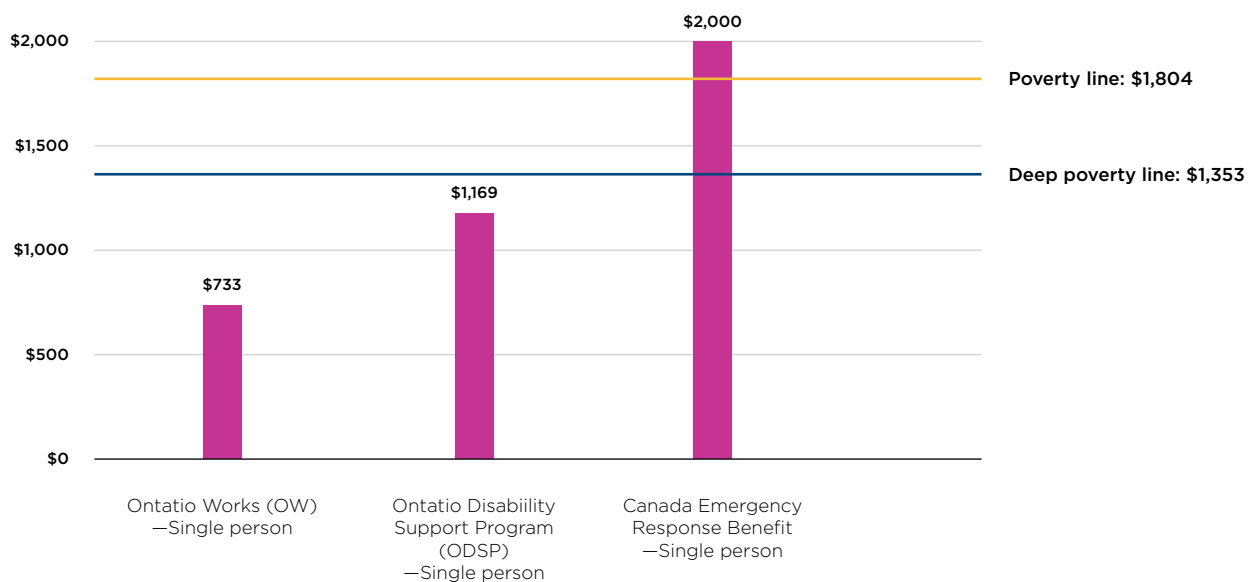


I am grateful for the financial support that I received over the four years on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), but I never felt as though the program was intended to help me unlock the gifts that I wanted to contribute to the world. I never felt as if my disability was an asset to society and valued, primarily the opposite.

LUKE ANDERSON
Executive Director, StopGap Foundation

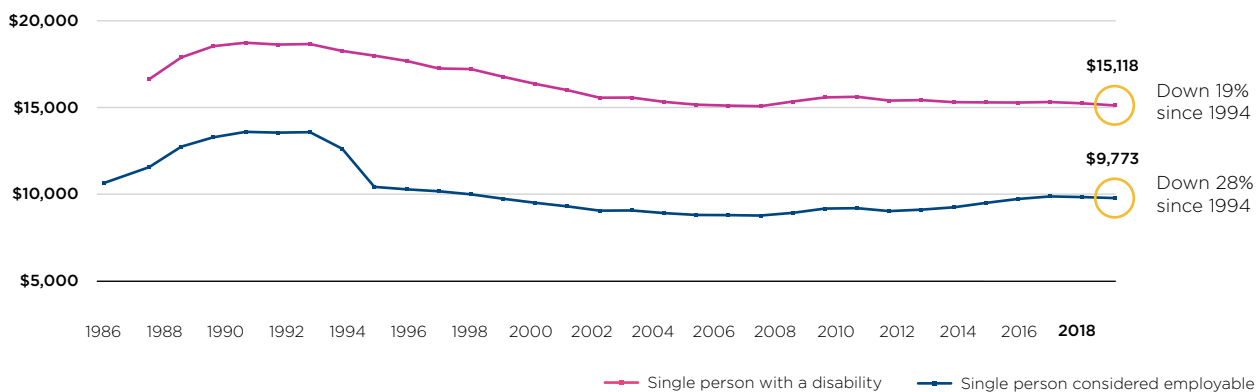
Social assistance and CERB montly rates compared to the poverty line

Toronto, 2020



Source: Who's Hungry Report 2020: Beyond COVID-19: Building a Future Without Poverty by Daily Bread Food Bank and North York Harvest Food Bank.³²

Welfare incomes for single adults in Ontario, 2019 constant dollars



Source: Welfare in Canada 2019 published by Maytree.³³

A September 2020 study from the Institute for Research on Public Policy highlighted that social assistance and other benefits for single individuals living in poverty are far less generous than those for families, which have increased in recent years.³⁴

Social assistance for single individuals in Ontario is down significantly since 1994 and has remained fairly stagnant for the past few years. In 2019 dollars, welfare recipients received \$15,118 in 2019, down 19% from the \$18,659 they would have received in 1994. Support for single people considered employable has dropped even further, with current payments being \$9,773, down 28% from the \$13,575 they would have received in 2019 dollars in 1994. From 2008 to 2020 alone, the rent of a vacant apartment in Toronto has increased by 94%, leaving those on social assistance far behind and completely unable to afford market rents. Further, the Daily Bread Food Bank notes that since 1995,³⁵ inflation, as measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI), shows that food costs have also increased 65% during this period, and fruits and vegetables have increased 143%, making it impossible for Toronto residents living on social assistance to lead healthy lives.

HIGH TIME FOR TAX POLICY REFORM

In the wake of findings like these, a July 2021 poll of Canadians by Abacus Data and commissioned by the Broadbent Institute and the Professional Institute of the Public Service of Canada found that 62% of Canadians describe Canada's tax system as unfair, with only 14% believing it is fair, and with 70% or more thinking that large corporations and wealthy individuals do not pay their fair share of taxes.³⁶

The strong majority (82%) believe that now is the time to tackle this growing wealth inequality, with broad support (87% or higher) for increasing marginal tax rates, implementing a wealth tax and closing tax loopholes, and adding an excess corporate profit tax for businesses with extraordinarily high profits during the pandemic. Support for these policies crossed political affiliation and demographics.

In a 2020 report, the Parliamentary Budget Officer (PBO) estimated that the top 1% of Canadians account for a staggering 25.6% of the country's wealth, and the top 10% account for 56.4%.³⁷ This type of wealth concentration is not new, but it has been getting worse, with only the top 1% increasing their share of the country's wealth between 2010 and 2019, from 17% to 26%.³⁸ The increasing concentration of wealth in the top 1% has led to calls for a wealth tax.

During the last election campaign, both the NDP and Green Party proposed an annual wealth tax of 1% on net wealth above \$20 million, which the PBO estimated would raise \$70 billion over 10 years, and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives estimated a more optimistic \$100 billion.³⁹

According to a 2020 Abacus Data Poll, the idea of a wealth tax on people with more than \$20 million in assets to pay for the costs of the pandemic is extremely popular with Canadians, with about eight in 10 (79%) Canadians favouring the idea, including 35% who strongly favour it. The idea of a wealth tax gets at least 75% support in every region, across all age groups, all levels of educational attainment, and is broadly (73%) supported by households in the top income bracket.⁴⁰ A wealth tax is also supported by a majority of supporters of all the major federal political parties.

Opponents of an annual wealth tax have voiced difficulties in estimating wealth and enforcing compliance on a yearly basis. Another option, as proposed by MP Nathaniel Erskine-Smith, would be to have a one-time wealth tax to help pay for the pandemic, which he argues would be more efficient and fairer. The Library of Parliament estimated that \$70 billion could be raised with a one-time tax of 3% on net wealth over \$10 million, and 5% on net wealth over \$20 million.⁴¹

Another issue not yet addressed is tax evasion. In 2018, the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) estimated that Canadians have hidden up to \$240.5 billion in foreign accounts that they have not declared and are evading up to \$3 billion a year in federal tax on those funds.⁴²

The CRA has been making efforts in recent years to combat tax evasion with increased audits of those with a net worth of at least \$50 million, but recently released data shows that this has resulted in zero prosecutions or convictions, despite more than 6,770 audits over the past six years.⁴³

Leslie Woo, chief executive officer of CivicAction, says of the crisis: “I think 2020 and 2021 have created an enormous opportunity for us as a society, in all sectors, whether private, government, public, or not-for-profit, to really embrace a shift in values. For everyone to do something different and do better and to benefit more people in the region. What I worry about is that we accept the status quo and don’t create change.”

Policy experts have long advocated measures to improve the conditions for those living in poverty and stem growing inequality. Sherri Torjman, social policy consultant and policy associate with Maytree, puts it this way: “We need a reformulation of the country’s patchwork social safety net for working-age adults. In the last few decades, tremendous progress has been made lifting families out of poverty, mainly thanks to decades of improvements to the Canada Child Benefit. However, progress stalled when it came to tackling the complex needs of working-age adults, especially those of singles on social assistance, who are often stuck behind the ‘welfare wall.’ What we need now are three major policy reforms: (1) a redesign of Employment Insurance; (2) an expansion of the Canada Workers Benefit to provide an income guarantee to low-income workers and boost their take-home earnings; and (3) a ‘big bang’ rebuild of all income-support programs. On top of those changes we must provide more diverse, individualized support services for the most vulnerable.” Potential policies improvements for workers are covered further in the section on Work on page 57.

PRIORITIES FOR DONORS, FUNDERS AND POLICYMAKERS

01

Seize the opportunity to reform the tax system, so that the gains of some are shared with those struggling the most. Policy experts have already tabled a range of options from a guaranteed minimum income to a wealth tax and increases to capital gains taxes.

02

Increase social supports to match CERB and bring low-income residents above the poverty line, as recommended by research and public policy findings.

03

Fund the advocacy efforts of groups pushing for universal basic income.

04

Shift from project to unrestricted operating support for social service organizations to meet increased and long-term demand.

TIPS FOR ENGAGED TORONTONIANS

01

Advocate for and support organizations working toward a universal basic income.

02

Consider donating to organizations working with those who are being marginalized the most and hardest-to-reach individuals. Give without restrictions and commit for more than one year.

03

Join a giving circle to increase the impact of your contributions and come together with like-minded people to make change.



3

The Issue

WORK

Even before the pandemic, the experience of work in Toronto was highly unequal. The city is home to some of the highest earners in the country, but low wages and poor labour conditions continue to be the norm for hundreds of thousands of people in the city, many from racialized communities and for recent immigrants, too. In the wake of the previous recession, temporary jobs grew at a rate five times faster than permanent jobs from 2008 to 2018, leaving considerable vulnerability for workers.⁴⁴

The pandemic and the associated lockdowns only further reinforced the existing divides. Whereas high-income workers were easily able to transition to work at home and continued to receive their full salaries, many low-income workers either lost their jobs or had their hours reduced, and in many cases had to continue working in unsafe environments.

Women have disproportionately suffered job losses (especially racialized women), often working in service sectors that have been subject to significant reductions during the pandemic and they have also assumed the majority of childcare

responsibilities that have resulted from school closures due to uneven caregiving. Parents with young children have often had the burden of educating and watching their children while coping with challenging working environments.

There has been some societal appreciation for “essential workers,” the usually low-paid workers who have kept the city running throughout the pandemic. However, despite calls for change, there has been little in the way of concrete policy changes or wage increases to fundamentally improve the lives of these workers.



OBSTACLES

- The August 2021 unemployment rate for the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area was 9.3%, up from 5.4% before the pandemic — increasing by 3.9% from February 2020 while Canada overall only increased by 1.6% — while data from May 2021 for the Toronto economic region showed an additional 10% of the labour force was underutilized.
- As of April 2021, there were 16% fewer women employed in the city of Toronto, compared to February 2020, while men have only seen a 3% decline in employment over the same time period.
- Indigenous, racialized, and younger workers have much higher unemployment rates (with Indigenous workers facing the biggest losses). For those 25–29, unemployment rates are still up by 70% in May 2021 in Ontario versus February 2020, while for those 20–24, unemployment rates were 149% higher. Skyrocketing rates of long-term unemployment raise the question of what the consequences will be for those who have been without work for more than a year, which is traditionally associated with huge risks for mental health, poverty, and labour market outcomes.



OPPORTUNITIES

- Pre-election the federal government committed to bringing childcare costs down to \$10 per day on average within the next five years, which in Toronto would translate to family savings of between \$12,000 and \$20,000 per child per year. The investments in childcare also offer an opportunity to improve the conditions of childcare workers (almost exclusively women) and to make access to childcare more equal across the city, though efforts to open new facilities and attract new workers will be needed to respond to increased demand for services.
- With 84% of people in the province supporting paid sick leave, the time is right to bring these basic employment protections to low-income workers and consider other improvements to labour standards that could have more impact on historically marginalized workers.

TORONTO FACING HIGHEST LABOUR UNDERUTILIZATION RATE IN CANADA

As of July 2021, the City of Toronto has had an unemployment rate of 9.4%, up from 6% in February 2020.⁴⁵ While this is a significant improvement from the peak unemployment rate of 14.4% in August 2020, it reflects relatively little improvement from March 2021 when the unemployment rate was 9.3%, though it showed significant improvement from May when it was 10.4%.

The Toronto Census Metropolitan Area had an unemployment rate of 9.3% in August 2021 on a three-month moving average, the fourth highest among the 36 Census Metropolitan Areas and the second highest among the 15 largest CMAs, and up from 5.4% in February 2020. This equates to an increase of 138,600 additional unemployed residents across the Toronto CMA in August 2021 versus February 2020. Toronto's unemployment rate rose twice as much as the rest of the country during the pandemic (a 3.9 percentage point increase in Toronto versus a 1.6 percentage point increase in Canada overall).⁴⁶

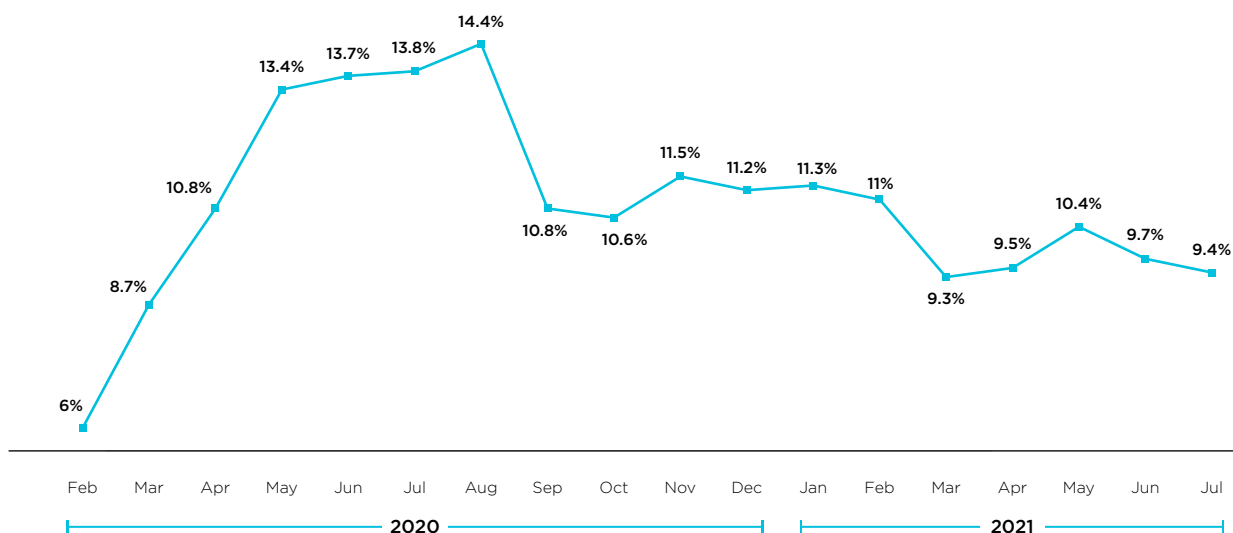
Looking at the broader Toronto Economic Region, more than in one in 10 workers (10.9%) in the Toronto region was unemployed in May 2021, the most recent month for which we had data, up from 5.6% in February 2020, a 95% increase in the unemployment rate since the onset of the pandemic.

But traditional unemployment rates are not telling the full story.

Many people are employed but working only a fraction of their normal hours, while others have given up on searching for a job altogether, though they still want one, meaning they are not included in the unemployment figures, which only count people who are actively looking for work.

City of Toronto's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate

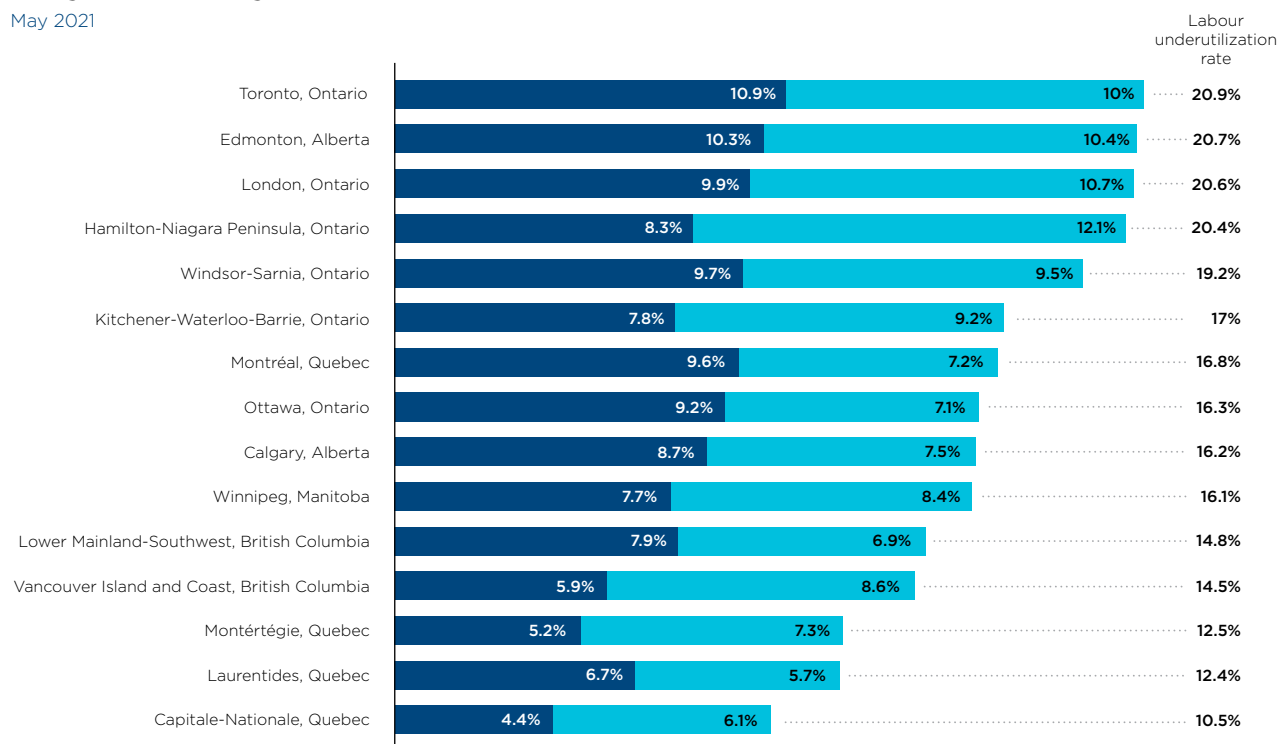
February 2020 to July 2021



Source: Labour Force Survey via Toronto Economic Bulletin.

Select labour force indicators, 15 largest economic regions in Canada

May 2021



Source: Labour Force Survey Supplementary Indicators Tables, accessed via Community Data Program.

This gives rise to the new calculation, the underutilization rate, which combines the unemployment rate with those working less than half their normal hours and those who want a job, but have given up on the labour market, as well as several other barriers to full participation in the labour market.

Toronto had the highest labour underutilization rate of any of the 15 largest economic regions in the country at 20.9% in May 2021, again almost double the rate before the pandemic. For more than a year, Toronto has consistently been among the worst labour markets in the entire country. These unemployed and underemployed workers, many of whom have been underutilized for more than a year, are facing huge risks, with many incurring debts and drawing down savings in ways that will impact them for years to come, a topic covered further on page 32.

There has been surprisingly little improvement in either the labour underutilization rate or the unemployment rates from September 2020 to May 2021 in the Toronto Economic Region, with one in five people consistently out of a job or working less than half of their usual hours.

“PRIVILEGED” WORKERS HAVE BEEN MOSTLY UNAFFECTED BY THE PANDEMIC

It is difficult to discuss the work situation in Toronto without noting the profound inequality of the outcomes on workers. Low-income workers have seen stagnant progress, while high-income workers saw their working hours fully recover by the end of summer 2020. As of August 2021, workers with wages below \$17.25 per hour were working 20% fewer hours while those with wages above \$35.85 per hour were working slightly more total hours than before the pandemic, a topic discussed further on page 30. This overall effect resulted in a significant increase in wage and median wages in the city, with average hourly wages increasing by as much as 8% in July 2021 versus February 2020,⁴⁷ though as an analysis by Statistics Canada noted “the strong wage growth observed from 2019 to 2020 largely reflects the disappearance of low-paid jobs during that period”⁴⁸ and not increased wages for other workers.

“In Toronto, we really have two communities: privileged people who work in secure sectors of the economy, and people who work in the less-stable sectors of the economy (service industry, manufacturing, community addictions and mental health, social services, etc.),” says Robin Griller, executive director of St. Michael’s Homes, an organization providing mental health and addictions support to many workers in the non-privileged sector. “Inequities have been exacerbated by COVID-19, both because the people who are getting sick are in less stable sectors, but also because the economic impact has been more extensively felt in those sectors. Sent to work for peanuts, exposed to illness daily, left without protections from public health and government, while the privileged folks have been able to work from home with no loss of income or risk.”

“



”

We have a situation where people are literally dying for going to work. But, the outpouring of public support around the importance of paid sick days has been incredible. Healthcare workers have stood side by side with workers in essential jobs to fight for what is an essential public health measure.

DEENA LADD

Executive Director, Workers' Action Centre

“We have a situation where people are literally dying for going to work,” says Deena Ladd, executive director of the Workers’ Action Centre, pointing to the protracted efforts to get the provincial government to create a paid sick day program. “We’ve had to go to excruciating levels to just extract three paid sick days from the government, which expire in September... and have been difficult to access for essential workers. But, the outpouring of public support around the importance of paid sick days has been incredible. Healthcare workers have stood side by side with workers in essential jobs to fight for what is an essential public health measure. A recent poll showed that 84% of people in the province support paid sick leave,” she adds.

SERVICE SECTOR AND SMALLER EMPLOYERS HARDEST HIT OF ALL

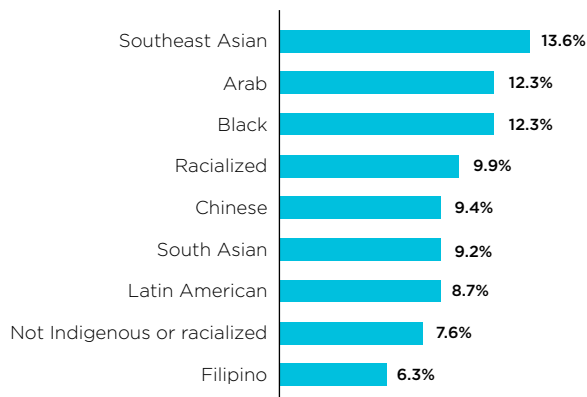
The Toronto Employment Survey found that the largest declines in jobs were concentrated in the community and entertainment space and the service employment sector, both of which may be slow to reopen.⁴⁹ The survey also noted that by far the highest proportion of jobs lost were at smaller employers, which may have the biggest difficulty in bringing employees back for reopening.

A separate survey of employers in the Greater Toronto Area found that 81% of arts, entertainment, and recreation employers were most worried about the risk of permanent closure, followed closely by food service establishments, businesses with one to four employees, and many educational organizations.⁵⁰

“Many economists and politicians tell us that paid sick leave is really expensive,” says Garima Talwar Kapoor, director of research and policy at Maytree, a charity that works to advance systemic solutions to poverty in Canada. “The cost of doing business includes ensuring that your workers can live a life with dignity. That should be an absolute baseline for all governments in terms of what they expect from employers in Canada, in Ontario, and in Toronto,” she adds.

Unemployment rate by race in Canada

April 2021

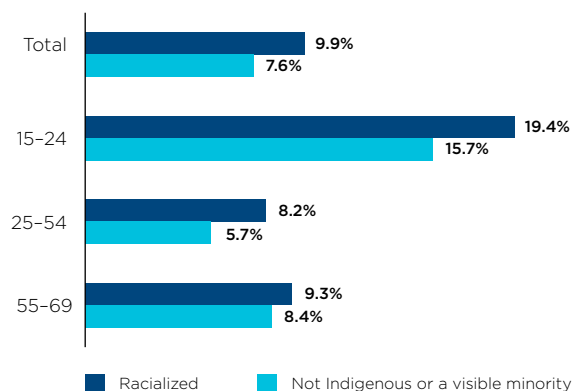


Source: Labour Force Survey Supplementary Indicators Tables, accessed via Community Data Program.

Note: Statistics Canada data on the unemployment rate for Indigenous Canadians was not available in this dataset, but at that month the employment rate for Indigenous peoples was 54% versus 59% for non-Indigenous Canadians.

Unemployment rate by race and age group

Canada, April 2021



The experiences of past recessions signal long-term risks, particularly for people who have historically been marginalized.

“Racialized people have been concentrated in low-paying jobs,” says Paulette Senior, president and CEO of the Canadian Women’s Foundation. “It’s a dynamic grounded in racism.” As we look to the recovery, Senior emphasizes that “it’s important we pay people liveable wages so they can have a good quality of life. In many of these sectors, this was not necessarily the case.”

National data highlights some of these challenges, with unemployment rates in April 2021 for non-Indigenous or non-racialized people at 7.6%, whereas people overall had unemployment rates of 9.9%, with rates particularly high for Southeast Asian (13.6%), Arab (12.3%), and Black (12.3%) Canadians.

Racialized youth, especially those between 15 and 24 years old, have been among the hardest hit by high unemployment, with 19.4% of racialized youth across Canada unemployed in April 2021, compared to 15.7% of youth aged 15–24 years broadly (see chart for notes and sourcing). While we do not have data on

unemployment for racialized individuals in Toronto, it is important to keep in mind that it is difficult to separate the challenges and experiences of youth overall with the experiences of racialized individuals, with half of the racialized population in the Toronto Central Metropolitan Area (CMA) under the age of 35, and racialized folks representing a full 57% of those 35 and under.⁵¹

A national Statistics Canada report noted that “Because of the job losses the pandemic triggered, the percentage of young men and young women not employed, in education or training (NEET), increased by between 3 and 4 percentage points from 2019 to 2020. As a result, 14.4% of young men and 13.4% of young women ended up being neither in school nor employed during the school months of 2020.”⁵²

Further data provided by the Environics Institute for the Greater Toronto Area for November and December 2020 from the 2020 Survey on Employment and Skills, conducted in partnership with the Future Skills Centre and the Diversity Institute, shows some of the other labour market consequences of the pandemic and how many of them are being disproportionately felt by racialized and Indigenous workers. Racialized and Indigenous peoples in the Greater Toronto Area sampled in the survey were more likely to report losing their job and not finding a new one as a result of the pandemic (17% of racialized respondents versus 8% of white and 34% of Indigenous respondents; note that there were only 75 Indigenous respondents to this question, and this sample may not be representative of the broader Indigenous community in Toronto so this number should be interpreted with caution) and they were also much more likely to lose hours because of the pandemic (43% of Indigenous workers, 29% of racialized workers, and 19% of non-racialized workers).

And it is the cumulative effect of all these things that creates such a significant burden for racialized communities. Cynthia Bell-Clayton, executive director of ENAGB Indigenous Youth Agency, which provides cultural, employment, life skills, and other opportunities, explains that this really had a disproportionate impact on Indigenous youth. “A lot of the youth who had full-time and part-time positions were let go. We were able to support many of them with food cards and were able to offer \$500 rent subsidies.”

Speaking to the challenges of supporting Indigenous youth, both now and in the aftermath of the pandemic, Bell-Clayton says their organization is working on providing youth wellness hubs. “Now we need funding to be able to provide wraparound service, primary care, counselling, Indigenous counsellors, housing support, etc. We want to be able to fully support Indigenous youth, so they don’t have to be referred to another organization. Oftentimes, when youth are walking from A to B, they may fall through the cracks.”

Looking at long-term risks, the Toronto Employment Survey looked back at previous recessions to better understand the economic impact.⁵³ It notes that “specific areas of Toronto and sectors of the economy have never fully recovered from the 1990s recession and remain vulnerable to disruption,” with long-term impacts seen in certain geographic areas of the city on the east and the west and losses in full-time permanent employment in sectors like manufacturing and warehousing, servicing, and retail since the late 1980s.

We noted in our 2019–20 *Toronto’s Vital Signs Report* that temporary jobs were growing 4.7 times faster than permanent jobs and self-employed jobs were growing three times faster than employed positions in the wake of the 2008 recession, while part-time jobs were growing two times faster.⁵⁴ The consequences of growing job precarity on access to dental benefits are discussed further on page 27. Every economic downturn is likely to have some form of permanent consequences on labour markets, but what those may be this time is still difficult to tell.

The 2020 Greater Toronto Area Employer Survey underlines the impending risks. Employers were asked to discuss how their workforce had changed and predict how it will change going forward. While most employers said they did not expect the composition of their workforce to change, of those who did, they were most likely expecting to reduce reliance on full-time workers and increase reliance on contract workers.

The data on the challenges for Indigenous workers comes as no surprise to those working in the Indigenous employment sector, explains Nancy Martin, executive director of Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment and Training.

Martin’s organization is expanding its efforts in response to the growing demand. They’re halfway through raising money for a new training centre in the West Don Lands that will be part of a new Indigenous hub to be shared with Anishnawbe Health Toronto, along with condos, a rental building, childcare and family centres, and a restaurant.



It's an investment in the Indigenous community. It's an investment in Indigenous youth. It's an investment in Toronto. The capital gets paid back to society at the federal, provincial, municipal levels of governments multiple, multiple times. Nobody benefits when Indigenous communities struggle with social, economic, human rights, housing, employment training, and education.

NANCY MARTIN

Executive Director, Miziwe Biik Aboriginal Employment and Training

"We've been working for over 15 years, between three locations, trying to get this hub going to help change the health outcomes of our community," explains Harvey Manning, director of programs at Anishnawbe Health Toronto. "The Anishnawbe part alone will be 45,000 square feet, so that will be able to house all of our programs under one roof, which will be amazing and make them more accessible. And of course, Miziwe Biik will have their four-storey training centre. We've established a great partnership with them and George Brown to set up an educational program that helps people close to the streets and not in a good place. Many of those people have moved onto university and many, many have gone on to jobs."

Manning notes that while they have had tremendous support from the community, they and their partners can still use further funding. Anishnawbe has also been working on a mobile health clinic to support its community throughout the city, a topic further discussed on page 20.

"It's an investment in the Indigenous community," notes Martin. "It's an investment in Indigenous youth. It's an investment in Toronto. The capital gets paid back to society at the federal, provincial, municipal levels of governments multiple, multiple times. Nobody benefits when Indigenous communities struggle with social, economic, human rights, housing, employment training, and education."

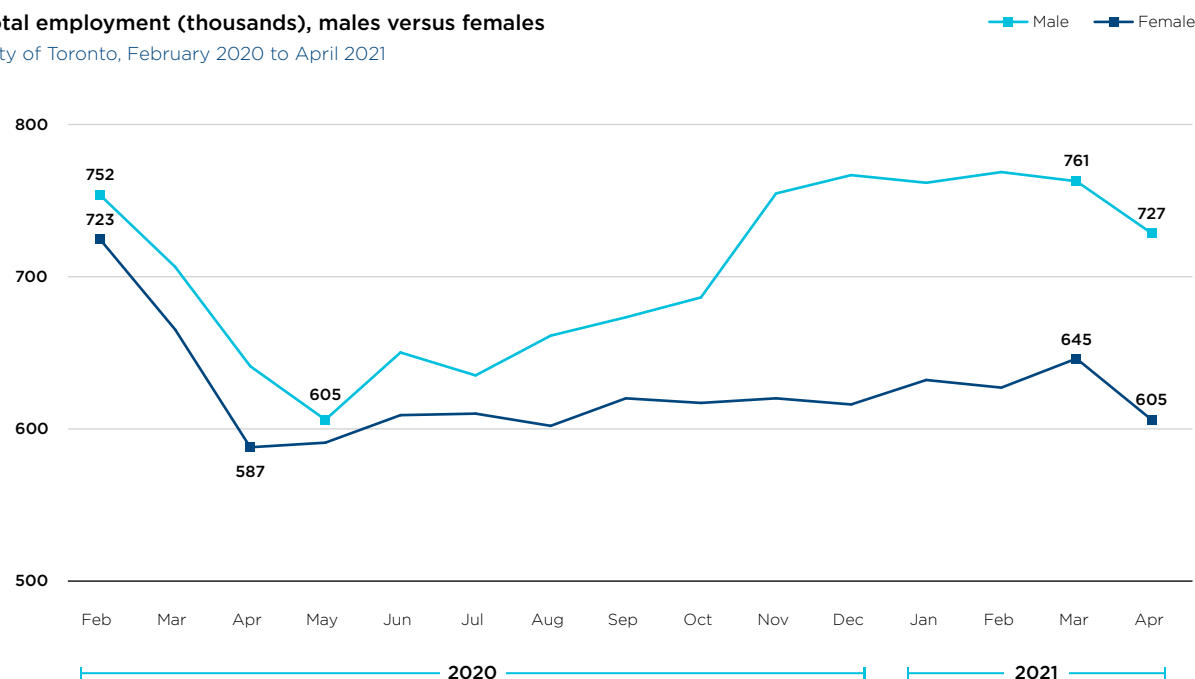
THE "SHE-SESSION" UNDERLINES NEED FOR NATIONAL CHILDCARE

When it comes to employment, women have been one of the groups most severely affected by the pandemic.

As of April 2021, 16% fewer women were employed in the city of Toronto, compared to 3% fewer men employed.

Total employment (thousands), males versus females

City of Toronto, February 2020 to April 2021



Source: Labour Force Survey via Toronto Economic Bulletin.

“We know that women have been most impacted by the pandemic in terms of job losses, and it’s been a slow return, because women are concentrated in lower-paid, lower-security jobs in retail, restaurant, service, and childcare,” says Paulette Senior, president and CEO of the Canadian Women’s Foundation. “These jobs have disappeared during the pandemic.”

Before the pandemic, more men were working in Toronto than women, but the gap was narrow (752,000 men, compared to 723,000 women). Employment for women fell to its lowest point in April 2020 (587,000; -19%) and for men in May 2020 (605,000; -20%). However, employment for men has rebounded quickly, while women have seen much slower progress, with further substantial declines in April 2021, after the second province-wide shutdown was announced beginning on April 3.

National data for May 2021 shows just how much of this impact has been borne by racialized women.

The unemployment rates for racialized men and non-racialized men were similar as of May 2021, with 8.3% for non-racialized men and 8.9% for racialized men.⁵⁵

For women, the differences between racialized and non-racialized workers’ unemployment rates are startling: racialized women were 60% more likely to be unemployed. The exact reasons that racialized women’s unemployment rate is so much higher is unclear, though the presence and age of children in the household likely plays a major factor, as does the concentration of racialized women in cities like Toronto that have experienced the most severe lockdowns.

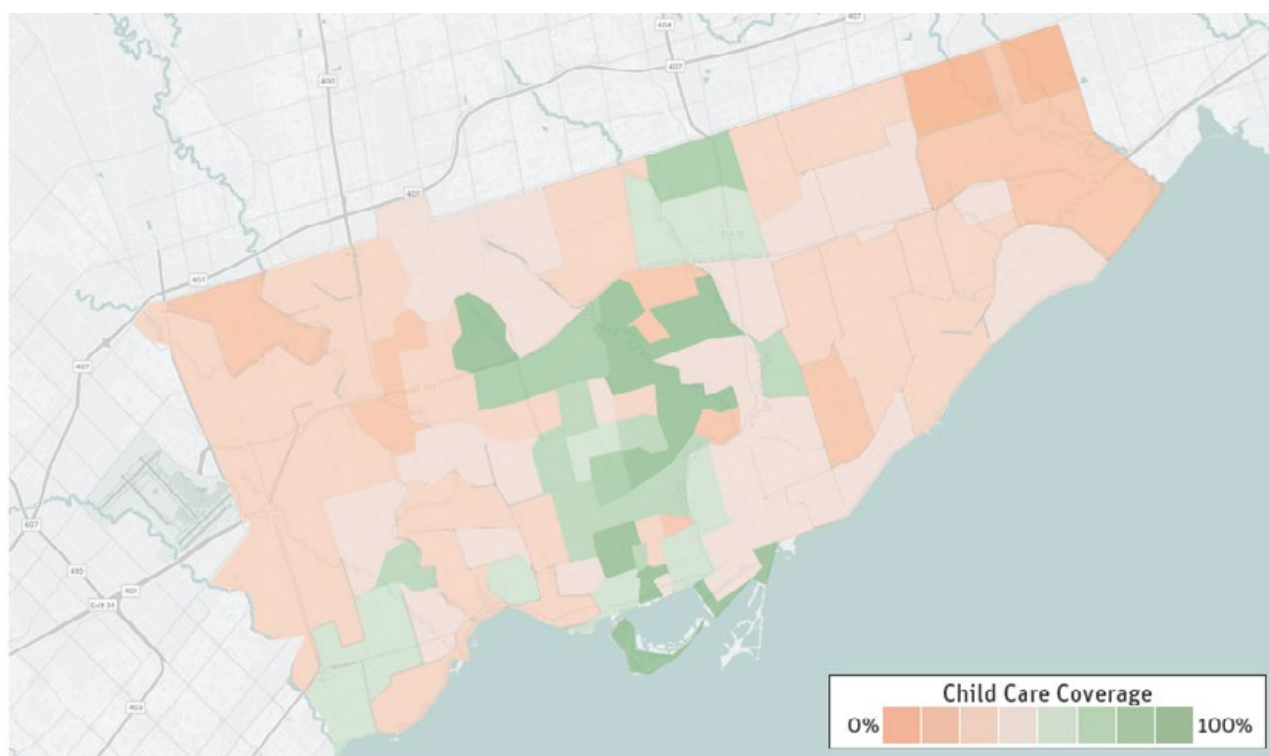
“Women in general were hit hard by job losses, and this is especially true for newcomer and racialized women. We know this. So, now we need to do something,” says Adwoa K. Buahene, CEO of Toronto Region Immigrant Employment Council (TRIEC). “One of the greatest barriers to labour participation in the GTA is the cost of childcare, particularly for low-income families,” with lack of access being a particular issue during the pandemic.

Armine Yalnizyan, a Canadian economist and the Atkinson Fellow on the Future of Workers, has dubbed the COVID-19 downturn the “she-cession” because of how it has disproportionately affected women, and she has argued that there cannot be a “she-covery” without proper investments in childcare.

Never has the impact of childcare on women’s ability to work been clearer than during the pandemic. In fall 2020, childcare enrolment in Toronto was down 45% from February 2020, which translates to almost 22,000 fewer children in childcare, and which helps explain why women’s employment rates have been rebounding more slowly. Childcare centres with the highest fees have seen the steepest drops in enrolment. Across Canada, four in 10 parents have reported having trouble finding childcare during the pandemic, and out of these, 31% reported fewer working hours as a result.⁵⁶

“Too many women are working for daycare, as one income is strictly covering those high costs,” says Buahene. “Many newcomer women are only doing this so their career doesn’t falter, but are forced into survival jobs and can’t actually afford to work,” she says. “For many newcomer women, there are additional layers to this. They hear the message that they need ‘Canadian experience’ to compete in the local labour market, but their efforts to gain this experience often land them in survival jobs. In these cases, the prohibitive costs of childcare could mean they can’t actually afford to work.”

Toronto has the most expensive childcare in Canada, with median preschool-age fees of \$1,250 a month (and \$1,578 for toddlers and \$1,866 a month for infants).⁵⁷ The infant fees are more than \$250 higher than the next most expensive cities, which are all part of the GTA: Mississauga, Richmond Hill, Brampton, Vaughan, and Oakville.



Source: Child Care Deserts in Canada, 2018. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives.⁵⁸

In the 2021 budget, the federal government committed \$30 billion to bring fees for regulated childcare down to \$10 per day on average within the next five years.⁵⁹ The budget also promised a 50% reduction in fees by the end of 2022. A \$10 per day average would translate to about \$220 per month, which would mean a monthly savings for Toronto families of \$1,030 for a preschooler, \$1,358 for toddlers, and \$1,646 for an infant.⁶⁰ All of these translate to annual savings of between \$12,000 and \$20,000 per child.

One of the top priorities for the new investments in childcare should be to overcome the huge swaths of the city with next to no childcare coverage. As can be seen in the map on the previous page from 2018, childcare is concentrated downtown and up Yonge Street through the middle of the city, while there is scarce coverage in Scarborough and the northwest of the city (the lack of investment in these areas is a common theme throughout this report).

According to a 2018 report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 40% of children in Toronto are living in a childcare desert, and 109,105 children under the age of four were competing for the city's 46,050 licensed spaces for that age group.⁶¹

The new investments in childcare must also consider the needs of childcare workers, 96% of whom are women and many of whom have lost their jobs due to the pandemic.⁶² In fact, employment among childcare workers was 21% lower in February 2021 when compared to February 2020 (employment in Canada as a whole was only down 3% in the same period).⁶³ This lower level of employment is related to the lower levels of women's employment and the drops in enrolment in childcare centres discussed previously. In 2019, there were 302,000 childcare workers across Canada, according to the Labour Force Survey.⁶⁴ About one-third of childcare workers are immigrants or non-permanent residents and on average are somewhat younger than the general working population. Data from 2015 also shows that these workers are poorly paid and make on average of \$24,100, which is half the national average.⁶⁵ The combination of low wages and lack of job security throughout the pandemic means that many childcare workers could be tempted to work in other sectors, which would potentially impact the overall economic recovery.

Medhat Mahdy, president and CEO of the YMCA of Greater Toronto, points to a few challenges that will need to be overcome to execute on this expansion of childcare. "There's a shortage of early childhood educators (ECEs)," says Mahdy. "But, what we're finding in the sector is that about half of graduates from early childhood education colleges don't go to work in childcare. We have to work hard to make early childhood education an attractive role: some of that is compensation and some of it is career development. How we nurture our ECEs will be critical. There's going to be no expansion without more ECEs."

Mahdy also highlights the immediate need to invest in capital to ensure the physical spaces are in place for when an expansion roles out. He points out that “for an organization like the YMCA of Greater Toronto, which operates in some of the most marginalized parts of the city, our childcare sites are not always economically viable. But with more than 300 locations in total, our charity has the ability to support them. I urge the government to provide the capital resources needed to open much needed centres in all neighborhoods and ongoing, predictable operating funding for future sustainability.”

LONG-TERM UNEMPLOYMENT POSES PERMANENT RISKS

Data from the Labour Force Survey shows a previously inconceivable growth in long-term unemployment. In May 2021 versus February 2020, there was a 266% increase in the number of long-term unemployed in Canada.

Canadian economists Fabian Lange and Mikal Skuterud say about this phenomenon: “There is much evidence indicating that the longer workers are jobless, the less likely they are to return to work and the more likely they are to experience significant earnings losses when they do. This effect reflects a number of factors, but of particular concern now are skill atrophy, loss of work routine and lack of labour market engagement.”⁶⁶

A review of the consequences of long-term unemployment by the Urban Institute in the United States underscores why the rise of long-term unemployment is such a worry:

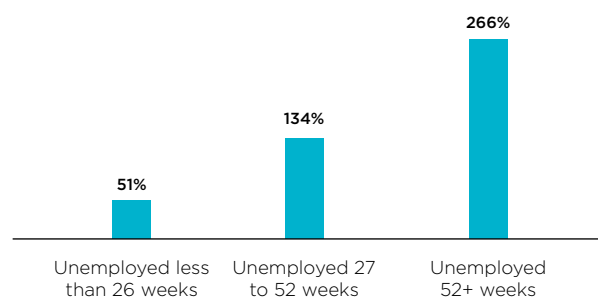
“Being out of work for six months or more is associated with lower well-being among the long-term unemployed, their families, and their communities...The long-term unemployed also tend to earn less once they find new jobs. They tend to be in poorer health and have children with worse academic performance than similar workers who avoided unemployment. Communities with a higher share of long-term unemployed workers also tend to have higher rates of crime and violence.”⁶⁷

Lange and Skuterud are particularly worried about the growing long-term unemployment among youth. “Long-term or permanent labour market disengagement in this population has high social costs that justify ambitious investments now,” they write.⁶⁸

At its peak in May 2020, the unemployment rate for youth aged 20–29 had tripled when compared to pre-pandemic rate in Ontario. For those 25–29, unemployment rates are still up by 70% in May 2021 versus February 2020, while for those 20–24, unemployment rates were 149% higher.⁶⁹

Growth in number of people unemployed, by length of unemployment, not seasonally adjusted

Canada, May 2021 versus February 2020



Source: Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0342-01: Duration of unemployment, monthly, seasonally adjusted. Notes: Calculations by the author. The chart title includes seasonally adjusted data, but the unadjusted data is used due to the complexity of looking at seasonality during the pandemic.

One Canadian economist, who studied the economic impacts of the downturns of the '80s and '90s in Canada, concluded that the impact on students' wages lasted up to a decade, and the impact was more severe for the less-qualified students. Even in those less-severe economic situations, he concluded that "earnings were lower even after finding work, even after five years. The gap eventually closed after a decade, but by then, unlucky labour market entrants had lost, on average, 5% of their lifetime earnings."⁷⁰ The disproportionate impact of the pandemic on young people's mental health is discussed further for students on page 95 and compared to the general public on the section starting on page 16.

HEIGHTENED RESPECT FOR ESSENTIAL WORKERS OPENS DOORS TO POLICY IMPROVEMENTS

"We can have the best programming ever. We can have a really strong Black social service sector. But, if there are policies that are prohibiting young people from upward mobility, they need to be addressed," says Agapi Gessesse, executive director of CEE Centre for Young Black Professionals.

CEE Centre for Young Black Professionals works with young people who are furthest from the labor market, some of whom may have had a conflict or interaction with the Canadian Justice System. She adds that "a major challenge for some Black youth is the complicated process for obtaining a pardon. This young person already had the odds stacked against them and now our society is blocking their ability to invest in themselves and move forward. This could be something that they've done in their adolescence, or

even earlier, and it causes a delay of seven to ten years," says Gessesse. "The cost of getting a lawyer to obtain a pardon is also prohibitive for many youth having risen from \$50 in 2012 to \$720 currently. At CEE we're exploring an advocacy campaign calling on policy makers to simplify the process. And this is just one of many systemic barriers for Black youth trying to find decent work."

Deena Ladd, executive director of the Workers' Action Centre, is cautiously optimistic: "For the first time, we're seeing workers recognized for their value. People have said for the first-time that cleaners, grocery store workers, and delivery drivers are our heroes...I don't want to be Pollyanna about it and say things are going to change right away, but it shows the growing public consciousness about jobs in our communities and how vital they are."

For the majority of nonprofit sector experts we consulted, raising employment standards is critical.

"When you improve working conditions for workers who have the least power and protection in the workplace, we are fundamentally improving the conditions for racialized, immigrant, and Black women," says Ladd. "When you raise the standards for them, conditions improve for everyone else. So, essentially, we need a very strong floor of labour standards that raises everyone up. This is directly connected to tackling systemic racism in the labour market. For example, it shows that our demand of equal pay for equal work is so critical," says Ladd. "For eight months, from April to December 2018, new employment standards were introduced after so many of us had lobbied the government for years. We finally had equal pay for equal work. We saw temp-agency jobs converted to full-time, regular jobs. We saw contract work, casual, relief, part-time work, mainly undertaken by racialized women, start to pay more because they were doing the same work as full-time workers. However, this equal pay legislation was eliminated by the new provincial government later in 2018."

Before the implementation of new labour standards and in the decade after the Great Recession, precarious jobs made up at least half of the net new job growth in the city, with temporary jobs, self-employment, and part-time jobs all growing at at least twice the rate of full-time permanent employment. After the implementation of increased employment standards and new wages, the data did not suggest any increase in unemployment and it was associated with higher wages for workers, as we noted in a previous *Toronto's Vital Signs Report*.

Garima Talwar Kapoor, director of research and policy at Maytree, points out that before the pandemic, job growth was very strong, but “we did not lower the number of social assistance recipients, nor decrease their duration of support. Minimum wage increases are part of essential labour legislation that help ensure that workers can live a life with dignity.” She also points to the need for “workers to be recognized as full employees in their workforce and not as contractors. We need to ensure people have access to health and retirement benefits.”

A 2019 report by Metcalf Foundation noted that “In the Toronto region, working poverty continued to expand northwards growing by 27%, to 170,000 individuals...This growth is troubling, especially given the relatively strong employment figures in 2016 and increases in the minimum wage and new government transfers.”⁷¹ This growth in working poverty is made even more challenging as rent — the largest expense for most working poor — grew dramatically over the last decade, discussed further in the Housing section on page 151.

“Focusing on workers’ rights also means focusing on issues of immigration, because the two are inextricably linked,” says Ladd. “The campaign ‘Status For All’ continues to be a huge priority for our organization, many migrant worker

organizations, and the approximately half a million workers across the country — many of them residing in Toronto. Migrant workers have been subjected to horrendous and unsafe working conditions and exploitation, because employers know that with no access to emergency benefits and the threat of deportation, workers have little choice.”

Adriana Beemans, director of the Inclusive Local Economies program at Metcalf Foundation, thinks the recovery spending by governments as well as foundations and philanthropists has opportunities to spread out benefits. “I hope that as we have new jobs, we are thinking how we can ensure good jobs are shared throughout the city. How can we expand our reach into new communities and expand our pipelines and investing in the workforce that can help connect people to jobs that are growing and in need?”

In 2019, the City of Toronto adopted the Community Benefits Framework,⁷² with the goal of using the city’s various levers (tools such as procurement, real estate transactions, or financial incentives for specific sectors) to create inclusive economic opportunities through job creation and investment in communities that are being marginalized. Today, there are four active community benefits initiatives: 1) Social Procurement Policy and Program; 2) Housing Now Initiative; 3) Rexdale Casino Woodbine Community Benefits Agreement; and 4) Imagination, Manufacturing, Innovation, and Technology Program. An additional 10 new community benefits initiatives are currently being reviewed.

“I’m inspired by the opportunity to push for fundamental changes to our labour rights, health standards and immigration laws right now. Collectively, we have the responsibility to fight for this,” emphasizes Ladd. “We need to keep organizing, build the people power in our communities to bring about real change.”

PRIORITIES FOR DONORS, FUNDERS AND POLICYMAKERS

01

Advance opportunities for better labour standards, including paid sick days, changes to minimum wage and rules around equal pay for equal work.

02

Increase childcare funding and create more childcare spots across the city, especially in underserved communities in Scarborough and in the northwest of the city.

03

Provide more employment training programs and academic upgrading programs, so that unemployed people can return to work more quickly and avoid the negative consequences of long-term unemployment.

04

Focus employment programs on those populations that face the greatest barriers to decent work: women, Indigenous and racialized communities, immigrants, people with disabilities and young people.

TIPS FOR ENGAGED TORONTONIANS

01

Support social enterprises with money and time, as they provide on-the-job training and essential revenue for community organizations.

02

Volunteer as a mentor to individuals facing barriers to employment.

4

The Issue

CIVIC ENGAGEMENT AND BELONGING

The pandemic has fundamentally changed the way we relate to one another. The experience underlined the role of social capital — the network of relationships that enable us to work and thrive together — and how precarious this can be in the face of a public health crisis.

Early in the pandemic, we saw a surge in trust in many institutions that declined as the months rolled on. What remains is half of Canadians believing that government, business leaders and journalists are purposely misleading us.⁷³

Also concerning, feelings of isolation and loneliness are on the rise, and data shows significant increases in the percentage of Toronto residents who say they have no one they can rely on in a time of crisis.

Community-based organizations, both formal and informal, play a fundamental role in connecting us, and the strain on them has been severe and will likely outlast the pandemic. For most nonprofits and charities, donations and volunteering tanked and then rebounded to some extent, at least on the short-term revenue

side, and staff burnout is high. But, the emergence of grassroots groups as essential components of the pandemic response is a positive turn of events. Communities came together in mutual support to ride out the pandemic and mitigate the damage.

Hope for a better future may be the most promising outcome of all. In the face of the unequal effects of the pandemic, the broad embrace of racial justice and the importance of Reconciliation have emerged as central issues that can guide us forward.



OBSTACLES

- Almost half of nonprofits reported decreased revenues in June 2021 (47%) versus before the pandemic. The average organization reported revenues were down by 11% and donations were down by 16%, while two-thirds (66%) indicated demand for services had increased, leading to huge gaps in services.
- The percentage of Toronto residents indicating they had someone to rely on when they really need it dropped by 12%, representing about 250,000 people aged 18 and older.
- A total of 64% of Toronto nonprofits reported a drop in volunteer hours, in line with the introduction of COVID-19 public health measures, with the average organization reporting an estimated 38% decline in volunteer hours, compared to before the pandemic.
- Almost half of nonprofit workers are feeling burned out dealing with the consequences of the pandemic (46%).



OPPORTUNITIES

- Many experts pointed to the increased public consciousness of inequities, particularly racial injustices, as an opportunity for social change.
- Local grassroots organizations, while still the most financially challenged, also reported increased donations as more funders and philanthropists allocated resources to historically marginalized parts of the city.
- While no Canadian data is currently available, the U.S.-based PEW Research Center found a significant increase in digital activism.

FORMAL VOLUNTEERING HAS CRATERED

Volunteering is one of the most common forms of civic engagement, and results from the 2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey suggest a massive decline in formal volunteering. The second annual Toronto Nonprofit Survey was conducted online between May and June 2021 and has responses from 261 nonprofit leaders in Toronto. See the Appendix for more details.

Before the pandemic, about 41% of Canadians volunteered in any given year, contributing more than 1.7 billion hours through formal volunteering roles, which translates to the equivalent of 863,000 full-time jobs.⁷⁴

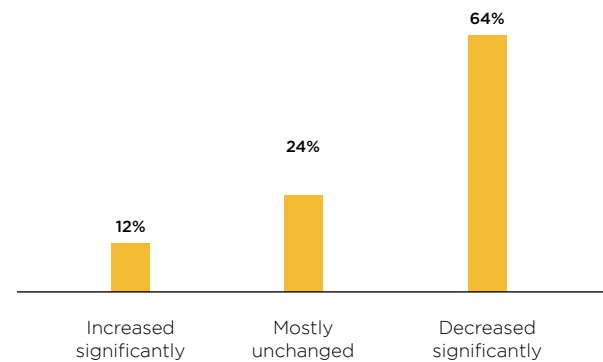
During the pandemic, many of these opportunities disappeared. Almost two-thirds (64%) of the organizations that responded to the survey reported a decline in volunteering.

On average, respondents reported that volunteers contributed 38% fewer hours at their organization than before the pandemic. Many organizations rely on volunteers for critical parts of their work and cannot function properly without them. A decrease of 38% in volunteer hours nationwide would be the equivalent of 327,000 full-time jobs being eliminated.

A small portion of organizations reported an increase in volunteering (12%), and the increases were often major, with an average estimated increase in volunteer hours of 50%. Many of these organizations were involved with food and medicine delivery, and many of them had added this activity after the pandemic began.

Change in volunteers hours compared to before the pandemic

2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey



Source: The 2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey, conducted by Toronto Foundation. Notes: A total of 261 respondents completed the survey. See the Appendix for full details.



People who have still been volunteering are people who are in situations where they are OK. There are people who normally would volunteer to help with their own development. But they are struggling, and they don't have the same opportunity to volunteer. We are going to have to look at how to make volunteerism more equitable as we move forward.

MEDHAT MAHDY

President and CEO, YMCA of Greater Toronto

“One of the things the pandemic has really amplified is more privilege versus less privilege, says Medhat Mahdy, president and CEO of the YMCA of Greater Toronto. “People who have still been volunteering are people who are in situations where they are OK. There are people who normally would volunteer to help with their own development. But they are struggling, and they don’t have the same opportunity to volunteer. We are going to have to look at how to make volunteerism more equitable as we move forward.”

A COLLECTIVE AWAKENING ON INEQUALITY

There were other bright spots amid these declines in formal volunteering directly with nonprofit organizations.

Social support networks, often called mutual aid groups, have stepped in to meet the needs of vulnerable neighbours, for social connection, food and access to medicine, too. While the existence of grassroots groups providing mutual aid is not new, particularly in communities of colour, the scale-up across the city is remarkable. In Toronto, 55% of organizations who responded to the 2020 Ontario Nonprofit Network’s survey reported working with mutual aid networks, higher than in any other region of the province. Adriana Beemans, director of the Inclusive Local Economies program at Metcalf Foundation, says: “We need to better understand neighbourhood resiliency and what neighbourhoods did to support themselves and their communities at a grassroot level during COVID.”

In the first year since COVID-19 hit, the Toronto Black Farmers and Growers Collective has found additional ways to help the community. Says Jacqueline Dwyer, co-founder and farmer: “We’ve provided over 1,000 food hampers that include culturally appropriate items, such as ginger and turmeric, yams and green bananas and other key organic groceries. This year, in partnership with Country Heritage Park, we have created learning opportunities for people to reskill themselves, with 14 garden plots with a starter kit of plants and seeds given to each plot for the season, so they can learn to grow their own food and become an active part of the food system by addressing food oppression that affects Black communities.”

But Dwyer is sometimes frustrated with how hard it can be to secure the resources to create access to healthy food. “We would like to see new legislation implemented to address how funds are shared with organizations like ours and with planning that includes all key participants in the sector. In our eight-year journey access to arable, fertile land, funding and resources have been big barriers for us. Also, we have people who are very interested in this community work — young people, adults, elders — but we have no means of resourcing them, because Black folk just don’t have the same access others do, and the degree of food insecurity has widened. We are asking for corporate sponsors, donors, and funders to support the work of developing a community food model.”

Others pointed to rising awareness of inequities and a passion for taking action as an outcome of the last year.



Funding and resources have been big barriers for us. Also, we have people who are very interested in this community work — young people, adults, elders — but we have no means of resourcing them, because Black folk just don't have the same access others do, and the degree of food insecurity has widened.

JACQUELINE DWYER

Co-founder and Farmer, Toronto Black Farmers and Growers Collective

“There is a collective consciousness and awakening around inequities in a way that we haven’t seen before,” says Garima Talwar Kapoor, director of policy and research at Maytree. “That collective awakening could be a precursor to political change, as many people now also better understand the role that they are playing in creating and reproducing these inequities.”

“What gives me hope is people organizing,” says Deena Ladd, executive director of the Workers’ Action Centre. “The fightback against racism — and the people in the streets around George Floyd and Regis Korchinski-Paquet and Ejaz Choudry — that has given me hope.” While similar data is not available for Canada, the Black Lives Matter movement may have been the largest movement in U.S. history, according to the New York Times⁷⁵, while Black Lives Matter Canada recently announced the launch of Wildseed Centre for Art and Activism at 24 Cecil St., near Spadina Avenue and College Street, to provide new space for Black community members.⁷⁶

And as people have been stuck at home, there has been an unprecedented use of the internet for rallying for social causes. A PEW Research Center survey in the U.S. in June 2020 found that 36% of social media users have posted a picture to show their support for a cause⁷⁷, 35% looked for information online about rallies or protests happening in their area and 18% used hashtags related to a political or social issue. PEW noted this was relatively concentrated among those 18–29, who had seen large increases in their digital activism since 2018, while it was relatively unchanged in other age categories.

MORE PEOPLE FEEL LIKE THEY HAVE NO ONE TO RELY ON

In 2018, Toronto Foundation and partners undertook the 2018 Toronto Social Capital Survey.⁷⁸ In a December 2020 poll conducted by the Environics Institute, the Future Skills Centre and the Diversity Institute at Ryerson, several of the same questions were asked again.⁷⁹ Data was provided to Toronto Foundation to allow for comparison.

Toronto residents are about as likely as before the pandemic to say they are confident in their abilities, even when faced with challenges (69% in 2020 versus 73% in 2018).

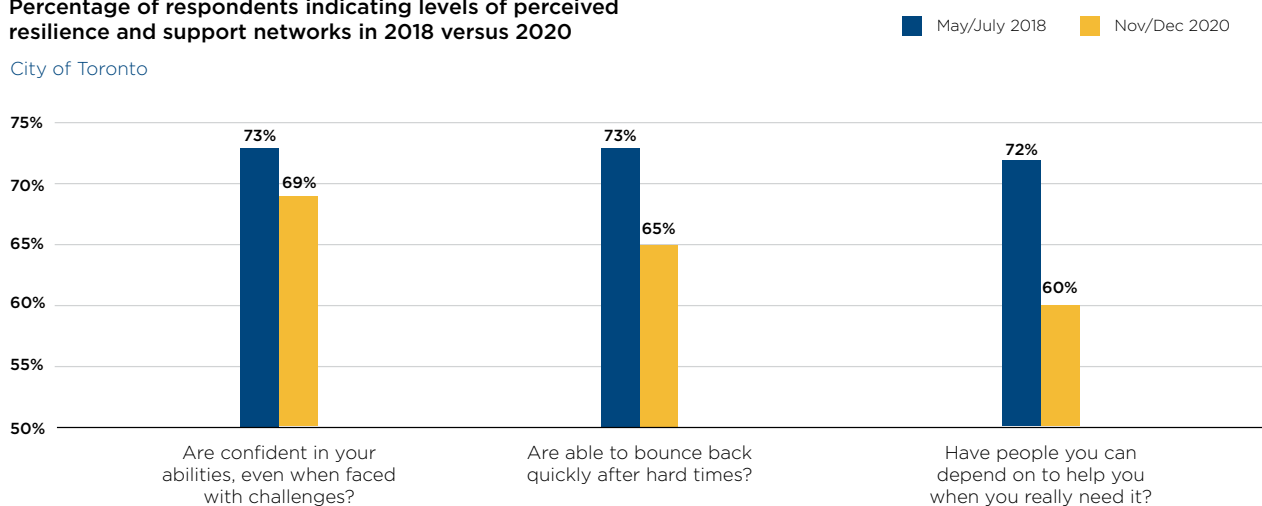
However, the percentage of residents who agreed that they have someone they can rely on when they really need it declined from 72% in 2018 to 60% in 2020 (this 12% decline represents about 250,000 fewer people aged 18 and older with someone to rely on). Young adults were much less likely to report having someone to rely on.

Mahdy worries about the 5,000 GTA youth who participate in the Y's weekly, free, drop-in Teen Nights program each year. "I'm wondering what happened to those kids," he says, after the Y had to shut down the program in compliance with lockdowns. Similar to other youth-serving organizations, the Y had good-news stories. Mahdy was inspired by newcomer youth leadership program participants who co-created virtual alternatives with staff that kept the youth connected.

Cynthia Bell-Clayton, executive director of ENAGB Indigenous Youth Agency, points to the youth engaged in the governance of the Indigenous youth-led organization as an example of what's working: "Their knowledge is so important to our community, our city, our province, this country." She also says that "they're finally feeling that their contributions are being heard, through their monthly meetings, their attendance to programming, and our continuous effort to host youth consultations. With youth knowing that they're being valued, and their voices are being heard, gives them confidence and courage to contribute to their community."

Percentage of respondents indicating levels of perceived resilience and support networks in 2018 versus 2020

City of Toronto



Sources: The 2018 Toronto Social Capital Survey and data provided by the Environics Institute as part of its 2020 Survey on Employment and Skills, conducted in partnership with the Future Skills Centre and the Diversity Institute.

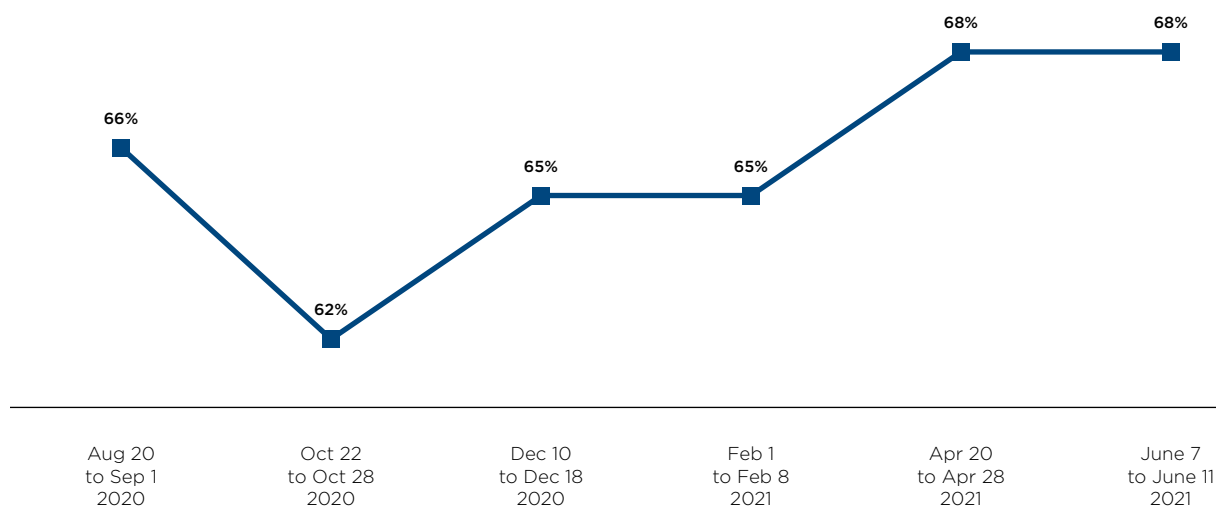
Notes: The data reflects the percentage who said they "always" or "often" report each of the statements in the chart. The May-July 2018 sample size was 3,207 adults over the age of 18, while the November/December 2020 survey included 487 respondents.

Data from Mental Health Research Canada about the negative mental health impacts of isolation shows that throughout each poll for which it provided us data, more than 60% of Toronto residents were reporting a negative mental health impact from isolation. Even as things have started to open up slightly over the summer with increased vaccination rates, this has not yet translated to improvements in the mental health impact of social isolation. This signals that investment in nonprofits that facilitate social connection will likely need to be a key role as we look forward to recovery.

The lack of change for some aspects of social capital combined with significant changes in others speaks to the ongoing question of the long-term impact of the pandemic. We've seen trust in politicians and government spike and collapse over the last year. About half of Canadians now say that the government, business, and journalists are actively trying to mislead them.⁸⁰ Whether these metrics will continue to worsen or whether reopening will provide stability and improvement is unknown.

Percentage of respondents reporting that social isolation/being apart from others is having a negative impact on their mental health

City of Toronto, August 2020 to June 2021



Source: Data provided by Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC). All analysis by the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of MHRC.

Notes: Respondents were asked to rate the negative mental health impact of social isolation and being apart from others on an 11-point scale, with zero being a very negative impact and five being neutral impact. Anyone who rated themselves a zero through four was classified as having negative mental health impacts from social isolation and being apart from others.

UNPRECEDENTED REVENUE DECLINES FOR NONPROFITS, BUT EXPERIENCE VARIES BY SUBSECTOR

Nonprofits' revenue drops have been record-high due to the pandemic. Since the peak of the crisis in 2020, across the board, the financial situation of nonprofits has improved significantly. The average decline in revenue since the onset of the pandemic was estimated at 11% in May and June 2021, an improvement from the 23% decline reported in July to August 2020.

The rate of organizations saying their revenue had increased also changed, with 31% reporting a significant increase in revenue in 2021, compared to only 17% in 2020. The number that reported a decrease in revenue went down from 60% to 47%. These results are very similar to a recent June 2021 Ontario Nonprofit Network survey that found that 48% of nonprofits in Toronto reported a decrease in revenue and 34% reported an increase, adding weight to the reliability of the numbers. Despite the improvements, these revenue declines remain unprecedented. During the Great Recession

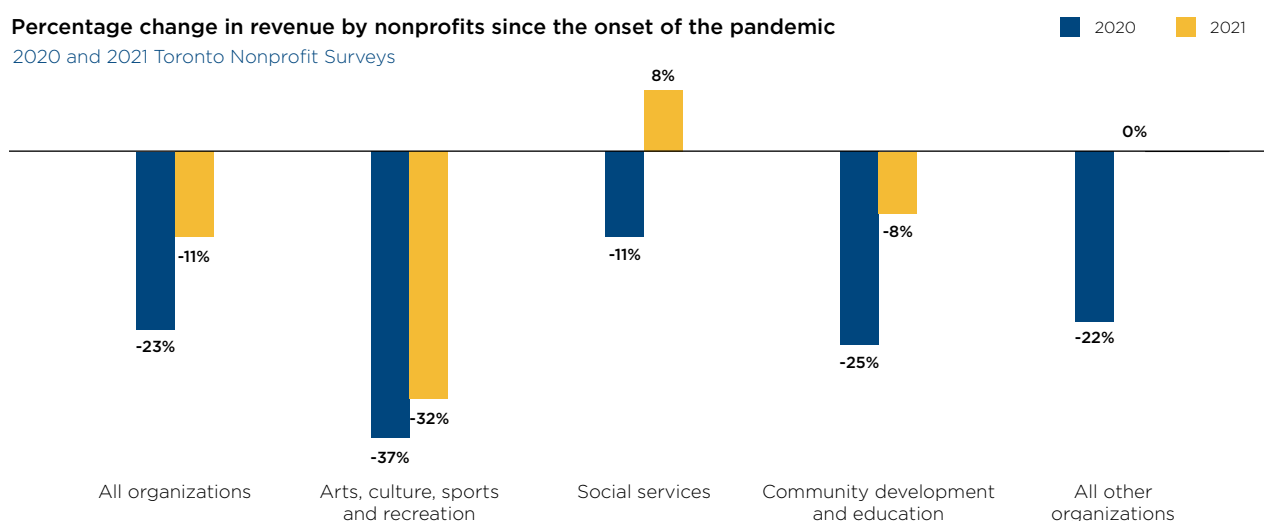
in 2008, overall revenues for the nonprofit sector were about flat.⁸¹ There has never been a period with sustained and steep revenue declines like this.

But, the experience varies dramatically within the sector. Social services organizations reported an 8% increase in revenue, with many seeing new funds to help support the emergency response. However, many point out that much of this revenue was for emergency response, rather than to address ongoing needs.

"The emergency funds provided food boxes and gift cards and other types of immediate supports. And now that money has run out," says Utcha Sawyers, executive director of the Boys & Girls Club of East Scarborough. "And we've had to discontinue a lot of those services in spite of ongoing need because there isn't resources to run them. We have to acknowledge that for the Black community, in particular, they're still in emergency mode."

Percentage change in revenue by nonprofits since the onset of the pandemic

2020 and 2021 Toronto Nonprofit Surveys



Source: The 2020 and 2021 Toronto Nonprofit surveys, conducted by Toronto Foundation.

Notes: The 2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey took place between May and June 2021. The 2020 Toronto Nonprofit Survey took place between July and August 2020. Sample sizes were 261 for 2021 and 225 for 2020. All respondents were asked to estimate the percentage change in their revenue, and this data represents the average response across organizations.

Arts, culture, sports and recreation organizations, on the other hand, have seen next to no improvement in revenue year over year. Many rely on program and user fees from the public, which has made them particularly vulnerable due to shutdowns. The challenges of these organizations are discussed more in the Arts, Culture and Recreation chapter on page 108.

The Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN) has called for offering a new round of small business and nonprofit grants, investing in workforce development and digital infrastructure, extending the wage subsidy, investing in a low-carbon, women-majority care economy and applying an equity lens to recovery efforts as part of its June 2021 report on the Ontario nonprofit sector.⁸²

OVERALL FINANCIAL HEALTH OF NONPROFITS IMPROVED, BUT STILL CHALLENGED

The percentage of organizations that said they were at risk of permanent closure were cut in half in Toronto Foundation's 2021 survey of nonprofits (from 21% in 2020 to 11% in 2021, and see chart on next page for further notes and explanation). It is impossible to say how much of this improvement is because some of these organizations already shut down, or those in the most difficult financial situations were less likely to fill out a survey now than last year, but barring that, it is a clear improvement for respondents. Nearly half (49%) of organizations predict the pandemic will have a negative financial impact on their organization next year, down from two-thirds last year (66%). Only four in 10 (40%) believe that five years from now, there will still be major negative impacts on their financials from COVID-19, down from 56% in 2020.

While these numbers show positive improvements, it is still critical to emphasize that the level of decline in nonprofit revenue is literally unprecedented in the entire history of the nonprofit sector, and the challenges that come from this will be ongoing.

The ONN's June 2021 survey of nonprofits found that 17% of Toronto organizations said they were able to sustain themselves for only the next six months, with 8% saying they would run out of funds in the next few months. The survey found that 30% of nonprofits in Toronto with reserves funds had dipped into those funds, with most (76%) using up less than a quarter of the reserve fund, and 15% of organizations in Toronto think they may not pay back loans they took out during the pandemic.⁸³

Neither our survey nor ONN's survey found significant evidence of an increase in closures among respondents from previous surveys, but it is impossible to say whether many had closed down in the last year.

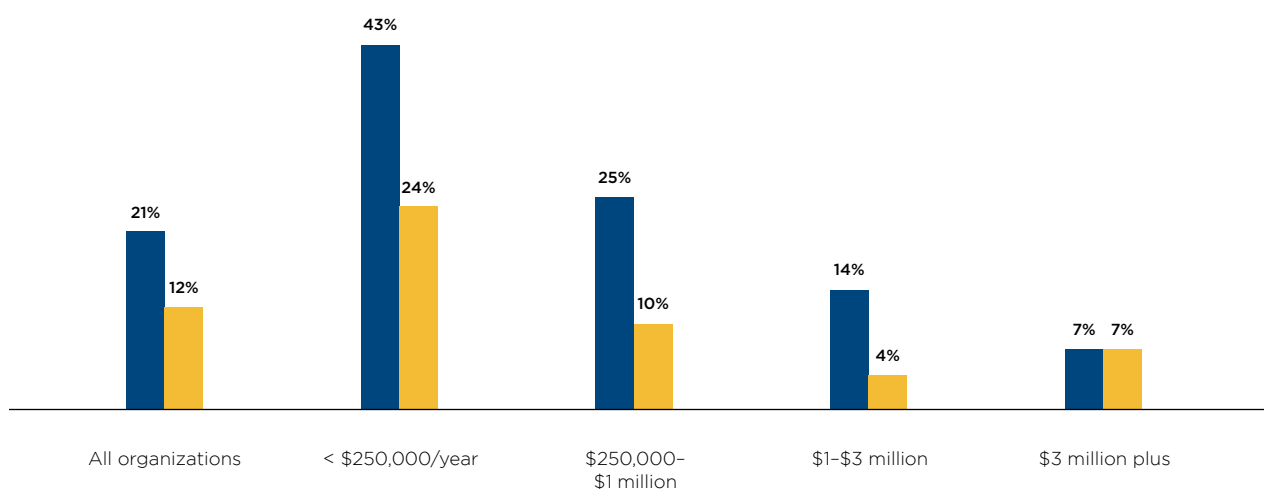
None of these metrics is a sign of a healthy nonprofit sector in Toronto, but they are all signs of an improving nonprofit sector.

Still, among the many nonprofits struggling, small and grassroots organizations are often the most at risk. Grassroots organizations are ones that deeply engage community members at the local level, but often do not have charitable status or a trustee relationship. It takes time, energy and money to get charitable status — investments and tradeoffs that vital groups may not want to, or be able to, make.

For organizations with less than \$250,000 a year in revenue, nearly a quarter (24%) still report they are at high risk of permanent closure (a four or less on a 10-point scale of financial health, with one being "at risk of permanent closure"). For non-registered organizations, 23% rated themselves at risk of financial closure, compared to only 6% of registered charities.

Percentage of organizations at risk of permanent closure, by annual operating budget

2020 and 2021 Toronto Nonprofit Surveys



Sources: The 2020 and 2021 Toronto Nonprofit surveys, conducted by Toronto Foundation.

Notes: Respondents were asked to rate themselves on a 10-point scale, with a one being at high risk of permanent closure and 10 being extremely strong financial health. Anyone who rated themselves a four or less was deemed at risk of permanent closure.

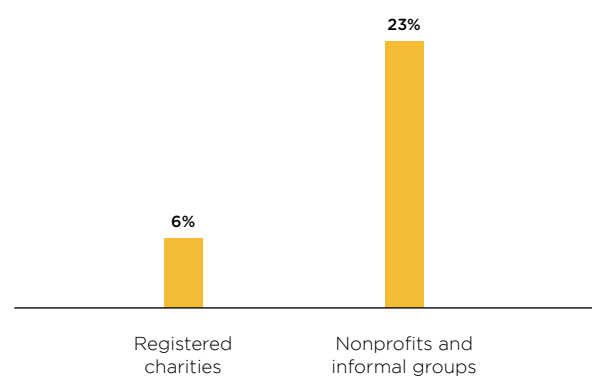
“We are experiencing a funding crisis, like many small grassroots nonprofits,” says one leader of a small grassroots group who asked to remain anonymous. “We are at a loss of where to look for and where to obtain sustaining funding at a time when the need and demand for the cost-effective community-building services we provide is at its highest ever.”

Emmay Mah, executive director of the Toronto Environmental Alliance, points to the critical role that grassroots groups played in responding to COVID-19 as an example of the resilience community infrastructure needed to respond to any crisis. And she makes it clear: “We need continuous streams of funding for community building. These types of investments result in activated residents, more civic participation and people who are better equipped to help one another in a crisis.”

Arts, culture, and recreation and sports organizations are also particularly struggling, a topic covered further on page 108.

Percentage of nonprofits at risk of permanent closure

2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey



Source: The 2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey, conducted by Toronto Foundation.

It is also critical to note that 60% of organizations with revenue declines are relying on the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy program, now expected to end in September 2021. Many organizations that are struggling will find themselves at even greater risk once this program ends. According to ONN's provincial survey of nonprofits, Toronto-based nonprofits were more likely to rely on wage subsidies than nonprofits in any other part of the province.

The financial and staffing questions are complex. "As a multi-service agency, we have both lost and gained revenue," says Bill Sinclair, executive director of The Neighbourhood Group Community Services. "The Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy fills many gaps. We have both laid off staff in one area and hired emergency staff in other areas. We hired staff to run 24-7 facilities to support homeless people who were COVID-positive, which left us with a net increase in staffing." At the same time, "we have also struggled to support essential services such as homecare and childcare with schools closed and employee and volunteer health concerns. The whole sector is short-staffed in these areas."

NONPROFITS REPORT RECORD DECLINES IN DONATIONS

Among the revenue declines, charities in the Toronto Nonprofit Survey estimated their donations declined by 16%, on average.

While donations are down, credit card data from RBC shows that December 2020 was a strong month for credit card and online donations, even as much of 2020 was a difficult year, signalling some hope that donations may improve through 2021.⁸⁴ Credit card donations reflect only a portion of overall giving, as a considerable portion of larger gifts still occur through cheques and money transfers. At the same time, CanadaHelps reported that giving through its platform more than doubled to \$480 million in 2020, even as it projected overall declines in giving.⁸⁵ CanadaHelps found the biggest increases in donations were to Indigenous peoples and social services, as well as healthcare organizations.

For many Canadians who kept their jobs, own their homes and invested wisely, the pandemic has brought with it one of the single biggest yearly increases in wealth this country has ever seen, as we discuss further in the Income and Wealth section on page 35. What role this will play in future donations is unclear.

Slightly more than a quarter (27%) of nonprofits reported their revenue from donations increased, while more than a third reported their revenue decreased. Broadly, more organizations that served a single neighbourhood or several neighbourhoods were more likely to report an increase versus a decrease, while organizations serving bigger geographies were more likely to report the opposite. This may be due to the rise in interest in hyper-local organizations that emerged during the pandemic.

"We're talking about really crucial issues in a very local way," says Adriana Beemans of the Metcalf Foundation. "This local focus really shines a light on some of what might have been happening on the fringes and brings it into the mainstream."

DEMAND FOR SERVICES GROWING FASTER THAN CAPACITY TO MEET IT

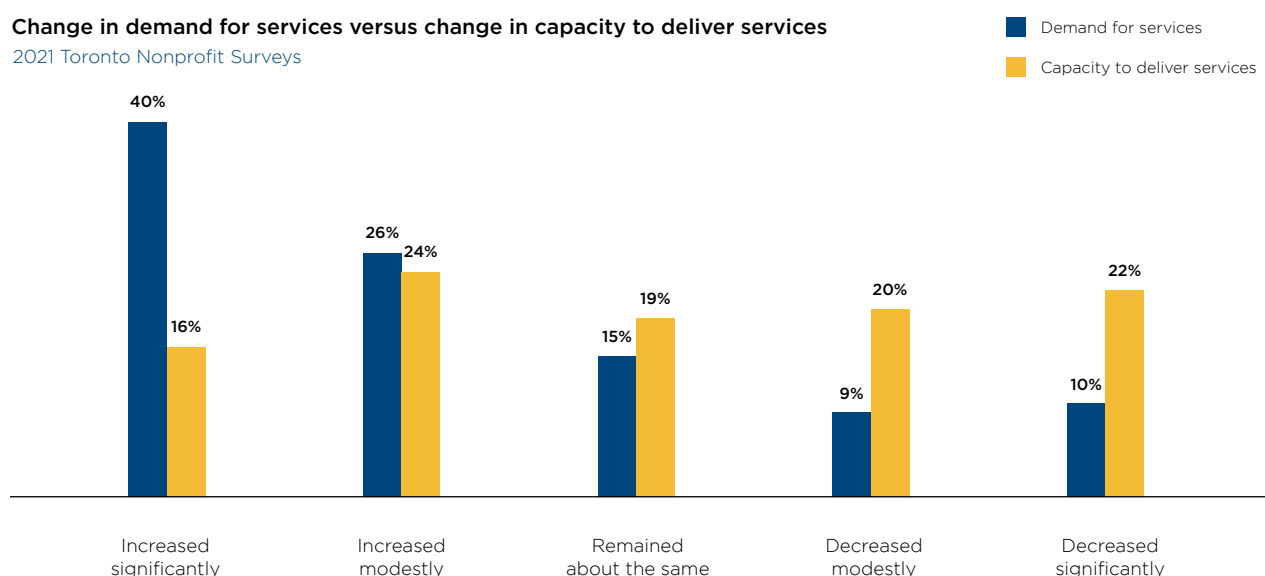
The pandemic has led to increasing demand for many types of services offered by nonprofits, with 66% seeing an increase in demand. Nonprofits that have experienced a modest increase in demand have mostly been able to increase their capacity to meet demand. However, 40% of charities have seen a significant increase in demand, and only 16% have seen a significant increase in a capacity. This means that these charities are stretched thin, and that many needs in the community are going unmet.

A further discussion of the challenges for social services charities is covered on page 38.

“One of the things that I like to stress with my team is that as broad, deep and intense as their response to the pandemic has been, the recovery is going to require the same level of intensity,” says Medhat Mahdy, president and CEO of the YMCA of Greater Toronto. “It may be different, but we can’t assume that when the pandemic is under control, you’re going to flip a switch. There’s going to be a need for understanding how people transition from the pandemic world to the post-pandemic world. And the recovery is going to require quite a bit of intensity and focus. And one aspect that I think has been neglected is building sustainable structures and infrastructure. If organizations aren’t healthy, they won’t be able to deliver what’s needed.”

Change in demand for services versus change in capacity to deliver services

2021 Toronto Nonprofit Surveys



Source: The 2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey, conducted by Toronto Foundation.



There's a spotlight on us, and we need to perform and we need to perform really well. And in order to do that, you need people and you need systems. And so there is a big change management aspect that we're really feeling.

AGAPI GESSESSE

Executive Director, CEE Centre for Young Black Professionals

NEW SKILLS AND CAPABILITIES ADDED DESPITE OBSTACLES

In the face of the many challenges associated with the pandemic, most organizations showed an ability to innovate and add new programs.

The number of organizations that spoke to new technological capabilities was near universal, with many talking about how they would be blending provisions of online services with physical programming for years to come.

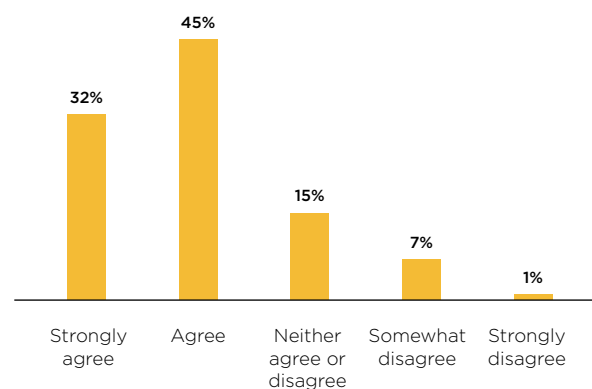
Many Black and Indigenous-led and serving organizations talked about the growth they were able to achieve during the pandemic, partially due to the increased awareness of issues of racial inequality.

"We're going to have close to 300 graduates by the end of the year," says Agapi Gessesse, executive director of CEE Centre for Young Black Professionals, "which is close to matching how many young people have graduated in the history of the organization."

According to Gessesse, "everything that our organization had envisioned for itself was fast-forwarded by at least a year or two. We used to have all of our programs in what we called a 'waiting pool.' We would create programs that made sense and that we knew our young people would support and where we knew there were market labour gaps, but we hadn't yet found a grant that would support it. And so we had a lot of programs in our waiting pool. We were able to take them out one by one and find supporters to fund them and get them done."

Our organization has added substantial new skills and capacities due to the pandemic

2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey



Source: The 2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey, conducted by Toronto Foundation.

Gessesse welcomes the sudden growth while recognizing it comes with challenge: “There’s a spotlight on us, and we need to perform and we need to perform really well. And in order to do that, you need people and you need systems. And so there is a big change management aspect that we’re really feeling.” She says as much as the new funding is critical, relationships with supporters willing to walk alongside organizations seeking systemic change are also key. “Relationships come with access, they come with networks,” says Gessesse.

Na-Me-Res, an organization working with Indigenous men in Toronto, was also able to expand during COVID-19 and amid heightened awareness on the need for Reconciliation. “I am extremely proud that Na-Me-Res never closed our doors during the pandemic, and we actually increased our services and expanded in Toronto and into other regions,” says Steve Teekens, executive director of Na-Me-Res. “We have never stopped delivering in-person services in our shelters and to homeless people outdoors through our outreach team. We started an outreach team in York Region, added new cultural supports for Indigenous inmates, offered COVID testing and vaccinations, and acquired two properties that will collectively provide 29 affordable housing units.”

“We’ve seen an outpouring of support that was truly transformational,” says Eugenia Duodu Addy, CEO of Visions of Science Network for Learning. “And that doesn’t mean we’re ‘good’ now. It means that we have a new responsibility to deepen our impact. And we’re going to be bold about the fact the support needs to be consistent. If we are going to address these systemic issues and wicked problems, it’s going to take a lot more resources to be able to do that.”

ALMOST HALF OF NONPROFIT SECTOR WORKERS BURNED OUT

While surveying nonprofit leaders for the 2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey, we asked all leaders about their mental health. The results were stark.

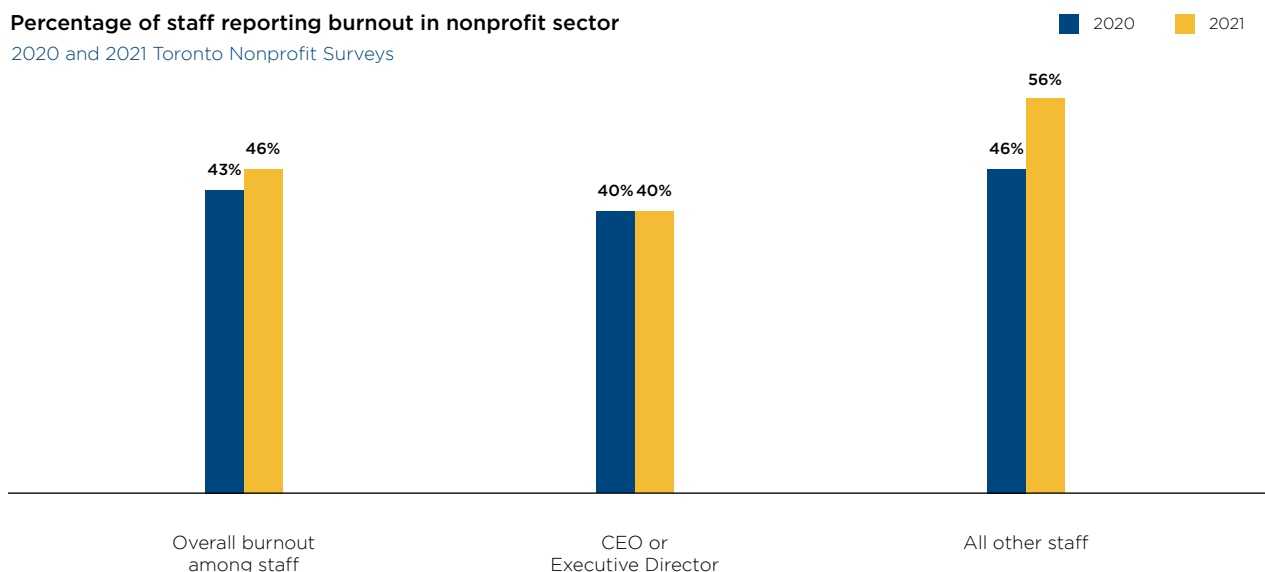
Almost half of nonprofit sector leaders are burned out (46%).⁸⁶ The level of burnout among leaders in the nonprofit sector was comparable to that of primary care workers in the medical field before the pandemic.⁸⁷

The rate of burnout is almost unchanged from last year (43%), with an increase in burnout reported by staff outside the executive director, where reported burnout increased from 46% to 56%.

This appears to be a much higher rate of burnout than in the general labour force, though our sample was not representative of the entire workforce and was skewed towards more senior staff. An April 2021 KPMG study found that 31% of Canadian workers were burned out or on the verge of being burned out, a standard of burnout that appears to be lower than the one used in our study.⁸⁸ That said, the experience among physicians appears more dire, with 68% found to be burned out in a 2020 UBC study.⁸⁹

Percentage of staff reporting burnout in nonprofit sector

2020 and 2021 Toronto Nonprofit Surveys



Source: The 2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey, conducted by Toronto Foundation.

The long-term consequences of this should not be underestimated, either for the quality of work or for leaders themselves. Previous studies^{90,91} have found burnout to be associated with work-family conflict, intention to quit, increased risk of depression, reduced performance at work and worse personal health outcomes. Medical studies have found burnout related to giving up easily, worse patient care and reduced patient satisfaction. Studies have even found that burnout can increase the odds of getting into a motor vehicle accident, even controlling for fatigue. Left untreated, it can lead to substance abuse issues and an increased risk of suicide ideation and completion.

In 2021, 40% of executive directors reported feeling burned out and 56% of non-executive directors. Those whose organizations were in the most difficult financial situations were also most likely to be burned out, with 74% of those whose organization was at risk of permanent closure reporting feeling burned out.

Female respondents were more likely than male respondents to report being burned out (49% versus 33%). The additional challenges that women with children have experienced, particularly in the labour market, is discussed on page 52.

People with disabilities were also particularly likely to report feeling burned out (61%), consistent with the disproportionate mental health and financial burden the pandemic has placed on those with disabilities, discussed further on page 23.

DONORS, FUNDERS AND POLICYMAKERS

01

Continue to promote an increased awareness of Reconciliation, as well as racial and social justice in the city and fund related advocacy.

02

Appeal to the segment of Torontonians who have saved significantly during the pandemic to make multi-year, unrestricted donations to charities.

03

Safeguard the mental health of nonprofit staff by ensuring access to mental health services and additional time off, especially for staff who have been overworked during the pandemic.

04

Invest in activities that can help sustain and rebuild social networks and connections post-pandemic.

05

Nurture new forms of both online and in-person engagement that have emerged during the pandemic and can continue to provide enhanced social services to the city's most vulnerable.

TIPS FOR ENGAGED TORONTONIANS

01

Consider forgoing the need for a charitable receipt and contribute financially to grassroots organizations that do not have charitable status. They are often led by the communities they serve and offer powerful solutions to entrenched challenges. As well, a little can go a long way.

02

Plan time for volunteering in ways that tap into your interests and make good use of your skills. This can help expand your social network, too. You can offer your time, talent and treasure.

03

Start a giving circle, where you pool funds with friends, family and colleagues for shared learning and bigger impact.

5

The Issue

ENVIRONMENT

Summer 2021 was marked by extreme weather events across the globe. July 2021 ended up being the hottest month ever recorded on earth. Lytton, B.C. experienced the hottest temperatures ever recorded in Canada, followed by a devastating forest fire. The B.C. coroner's office reported 800 deaths across B.C. in the wake of the one-week heat dome, more than four times what had been considered usual. Worldwide, much of the northern hemisphere saw record-high temperatures as heat domes extended across dozens of countries. And widespread flooding due to extreme rainfall led to hundreds of deaths in Germany and Belgium. Here at home, Toronto recorded the highest temperature ever in July 2020, in the early months of COVID-19.

The pandemic experience in our city had an unequivocal impact on the environment, for good and for bad.

As residents stayed home, air quality improved, and vehicle emissions decreased, but the volume of residential waste went up. As the weather got warmer, people emerged from lockdown and flocked outdoors, and many reported an increased appreciation of nature. But as past research has shown, the burden of many environmental risks often falls to those already vulnerable. Older, low-income, predominantly racialized residents experience higher deaths from heat waves, have lower access to green space and are also more prone to negative health outcomes arising from poor air quality.

The past 18 months, which have so clearly laid bare the inequities upon which our city is built, need to be a wake-up call for how we talk about and urgently address the climate crisis. If we continue with the status quo, future *Vital Signs Reports* will increasingly be about how climate change is disproportionately affecting low-income residents and residents who are otherwise being marginalized, while more advantaged residents will inevitably find ways to mitigate the worst of the climate crisis, as they have with COVID-19.



OBSTACLES

- July 2020 was the hottest month ever recorded, and the most recent greenhouse gas emissions numbers showed an increase in 2018, the first increase in Toronto in many years.
- During the pandemic, the volume of waste increased by 4.4%, undoing previous decreases and raising waste beyond 2015 levels, even as waste-diversion rates continue to be stalled at levels well below the City of Toronto's targets.



OPPORTUNITIES

- Toronto residents reported significant mental health gains from being outside during the pandemic, as more residents reported spending time outdoors, though access is uneven across the city, with those in the northwest and east parts of the city less likely to report benefits.
- Natural infrastructure is a promising solution to some climate-related challenges, including flooding, while also improving access to green space. The most green roof permits ever issued in Toronto was in 2020.

HEIGHTENED APPRECIATION FOR THE GREAT OUTDOORS — BUT GAPS IN ACCESS PERSIST

Parks and green space play a critical role in building a resilient city: green space protects against flooding, reduces surface temperature and improves air, soil and water quality, while improving biodiversity. It also provides critical recreation opportunities across the city.⁹²

Data from Park People shows that self-reported park usage increased significantly during the pandemic, with 53% of Toronto respondents in its spring 2021 survey reporting they spent much more time in parks/green space than prior to the pandemic.⁹³

Toronto has a robust tree canopy covering about a quarter of the city, or about 28.4% of the city, up from 26.6% in 2008⁹⁴, including the ravine system covering 17% of the city's land mass.⁹⁵ Compared to other dense urban cores, the average amount of parkland in Toronto per person, at 2.7 hectares, exceeds several other major cities such as Montreal (2.4) and Vancouver (2.0), though lags Ottawa (4.5) and Calgary (6.6).⁹⁶

Park People's data for 2021 for Toronto shows that more than half of Toronto respondents reported using pedestrianized streets (58.5%) that had been set up during the pandemic, while 49% reported using community gardens or recreational amenities, 29% reported using playgrounds and a quarter reported using sports field or outdoor exercise equipment.⁹⁷

Respondents to the Park People survey were most likely to say they were interested in more winterized public washrooms in parks (74%), adding outdoor cafés (63%) and more community gardens in parks/green spaces to support food security (63%). Half or more were interested in reduced restrictions around alcohol, more arts and culture activities in sports and more recreational and sports, in addition to continuing pedestrianized streets (63%).

But, the general increase in park usage only tells a portion of the story.

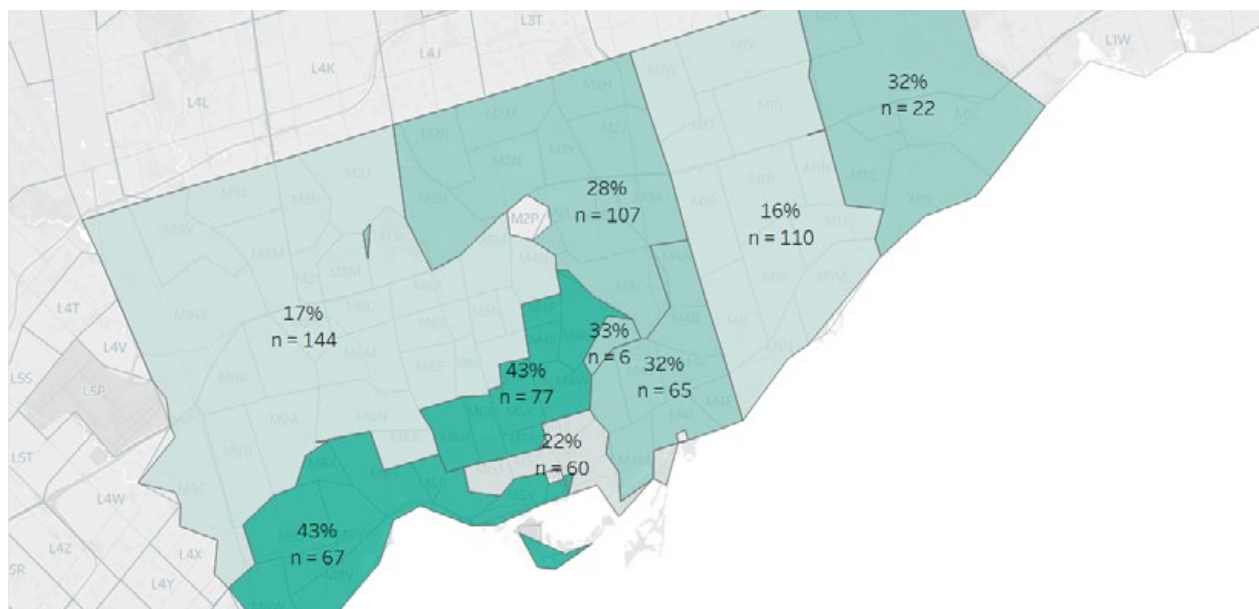
"When you look at the distribution of trees in the city and when you map that to the demographics of Toronto, there are fewer trees in the areas where Black and Brown people live," explains Jacqueline L. Scott, a PhD student at the University of Toronto and author of the *Black Outdoors* blog.

Data provided by Mental Health Research Canada covering more than 1,000 respondents in the City of Toronto also suggests that residents in areas with the lowest forest coverage were significantly less likely to report that their mental health had benefited from going outside, taking a walk, or hiking. Only 17% of residents in the northwest corner and 16% of residents in the western portion of Scarborough reported significant mental health benefits from going outside, compared to 43% of people living in the lakeshore area of southern Etobicoke.

For Scott, the gaps in access to green space are a social justice issue with sweeping implications. "The benefits of trees include increased property value, cleaner air, more wildlife, and opportunity for recreation," she explains.

Percentage of respondents reporting very high mental health benefits from outdoor activities during the pandemic

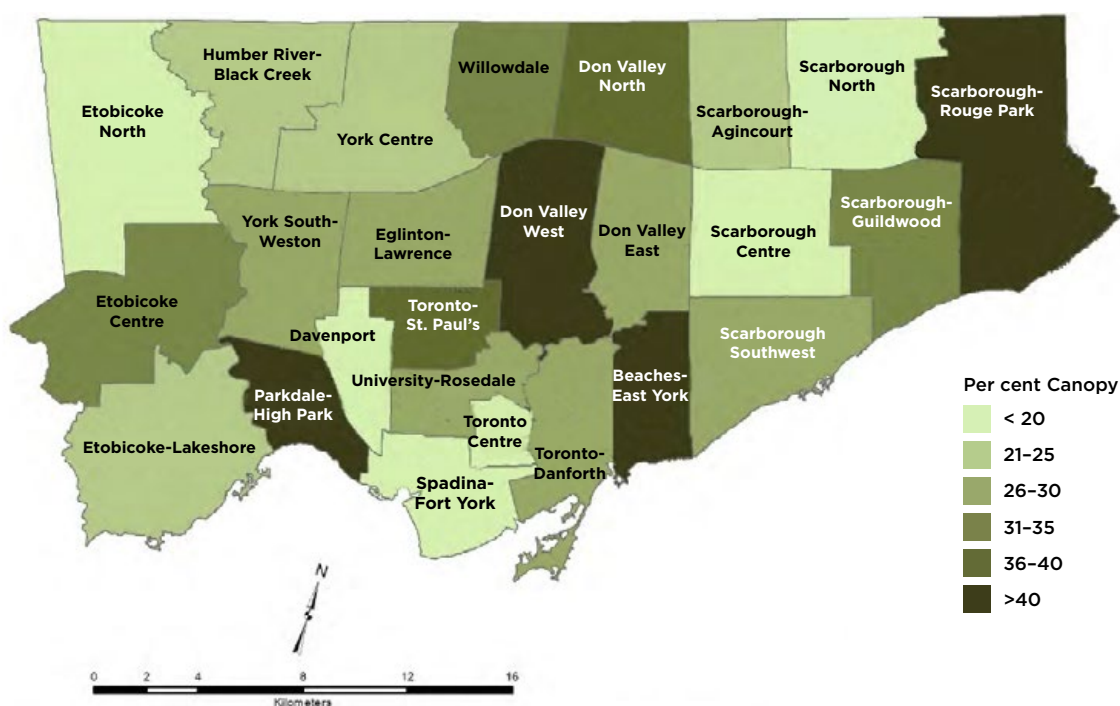
City of Toronto, August 2020 to April 2021



Source: Mental Health Research Canada (MHRC) data. All analysis by the author and does not necessarily reflect the views of MHRC.

Notes: The data is aggregated from five separate national polls from August 20, 2020, to April 28, 2021. Respondents were asked to rate the impact of going outside/walking/hiking is currently having on their mental health, if any, on an 11-point scale, where zero was very negative, five was neutral or no impact, and 10 was very positive. This chart shows the percentages of respondents who rated their experiences as an eight, nine or 10.

Tree cover distribution in the City of Toronto



Source: The Tree Canopy Study 2018.⁹⁸



Park People is providing seed grants for organizations led by people of colour to animate the ravines and get people into them. That's the way you need to do it: give money to community organizations led by people of colour, instead of going through white organizations.

JACQUELINE L. SCOTT

PhD Student, University of Toronto and Blog Author, Black Outdoors

Minaz Asani-Kanji, manager of outreach at Park People, explains that “lack of tree coverage is just one part of a multi-faceted problem. Parks in underserved communities are often blank slates. They are so often just flat grassy landscapes with no programming and little infrastructure.”

Scott highlights the work of Asani-Kanji and Park People as one effective tool that needs to be emulated. “Park People is providing seed grants for organizations led by people of colour to animate the ravines and get people into them. That’s the way you need to do it: give money to community organizations led by people of colour, instead of going through white organizations.”

Asani-Kanji emphasizes that Park People’s work in communities that are being marginalized is critical, because they face many barriers that their projects can help overcome: “Many people who live in underserved communities are newcomers, lower-income and people of colour. Many of them can’t or don’t vote. There are language barriers. They don’t have connections to their politicians. It’s very different from the more affluent communities, where people are mostly white and unafraid to pick up the phone and ask for their park to be cleaned up.”

“COVID has really shown the City of Toronto that ensuring access to green space is not an optional activity,” underscores Scott. “During the pandemic, I’ve seen way more racialized individuals using the ravines and out in parks. Says Scott: “I believe this shift is a gift to the environmental sector, but at the same time wonder whether the sector will capitalize on that.”

NATURAL INFRASTRUCTURE PRESENTS AN EQUITABLE SOLUTION

The deaths of hundreds in Europe from extreme flooding emphasizes the risks of flooding in ways that we may not always appreciate.

“Natural infrastructure is the solution to a variety of challenging problems facing Torontonians,” says Franz Hartmann of Unflood Ontario, a network of 50-plus organizations working to encourage development of more natural infrastructure to reduce the harm caused by flooding. “And it is something that almost everyone can engage in; it mostly requires labour and basic resources.”

Natural infrastructure ranges from building green roofs that absorb water and lower temperatures to planting trees in unexpected places that filter pollutants, to removing hard surfaces and replacing them with materials that let water soak into the ground, to creating rain gardens that can also serve as homes for pollinators.

Hartmann explains the benefits of natural infrastructure: “It’s going to help us reduce the harm caused by flooding, it’s going to reduce the urban heat island impact and it will create more beautiful neighbourhoods that are an oasis for people to go to when it’s super-hot outside.”



RAIN GARDENS



GREEN ROOFS



PERMEABLE PAVEMENT



TREES

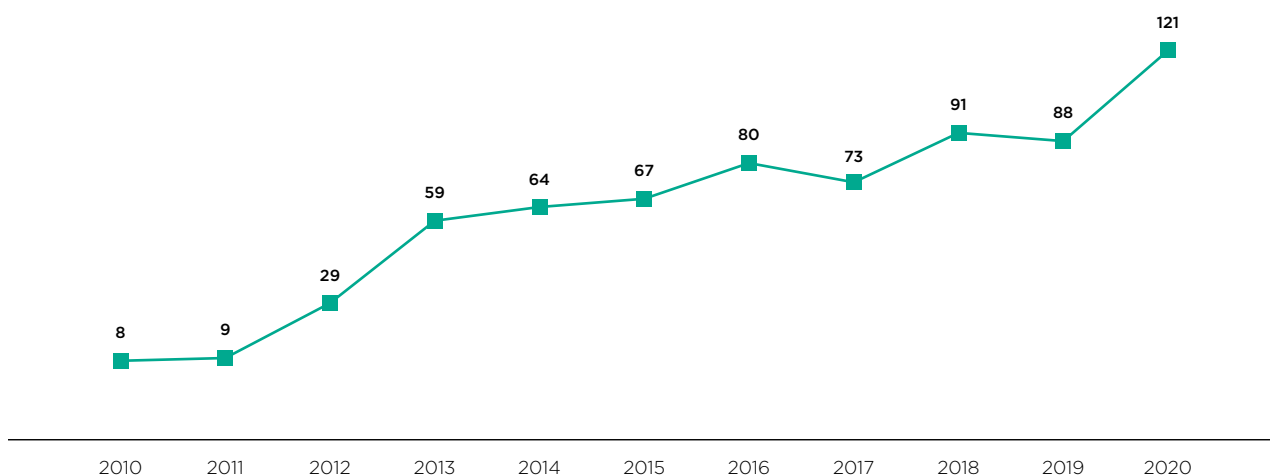


BIOSWALES

Source: Highlights of natural infrastructure from Unflood Ontario.

Number of green roof permits issued

City of Toronto, 2010 to 2020



Source: City of Toronto Open Data on Green Roof Permits.

But the benefits go beyond that, says Hartmann. “Think of all the ugly inner city parking lots next to high-rise apartments which drain water into the storm-sewer system and cause flooding. Imagine turning them into community gardens that grow beautiful fresh vegetables that are brought to community kitchens and turned into meals for community members. Families in more affluent neighbourhoods who have green lawns can turn them into rain gardens, so that there’s a place for pollinators and bees so that our pollinator population is replenished, and we can ensure a positive local food supply. This is where natural infrastructure creates all these wonderful webs and connections, and can be so helpful to everyone. If we can scale this up, my goodness, that’s going to have a dramatic positive impact on the city.”

One solution that helps provide more greenery in the city while improving resilience to flooding is Toronto’s Green Roof initiative. Toronto was the first city in North America to create legislation requiring certain new buildings to have green roofs.⁹⁹ Because of that, it has regularly been a leader in new green roof installations.

In addition to their benefits in reducing stormwater runoff, which can cause power outages and flooding in buildings, widespread adoption of green roofs has the potential to reduce ambient air temperature by up to 3°C in Toronto.¹⁰⁰ For buildings that themselves have green roofs, the effect can be even more dramatic, with temperatures on green roofs potentially 16–22°C cooler than a comparable non-green roof during a hot sunny day.¹⁰¹

This form of cooling has the potential for a significant impact on the more than 500,000 Torontonians who live in high-rise apartment towers that are older than 35 years.¹⁰² Almost all do not have central air conditioning (94%), many have inefficient older windows and other systems that lead to elevated temperatures, while many do not have back-up power in case of an emergency. It is critical to note that ultimately, these buildings will likely need deep retrofits that can both reduce greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions by more than 50% and improve temperatures and livability in the buildings, though the investment needed is greater, and adequate government funding is lacking. We cover this topic further in our 2020 *Toronto Fallout Report*.

As the pandemic unfolded, more permits were issued for green roofs in 2020 than in any previous year, according to Open Data from the City of Toronto (chart on previous page). Part of this is the ongoing new building boom in Toronto, but supportive policy is also a key factor in the creation of more green infrastructure.

Still, like other natural infrastructure, green roofs are not evenly distributed across the city. In our analysis of the City of Toronto's Open Data for green roofs, about two-thirds of permits have been issued in the postal codes beginning with M6, M4 and M5, all primarily downtown. Scarborough (encompassing the M1 postal codes) collectively had about 6% of green roof permits issued. The M9 postal codes that make up the city's northwest corner also had about 6% of green roof permits issued.

This concentration of investment in natural infrastructure in downtown and more affluent neighbourhoods is an ongoing problem with nearly all forms of natural infrastructure, and Hartmann encourages all governments to make more investments in natural infrastructure in communities that have been historically marginalized.

While Hartmann believes natural infrastructure is a huge opportunity because it gives many people an opportunity to get involved, he sees the greatest opportunity in government investments in the communities that need it most.

For Hartmann, the extreme climate events that are becoming more common underscore the risk if we do not make investments in historically marginalized communities now. "My nightmare is that we get increased severe weather events, like extreme heat days where the temperature doesn't go below 25 degrees at night. And then you have a major rainstorm, which causes terrible flooding, and that causes the power to go out. Imagine an elderly person living in a high-rise building without air conditioning. It's extremely hot, and they can't leave because the elevators don't work."

This sort of scenario is already an all-too-frequent reality in Toronto, with this and similar situations leading to more than 100 deaths per year, but will become more and more common as times goes on. And in a more extreme weather event, this could lead to levels of suffering that are far beyond what we've seen in the past.

Recognizing that many systems cannot handle the volume of need in a crisis, the Toronto Environmental Alliance has worked with an advisory group of community hubs, agencies and civil society organizations to study and learn from how they supported neighbourhood networks and mutual-aid structures during COVID-19. The goal is to “apply this learning to forward thinking about the kind of social and physical infrastructure we will need in a future shock or crisis,” explains Emmay Mah, its executive director. “What we’ve learned during this very difficult time is that these types of mutual-aid structures and community networks are essential for supporting residents during an emergency.”

Michelle Senayah, co-founder and former executive director of The Laneway Project, saw the potential of laneways and other neglected urban spaces to contribute to better natural and social infrastructure systems throughout the city. The Laneway Project transforms utilitarian laneways into vibrant public spaces and “COVID-19 has led to a greater awareness of the need for high-quality everyday public spaces in all of our neighbourhoods, spaces of all scales and types, close to where people live and work.” These transformations implement diverse natural infrastructure elements that both create recreational spaces for our communities and improve the environmental performance of these spaces by contributing to ecosystem services like temperature and flood reduction.

Before her passing, Senayah shared that The Laneway Project has seen increased demand for and recognition of their services — that help transform neglected local laneways into vibrant community spaces — surge during the pandemic. Laneways are a significant, underutilized public resource: Toronto has more than 2,400 laneways covering more than 250 acres. Senayah and The Laneway Project have led the improvement of laneways in more than 30 of Toronto’s communities. The organization will be carrying on her vision of building a better Toronto one laneway at a time.



COVID-19 has led to a greater awareness of the need for high-quality everyday public spaces in all of our neighbourhoods, spaces of all scales and types, close to where people live and work.

MICHELLE SENAYAH

*Co-founder and Former Executive Director,
The Laneway Project*

Senayah unexpectedly passed away before the publication of this report, on June 29, 2021, at the age of 36. Tributes to her and her legacy as an innovative placemaker have been made by The Laneway Project, numerous other place-making groups and individuals, and media outlets, including the *Toronto Star*.



There's a need for environmental efforts to contextualize and connect what we're doing to other pressing societal goals, such as addressing social and economic inequality, as part of a climate mitigation and adaptation agenda.

EMMAY MAH

Executive Director, Toronto Environmental Alliance

DECREASING GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS KEY FOR TORONTO

While natural infrastructure can help mitigate environmental degradation and allow for more equitable local access to green space, the climate crisis requires urgent and large-scale action.

“We’ve seen multiple public opinion surveys showing that the public is still very concerned about climate, and one crisis doesn’t override another,” emphasizes Mah.

Mah also argues that the process of rebuilding from the pandemic can “simultaneously stimulate the economy, address inequality and also make progress on environmental goals, particularly around climate change solutions.”

Before the pandemic, Toronto was already falling behind on its commitments to reduce GHG emissions. The most recent data from 2018, released amid the pandemic, shows that Toronto’s GHG emissions increased for the first time in decades.¹⁰³

While GHG emissions decreased significantly from 1990 to 2014, from 2014 to 2018, total emissions remained relatively stagnant, and they increased in 2018 for the first time since 1990.

Even before the pandemic, activists highlighted that we were not investing enough to hit our reduction targets. And the reversal in progress in 2018 was just the first data point in what many fear is a longer-term trend where Toronto fails to see substantial progress in reducing its emissions.

While more recent data is not available for Toronto since the beginning of the pandemic, evidence worldwide suggests that greenhouse gas emissions did decrease initially in the pandemic before quickly rebounding as economies improved.

WASTE DIVERSION RATES CONSTANT, THOUGH GARBAGE INCREASED

But waste reduction is one area that we did not report data on last year in the *Toronto Fallout Report*, and the most recent data shows enormous challenges during COVID-19.

Heading into the pandemic, Toronto has seen no progress on waste reduction in at least a decade. This is seen in emissions targets, where 1.4 million metric tonnes of CO2 were emitted due to waste in 2004 and 1.5 million were emitted in 2018.¹⁰⁷

In 2020, the total volume of waste increased by 4.4% (from 357k tonnes in 2019 to 373k tonnes in 2020), the largest increase seen since at least 2014.

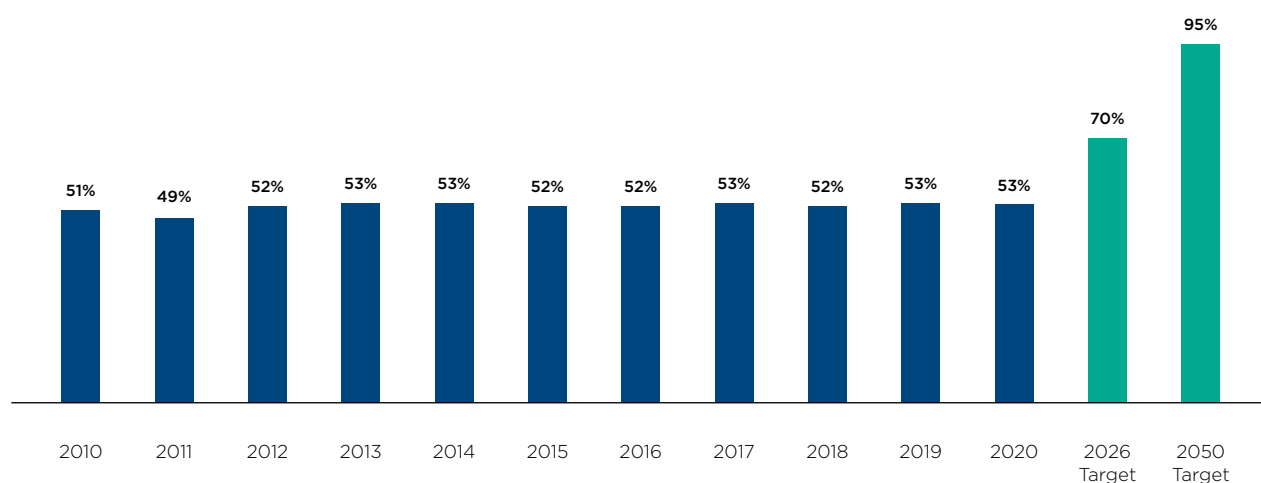
This has coincided with a period where waste diversions — the amount of total waste diverted from the landfill — have likewise remained stagnant at around 52% since at least 2010.

As people have been stuck at home, the overall waste diversion rate has not changed: it was 53% in both 2019 and in 2020.

But the volume of garbage did increase, with total garbage waste coming in at 373,000 tonnes, up from 357,000 tonnes in 2019.

Waste diversion rates and future targets

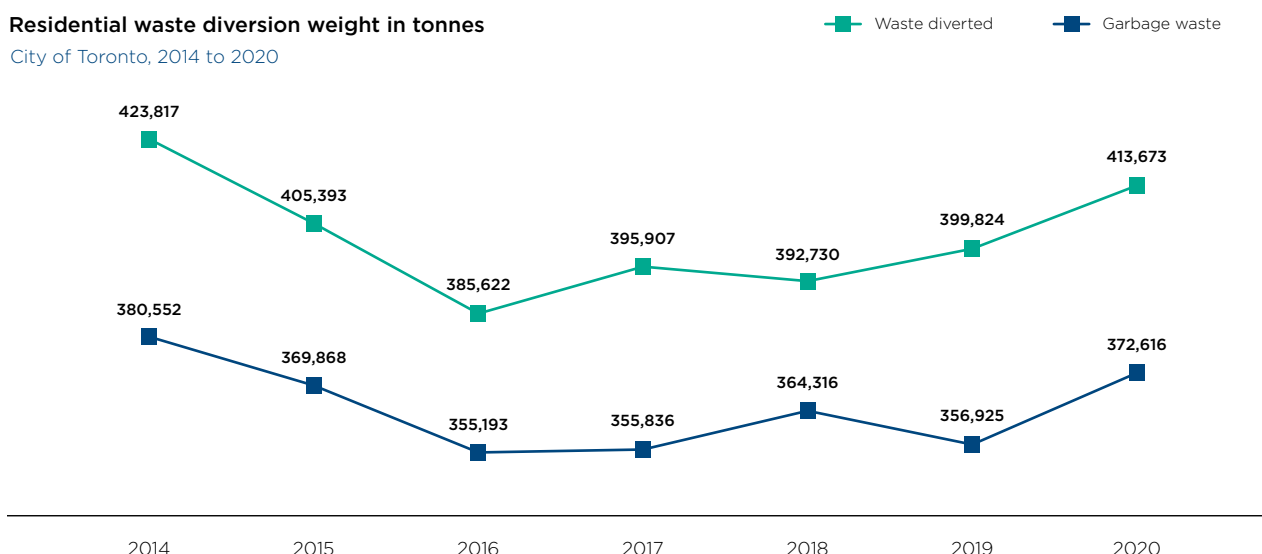
City of Toronto, 2010 to 2020



Sources: For 2020 data, see the City of Toronto Waste Reports and Diversion Rates.¹⁰⁴ For historical data sources, see Toronto Foundation's 2019–20 *Vital Signs*.¹⁰⁵ For targets, see the TransformTO¹⁰⁶ Additional data was retrieved from Archive.org.

Residential waste diversion weight in tonnes

City of Toronto, 2014 to 2020



Source: For sourcing and notes, see the details on the previous chart.

While the lack of progress toward waste-diversion targets combined with the increased volume of waste does signal challenges, there are significant opportunities. A 2016 Toronto Environmental Alliance report entitled *Zero Waste Toronto* found that 71% of garbage in houses and 86% in apartment buildings can be diverted.¹⁰⁸

In 2020, single-family residential homes diverted 63% of their waste, while multi-unit residential diverted only 26%, presenting a huge opportunity to improve waste diversion through improving progress for apartments.¹⁰⁹ Toronto Environmental Alliance has recently been working with high-rise buildings to improve their waste diversion, and for those where community-led changes take root, the results can be significant. The project highlights leading buildings that can divert 85% of their waste, saving large amounts on waste-hauling costs.¹¹⁰

Mah is “concerned that misleading information is being used to promote single-use and disposable products in restaurants and retail, despite the fact that public health officials have said reusables are safe.” For her, a crucial question is, “How do we support businesses to reopen with less waste and ‘more reusables?’”

Says Mah: “There’s a lot of momentum in Toronto because of local work that’s been done to promote reusables, and many businesses are looking at how they can reduce disposables. We know restaurant owners and staff have been hard hit by the pandemic. We need nonprofit and neighbourhood organizations working with the government to support the restaurant industry and build reusables into reopening and recovery.”



OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE ENVIRONMENTAL SECTOR

While the climate crisis has shifted from a special interest to one that garners broader attention, the next big bump in support for action may lie in an increased appreciation for the interconnectedness of natural and social challenges. Mah calls out: “There’s a need for environmental efforts to contextualize and connect what we’re doing to other pressing societal goals, such as addressing social and economic inequality, as part of a climate mitigation and adaptation agenda.”

Jeffrey Schiffer, executive director of Native Child and Family Services of Toronto, shares this perspective: “We have 1,500 parks in the City of Toronto and over half of the green space in the city is tied up in our ravines. That is not just a natural resource, it’s a socio-cultural resource, with a capacity for health and wellness. When we think about the diversity of the city, and the way that poverty continues to find itself embedded in communities that are racialized and when we think as a city about how we create wellness for those people, we can’t ignore the possibility of interaction with green space in meaningful ways to be able to achieve that in very measurable, concrete, evidence-based ways.”

PRIORITIES FOR DONORS, FUNDERS AND POLICYMAKERS

01

Enable environmental initiatives that are intentionally intersectional, meaning that they embrace the interconnectedness and diversity of planet and people.

02

Increase access to nature and public space for different populations and invest in amenities that serve the local community.

03

Build more natural infrastructure, particularly outside the downtown core, led by the local community.

04

Support social infrastructure at the neighbourhood level to build environmental leadership and stewardship that reflects communities.

05

Focus on the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

06

Integrate public learning and engagement into reduce-and-reuse efforts for widespread uptake.

TIPS FOR ENGAGED TORONTONIANS

01

Bring environmental consciousness to your daily routines, from what you buy and where you invest, to how you get around and what you eat.

02

Support the advocacy efforts of environmental groups. Their voice is essential to ensure the necessary policy changes are put in place to reverse environmental degradation.

03

Retrofit your residence to maximize energy efficiency and model best practice in energy efficiency, and water and waste diversion.

6

The Issue

LEARNING

The switch to online education has been challenging for students and parents, with disrupted and unequal learning, lack of connection with peers, loss of recreational opportunities and increased mental health challenges. And yet, the forced experiment in virtual education also presented opportunities to expand reach and explore different avenues for learning for many nonprofits, which saw enrolment in extra-curricular virtual programming increase.

The physical closure of schools and cancellation of before- and after-school programs together led to sharp increases in hunger for many students who had previously relied on nutritional supports.

Like the other topics covered throughout this report, parts of the city that are home to more low-income and racialized residents bore

the brunt of learning disruptions. Students in those areas were more likely to quickly switch to virtual schooling, as these neighbourhoods had the most severe COVID-19 outbreaks, but students in these neighbourhoods were most likely to struggle with access to high-speed internet, high-quality devices and adequate space to focus on schoolwork.



OBSTACLES

- Online learning posed huge barriers for all students, with Toronto data showing declines for literacy rates, and historically marginalized students affected the most, with a very strong relationship between racialized school wards and those who started the school year virtually.
- Student mental health issues have soared, and supports have not been able to keep pace, with Toronto students half as likely to report feeling happy in 2021 versus 2017 (32% versus 66%), much less hopeful about the future (58% versus 31%) and twice as likely to feel lonely (44% versus 22%).
- Nearly all supplemental programming at nonprofits, including before- and after-school programs, closed, and budgets were often reallocated to support basic needs like hunger. With the return of supplemental programming, additional resources may be required, as the need for food is likely to continue indefinitely.



OPPORTUNITIES

- While the challenges are significant, the pandemic may have heightened some students' appreciation for the role of school in their lives, with some Toronto evidence suggesting students are more likely to feel like they belong at school and that their teachers care about them.
- Virtual education models allowed some programs targeted at youth, who are being marginalized, to greatly expand their reach.

ONLINE SCHOOLING FALLS SHORT OF IN-PERSON LEARNING

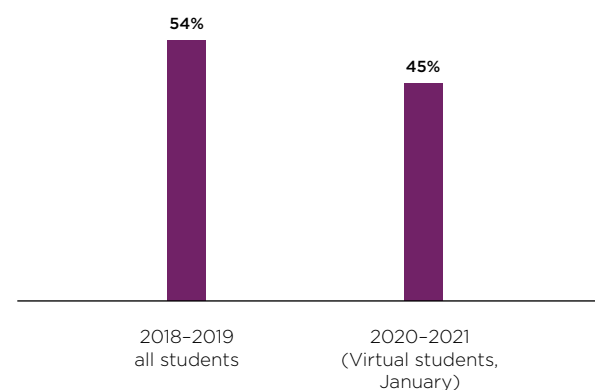
Online learning, while a critical public health measure, has caused students considerable difficulties. The vast majority — 84% — of both primary and secondary school students agreed or strongly agreed they learn better in person, compared to virtual school in a February 2021 Toronto District School Board (TDSB) survey of its students.¹¹¹

The majority of both primary (59%) and secondary (69%) school students were worried that they would fall behind in school because of COVID-19, though a majority of both primary and secondary students reported their progress in school was strong. As with other themes covered in this report, students in communities that are historically being marginalized were less likely to report their progress was strong this year. Students in Etobicoke North were least likely to indicate that their own progress was good or excellent, with only 49% of students reporting this, compared to 58% across all school wards.

Data shows that students have struggled to meet expectations related to literacy and other skills. The TDSB conducted a study of Grade 1 students in January 2021 and found that only 45% of virtual students were meeting grade level expectations for reading, down from 54% in January 2019.¹¹³ Still, report card marks in the TDSB actually increased during the pandemic, though with significant changes in grading methods and elimination of most final exams, this may not reflect any improved learning outcomes.

Percentage of students meeting grade level expectations among virtual students, Grade 1

TDSB, January 2019 versus January 2021



Source: Toronto District School Board.¹¹²

“A national study of more than one million students in the United States found that this winter, there were reductions of up to 16 percent in the number of elementary school students performing at grade level in math, and up to 10 percent in the number of students performing at grade level in reading.”¹¹⁴

In almost all cases, racialized and low-income communities experienced the greatest gaps, meaning that these communities will require unique supports to overcome these challenges.

STUDENTS STRUGGLING WITH PACE AND LACK OF SUPPORTS

In Toronto, a TDSB survey of secondary school students found that they particularly struggled with the pace of instruction, with 53% reporting that the pace was too fast and that they couldn't keep up, compared to only 24% of elementary school students.¹¹⁵

"It's almost like the last two years are a wash," says Utcha Sawyers, executive director of the Boys & Girls Club of East Scarborough. "So, there's going to be such an academic gap."

She is worried about students who are being "pushed into different grades, who are still having tremendous academic difficulties."

Tesfai Mengesha, executive director of operations at Success Beyond Limits, a youth-led community group that provides holistic supports to youth in the Jane and Finch neighbourhood, points out that many students "are not necessarily getting the supports they need, at the time of the need."

Mengesha says: "Young people bring their whole selves into the classroom. Everything they're experiencing outside of the education system manifests itself within the classroom. Think about what unemployment rates look like now in our community versus other communities, issues around food security in Jane and Finch communities or access to transportation. Those issues impact how a young person then goes into a classroom and experiences their education. They might be physically present, but are they mentally present? And is school the thing that they're most concerned about? Or are they thinking about all the other things that are happening in their life, with their family and in their community?"



Think about what unemployment rates look like now in our community versus other communities, issues around food security in Jane and Finch communities or access to transportation. Those issues impact how a young person then goes into a classroom and experiences their education. They might be physically present, but are they mentally present? And is school the thing that they're most concerned about?

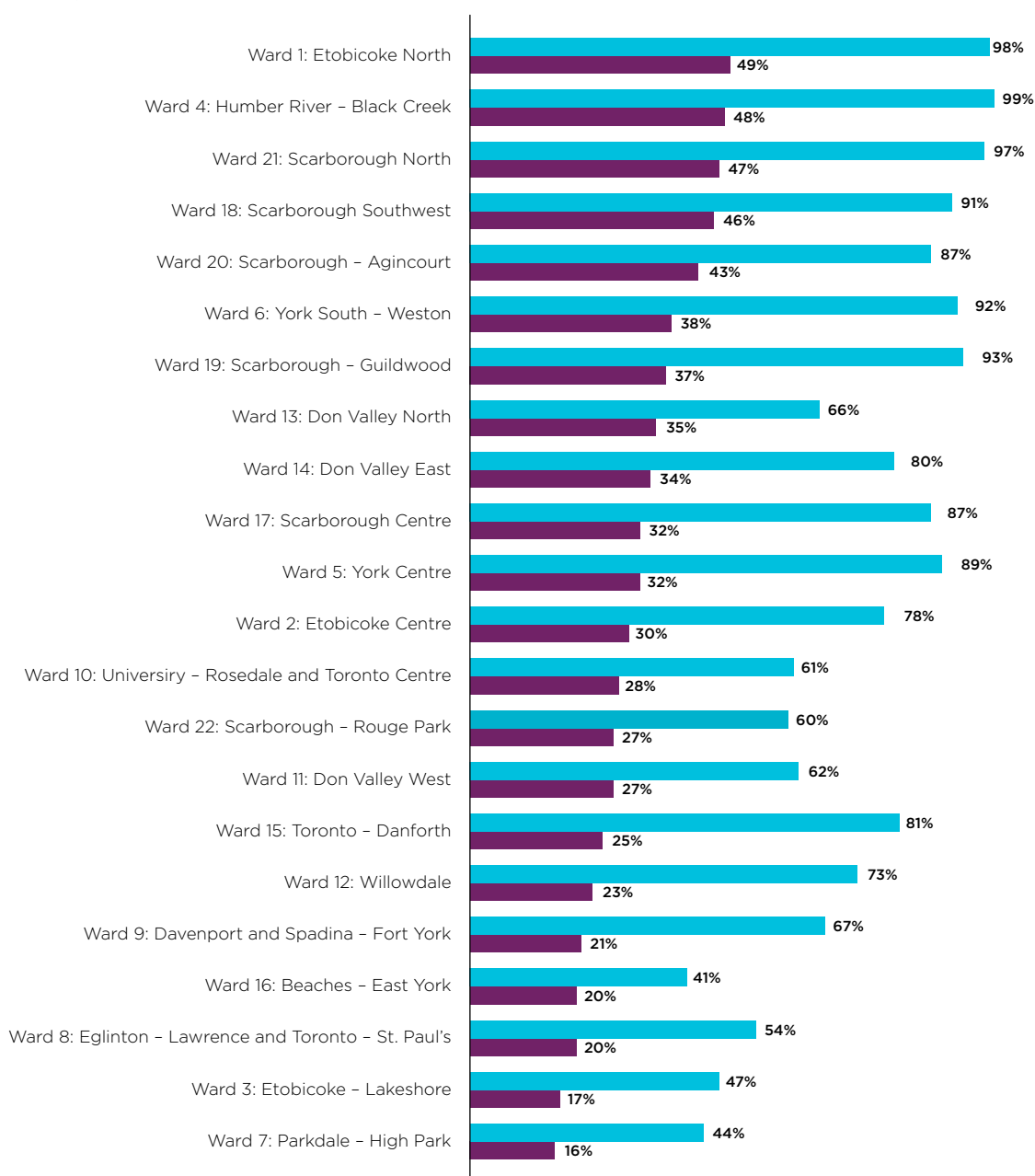
TESFAI MENGESHA

Executive Director of Operations, Success Beyond Limits

Percentage of secondary students learning virtually and percentage who identified as any racial background but white, by school ward

TDSB, January 2021

■ % learning virtually at January 2021
■ % who identified as non-white*



Source: TDSB Survey of Students. Notes: *Students were asked to identify their racial background. Anyone who identified any response but white was listed in this category, which includes 5% of respondents who reported other and 5% who preferred not to disclose. The data on the percentage of students who are learning virtually reflects those who opted to learn virtually or online before all students were transitioned virtually.

VIRTUAL LEARNING MORE PREVALENT IN LOWER-INCOME AND RACIALIZED PARTS OF THE CITY

Students in neighbourhoods devastated by COVID-19 were more likely to learn at home at the start of the school year, when virtual school was optional.

In Etobicoke North, where 98% of students self-identified as non-white in the TDSB's February 2021 student survey, 49% reported they had started the school year virtually (see notes in chart).¹¹⁶ In Beaches-East York, where only 41% of the students identified as non-white, 20% had opted to start the school year virtually.

There is almost a direct correlation between the percentage of respondents who identified as racialized and the percentage of students who reported starting the school year virtually, with the parts of the city where students are most likely to identify as racialized likely to have opted for virtual learning.

Given the difficulties of those learning virtually, it is likely these were disproportionately felt by these racialized communities because of these differences.

For many communities historically excluded by the education system, there are additional challenges associated with virtual learning. “We’re getting a lot of calls from parents who are close to having mental breakdowns, having to deal with teaching,” says Sawyers. “They don’t feel like they have the skills to transfer to their children. Parents are struggling with their own esteem and feeling like they can’t support their children, who are also struggling.”

Further data on the connectivity divide is discussed in the chapter titled Getting Around, Access and Connectivity, on page 143.

MENTAL HEALTH OF STUDENTS A SERIOUS CONCERN

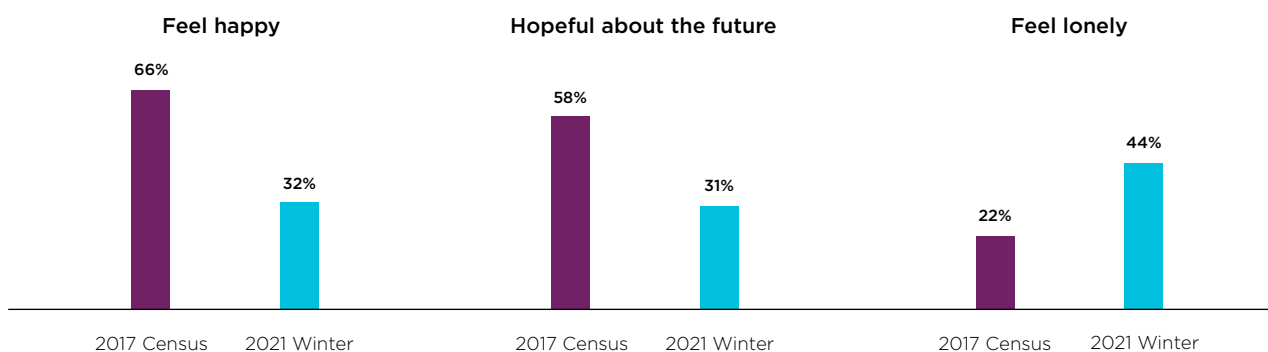
Compared to TDSB’s most recent student Census, a 2021 survey of secondary school students found they were more than half as likely to report often or always feeling happy (66% in 2017 versus 32% in 2021), almost half as likely to feel hopeful about the future (58% in 2017 versus 31% in 2021) and twice as likely to feel lonely (22% versus 44%) (see the infographic for detailed sourcing and notes, as there are many reasons to interpret the two surveys with cautions). Students in elementary school also saw significant decreases in each of these indicators of mental health, though not as significant as for secondary school students.

“Indigenous and racialized youth are not OK,” says Jeffrey Schiffer, executive director of Native Child and Family Services of Toronto. “As we move into the 2021–22 school year, we’re going to see massive challenges related to education success and schooling, but also related to the wellness and psychological development of kids.”

Perception among secondary school students

Toronto District School Board, 2017 versus 2021

Students were half as likely to feel happy or hopeful, and twice as likely to feel lonely



Sources: Data reflects response from secondary school students only, as elementary school student data was not aggregated in a comparable way. Data is from the TDSB Student Census¹¹⁹ and the TDSB 2021 Winter Survey.¹²⁰

Notes: Data reflects the percentage of students who reported they “all the time/often” felt each way in 2017 and 2021.

For the questions on enjoying school, belonging at school, and whether teachers care about them, students were asked whether they felt this way “all of the time/often” in 2017 and “strongly agree/agree” in 2021, so interpret increases with caution. Some questions like the one on belonging were slightly reworded, and differences should be interpreted with caution. More than 22,000 secondary school students completed the 2021 survey, compared to more than 56,000 secondary school students who completed the 2016-17 Census. Survey methodologies differ, and comparisons should be interpreted with caution due to the potential of response bias.

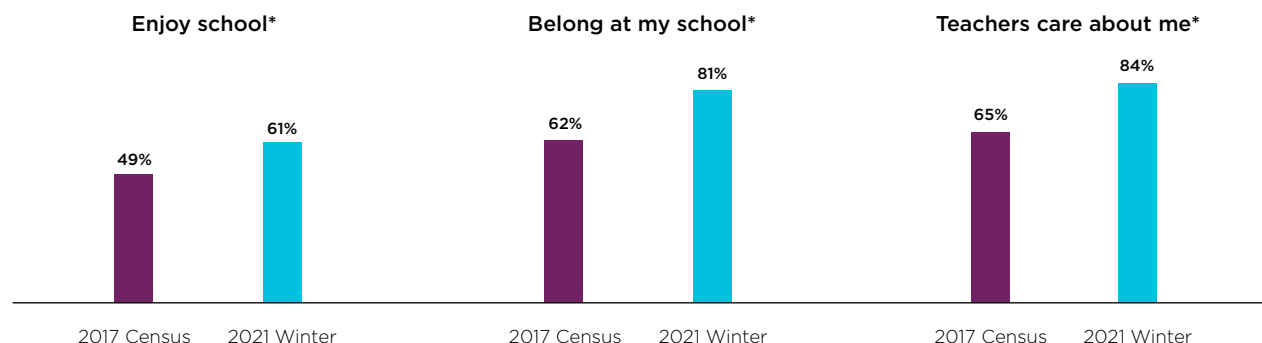
Kids Help Phone is Canada’s only 24-7 national support service that provides counselling and referrals to young people in need. The organization had 4.6 million interactions with young people through phone, text, live chat and self-directed resources through the gateway portal in 2020, compared to 1.9 million in 2019.¹¹⁷ Previous data provided to us for an earlier study showed that calls and texts from Toronto had been increasing even faster than the rest of the country, suggesting that the disruptions in Toronto may have had even greater impacts on students.¹¹⁸ A similar issue was noted in our broader discussion of mental health in Toronto, discussed starting on page 12, where people living in Toronto reported more severe depression and mental health challenges than nearly anywhere else in the country.

Miranda Kamal, executive director of MJKO, a charity that provides mentorship and training to children and youth through non-contact boxing, says programs like hers are “just a Band-Aid to another systemic challenge. We are seeing our own MJKO kids in the hospital with eating disorders. We are seeing them get left behind in a failed education system and we are seeing them become depressed and suicidal. Nothing about this pandemic has been fair.”

Perception among secondary school students

Toronto District School Board, 2017 versus 2021

While forced into online learning, students were more likely to reflect that they enjoy school, belong at school and that their teachers care about them



*For detailed notes about sourcing, definitions, and caveats, please see the writeup on the previous set of charts.

Data from the ER department of Toronto's Hospital for Sick Children (SickKids) provided to *CBC News* reported that it had seen a 25% increase in visits involving suicide ideation in 2020 versus 2019.¹²¹ Survey data provided by Mental Health Research Canada suggested that 16% of youth in the Greater Toronto Area had thought about suicide in recent months, as of April 2021 (discussed further on page 16), emphasising the seriousness of the challenges.

By the time of publication, students are expected to have returned to in-person schooling, though it is impossible to say the extent to which children will easily recover from the experience of lockdown.

The rise in mental health challenges is placing serious strain on a mental health system for children and youth that was already under pressure pre-COVID-19. Hospital visits resulting from mental health and addictions for youth doubled from 2007 to 2017 as a percentage of all discharges in Toronto.¹²² Children's Mental Health Ontario reported in January 2020 that the wait-list for public mental health services had more than 28,000 children and youth on it, more than double the volume of 12,000 in 2017.¹²³

The broader challenges facing youth are significant. Among the emerging mental health issues are a rapid increase in eating disorders cases. Debra Katzman, a senior associate scientist and co-founder of the eating disorder program at SickKids, described the situation in July 2021 as "no question— this is the worst it has ever been."¹²⁴ Data provided to TVO by SickKids in May 2021 noted a 55% increase in eating disorders.¹²⁵

Experts point to real long-term risks. A recent study in *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* noted that "major mental disorders such as major depression, bipolar disorder, and psychotic disorders that begin early mostly continue through adult life. Given their age at onset of such disorders, delays and missed opportunities for intervention are alarming."¹²⁶

Heather McDonald, CEO of LOFT Community Services, says she worries most about her organization's youngest clients. "We serve about 800 youth a year, and the youth we serve are all youth who are either from shelters with mental health and addiction challenges, or from hospital referrals after being hospitalized," explains McDonald, adding that, "they're struggling. They're really struggling. They're isolated. They're lonely." For McDonald, the solution lies in increased access to wraparound supports with an emphasis on connection. "I think providing really comprehensive services to people who are really doing poorly is needed, and we also need more campus wellness services. It's about finding those young people whose silence and disconnection are a problem. And that will be through our school system. It will be through hospitals, too. They end up there when they're really unwell."

Despite the numerous challenges, students reported feeling supported by their teachers and that their teachers care about them to a greater extent than they did before the pandemic, particularly among secondary school students (84% of respondents in 2021 versus 65% in 2017). They were also more likely to report that they enjoyed school (61% versus 49%) and they belong at their school (81% versus 62%) in 2021 than in 2017. Note the phrasing of the questions and the sample methodology were different (see details in the infographic in the previous pages), so caution should be used in interpreting these changes. While the challenges are significant, the pandemic may have heightened students' appreciation for the role of school in their lives. No data is available that breaks down these findings by group.

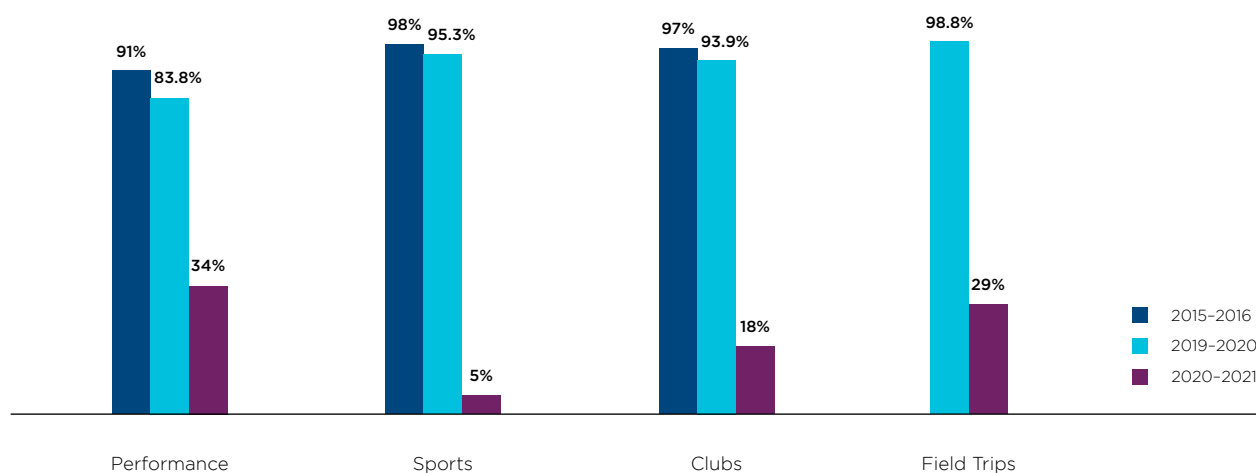
Schiffer's organization, Native Child and Family Services of Toronto (NCFST), continued to offer early childhood education outdoors throughout the pandemic, even as many shut things down, since the organization is a designated emergency service provider. "One thing that is really working for the Indigenous community is running evidence-informed, land-based practices outside." Land-based education assumes an environmental approach to learning that recognizes the deep connection and relationship of Indigenous peoples to the land. Before the program, staff saw mental health challenges start to increase among the children they work with.

"Getting those children and families outside during the context of the pandemic and engaging them in culturally relevant, trauma-informed, land-based practice was having a massive positive impact on their mental health. It was not only reducing depression and anxiety, but also improving family connectedness and cultural connectedness. And I really think that that has been helping some of the most vulnerable families in the city of Toronto move through this pandemic...and then we had more and more and more demand."

NCFST, SickKids and researchers from the Factor-Inwentash Faculty of Social Work at the University of Toronto released a statement calling for action to prioritize children's health and development in May 2021 with the tagline "Let the children play."¹²⁷

Percentage of elementary schools offering broader learning opportunities

Ontario, select years



Source: People for Education, 2021.¹²⁸

GAPS IN ACCESS TO EXTRA-CURRICULAR PROGRAMMING INTENSIFIED

A recent report by People for Education shows that the percentage of Ontario schools offering broader learning opportunities has plummeted.

For example, 95% of schools had sports in 2019-20, declining to only 5% in 2020-21. Clubs, field trips and performance-based programming also all declined significantly.

Before the pandemic, there were already significant gaps in participation driven by a variety of systemic barriers. Students in wealthier neighbourhoods were most likely to participate in sports and other school activities. In Black Creek, in the 2017 TDSB Parent Census, 28% of parents of children in kindergarten to Grade 6 responded that their child regularly participated in individual sports, compared to 87% in Lawrence North.¹²⁹ While that disparity is particularly pronounced, these patterns of low rates of participation are repeated in the northwest corner of the city, Scarborough and in other neighbourhoods that have been marginalized.

Racialized students are also less likely to participate in school sports. Again, according to data from the 2017 TDSB Student Census, 74% of white students reported regularly participating in individual sports, compared to 39% of Black students and 36% of Southeast Asian students. Similarly, 49% of white students regularly participate in team sports, compared to 30% of Black students, 24% of Indigenous students and 19% of Southeast Asian students, all significant pre-existing gaps that will need focus. The broader issue of youth return to sports and the barriers faced by racialized and other marginalized communities is discussed on page 113.

“Native Child and Family Services has two Native learning centres that are in TDSB schools, where we provide culturally grounded additional supports to Indigenous kids that we know are not getting proper services from the TDSB, not because the TDSB doesn’t want to provide those services, but because they’re not funded to do so,” says Schiffer. “If funders are interested in filling those gaps, they should look at where the education needs are more acute and also recognize that they’ve just been made even more acute on the heels of this pandemic. Think about all these Indigenous and racialized kids who are now a year behind...working in a system that is enshrined in systemic racism. How do we build programs and supports around them to start building before- and after-school programs, recreational programs that have some tutoring, land-based education programs?”



Think about all these Indigenous and racialized kids who are now a year behind...working in a system that is enshrined in systemic racism. How do we build programs and supports around them to start building before- and after-school programs, recreational programs that have some tutoring, land-based education programs?

JEFFREY SCHIFFER
Executive Director, Native Child
and Family Services of Toronto

RECONCILIATION FUNDAMENTAL TO EDUCATION REFORM

Calls to incorporate more Indigenous content, as well as anti-racist content more broadly, into the education system became louder than ever in 2021, as a growing number of people began to engage more deeply with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's Calls to Action. This shift came after several First Nations announced the discovery of unmarked graves at the sites of former Indian residential schools and in the wake of a global outcry around anti-Black racism and systemic discrimination against groups that are being marginalized that rose to attention after the murder of George Floyd.

In May 2021, the Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation announced the discovery of the remains of 215 children at the former Kamloops Indian Residential School, and in June 2021, the Cowessess First Nation announced a preliminary finding of 751 unmarked graves at a cemetery near the former Marieval Indian Residential School, and other communities have begun to report similar findings.



24-HOUR NATIONAL CRISIS LINE

A national Indian Residential School Crisis Line has been set up to provide support for former students and those affected. People can access emotional and crisis referral services by calling the 24-hour national crisis line: **1-866-925-4419**

“We are doing a massive disservice to every child and youth in Ontario,” says Schiffer, in speaking about the ongoing failure to adequately integrate Indigenous history, knowledge, and innovation into the curriculum. According to Schiffer: “That’s got to be integrated into primary and secondary education, along with post-secondary, along with professional education that we get in the workplace, because we’re dealing with many different generations here.”

Calls to Action 62–65 lay out specific steps the federal, provincial and territorial governments’ need to take to support “Education for Reconciliation.”

Harvey Manning, director of programs and services at Anishnawbe Health Toronto, adds “a lot of times people put it on the Indigenous community to educate our oppressors about what they should be learning. And to me, it’s

completely the opposite. I think that it’s really on our allies to learn on their own. It’s really about people learning about who we are instead of us teaching them who we are.”

“Colonialism wasn’t that far back and is ongoing. Residential schools were not that long ago. This is not lifetimes ago,” says Tesfai Mengesha of Success Beyond Limits in his call for an increased focus on, and investments in, communities disproportionately affected by both the pandemic and historical oppression.

“From an Indigenous perspective, children are these sacred little bundles who come from the Creator. They are medicine and our future. They’re our most valuable resource. So, what we should be doing is investing in kids. What we should be doing is investing in kids in a way that’s also refracted through a lens of Reconciliation and equity,” says Schiffer.

NONPROFITS STEP UP TO FILL GAPS WITH VIRTUAL PROGRAMMING

Visions of Science Network for Learning is a Toronto charity that advances educational achievements for low-income and racialized students through engagement in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). The organization has been growing dramatically in the last five years, from 200 students served annually in one program to more than 1,000 in five programs.

Even in a year of profound challenges for students, Eugenia Duodu Addy, CEO of Visions of Science Network for Learning, sees that “there are a lot of things that you can do online that you can’t do in person, and because we convene youth across the city, being able to engage everyone online has been optimal. We now have youth from Scarborough to

Mississauga all hopping online from home, whereas before they came to a central Regent Park location. So, in some cases, accessibility has increased for our programs.”

Ayla Lefkowitz, co-executive director of CANVAS Arts Action Programs, had a similar experience when a 2SLGBTQ+ inclusion symposium that they had originally planned for a couple of hundred students to attend in-person in Peel Region was made virtual and opened to students across the GTA. “Because it was online, we had 3,000 students attend,” says Lefkowitz. “The school board ended up putting it out, and I think teachers were desperate to get their kids something different because it’s so hard to do interesting teaching online. So, that was fabulous.”

At the same time, the inability to connect in person leaves some students out, as do the barriers to technology, a topic covered further in *Getting Around, Access and Connectivity*, on page 143.

Other organizations are focused more broadly on improving pathways through education for more students who are being marginalized.

Utcha Sawyers of the Boys & Girls Club of East Scarborough notes: “Even before the pandemic, our after-school mentorship program, *Race to Grade*, was always full. We need additional resources to meet the demand, but this is just one part of the solution to more equitable educational outcomes. Our bridging programs are also essential when it comes to helping racialized students navigate post-secondary life and graduate.” A recent U of T study found that once admitted to the university, TDSB students who were male, Black, from single-parent households, 2SLGBTQ+ and from lower-income neighbourhoods and other students from other groups that are being marginalized, were less likely to graduate from the university once enrolled.¹³⁰

HUNGER AN EXACERBATED FACTOR IN LEARNING

Students are not only struggling with education and mental health, but also basic needs like getting enough food. Many organizations that provide educational programming have had to shift their focus to helping students get food and meet other basic needs, with almost all types of programs focused on youth now having a food or healthy eating component built in.

“I look forward to a time when South Parkdale has enough food to eat, so we can get back to the business of using sport to create social change,” says Miranda Kamal of MJKO. “It’s not fair that grassroots charities are being left to serve marginalized people without money or resources. We are now running a full food bank serving 50 seniors, 33 people experiencing different levels of housing insecurity and 50 MJKO families. Over the last year, we distributed 96,000 pounds of food with a value of over \$300,000. Each week, we leave feeling depressed, as we never have enough food for the demand.”

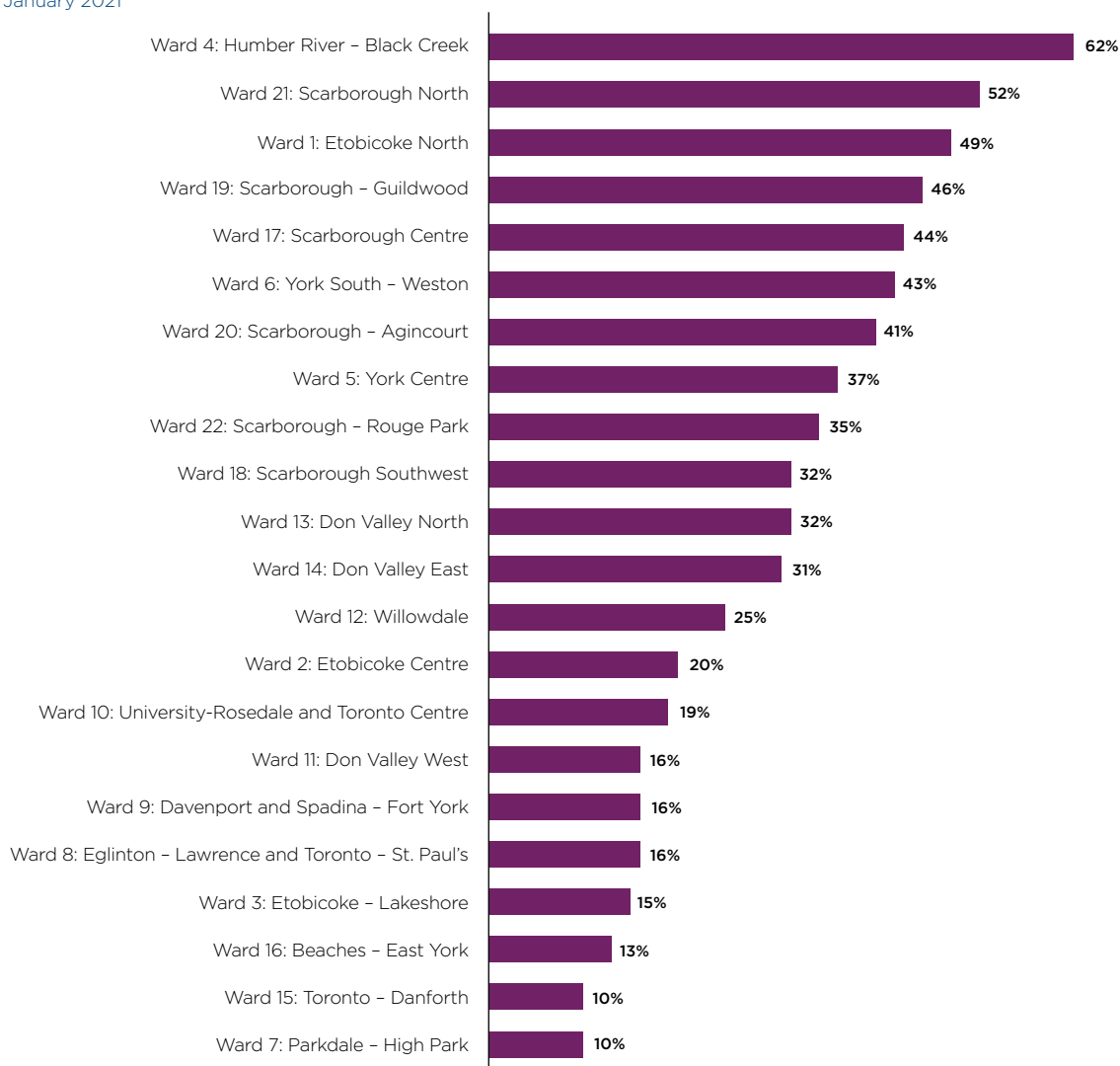
Concerns about hunger vary dramatically based on school wards. Almost two-thirds of parents (62%) in Humber River-Black Creek, in the northwest corner of the city, reported worrying that they would run out of food before they can buy more food for their family, compared to only 10% in Parkdale-High Park.

Those who are struggling to buy food often have issues compounded with reducing the quality of food, inadequate supply of fruits and vegetables, reducing meals and often feeling hungry, leading to more challenge focusing on school.

Hunger is a persistent problem in this city, and visits to emergency food providers continue to increase, with the most recent month of data for June 2021 showing that Daily Bread Food Bank had the highest food bank visits ever recorded, a topic covered further on page 19.

Have worried food will run out before they can buy more, parents of TDSB students

TDSB, January 2021



Source: TDSB Parents Survey.¹³¹ Notes: Parents were asked if since September 2020, they have been worried that food will run out before they can buy more for their family. Chart includes respondents who answered either “sometimes true” or “often true.”

LONG-TERM CHALLENGES EMERGING THAT NEED SYSTEM-WIDE SOLUTIONS

“We have a greater, bolder, more focused vision as a result of this year,” says Eugenia Duodu Addy. The organization has expanded its scope and is looking to better understand their role in advocacy and public policy, too. “Virtual learning is an awesome opportunity for us to get really creative about what the future of education needs to look like, especially as it relates to STEM. We’re open and committed to advocating for more serious reform to meet all students’ needs.”

Duodu Addy explains that a portion of their current strategy is helping students be equipped to self-advocate. “We’re really looking with an eye to strengthen the support networks for youth, partnering with communities, community leaders, families and educators, sharing knowledge and through reciprocal capacity building. The stronger the youth network is, the more effective our work will be. This approach has changed everything for us, and that’s given us hope for the future.”

PRIORITIES FOR DONORS, FUNDERS AND POLICYMAKERS

01

Push for the inclusion of Indigenous history, knowledge and innovation, as well as anti-racist material more generally, into the curriculum from the primary levels through to post-secondary.

03

Close the digital divide by investing in more universal access to the internet and digital devices.

05

Fund programs that bridge school and work, and the transition from elementary school to post-secondary, as they are just as important as those offered throughout the elementary and secondary school context.

07

Research into the pitfalls, as well as the opportunities, that virtual learning can bring will pave the way for improved access to education and better learning outcomes for all.

02

Focus educational supports on neighbourhoods and groups hardest hit by the pandemic and provide unrestricted and multi-year support that acknowledges the necessary shifts in program delivery.

04

Recognize that extra-curricular programming that keeps children and youth emotionally and physically healthy and able to learn is fundamental to equitable educational outcomes.

06

Support front-line organizations working with communities that are being marginalized, so they can engage in public policy development. Their experience is critical to addressing systemic gaps and ensuring that all students have the capacity to succeed.

TIPS FOR ENGAGED TORONTONIANS

01

Academic achievement and post-secondary attainment are contingent on strong social supports. Consider the barriers many children and youth face and support those organizations best equipped to address them. Sometimes this is as simple as ensuring basic nutrition needs are being met, a quiet place to go to do homework or access to physical activity to fuel brain energy.

02

Mentor a student to give them an additional outlet and a source of inspiration.

03

Leverage existing federal investments in RESP matching for low-income students to access.



The Issue

ARTS, CULTURE AND RECREATION

Arts and culture, and recreation and sport are all fundamental to making Toronto a livable city. The role they play in connecting people and building social capital, as well as health and wellbeing, came into sharp focus in the face of physical distancing measures. Much of their activity was curtailed and, in the case of sport, in particular, came to a complete halt. The impact of this has been devastating to the finances of nonprofits and charities serving these sectors.

Where it was possible, the shift to online kept organizations afloat, the livelihoods of some workers intact and the hearts and minds of residents engaged throughout the dark days of the pandemic. Claire Hopkinson, director and CEO of the Toronto Arts Council, explains: “During COVID, people have turned to the arts for mental health, for joy, for survival. The role of the arts has been understood very deeply in a profound way.”

While the pace of recovery is uncertain, the move online offers some organizations the opportunity for audience expansion. The historic dependence on face-to-face interaction has been an obstacle for many whose location and/or financial limitations have precluded them from participating in the past. The forced shift to virtual programming without a doubt offers immediate-term potential for greater access, and this will help address well-documented gaps, particularly for low-income and populations that are otherwise being marginalized.



OBSTACLES

- Arts, culture, recreation and sport organizations have been the hardest hit by COVID-19 restrictions, with 70% of these Toronto nonprofits reporting revenue declines in 2021, compared to 36% of other nonprofits, putting some organizations' survival at risk.
- Thousands of arts workers lost their jobs during the pandemic, while many more have had their hours reduced, and there is a risk that they will have to leave Toronto due to high living costs.
- Some arts and recreation activities were out of reach for many before the pandemic, and there is a possibility that organizations will need to raise prices to make up for lost revenues, which could make activities even less accessible.



OPPORTUNITIES

- Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) was an important lifeline for many artists and arts workers, underlining the need to raise the income floor for workers living historically below the poverty line.
- Many organizations successfully added online programming during the pandemic, some of which will continue even after in-person activities resume, thereby reaching larger and more diverse audiences.
- The inequitable impacts of the pandemic overall point to the need for equal access to arts, culture, sports and recreation activities, with expansion to underserved communities a likely outcome of the recovery period and beyond.

ARTS, CULTURE, RECREATION AND SPORTS ORGANIZATIONS CONTINUE TO STRUGGLE

According to the Toronto Nonprofit Survey, in 2020, more than half of non-arts organizations (57%) experienced revenue decreases. In 2021, things were beginning to improve for non-arts organizations, with only 36% reporting less revenues than before the pandemic and 40% reporting higher revenues.

Arts organizations, on the other hand, have seen almost no improvement over the past year, with 70% reporting lower revenues in both 2020 and 2021. One of the main reasons for these continued struggles is that many arts organizations are dependent on ticket, and food and beverage sales, which have been mostly non-existent for the past year. See the Appendix for more details about the survey.

The survey responses across the nonprofit sector are covered in far more detail in the Civic Engagement and Belonging chapter starting on page 62.

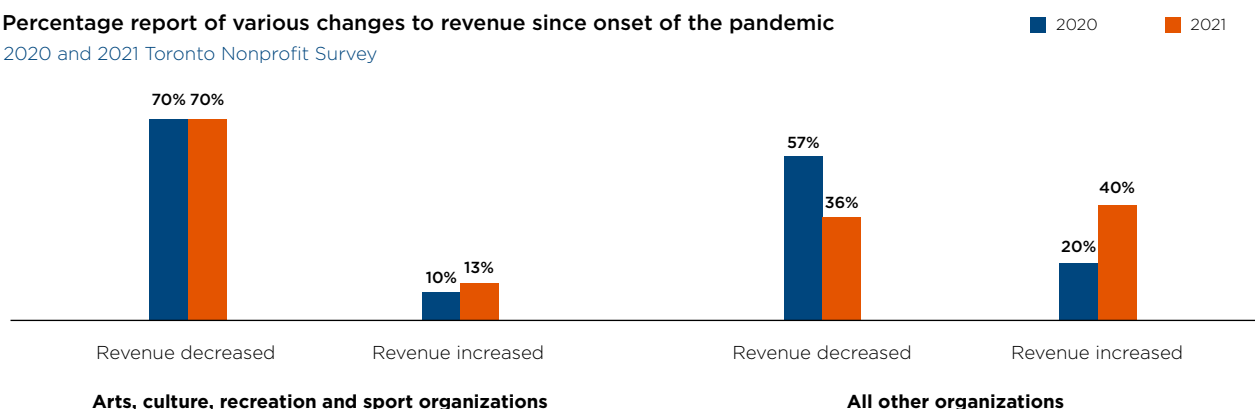
The Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts estimated more than \$900 million in lost revenue during the first year of the pandemic from results of its survey of members.¹³²

Many arts organizations have already closed during the pandemic. For example, 22 live music venues closed in Toronto in 2020, including mid-sized venue the Mod Club, which had been operating since 2002.¹³³ This is devastating news for musicians, because more than 75% of their revenue can come from touring.¹³⁴ According to a study by consulting firm NordCity for the Canadian Live Music Association, “each venue that closes in Toronto costs an average of 10 full-time employees, \$575,000 in annual GDP contributions and \$148,000 in provincial and federal taxes.”¹³⁵

While results for sports and recreation organizations are not definitive in the Toronto Nonprofit Survey, other research paints a similarly dire picture as for arts and culture organizations. A February 2021 Ipsos survey found that 28% of sports organizations are temporarily closed and 52% are concerned about permanent closure.¹³⁶ A study from the MLSE Foundation released in June 2021 also found that less than half of youth who played team sports pre-pandemic are engaged in their sport now.¹³⁷

Percentage report of various changes to revenue since onset of the pandemic

2020 and 2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey



Source: 2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey conducted by Toronto Foundation. For full details, see Appendix. Notes: The 2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey took place between May and June 2021. The 2020 Toronto Nonprofit Survey took place between July and August 2020. Not shown: those who say their revenue is relatively unchanged.

ARTS WORKERS ARE SUFFERING, AND MANY MAY HAVE LEFT THE SECTOR PERMANENTLY

Workers in the arts, culture, recreation and sport sectors already faced high rates of poverty before the pandemic, and many of them have either been laid off or had their hours drastically reduced during the past year. As discussed in the 2019–20 *Toronto's Vital Signs Report*, workers in the Toronto CMA in the arts and recreation field had median salaries 42% less than the typical occupation (\$23,926 versus \$41,029 in 2016).¹³⁸ Arts workers in Toronto also made less money on average than arts workers across Canada. Women in the arts and culture sector have considerably lower salaries than men, and racialized workers have lower incomes than non-racialized workers.

Arts, entertainment and recreation workers have seen the steepest drops in employment since before the pandemic. According to the Canadian Association for the Performing Arts (CAPACOA), 114,400 (one in four) arts, entertainment and recreation workers in Canada lost their jobs in 2020. Total hours worked in arts, entertainment and recreation also declined by 37% between February 2020 and February 2021.¹³⁹

Employment change (%)

February 2021 compared to February 2020

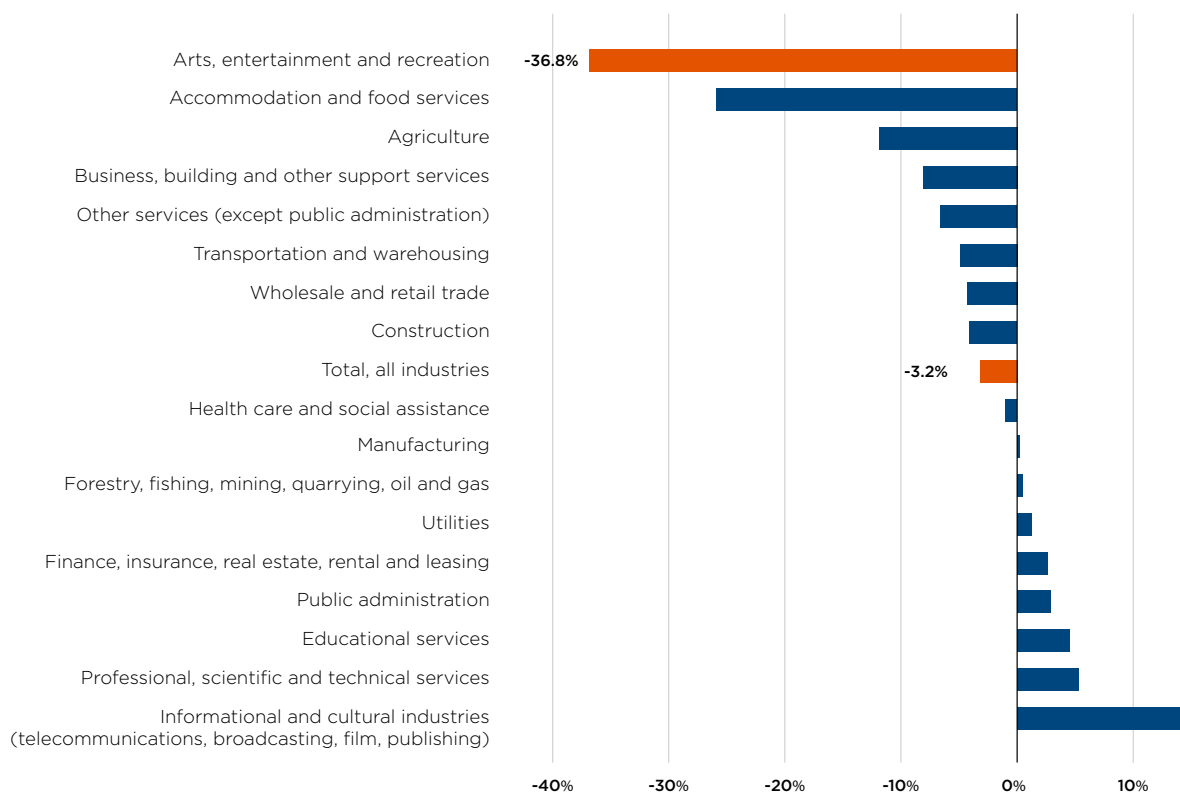


Image Source: The Canadian Association for the Performing Arts/l'Association canadienne des organismes artistiques (CAPACOA). Data source: Statistics Canada, Labour Force Survey, employment by industry, Canada.

A November 2020 survey of more than 1,200 artists and arts workers across Canada also found that 71% of respondents were working less in the arts and culture sector than before the pandemic, and 12% were no longer working in the sector.¹⁴⁰

Toronto Foundation's 2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey also found that arts workers are stressed, with 57% of respondents from the arts and culture expressing symptoms of burnout, compared to 41% of non-arts workers. A broader discussion of burnout in the nonprofit sector is covered on page 73.

During the pandemic, many arts workers greatly benefited from receiving the \$2,000 monthly CERB payments. Hopkinson says that CERB "pointed out that artist incomes have been well

below the poverty level. We're very grateful that CERB has been there to support artists, many who are actually earning more money from CERB than they do from their careers. With the cost of living in Toronto skyrocketing, will we continue to have an incredibly vibrant art scene which enriches this city so much?"

Once the federal government's COVID-19 support programs end, there is a real risk that many artists in Toronto will no longer be able to afford living in the city, and without an immediate return by the public to pre-pandemic levels of in-person art attendance (which is highly unlikely), many artists may need to switch to other careers or move to more affordable cities, which would deprive Toronto of its prized artistic talent. Broader discussions of income support programs are covered on page 39.

“

BIPOC, newcomer, refugee, 2SLGBTQ+ communities in the arts are already on the margins. Especially artists and art professionals in these communities, who are all gig workers. Due to COVID, most of these individuals have had substantial loss of income/livelihood, and the impact of this will be long term.

”

ANONYMOUS SURVEY RESPONDENT

The 2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey

SOME ARTS ORGANIZATIONS SUCCESSFULLY WENT ONLINE DURING THE PANDEMIC

Although many organizations have been facing existential struggles during the pandemic, some have been able to successfully move some of their activities online.

In a survey conducted by the Toronto Alliance for the Performing Arts, 63% of respondents created new digital work and 35% digitized existing work.¹⁴¹

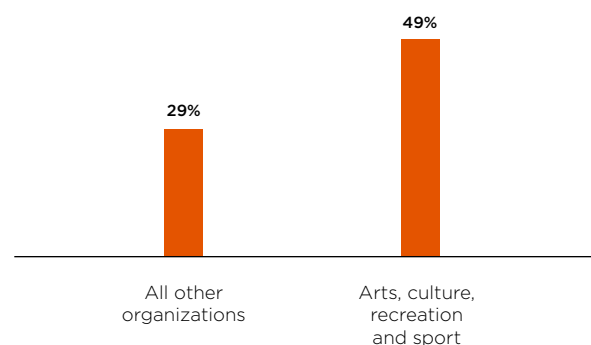
Says Ayla Lefkowitz of CANVAS Arts Action Programs: “We’ve been able to pivot during the pandemic to offer all of our programs online. It has been challenging at points, and certainly a lot of work, but I think they’re going really well. We’re doing more storytelling and poetry, and I think that’s had a really strong effect on how queer and trans folks are able to share their stories, rather than just educating on all the specifics of queer and trans identity... Once we hopefully go back to being in person, I think we’ll continue to do the online component for places that we can’t go to. We’ve been running workshops all over Canada, and even in the [United] States this year, and that has been positive. I don’t think we would have pushed ourselves to create an online workshop if it weren’t for the pandemic.”

Debra Chandler from Concerts in Care Ontario, which serves seniors in a variety of facilities, also spoke of the success of the organization’s online programs: “Our 30-minute up-close-and-personal concert videos and our Zoom Concerts & Conversations make people happy, give them a chance to talk live to musicians and each other, and feel like they are part of the community again. We have kept up delivery and social contact with excellent music, and our community is waiting for us to be able to do in-person concerts again.”

David Anderson, founder of Clay and Paper Theatre, also spoke about how they continued to serve their communities, both online and in public spaces: “In our theatre work, we were able to ‘pivot’ and to continue to work with our communities online. The connections were deep and heartfelt, and highlighted the strong desire of people to maintain connections that had occurred previously in physical space. While half of our team was digital, our strategy with the other half was to find new ways of being in the public spaces that we traditionally inhabit and, surprisingly, to even find new (though circumscribed by COVID requirements) places to serve our audiences. We feel that the desire for live performance has greatly increased in our communities.”

Percentage who agree that they are worried many people they serve will never reconnect with the organization

2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey



Source: The 2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey, conducted by Toronto Foundation.

A major downside of the shift to online programming is that audiences are much less willing to pay for online performances. The February 2021 Arts Response Tracking Study found that people spent 68% of their time on arts and culture consumption during the pandemic on free content versus only 13% for paid content.¹⁴² Only 4% of respondents in a May 2020 poll conducted by Nanos for business/arts said they would be willing to pay the same price for a digital performance as they do for an in-person performance.¹⁴³

A LONG RECOVERY EXPECTED

Although some organizations have had success in delivering their programs online and in public spaces, there is no doubt that the sector faces a long recovery, and many of the respondents to the Toronto Nonprofit Survey fear that the pandemic will have long-term consequences for their organizations.

Close to 60% of arts organizations believe the pandemic has affected their long-term sustainability (compared to 43% of non-arts organizations).

As COVID-19 restrictions are lifting, many non-arts organizations are more hopeful that their finances are beginning to recover, but this is less true for arts organizations.

Looking ahead, 70% of arts organizations in the Toronto Foundation Nonprofit Survey believe that the pandemic will negatively impact finances in 2022, compared to 42% of non-arts organizations. Nearly half of arts organizations (49%) are worried that the people they serve will never reconnect with them, compared to nearly a third (29%) of all other organizations.

One of the major reasons that arts organizations expect a slow recovery is that many of them are dependent on ticket revenue, and other surveys have found that many people will remain hesitant to attend in-person events for the foreseeable future.

For example, a February 2021 poll conducted by Nanos for business/arts found that only 30% of respondents would immediately attend an indoor arts/culture event after reopening (and 5% had already attended an event during the pandemic).¹⁴⁴ Also, 18% of respondents said they would wait between one and five months, 11% of respondents said they would wait more than six months and 34% were unsure.

Andrew Lamb, artistic director of Roseneath Theatre, spoke about the difficulties facing the sector during the years ahead: “In the theatre sector, playwrights and performers have been able to do some work digitally, but many independent artists like designers (set, costume, sound, lighting) and others who require an in-person production to be happening to do their work are mostly about to go off the government support, and there just isn’t going to be the same number of contracts for a few years. I’m really concerned that many artists I’ve collaborated with in the past will no longer be in theatre in the next couple of years, resulting in a missing generation of theatre artists.”

EQUITY AND FEES ARE MAJOR PROBLEMS

Before the pandemic, high fees for arts and recreation activities meant that these activities were not always inclusive. Only 14% of Toronto residents with incomes under \$30,000 were a member of a sport or recreational organization in 2018, compared to 39% of those earning more than \$150,000.¹⁴⁵ While barriers are many, often the cost of attending is one of the biggest. And there is a risk that organizations will need to raise fees to cope with decreasing revenues, which, in addition to time and transportation barriers, would make arts, culture, sports and recreational activities even more unaffordable for low-income residents.

A 2021 MLSE Foundation study of more than 6,800 youth and their parents in Ontario found that youth participation in sports was highly correlated with income, with 87% of youth from high-income families participating in sports in the last two years, compared to only 57% of low-income households.¹⁴⁶ The pandemic has hit youth sports in the city hard, with less than 31% of youth in the GTA saying they returned to team sports, compared to more than half in the rest of the province (53%), and 23% returning to individual sports, compared to 36% in the rest of the province (chart and sourcing on next page).

A quarter of respondents to the MLSE Foundation survey cited the availability of low or reduced-cost opportunities as one of the top factors when deciding whether to access a sport opportunity, and this was true of 42% of low-income respondents. A total of 65% of Black youth in the GTA identified affordability as a top priority, compared to 47% of Black youth outside the GTA.

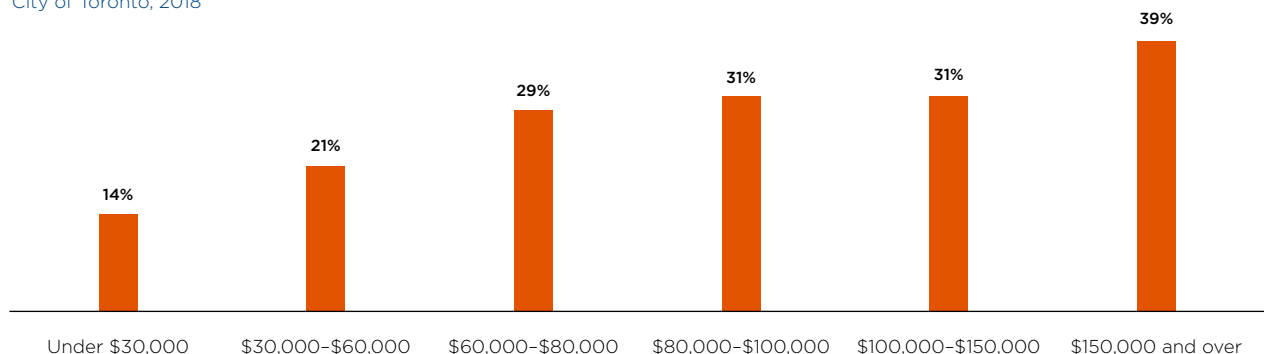
The MLSE Foundation study also found that youth who had participated in sports within the last two years were 91% more likely to list a very strong sense of belonging to their community, meaning that low-income youth who cannot afford sports are missing out on an opportunity to build their sense of community.

With huge problems regarding feelings of isolation that are particularly hitting youth hard (see a further discussion on page 65), this suggests that investments in nonprofit sports and other activities that build these sorts of connections will be essential. A discussion of recreational programs for children is covered on page 99.

The study also found that when controlling for other demographic factors, young women and girls are less likely to participate in sports, and this is especially true for South Asian and Southeast Asian youth.

Percentage who were a member of a sport or recreational organization in the last 12 months

City of Toronto, 2018



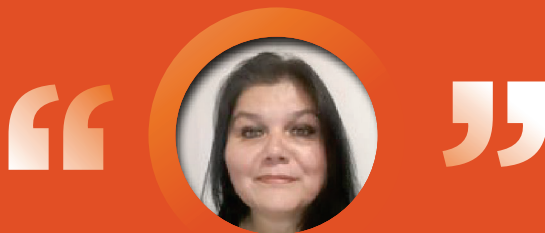
Source: Toronto Social Capital Study via 2019–20 *Toronto's Vital Signs*.¹⁴⁷

Percentage of youth who have returned to sports

Toronto, March–May 2021



Source: MLSE Foundation 2021 Change the Game Research Open Data.¹⁴⁸ Note: Analysis by the author.



There's a lack of Indigenous culture within the city because of policies and procedures, and all the bureaucracy that one has to deal with to practise culture within the city.

CYNTHIA BELL-CLAYTON

Executive Director, ENAGB Indigenous Youth Agency

While cost is a barrier, the discrimination that many racialized youth report experiencing when entry is gained points to the need for anti-racism efforts if the benefits of sports are to become more broadly shared. According to the MLSE Foundation survey, 33% of Black youth, 26% of Indigenous youth and 21% of BIPOC youth overall reported experiencing racism in sports, and the numbers were even higher when asked about discrimination, rather than racism (38%, 36% and 28%, respectively).

Cynthia Bell-Clayton of ENAGB Indigenous Youth Agency highlights issues that prevent Indigenous communities from practising their culture more. She says that COVID-19 made gathering for in-person cultural events more challenging, but points to bigger barriers that existed pre-COVID-19. “There’s a lack of Indigenous culture within the city because of policies and procedures, and all the bureaucracy that one has to deal with to practise culture within the city,” she says. Prior to COVID-19,

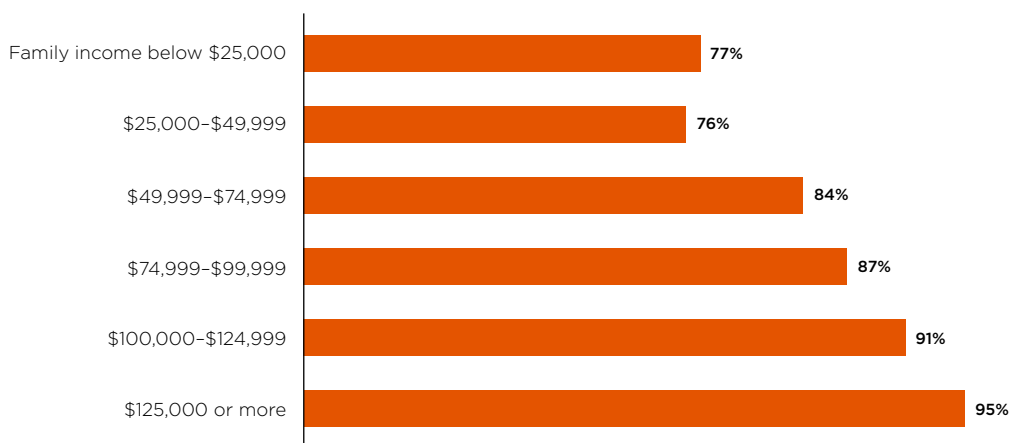
during a pipe ceremony with youth, ENAGB identified the need for more access to culture and language and land-based learning as a priority. ENAGB was getting set to access a lodge that a grassroots organization had built by the Humber River and started to plan events, only to see the lodge torn down. This made rebuilding the lodge a major pandemic focus. “So, with the help of the City, ENAGB and the grassroots peoples in that area, we were able to build a 40-foot by 70-foot lodge, which now serves as a teaching lodge and a sweat lodge,” says Bell-Clayton. She adds that meetings are ongoing with the City to ensure longer-term access to the community-built sacred spaces.

“Recently, we held a sacred fire ceremony and a naming ceremony, where we named 18 babies. We also were able to host a sweat, which included 16 youth. So, now that we have our space, we can gather more regularly for ceremonies and prayers.”

Participation in arts and culture in Canada is also stratified by income. In a study called Demographic Patterns in Canadians’ Arts Participation in 2016, Hill Strategies found that 95% of people with a family income of more than \$125,000 attended arts events, compared to 77% of those with family incomes under \$25,000.¹⁴⁹

Participation in art events, by income

Canada, 2016



Source: Demographic Patterns in Canadians’ Arts Participation in 2016.¹⁵⁰

PANDEMIC LEARNINGS HOLD HOPE FOR BRIGHTER FUTURE



Artists imagine the future that isn't here today. They have this incredible ability to see, to imagine what better lives can be and to predict challenges that are around the corner.

CLAIRE HOPKINSON

Director and CEO, Toronto Arts Council

In the MLSE Foundation survey, 59.6% of youth across income levels identified “making sport opportunities more affordable” as an important way to build sports back better than before the pandemic.

In addition to making sports more affordable, there is also a need to create more inclusive environments.

For example, the MLSE Foundation survey found that while only one in eight youth overall identified “coaches that look like me” as a priority, this was true for one out of three Black youth and one out of five South Asian youth. This knowledge is an important first step in addressing long-standing barriers to participation.

“Our programs push and support Black girls using STEM, sports and the psychology that comes with it,” says Toyo Ajibolade, executive director at Lady Ballers Camp. “Participants in our Young, Dark and Anxious program leave equipped with practical coping skills and tools, including visualization, positive self-talk, concentrated refocusing and breathing muscle-relaxation exercises. In basketball, we encourage girls to take a shot, and if the ball does not make it in, what matters is to get the rebound, refocus and try again.”

RETHINKING OUR CULTURAL SPACES AND ACCESSIBILITY

The role of physical space was a common theme during our interviews, particularly the inconsistent access across the city and to particular population groups.

“We need a total rethink of cultural space in Toronto,” says Hopkinson. “We have sports fields, we have parks, we have community centres, we have libraries, but we do not have sustainable art space. Through all the work that our foundation has done by taking the arts outside and out of libraries and historic sites, we know there is a tremendous appetite there. It is a matter of democratic access to the arts. And this has been an oversight.”

Stachen Frederick, executive director of Frontlines, also emphasizes that access to existing recreational space has not always been equal:

“Even before the pandemic, there wasn’t much indoor space for activity, and outdoor space has been typically occupied by the privileged.” Frontlines provides arts, culture, educational, employment, and recreation programming to children and youth from Weston and the surrounding neighbourhoods. Frederick shares that booming registration for the organization’s summer day camp and leadership training programs gives her hope they can start to address the negative impacts on youth of not having spaces and opportunities to connect with each other for so many months. “Our kids, they don’t use the word ‘isolated.’ But, it’s like, ‘I feel lonely,’ and ‘I miss my friends.’ So, creating space and creating opportunities for them to connect will be absolutely critical in the next little while.”

Utcha Sawyers, executive director of the Boys & Girls Club of East Scarborough, told us they are working to provide more arts and recreation space for youth who are being marginalized: “We have a new youth centre that’s focused on Black youth and youth identifying as both Black and Indigenous. We have the largest population in our local community of youth who identify as both. There’s just no tangible space for them. We were able to secure a site last year, and the whole mandate and focus are on animating opportunities for them to live their best life. We’re very excited about that... We’re also building a state-of-the-art studio and we’re hoping to start doing some major fundraising to get that done. We have amazing talent in Scarborough, and they just need the opportunity to access quality equipment, to be able to come in and produce and record, and come out with a demo and their foot in the door.”

The recreational needs of those with disabilities are covered further on page 24.

The City of Toronto has been working on several initiatives to help the sector recover from the pandemic and to make arts and culture more accessible throughout the city. A December 2020 report of the City’s Economic and Culture Recovery Advisory Group acknowledged that the city’s cultural sector has been concentrated in the downtown core and it called to continue efforts to create opportunities for cultural engagement in all parts of the city, including in the winter.¹⁵¹

“



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We have a new youth centre that's focused on Black youth and youth identifying as both Black and Indigenous. We have the largest population in our local community of youth who identify as both. There's just no tangible space for them. We were able to secure a site last year, and the whole mandate and focus are on animating opportunities for them to live their best life.

UTCHA SAWYERS

*Executive Director, Boys & Girls Club
of East Scarborough*

One major initiative which will help achieve this goal is ArtworxTO: Toronto's Year of Public Art 2021–2022, which will include free public art across the city. In September 2020, the City of Toronto also launched BigArtTO, a city-wide public art celebration featuring free access to more than 200 hours of temporary public artworks projected onto local buildings and landmarks in each of Toronto's 25 wards.

Other major arts and culture events will be returning to an in-person format in the second half of 2021. The Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) is scheduled for September 9–18 and will include in-person screenings. This year's festival will also include 100 films, doubling 2020's scaled-down version (although still down from the 250 films screened pre-pandemic).¹⁵² Some of the changes made for the 2020 edition will continue in 2021, including TIFF's digital screening platform, which will continue to make films more accessible, even outside of Toronto. Outdoor and drive-in screenings will also be repeated this year.

PRIORITIES FOR DONORS, FUNDERS AND POLICYMAKERS

01

Earmark funds to grow arts and culture opportunities for Indigenous community members to reclaim their culture and language.

02

Consider wages for artists when funding arts organizations. Artists are the backbone of the sector, and yet CERB represented a rare moment of financial stability for many.

03

Support initiatives to advance greater diversity and anti-racism in the sector so that all communities feel welcome to participate.

04

Support existing efforts to expand programming outside of downtown and into lower-income neighbourhoods.

05

Build from scratch or retrofit additional arts and recreation facilities, especially in underserved communities and, in the meantime, ensure that low-income communities have access to existing spaces.

06

Invest in either free or low-cost arts and recreation activities with a holistic approach that also considers transportation and equipment costs to create more access for marginalized communities.

TIPS FOR ENGAGED TORONTONIANS

01

Routinely add a donation when you're purchasing tickets to events. This kind of unrestricted funding is critical particularly as organizations recover from huge financial losses due to COVID-19.

02

Explore the range of culturally diverse arts programming available across the city. There's no better way to understand the unique perspectives and experiences of your fellow residents.

03

If you typically donate to cultural institutions, consider supporting neighbourhood programs, too. Local arts and physical activity programs are often the first points of entry for young people.

04

Before you donate, ask organizations whether or not they provide subsidies or bursaries for audiences and participants who face barriers to experience the arts and/or sports.



The Issue

SAFETY

With the first news of the pandemic's arrival, safety rose up as a central theme in all of our lives. Those of us who could sheltered at home, where we could feel safe and secure. Others took the necessary risks to keep income flowing to pay bills and feed family, even though this significantly increased the likelihood of getting sick.

These divergent experiences of safety also showed up in documented crime rates. While overall crime went down in 2021, some neighbourhoods experienced spikes in violent crime, and intimate partner violence reached alarming levels. The extreme hardships experienced by some are no doubt a factor here. There's no starker example of this than in the record 529 deaths from opioid overdoses, an overlooked but contingent fact in the unfolding story of COVID-19.

Crises can bring out the best and the worst in people, too. In fact, history has shown that hate crimes often rear up when fear and mistrust dominate. The foundations of Toronto's great diversity have certainly been rocked with hate-related complaints to police up 51% in 2020.

But it was the role of policing itself that took centre stage, and many believe this is a sign of necessary change to come.



OBSTACLES

- Complaints to police of hate crimes in Toronto increased 51% in 2020.
- Calls to the Assaulted Women's Helpline increased by 55% during the pandemic.
- A total of 529 people died from opioid overdoses in Toronto in 2020, an 81% increase from 2019 and a 286% increase from 2015, reflecting increasing complex mental health challenges with inadequate supports.



OPPORTUNITIES

- Crime rates in Toronto mostly declined in 2020, though some forms of crime were increasing again in the first half of 2021.
- Toronto City Council approved a pilot project where mental health calls will be responded to by non-police response units.

OVERALL POLICE-REPORTED CRIME DOWN

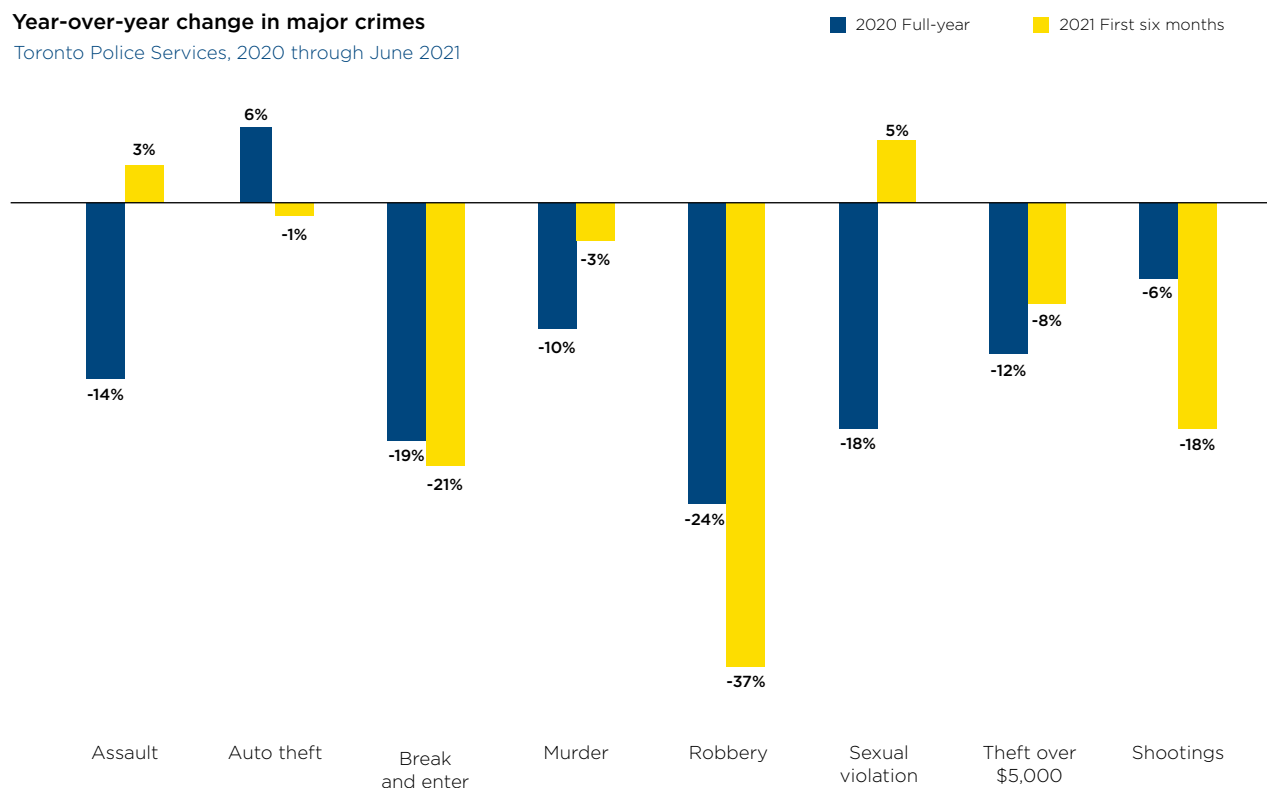
Statistics from Toronto Police Service paint a relatively rosy picture, with 2020 numbers for assault, break and enter, murder, robbery, sexual violence and theft over \$5,000 all seeing double-digit declines year over year.¹⁵³ In general, the first six months of 2021 have shown a similar pattern of decreases for most major crimes, though notably assaults were up by 3% and sexual violations were up by 5%. The United States by contrast has seen historic increases in major crimes during 2020 and 2021, a trend not repeated in Canadian cities.¹⁵⁴

Murder rates in Toronto were down by 10% in 2020 and 3% through the six months of 2021.

The declines in crimes in Toronto are part of a national trend. Statistics Canada looked at police-reported crime from 19 police services across Canada (representing 71% of the national population) for the first eight months of the pandemic and found that selected criminal incidents were down by almost one-fifth (18%), compared to a year earlier.¹⁵⁵ These police forces collectively reported declines in 12 out of 13 types of crimes, with the exception being uttering threats by a family member, which increased by 2%.

Year-over-year change in major crimes

Toronto Police Services, 2020 through June 2021



Source: Toronto Police Service Public Safety Data Portal — Major Crime Indicators.

VIOLENCE INCREASING BACK TO PRE-PANDEMIC NORMS

There are some concerning statistics, however, on violence in summer 2021. Comparing June 2021 to previous years shows that murder rates were back to 2019 levels in June and so far into July 2021 seem to be showing similar trends. And April, May and June 2021 saw crimes significantly increase beyond 2020 levels in violent crimes, such as assault and sexual violations, though still below 2019 levels.

Shootings and firearm discharges ended up in 2020 only slightly below 2019 levels (462 versus 492) despite persistent lockdowns, down by 6%, though injuries were down 26% and deaths down by 11%. Even across the city, trends differed widely on certain indicators. For example, police division D31, in the northwest corner of the city, saw shootings increase by 34% in 2020, with deaths/injuries up by 47%. Police division 23, just slightly farther to the west, saw shootings decrease by 44%, with deaths/injuries down by 67.5%. In the first six months of 2021, these trends shifted, with shooting incidents up 41% in division 23 and down 12% in division 31.

But these are building off years of increased gun violence in the city, with 462 gun-violence incidents in 2020, up from 177 in 2014.

Yonis Hassan, CEO and co-founder of Justice Fund Toronto, says to interpret any of these statistics with caution: “There’s a significant amount of violence that is underreported in the city of Toronto, whether it’s gun-based, physical, gender-based violence or sexual assaults. Toronto Police Services are not capturing these statistics because many of them go unreported.”



JUSTICE FUND

There’s a significant amount of violence that is underreported in the city of Toronto, whether it’s gun-based, physical, gender-based violence or sexual assaults. Toronto Police Services are not capturing these statistics because many of them go unreported.

YONIS HASSAN

CEO and Co-founder, Justice Fund Toronto

Hassan highlights that many of the greatest challenges around violence and crime are because “the Canadian philanthropic community has failed us and underinvested in the social determinants of health for the northwest and northeast. That contributes to this increase of violence, particularly in those neighborhoods that are socially, politically and economically segregated. When major and transformational gifts are prioritized for the downtown core, whether it be for mental health supports, cultural facilities or food insecurity, it’s to the detriment of young people and young families in the northwest and northeast of Toronto.”

DOMESTIC DISTURBANCES ALSO ON THE RISE

The 19 police forces in the Statistics Canada study reported an 8% increase in calls for domestic disturbances in the first eight months of the pandemic.¹⁵⁶

Calls to police about domestic disturbances tell only a small part of the story, as violence usually goes on for a long time before it ever gets reported to the police.

Calls to the Assaulted Women's Helpline (AWHL) in Toronto provide a fuller picture of the realities faced by many women during the pandemic. Overall calls to AWHL increased 55% from March 2020 to December 2020, compared to the same period in the previous year.

Prior to the pandemic, call volumes to AWHL in 2020 were nearly identical to 2019, but they immediately surged once the pandemic lockdowns started taking effect, including a 90% increase in April 2020.¹⁵⁷

Through the second half of 2020, call volumes were still up more than 40% over the previous year. The final three months of 2020 still had elevated call levels, although with smaller year-over-year increases since the pandemic began.

"If there had been emotional abuse present before the pandemic, then that crossed the line into physical abuse. With physical abuse, it crossed the line into threats," said Yvonne Harding, an AWHL resource development manager, in an interview with *Vice*.¹⁵⁸



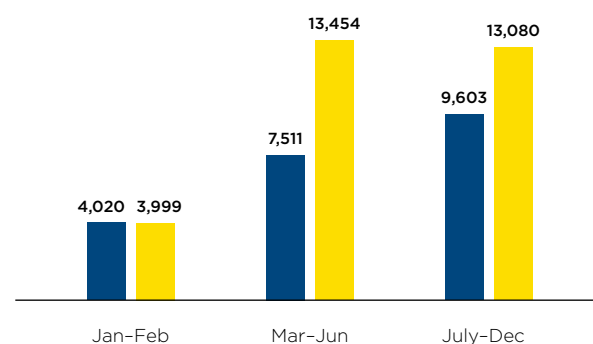
ASSAULTED WOMEN'S HELPLINE

If you or anyone you know needs help, the Assaulted Women's Helpline can be reached at **1-866-863-0511** and is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Total number of calls answered, Assaulted Women's Helpline

■ 2019 ■ 2020

City of Toronto, 2019 to 2020



Source: Data provided by the Assaulted Women's Helpline (AWHL).

In the past, calls were typically more than 30 minutes, but due to lockdowns, calls have increasingly been brief: "We've had calls from women calling from a closet, the bathroom. Women who are calling because they've taken the baby out for a walk and are calling while they have a 10- to 15-minute window," noted Harding.

Paulette Senior, president and CEO of the Canadian Women's Foundation, explains how you can trace a path of how violence affects a woman's life that "starts from that first moment of experiencing abuse and then trying to escape that abuse and violence and then having to navigate all of the systems to respond to address her multiple concerns." These concerns range from an overburdened shelter system that may have to turn people away, cutbacks to legal aid that make it harder for women to navigate custody and immigration issues, to the lack of affordable and accessible housing both in Toronto and increasingly around the country. This extends to childcare and employment systems that are often not set up with a single parent in mind, especially one who may be uncertain as to where they may be staying on any given night.

For Harmy Mendoza, executive director of Woman Abuse Council of Toronto: "one top priority is safe and affordable housing, particularly for victims of violence." She sees opportunities in that all three levels of government are looking at enhancing support for victims, and she calls for "victims of violence being at the forefront."

Says Mendoza: "If we really want to eliminate or at least reduce the number of women killed every year...we would be making immediate improvements to enhance prevention and support systems."

Senior offers an aligned call to action: "This is the time that we can actually seize to reset normal. It shouldn't be that we are OK with normal. The pandemic has revealed to us that because normal was so inequitable, and in some aspects harmful to some people, that trying to go back to that is not OK. It's just not OK."

More than eight in 10 of those in women's emergency shelters (83%) report being there for reasons of abuse.¹⁵⁹ And for women who need support, there is very little available. A recent study examined in depth a single day in 2016 in Canada to see how many women were turned away from shelters: 73% of women seeking shelter at transition houses and shelters were turned away and referred elsewhere due to a lack of capacity.¹⁶⁰ A 2020 report from Women's Shelters Canada also found that more than one-quarter (28%) of shelters/transition houses said that the pandemic affected their ability to provide services to women and children fleeing violence to a "great extent," with more than one-third (39%) indicating it was to a "moderate extent."¹⁶¹

The lack of women's shelters puts women at real risk. Most women who are murdered by their partners were separated or pending separation. A review of 311 domestic homicides in Ontario found that 67% of intimate partner homicide victims had an actual or pending separation from their partners.¹⁶² Having no safe place to go means more women will be victims of violence.

Decades of underinvestment in social housing have not helped the problem. The average wait time in years to get a subsidized unit exceeded two in Toronto for survivors of abuse/human trafficking victims (a single category in the data), according to a 2019 report by the City of Toronto's Auditor General.¹⁶³ It took more than a year for a three-bedroom apartment, even after a person is deemed a priority.

Mendoza, despite her concerns, remains hopeful “that there is a collective consciousness and awakening around inequities in a way that we haven’t seen before. I believe that that collective awakening is a precursor to political change. And that is what gives me hope.”

Data provided by Kids Help Phone for the *Toronto Fallout Report* last year noted that the volume of text messages related to sexual abuse, physical abuse and emotional abuse

were all up more than 100% in Toronto in the early months of the pandemic. For each of these, the increases were greater in Toronto than the rest of the country. Like the data from the Assaulted Women’s Helpline, it is hard to know exactly how much these challenges increased versus more people becoming aware of the resource, but both areas signal risks that need ongoing monitoring.

REPORTED HATE CRIMES AGAINST ASIAN, BLACK AND JEWISH PEOPLE INCREASING

In 2020, 210 hate crimes were reported to Toronto police, up from 139 in 2019 — a 51% jump — and well above the average of 152 incidents per year noted over the past decade.¹⁶⁴ With all police-reported crime, it is difficult to know whether they are being reported more frequently or being investigated differently than in the past, but regardless, growing hate crimes are an area of concern, especially as most are likely unreported to police.

The Jewish community was the most frequent target of police-reported hate crimes last year, followed by the Black, 2SLGBTQ+ and Asian/Chinese communities.

In 2020, there were 63 anti-Semitic verified Toronto police-reported hate crimes (up 43%), 43 anti-Black hate crimes (up 230%) and 15 anti-Asian/anti-Chinese hate crimes (up 400%). The police also reported anti-Black hate crimes increased after George Floyd’s murder sparked widespread protests against police violence and systemic racism. Hate crimes against 2SLGBTQ+ populations decreased slightly year over year, from 26 to 21.

After several violent assaults in Toronto in July 2021 that are being investigated for being anti-Semitic, the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs and the UJA Federation of Greater Toronto released a joint statement noting that anti-Semitic hate crimes continued to increase into 2021: “Over the past few months, Jewish Canadians — already the most targeted religious minority in this country according to Statistics Canada — have witnessed an alarming rise in hate-motivated harassment, vandalism, and assault...Like all members of society, Jews should be able to walk down the street with confidence in our safety and security. Anti-Semitism is a scourge that is quickly spreading throughout Canada and around the world.”

“I recently wrote an article for *IN Magazine* reminiscing about some of the violent acts I’ve experienced as an Indigenous person and as a queer person,” says Keith McCrady, executive director of 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations. “I am a physically big, strong man, and still this happened. Can you imagine the experience of others? If you’ve never been violently attacked randomly, you’re very privileged. So, celebrate that and then do something different.”



But, I think the more difficult conversation to have is: What gives permission for this level of hate to exist? What produces environments conducive for this to thrive and continue to thrive over centuries?

NEETHAN SHAN

Executive Director, Urban Alliance on Race Relations

The stark increase in anti-Asian/anti-Chinese hate crimes was particularly striking, though starting from a small number in previous years, but like all incidences of hate discussed in this section, police-reported crimes also reflect just a portion of the experience.

A study published in June 2021 found that more than half of Asian Canadians reported they saw offensive anti-Chinese or anti-Asian social media/graffiti/propaganda/jokes over the last year, while 16% reported personally being threatened, 21% reported being called names and 7% reported being physically attacked by strangers. Among Asian Canadians, 83% thought that anti-Asian racism and discrimination was a problem in Canada, with 71% saying it had gotten worse in the last year or so.¹⁶⁵

In a third of assaults against Asian victims in Toronto, the suspects mentioned COVID-19 and blamed China for it during the assault. Toronto Police reported that the crimes against the Asian/Chinese and South Asian/Indian communities tended to be more severe, with more cases of assault.

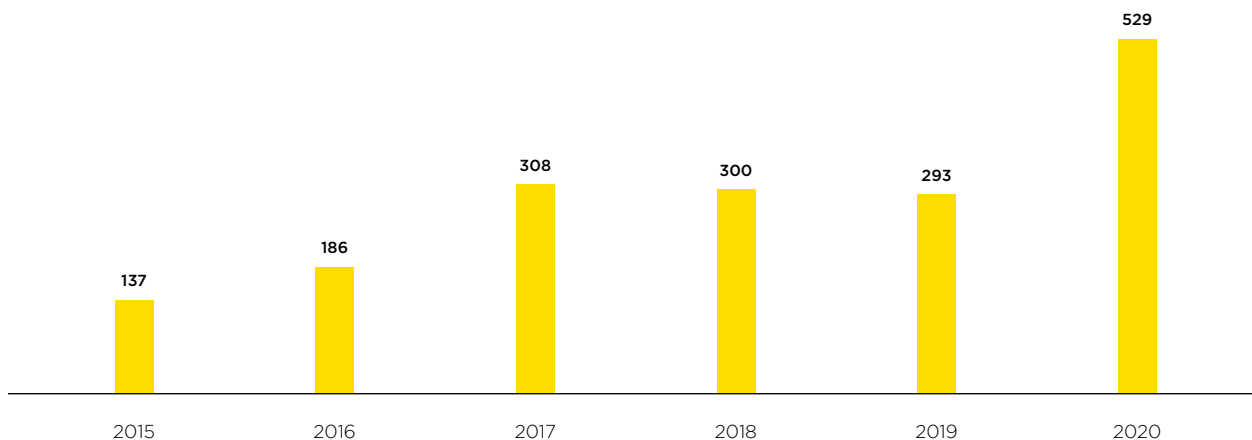
There were 15 hate crimes against Muslims reported to Toronto Police in 2020, and the killing of four members of a Muslim family in London on June 6, 2021, in what police are investigating as a hate-fuelled terrorism attack speaks to the consequences of these growing hate crimes and discrimination.

Neethan Shan, executive director of the Urban Alliance on Race Relations, points out that for many racialized people living in Canada, the fear that sets in after a violent hate crime takes place, just like racism itself, is not new. “The fears have been there for centuries in this country when it comes to anti-Black racism and anti-Indigenous racism,” he says, adding that incidents like the London attack remind us how big of an issue hate crimes really are. Says Shan: “We saw that after the Quebec mosque massacre, many Muslim Canadians became even more concerned about the safety of their place of worship. So, now we have been hearing from more people that they are fearful of even being themselves in public spaces, whether it’s what they wear, how they carry themselves, their names, lots of things. But, I think the more difficult conversation to have is: What gives permission for this level of hate to exist? What produces environments conducive for this to thrive and continue to thrive over centuries?”

OPIOID CRISIS FURTHER HEIGHTENED

Number of deaths from opioid toxicity

Toronto, January 2015 to December 2020



Source: Toronto Overdose Information System by Toronto Public Health.¹⁶⁶

The number of people who died from opioid toxicity rose to a shocking 529 in 2020, an 81% increase from 2019 and a 286% increase from 2015, according to data from Toronto's Overdose Information System.¹⁶⁷

In 2020, the number of deaths increased in each quarter, with 168 people dying in the final three months of the year (the highest for a three-month period in 2019 was 85). All data from this section is from Toronto Public Health's Overdose Information System dashboards, unless otherwise noted.

Since 2015 alone, there have been at least 1,753 opioid-related deaths in Toronto (through June 15, 2021). Through mid-2021, the crisis has shown few signs of abating. Every one of the first four months of 2021 had more fatal overdose calls to paramedics than in the same month in 2019, prior to the pandemic, though the number of non-fatal overdoses were higher in March and April of 2019.

In February 2020, there were 3,853 visits to the supervised consumption service The Works. This dropped down to 1,120 in February 2021 due to barriers created by COVID-19, and visits seem to now be increasing. May 2020 saw just 651 visits, compared to 1,600 in May 2021. It is hoped these increases help bring down death rates, as visits are still much lower than prior to the pandemic.

In 2020, 78% of accidental overdoses were among males, while almost half (47%) occurred among those 25 to 44 years old.¹⁶⁸

Like many other crises, homelessness is intricately tied to overdoses. More than one in four (26%) of overdose deaths were among the homeless in Toronto, twice as frequent as in the rest of the province (12%). Almost all of the deaths were caused by Fentanyl (92%).

Jennifer Ko, a member of the Toronto Overdose Prevention Society (TOPS), calls the "level of inaction" from various levels of government "baffling."

Ko says “overdoses have not been met with the kind of gravity and action that is given to other issues. COVID really highlighted for us that you could declare the overdose crisis a public health emergency and that way you could enable funding, data, communications, all kinds of things that we’ve seen with COVID. But that hasn’t happened, despite thousands and thousands and thousands of deaths.”

Says Ko: “We’ve been deputing with the City on this kind of thing for years, crying and talking about our dead friends and dead colleagues and dead clients...these deaths are preventable.”

In response to the opioid crisis, the Toronto Board of Health called for the federal minister of health to grant an exemption for simple possession of all drugs for personal use in Toronto, remove the current cap on supervised consumption sites and reinstate funding for overdose-prevention sites operated by Street Health and St. Stephen’s Community Health. Not only are these responses critical for saving lives, but they also have broad public support: a recent poll found the majority of GTA residents were in favour of decriminalization and increased access to supervised injection sites.¹⁶⁹

Ko and her colleagues emphasize that the City needs to stop with “toothless recommendations” and that it needs to take more action on its own, rather than wait for other levels of government.

“We’re seeing way more houseless folks die from overdoses because of the pandemic response in Toronto. Moving people from encampments, from their community, and their supports to shelter hotels means they are alone. None of the shelter hotels opened with harm-reduction supports,” says Ko.

The challenges of shelter and homelessness are covered further on page 150.

“Before the pandemic, we were giving out 10 or so safe drug use kits a day, but now we see many days with more than 100,” adds Cheryl Prescod, executive director of Black Creek Community Health Centre. “There are just more and more people seeking solace from substances to help them feel better.”

She also speaks to how the diversity of people they are supporting through the pandemic has shifted. “Early in the pandemic and before the pandemic, we were mostly supporting white males through our Harm Reduction Program. Now, we’re seeing more females, we’re seeing more ethnic and cultural diversity and especially newcomer groups.” This echoes findings from Ontario Public Health, which found an emerging trend during the pandemic of greater opioid-related deaths in neighbourhoods with higher ethno-cultural diversity.¹⁷⁰

“I think folks are just trying to stay alive, trying to go from day to day, really not knowing what tomorrow will bring. There’s a sense of hopelessness...People have lost jobs, people have lost loved ones. Now they are dealing with grief and loss on top of their already-difficult circumstances that pre-dated COVID,” Prescod says.

Kenn Richard, lead consultant of the Toronto Aboriginal Research Project study 2, told us “mental health and addictions are some of the dominant themes in terms of the debilitations confronting the Indigenous sector. Unhealed trauma is still evident in this generation. The legacy of residential schools, the child welfare system, it’s going to take some time to work through. So, that’s one of our arguments, that the Indigenous sector needs to be supported more heavily, given the extensive colonial trauma that has been inherited. Whatever the rates are, I guarantee we’re at the top of the list in terms of those who are at most risk.”

ROLE OF POLICE IN CRISIS RESPONSE COMES TO A HEAD

A City of Toronto report published in 2021 noted that over the past five years, the Toronto Police Services has seen a 32.4% increase in “person in crisis” calls.¹⁷¹

In 2020 alone, Toronto police recorded a 12% increase in mental health calls.¹⁷² While that pales in comparison to the increase in calls at crisis lines, where call volumes increased by up to 70% (see page 12), or calls to the Assaulted Women’s Hotline (discussed in this chapter on page 124), it represents a significant increase.

The fact that it is not higher may reflect polling that reveals 59% of Toronto residents would feel unsafe or very unsafe with a police presence if they were experiencing a mental health crisis.¹⁷³

This is particularly of concern for racialized members of the community. A 2017 study found that white people were three times more likely to say that police treat people of their ethnic background fairly when compared to Black members of the public (76% versus 26%).¹⁷⁴ Broadly, South Asian, Arab, Indigenous, Latin American and West Asian members of the community also had at least 40% of community members who felt they were unable to trust police.

Widespread awareness of the circumstances surrounding the deaths of D’Andre Campbell, Regis Korchinski-Paquet, Chantel Moore, Rodney Levi and Ejaz Choudry has reinforced the notion that calling the police can have fatal consequences. All of the victims were people of colour who died during interactions with police responding to mental health calls.

A CBC investigation found that across Canada, 70% of victims of fatal police interactions between 2000 and 2017 suffered from mental health issues, and in Toronto, 37% of victims were Black, despite accounting for less than 10% of the population.¹⁷⁵

The Human Rights Commission of Ontario undertook an investigation of complaints against the Toronto Police Services and found that between 2013 and 2017:¹⁷⁶

- While comprising 8.8% of the population, Black residents represented a disproportionate share of use-of-force cases (28.8%), shootings (36%), deadly encounters (61.5%) and fatal shootings (70%).
- Black residents were nearly 20 times more likely to be shot by the police than white residents.

This has led to widespread calls to defund the police, as covered in last year’s *Toronto Fallout Report*. An October 2020 poll found that 41% of GTA residents feel that “there is a serious problem” with how police interact with Black, Indigenous and other non-white people in this community.¹⁷⁷ An additional 26% of respondents said there is sometimes a problem, and only 17% felt there wasn’t a problem. A total of 38% of GTA residents also believe that too much money is spent on policing in the community, and 67% believe that money should be allocated more toward social welfare solutions like mental health resources and housing programs, instead of adding more police in high-crime areas (33%).

Asante Haughton is the co-founder of the Reach Out Response Network, which is dedicated to the introduction of alternative crisis response models in Toronto. “For a long time, the system we’ve had in place is that police respond to mental health crisis or the police accompany a mental health worker to the scene to address the mental health concern. And that hasn’t been working,” says Haughton.

He says: “I spend a lot of time thinking about marginalized folks, and, in particular, Black folks and Indigenous folks, and how our needs, mental health or otherwise, are not currently being supported by society in a variety of different ways. I helped create this alternative crisis response program to make sure that a system wasn’t being built that would still be another thing that would be inaccessible to Black and Indigenous folks. One of our network’s guiding principles is that a mobile crisis team must be created by and for the community it aims to serve.”

Following advocacy from the Reach Out Response Network and others, Toronto City Council approved a pilot project where non-police response units will answer mental health calls, to be put in place by early 2022.¹⁷⁸

Four pilot projects were approved, targeted at northwest Toronto, northeast Toronto and downtown east Toronto, and another pilot was approved that will be Indigenous-led and involve working with Indigenous communities.¹⁷⁹

“A lot of people say that injuries or death don’t happen often in mental health calls.” But Haughton is adamant that “we should be setting the bar at ‘Did someone get proper help?’ and not ‘Did someone get hurt or not?’”

All pilots will involve partnerships with healthcare providers, including community health centres and nonprofit organizations that provide mental health and substance use services, to connect people to services and programs they need after the initial response. These teams will encompass at least two crisis workers (e.g., community health nurses, counsellors, harm-reduction workers, peer workers) with proper training in mental health and crisis management, de-escalation, advanced first aid, overdose response and be equipped to connect people to follow-up supports like case management, primary healthcare and specialized services.

For Haughton, better mobile crisis response is just the start of the list of things that need to change to create better mental health outcomes for racialized people. “For me, the big thing is looking at how racism and discrimination impact mental health directly. There’s a lot of stress and pain and suffering associated with racism, and people treating you differently or badly,” he says. “I mean, that’s gonna have an impact.” It is well-established that trauma is associated with mental illness and psychosis, and a growing body of evidence, including studies from Ontario, suggests that increased experiences of racism and discrimination are one of the forms of trauma leading to higher rates of psychosis among darker-skinned individuals.¹⁸⁰



For me, the big thing is looking at how racism and discrimination impact mental health directly. There's a lot of stress and pain and suffering associated with racism, and people treating you differently or badly. I mean, that's gonna have an impact.

ASANTE HAUGHTON

Co-founder, Reach Out Response Network

Improvements like those described previously for mental health crisis response are critical to implement in the aftermath of the pandemic, where the amount of trauma people have experienced has been collectively tremendous, and given past evidence, will likely trigger a variety of health challenges for many who have gone through protracted anxiety and stress. While these problems will span the population, historically marginalized groups, and particularly racialized folks, who have borne the brunt of the pandemic economically, will also likely bear the long-term mental health consequences of the pandemic. The increases in hate crimes and the increased harassment of many marginalized groups during the pandemic will only deepen this trauma. The combined impact of these factors underscores the importance of investing in a community-led response strategy to provide the best possible outcomes for those in need.

PRIORITIES FOR DONORS, FUNDERS AND POLICYMAKERS

01

Fund culturally specific mental health support, particularly for residents who've experienced anti-Black racism and all Indigenous peoples in the city who've borne the weight of intergenerational trauma brought on by residential schools and colonialism.

02

Decouple policing from mental health crisis intervention.

03

Invest in wraparound supports for those experiencing gender-based violence, including shelter, legal aid, affordable housing and other key services.

04

Integrate overdose prevention services into all shelters and ensure the widespread availability of Naloxone to reverse opioid overdoses and save lives.

05

Expand culturally safe mental health and addictions services grounded in harm reduction, rather than an abstinence-only framework.

TIPS FOR ENGAGED TORONTONIANS

01

If you want to contribute to a safer city, donate to organizations that work on addressing the root causes of crime.

02

Support women-led and women-focused organizations that have the experience and expertise to help victims of violence feel safe and welcome.

03

Get involved in advocacy efforts to improve conditions for victims of crime, as well as to support the rehabilitation of offenders who are often victims themselves.



9

The Issue

GETTING AROUND, ACCESS AND CONNECTIVITY

As many worked and studied at home, travel by both car and transit cratered during the pandemic. Transit ridership still remains a fraction of pre-pandemic rates, creating financial difficulties for agencies that could take years for recovery, particularly if travel patterns don't change.

Despite recent big announcements of major capital investments in transit, the Toronto Transit Commission (TTC) continues to be one of the transit systems with the lowest public funding in North America. Without additional subsidies, declines in ridership will likely necessitate fare hikes in order to offset losses. And this will mean the burden will fall to those least able to afford them, disproportionately, women, essential workers, racialized residents and low-income residents.

As transit has been hard hit, the rise in active transportation offers a ray of hope. People have taken up walking and cycling in droves to not only get around, but also to connect with others and for physical activity. Yet, access to infrastructure has been unequal. At the same time, social distancing measures dramatically reduced mobility around the city, driving social connectivity online. Those with weak or no access to the internet suffered the consequences.



OBSTACLES

- Public transit usage was still down by more than 70% in Toronto in June 2021 versus February 2020, further contributing to revenue shortfalls and raising questions about the long-term consequences on public transit in the city.
- Active transportation needs outside the core are different and have received limited investment, meaning that the benefits for the residents of the inner suburbs remain unrealized.
- As social programming has shifted online, people without consistent high-speed internet access are being left out, with racialized and Indigenous residents far more likely to worry about paying for high-speed internet.



OPPORTUNITIES

- The TTC is conducting a fare review focused on access and equity, while the City is debating whether to expand discounted fares for low-income residents; the outcomes of these will shape affordability of transit for years to come.
- New investments in transit infrastructure have the potential to provide economic benefits for low-income communities.
- The shift to active transportation seen during the pandemic has improved physical activity, increased access to nature and helped lower carbon emissions.

RISK OF TRANSIT “DEATH SPIRAL” REAL

The pandemic’s immediate impact on transportation in the city was dramatic and stunning in its duration. The most recent available data for the TTC for June 2021 shows that ridership is still about a quarter of what it was prior to the pandemic (30%) and has remained constant since July 2020, peaking at 36% of previous usage in September 2020. Air traffic through Toronto Pearson International Airport and GO Train ridership have experienced and maintained even greater declines than TTC ridership (about 10% of normal volumes as of early 2021).

Even as vaccination rates have increased (as of June, the most recent month for which we have TTC data, 74% of Toronto residents 18-plus had received a first dose as of June 14, and 20% had received their second dose¹⁸³), as of writing, this has not yet translated to a return to public transit.

Congestion from vehicles has returned much more quickly, according data from GPS provider TomTom. While in April 2020 congestion in Toronto was at 20% of previous levels, by November 2020 it had increased back up to 79% of previous levels, before declining again during the lockdowns over the winter. By July 2021, congestion was back up to 83% of pre-pandemic levels, a rate of recovery well ahead of that of the TTC. Congestion is a relative measure and should be interpreted with caution when comparing to the other measures discussed in this report.

Select transportation use relative to February 2020

City of Toronto, February 2020 to July 2021



Source: Toronto Economic Bulletin Open Data, updated August 6, 2021.¹⁸¹ TomTom Congestion Data.¹⁸²

Notes: Calculations by the author. The congestion calculation is comparing the average congestion in each month to the level of congestion prior to the pandemic and is a more relative measure and should be interpreted with more caution than others.

Ridership has been down for all forms of TTC transportation, but bus boardings have remained the most consistent, echoing the widely made point that those who rely on bus travel have no other options. Subway ridership for the week of April 19, 2021, was at 19% of previous levels, while streetcar ridership was at 23%, and bus boardings were at 36%.¹⁸⁴

These declines in ridership have significantly affected TTC revenues. Despite receiving \$1.3 billion in federal and provincial pandemic aid,¹⁸⁵ as of June 2021 the TTC is projected to run a \$106.8-million shortfall by the end of the year,¹⁸⁶ beyond what is covered by the aid package. Surveys show that some transit users plan to avoid transit until the crisis is declared over,¹⁸⁷ while many expect to work at home more often than prior to the pandemic, which, if both are true, means that transit systems will need to find new revenue streams to make up for lost riders.

“We’ve seen how essential public transit is during the pandemic. It’s keeping our whole city moving,” says Shelagh Pizey-Allen, executive director of TTCriders, an advocacy group for those who use the TTC, “and we can’t afford to see it cut back, or have fares increase.”

“If federal funding for operations doesn’t continue, we are very worried that we’ll see cutbacks and fare increases. What we need to see is bigger investments,” adds Pizey-Allen, “so that transit is safe, and people feel comfortable returning to it. And to lower fares rather than increase them, so that more people come back to the system.”

TTCriders is worried about the risk of a “transit death spiral,” a process whereby the TTC increases fares to make up for revenue shortfalls, which would lead to decreasing usage, leading to further fare increases, route cutbacks and lack of maintenance, which all decrease the appeal of ridership in the future.

Prior to the pandemic, #CodeRedTO published a review of Toronto transit, as compared to other North American providers.¹⁸⁸ It found that Toronto had the lowest subsidy per rider of any system in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area and of any major system in the United States and Canada. This resulted in the lowest annual operating subsidies as a percentage of budget and the lowest operating budget per trip of any reviewed transit system in North America.

“We don’t think that transit users should pay the price of the pandemic,” says Pizey-Allen. She hopes that the government continues its operational support, so that transit can play an important role in the recovery.

“



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What we need to see is bigger investments, so that transit is safe, and people feel comfortable returning to it. And to lower fares rather than increase them, so that more people come back to the system.

SHELAGH PIZEY-ALLEN
Executive Director, TTCriders

UNDERSTANDING RIDERSHIP KEY TO FUTURE TTC FINANCIAL MODEL

The cost of transit is a top priority in the city right now, with two major initiatives being reviewed in the context of dramatically lower revenues and services.

The TTC is currently undertaking a five-year fare policy review to be completed at the end of 2021.¹⁸⁹ In a similar vein, during 2021, the City of Toronto is reviewing its Fair Pass program, a discount pass initiative funded by the City to help lower-income residents get access to affordable transit.¹⁹⁰

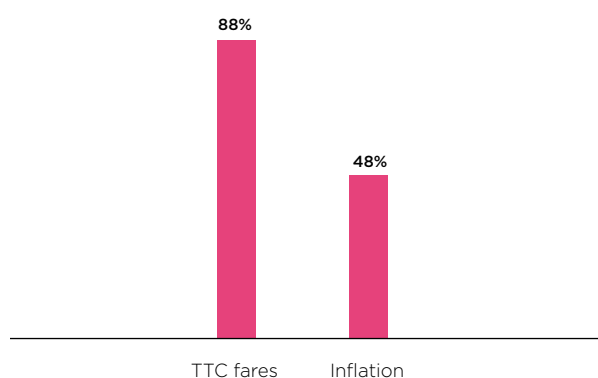
The background document for the fare review noted that the strategy will help the TTC “adapt to...changing circumstances” caused by its massive financial losses and also that “access and equity is at the forefront of this strategy.”

Without additional government support, the TTC revenue declines could lead to higher fares, which presents a clear contradiction to an equity-based approach.

“We’re glad that the TTC is conducting a review of fare options, but we are concerned that equitable fare policies won’t be possible without investment in operating funding,” says Pizey-Allen.

What is known is that low-income riders were the most likely to continue to use the TTC throughout the crisis.¹⁹¹ A study of riders in May 2020 found that only 14% of those with \$125,000-plus in household income were still riding transit, compared to 41% of those with less than \$40,000 in household income. Broadly, lower-income, racialized and people with disabilities are most likely to continue to be transit reliant. And the cost of transit can pose a significant challenge. TTC fares increased at twice the rate of inflation over the last 20 years, with fares increasing by 88% from 1998 to 2018, compared to only 48% for inflation overall in Ontario.

TTC fares versus inflation
1998 to 2018



Source: Mixed Signals: Toronto Transit in a North American Context.¹⁹²

A 2016 study concluded that a transit-dependent family of four, with two working parents earning the minimum wage, spends between 20% and 35% of their after-tax and after-rent income on TTC fares, though some fare policies have changed subsequently.¹⁹³ For those who are food insecure, the implications of this are shocking. The most recent *Who's Hungry Report* indicated that the cost of transportation was the second most common reason people were skipping meals (46%), only slightly behind the cost of rent (56%).¹⁹⁴

While the TTC has a single ride cost similar to other cities, the TTC's discounts for weekly and monthly passes are among the lowest of comparable jurisdictions across North America.¹⁹⁵ For example, in 2018 it took 45 cash fares to match the cost of a monthly pass in Toronto, compared to 32.2 in Vancouver or 26.2 in Montreal. A recent study concluded that transportation in Toronto is one of the highest relative to income of a number of major cities, with Toronto coming in fifth most expensive out of 24 major global cities.¹⁹⁶ TTCriders and other advocates see opportunities to provide caps on fares that would make access to transit more equitable.¹⁹⁷

Fair Pass is one major City of Toronto initiative that provides discounts to eligible lower-income residents on single rides and monthly passes, too, on the TTC.

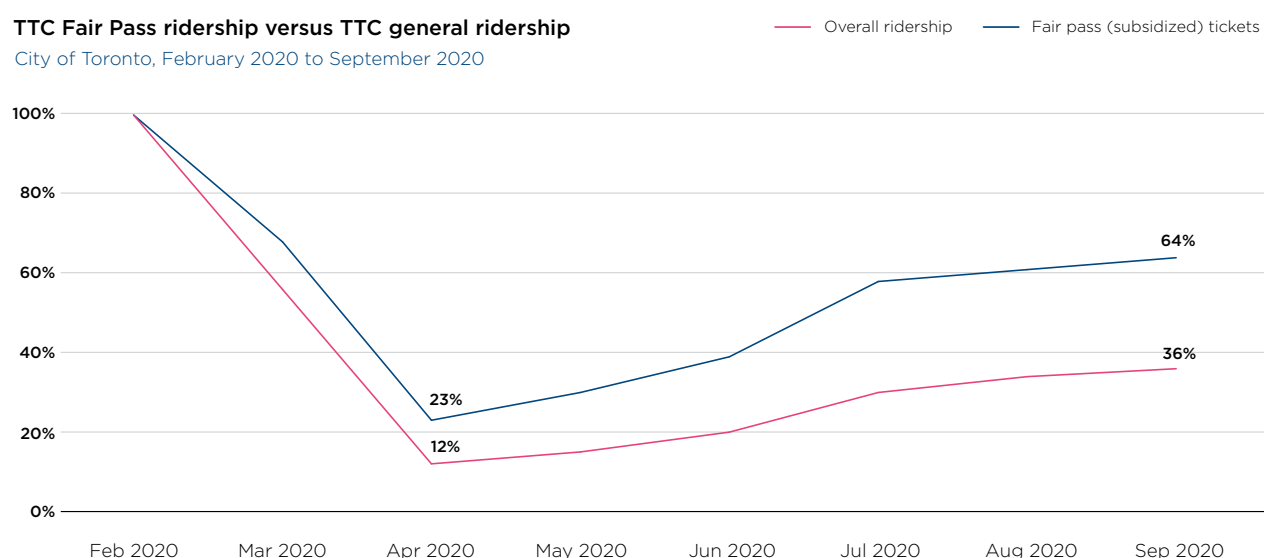
It has been implemented on a gradual basis, and, so far, it has been offered to recipients of Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program, and those receiving housing and childcare subsidies from the City.

The final phase of Fair Pass — if approved — will extend the discount to all adult Toronto residents with household incomes at or below the Low-Income Measure, plus 15%. This will greatly expand the impact — and the cost of the program, adding an estimated \$20 million to the budget annually.²⁰⁰

An evaluation of the program concluded that “Fair Pass cardholders are using transit more frequently,” that the program promotes social equity by allowing residents to participate more fully in their community and allows them to access more services and supports.²⁰¹

TTC Fair Pass ridership versus TTC general ridership

City of Toronto, February 2020 to September 2020



Sources: Toronto Economic Bulletin Open Data ¹⁹⁸ and Fair Pass Report.¹⁹⁹ Notes: The Fair Pass data is for single rides and excludes monthly Fair Passes. Calculations compared to February 2020 were done by the author.

A second economic cost-benefit analysis of the program broadly concluded that the program had high financial and economic returns.

The magnitude of the discount in the Fair Pass program — 33% off a single ride and 21% off an adult monthly pass — is not huge considering the high costs of transit. Still, the evaluation findings show that it made a difference on transit affordability for users, while significantly increasing access to employment, medical appointments, childcare, and recreation.

A TTCriders report using 2020 data noted that the discount for a lower-income pass in Toronto was less than any of the other 14 cities they reviewed that had discount programs for low-income residents, and that the most common discount offered was 50%, considerably higher than the program offered in Toronto. Still, even this discount seems to be highly valued by users, showing the importance of expanding the program.

During the pandemic, ridership among Fair Pass users was almost twice as high as it was among other riders (for example, ridership was at 64% of previous levels in September 2020 for Fair Pass participants versus only 36% for overall TTC ridership in the same month).

This underscores that for the lower-income residents who rely on it, transit is absolutely essentially and irreplaceable. By extending the benefits of Fair Pass to more customers, it will likewise extend more support to those who need it most, and who will likewise have greater access to jobs, services and educational opportunities.

TTCriders released a report in June 2021 after conducting focus groups with hundreds of residents and surveying hundreds more, calling for lower fares to win back the transit riders lost during the pandemic, noting that a number of other major cities like Los Angeles and Washington, D.C., have implemented these sorts of fare reductions. The key recommendations include “lower fares for working poor residents, encouraging mask use, expanding fare-free TTC to people receiving social assistance and high school students, funding free transfers between TTC and other transit agencies, adding more bus service and priority lanes, and ending fare enforcement.”²⁰² The report notes that affordability was the No. 1 issue by far for users in the survey, especially for those who use the TTC most frequently.

INVESTMENTS IN TRANSIT INFRASTRUCTURE CONTINUE

May 2021 brought the federal government commitment of \$12 billion to fund Ontario transit projects.²⁰³

These include investments in the Ontario Line, Eglinton Crosstown West LTR, and the Scarborough and Yonge North subway extensions, with a collective cost of \$28.5 billion split between the three levels of government. The announcement also came with a joint agreement between Ontario, Canada, and the City of Toronto to jointly invest more than \$500 million in new streetcars to be delivered in 2023. This will allow the reallocating of buses that are currently operating on streetcar lines, thereby increasing service.

“From governments to corporations, we’re seeing substantial investments being made to help people and communities recover from COVID-19,” says Leslie Woo, chief executive officer of CivicAction and former chief planning and development officer of Metrolinx. “The opportunity is to ask ourselves who will directly benefit from the investments, and how can we ensure that money spent on things like transit and green technology actually help the people most impacted by social and environmental changes.”

Woo noted that, for example, that “the opportunity is to see public investments as more than just steel, wheels, and concrete — to make every dollar work harder. These investments have high potential to leverage more inclusive centres of community, with childcare, public parks, and public health services that serve all residents.”

Says Woo: “The projects themselves can be procured to more deliberately benefit small- and medium- sized businesses owned by more women and racialized entrepreneurs. They can be opportunities to diversify the supply chain, or to expand access to the skilled trades.”

Rosemarie Powell, executive director of the Toronto Community Benefits Network, works to create agreements for large infrastructure projects that directly benefit the surrounding neighbourhood. She believes they present a massive opportunity to aid economic recovery. “Community benefits agreements are about hiring people from local communities, people who have been under-represented in the industry and in the workforce to get access to the jobs and opportunities that are coming out of these massive government investments,” Powell explains.

While major investments in transit can lead to transformative change in the city, many experts suggest that the smaller investments, such as added bus services, are just as important, even though they may not be as politically appealing.

For example, Toronto City Council’s unanimously approved the RapidTO initiative, which resulted in the addition of priority bus lanes on Eglinton Avenue East, Kingston Road and Morningside Avenue.

“There is no question that major improvements to bus frequencies and bus speeds along suburban avenues is a quick, easy and effective solution that is likely to improve transit access for many people,” said Steven Farber, a professor at University of Toronto specializing in transportation, in a recent article for the *University of Toronto Magazine*, highlighting that many international and local studies have shown the efficacy of this approach.²⁰⁴

“Increasingly, it seems clear that more rapid bus transit must be part of the solution” for equitable transit in the city.

ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION ON THE RISE

As reported in last year’s *Toronto Fallout Report*, Toronto is among several Canadian cities that made increased investments in cycling infrastructure during the pandemic.

Last year saw the largest one-year expansion of on-street bike lanes ever in Toronto. Through ActiveTO, the city added 40 kilometres of bike lanes and closed four major streets to cars on weekends. At the same time, an expansion of the city’s Bike Share Program (planned before the pandemic started) introduced an additional 160 stations and 1,850 bikes to Toronto in 2020, bringing the total to 6,850 bikes.

This expansion could not have come at a better time for residents on the lookout for low-risk ways to move around outside, with the added bonus of low carbon emissions. Using the City's Open Data site, The Signal reported an increase of half a million Bike Share trips in 2020 over the previous year, as well as a notable shift in ridership. Whereas annual members increased the number of rides they took slightly, casual riders (those buying a single trip, or a one- or three-day pass) almost doubled the number of rides they took.²⁰⁵

This mirrors results from an evaluation ActiveTO undertook with partners Park People and the Centre for Active Transportation of the city's weekend road closures.²⁰⁶ An intercept survey that they conducted at two locations along the Lakeshore Boulevard closure in September 2020 showed that almost a third (29%) of riders identified as being new to cycling, or as having rediscovered cycling in 2020. Among those riders, 77% agreed that the space provided by the weekend road closures helped them discover or rediscover cycling. Almost all respondents supported continuation of the closures, both during (92%) and after (93%) the pandemic.

The results of the road closures and the Toronto Bike Share expansion point to the positive potential of increased investments in cycling infrastructure in the city. However, there was a notable gap in those benefiting. Overall, cyclists who identify as Black, Indigenous or people of colour, female, having a low income or older adults were under-represented among road-closure users.

Only 11% of users surveyed reported household income of \$50,000 or less. In Toronto, 38% of residents have income in this range. Of the long-time cyclists (71% of respondents), only 15% self-identified as Black, Indigenous or people of colour, with a bump to 24% among new cyclists. In Toronto, 52% of residents identified as racialized on the Census, though methods of identifying racialized individuals differed.

Such results have not surprised cycling advocates and active mobility experts, who have pointed to the downtown focus of the 2020 investments. According to Darnel Harris, executive director of Our Greenway Conservancy (OGC), "the way that we build cycle infrastructure assumes that it's entirely recreational, when many people are riding for practical purposes."

Harris says the active mobility infrastructure needs of racialized residents in the city, particularly those outside the core in Toronto's inner suburbs, are different: "No one's sipping a latte and going to the beach in northwest Toronto. It's a matter of, 'I have six bags of groceries and three kids. How am I going to make this work?'"

“



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The way that we build cycle infrastructure assumes that it's entirely recreational when many people are riding for practical purposes.

DARNEL HARRIS

Executive Director, Our Greenway Conservancy

Harris and the OGC team aim to change that. Their goal is to finance, program and steward a high-quality multi-modal mobility greenway network, enabling safe and resilient neighbourhoods across northwest Toronto. The wide lanes would be buffered by extensive rain gardens, trees, and plant barriers helping to manage storms and filter polluted air, while delivering protection from heavy vehicles as residents use cargo e-cycles, traditional bikes, and other mobility devices to haul goods and travel across their communities year-round.

In June 2021, Toronto City Council approved the continued use of cargo e-bikes to support local businesses, as well as a plan for a new micro-mobility pilot for larger cargo e-cycles.²⁰⁷ While not a permanent solution, Harris says he is encouraged by the growing support for locally relevant mobility alternatives.

While Harris appreciates that there has been a shift in the conversation and a recognition of what cycles can do, he says Toronto is still far from where it needs to be in terms of recognizing its full potential, especially in areas like northwest Toronto, where most residents continue to rely heavily on crowded buses for their transportation needs, both before and during the pandemic.

In a University of Toronto study of the impacts of the COVID-19 cycling lane expansions, researchers found the infrastructure increased cyclists' road access to people, food stores and jobs by 10% to 20% and increased access to parks by 6%. However, the increases were clustered around central Toronto, with smaller gains in other parts of the city.²⁰⁸

"You don't necessarily need a cargo bike or trike in downtown Toronto. It's efficient, but not a necessity because of the shorter distances," Harris says. "You need to move heavy goods or people long distances in the inner suburbs. That's a core fact of suburban design. If people do not have access to the practical micro-mobility vehicles and the lane widths they need to travel safely, they will make other dignified mobility choices, if they travel at all," explains Harris.

ACCESS TO INTERNET AND TECHNOLOGY

Toronto has relatively high rates of internet access relative to the rest of the country (95% versus 90%)²⁰⁹, but high costs mean that many lower-income residents cannot afford high-speed access, making it difficult for them to fully participate and receive services.

Data provided by the Environics Institute, the Future Skills Centre and the Diversity Institute at Ryerson University from their November/December 2020 collection from their Survey of Employment and Skills found that while 26% of white GTA residents were worried about being unable to pay for high-speed internet at home, this was true for 43% of racialized residents and 73% of Indigenous residents of the GTA (note that the Indigenous sample contained only 87 respondents who self-identified as Indigenous and who may not reflect the broader Indigenous community in the Greater Toronto Area).

Brookfield Institute in a 2021 publication found that those without internet were half as likely to access government services and information (32% versus 69%) and much less likely to access healthcare (27% versus 45%) and education (25% versus 44%).²¹⁰ Public libraries were the most likely place for people without internet to be able to get online (42% of those without internet in the GTA in 2020).

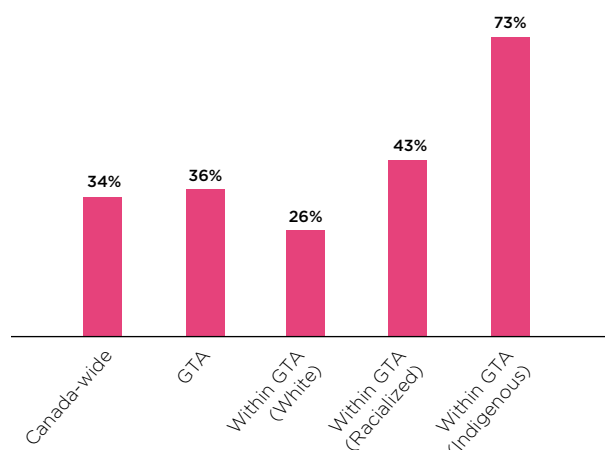
“One thing I want everyone to know is that they need to listen to more stories of people like those in my community,” says Keith McCrady, executive director of 2-Spirited People of the 1st Nations. “Many people don’t have access to all of these simple things like a phone and a tablet and internet that we take for granted... And members of our community are used to the system failing them or forgetting them or treating them poorly.”

Further data provided from the same survey from the Environics Institute showed the challenge that many children have had in completing their education amid the pandemic. Overall, 31% of parents in the GTA reported their children were unable to complete all of their school work because they do not have adequate access to a computer at home. While sample sizes were too small to report for the GTA, national data shows that Black and Indigenous parents were particularly likely to report this challenge (45% of Black parents nationally and 52% of Indigenous parents), and the pattern in Toronto appears similar.

“Digital inclusion for newcomers is a challenge that needs to be addressed,” says Anna Hill of the Together Project, an organization that connects newcomers with other Canadians to help them integrate into Canada. “Without a computer or tablet and internet, it’s almost impossible to go to school, find a job or connect with local community members. Whereas language classes support newcomers with low language levels, digital training and access to a device are just now being recognized as essential for newcomers to develop a sense of welcome and belonging in Canada. In particular, refugee newcomer women are often the last members of their households to have the time and technology to cross the digital divide.” Organizations like hers, and many social services charities, provide devices and internet access to their participants, a topic covered in more depth in last year’s *Toronto Fallout Report*.

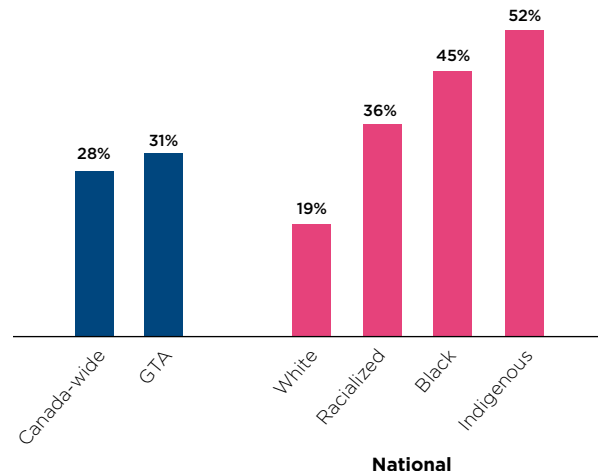
Worried about being unable to pay for high speed internet at home

Greater Toronto Area, Nov/Dec 2020



Likely that children unable to complete schoolwork because they do not have access to a computer at home

Greater Toronto Area, Nov/Dec 2020



Source: Data from the November/December 2020 Survey of Employment and Skills, by the Environics Institute for Survey Research, the Diversity Institute, and the Future Skills Centre.

Notes: Data includes those who indicated they have children for the questions on schoolwork and so due to sample sizes, results were only show nationally, though trends seem consistent in the Greater Toronto Area. There were only 87 Indigenous respondents to the high-speed internet question in the Greater Toronto Area, and this sample may not be representative of the broader Indigenous community in Toronto, so this number should be interpreted with caution.

PRIORITIES FOR DONORS, FUNDERS AND POLICYMAKERS

01

In devising new funding models for transit, do not penalize those for whom ridership is essential.

02

Continue to expand cycling infrastructure, with an emphasis on the parts of the city that lack it, specifically the inner suburbs, and with an eye to creating transportation routes from home to work and back.

03

Consider unrestricted operating support for public and active transit advocacy groups, especially with the interests of low-income residents in mind and for those supporting embedding universal mobility in city infrastructure.

04

Increase access to bicycles and bicycle repairs for low-income residents.

05

Close the digital divide by investing in more universal access to the internet and digital devices.

06

Pilot free Wi-Fi in public parks.

TIPS FOR ENGAGED TORONTONIANS

01

Lend your voice to supporting public petitions and policy changes that protect public transportation for those who need it most. For example, consider supporting The Fair Pass program that will be debated before the end of 2021.

02

Support advocacy organizations working for widespread public transit. Current financial losses cannot undermine the value of a strong, accessible transportation system.

03

Leave your car at home as much as possible.



10

The Issue

HOUSING

Housing prices have long been unaffordable for most Toronto residents, and their continued rise in 2020 led to Toronto being labelled the second most expensive housing market in North America for local buyers. The rental market also has a long history of unaffordability, but in 2020 rents dropped somewhat for the first time in many years as large numbers of people left the city. Despite the decrease, there are virtually no vacant units in the city that are affordable for lower-income residents.

Amid the economic disruption of the pandemic, 11% of rental units were in arrears as of October 2020, and as eviction bans were lifted in June 2021, the threat of increased homelessness looms.

Adequate housing is a fundamental human right, and successful models of nonprofit and community housing exist, but they require significant scaling up. Housing is the single largest expense for most Canadians. The

explosion of housing prices combined with stagnant incomes and low availability of affordable units point to serious concerns for rising housing precarity. A new report from the Toronto Region Board of Trade and WoodGreen Community Services estimates that the housing crisis is costing the regional economy somewhere between \$6 billion and \$8 billion per year.²¹¹



OBSTACLES

- Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) estimated that 11% of primary rental units were in rent arrears, as of October 2020.
- Eviction moratoriums were lifted in June 2021, meaning that thousands of Toronto residents who lost their incomes during the pandemic could potentially be evicted, contributing to significant surges in identified homeless in June 2021 and July 2021.
- Toronto now has one of the most unaffordable housing markets in the entire world (ranked fifth highest out of 92 major markets for home prices to median household income), with home prices on the MLS Home Price Index showing a 213% increase since 2005 and rent for vacant units up 93% since 2008.
- There are virtually no deeply affordable housing units for lower-income residents available, putting a significant portion of the population at risk.



OPPORTUNITIES

- Housing has been classified as a human right by both the federal and local governments, though the work of realizing the implications of this is still to come.
- As of 2018, those in co-operative and nonprofit housing in Toronto were much less likely to report their housing was unaffordable than private providers, and many nonprofits housing solutions in Toronto are ready to be scaled up.

IMPACT OF EVICTIONS MORATORIUM ENDING POSES SERIOUS RISK

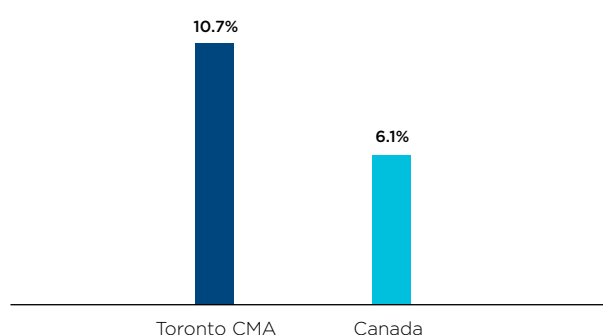
As of October 2020, CMHC found that about 11% of rental units were in arrears in Toronto, almost twice the national rate.²¹³ Statistics show that renters were behind just under 1% of total rent.

“We’ve heard that 11% of renters are behind on rent, a number that is unimaginable in periods of greater economic stability when rent nonpayment is normally in the 1% range,” Tony Irwin, president of the Federation of Rental Housing Providers of Ontario, said early in the pandemic to the *Toronto Star*.²¹⁴

With eviction moratoriums lifted in June 2021, the big question is, “What happens next?” A total of 525,000 households were renting their home in the city of Toronto as of the 2016 Census, accounting for approximately 1.3 million people.²¹⁵ While CMHC’s numbers only capture a portion of the rental market, excluding condo rentals and many other private rental options, the number of people potentially being behind on rent is staggering.

Percentage of apartment units in rent arrears

Toronto Census Metropolitan Area, October 2020



Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation Rental Market Survey.²¹²

Still, with the expiration of the eviction moratoriums, “we are anticipating a significant number of individuals who will be faced with the loss of their home,” says Alyssa Brierley, executive director and general counsel of CERA, which provides supports to thousands of Ontario residents facing eviction each year.

“It really is quite a dire situation,” continues Brierley. “It’s not entirely clear to me what happens to all of these individuals, once they are removed from their homes. There is not an obvious solution for them in Toronto; there’s no longer an obvious solution to that I can see outside of Toronto. We are potentially facing a human rights catastrophe and a homelessness catastrophe at a scale that we haven’t seen before,” says Brierley.

Statistics Canada has been monitoring the financial wellbeing of Canadians since April 2020, asking them each month how difficult it was to meet financial needs. The percentage of Canadians reporting difficulties paying their bills has been nearly identical in every month since August 2020, between 20% and 22% reporting.²¹⁶ Given relatively stalled progress on unemployment in Toronto (see page 46) and no substantial new income support programs rolled out, there is little to suggest that people who were struggling with rent previously would have found a way to make up payments, although the facts are illusive at this stage.

On the other hand, we’ve seen a number of datasets showing increased difficulty covering the bills in Toronto in late 2020 and increased worry that Toronto residents will not be able to make ends meet in early 2021 (see page 32 for further discussion), while data from Daily Bread Food Bank in Toronto, a network of more than 200 food banks, showed an 84% increase in usage in June 2021 versus June 2019 (see page 19), showing that ongoing financial difficulties are clearly present.

So far in the pandemic, we have not seen huge increases in homelessness that you may expect when you likely have hundreds of thousands of residents living in units that are behind on rent. In fact, for most of the year, the shelter system saw a decrease in users, though numerous tent encampments popped up across the city (covered further later in the chapter). Though the next section discusses initial increases in homelessness in the June and July, after the end of evictions moratorium.

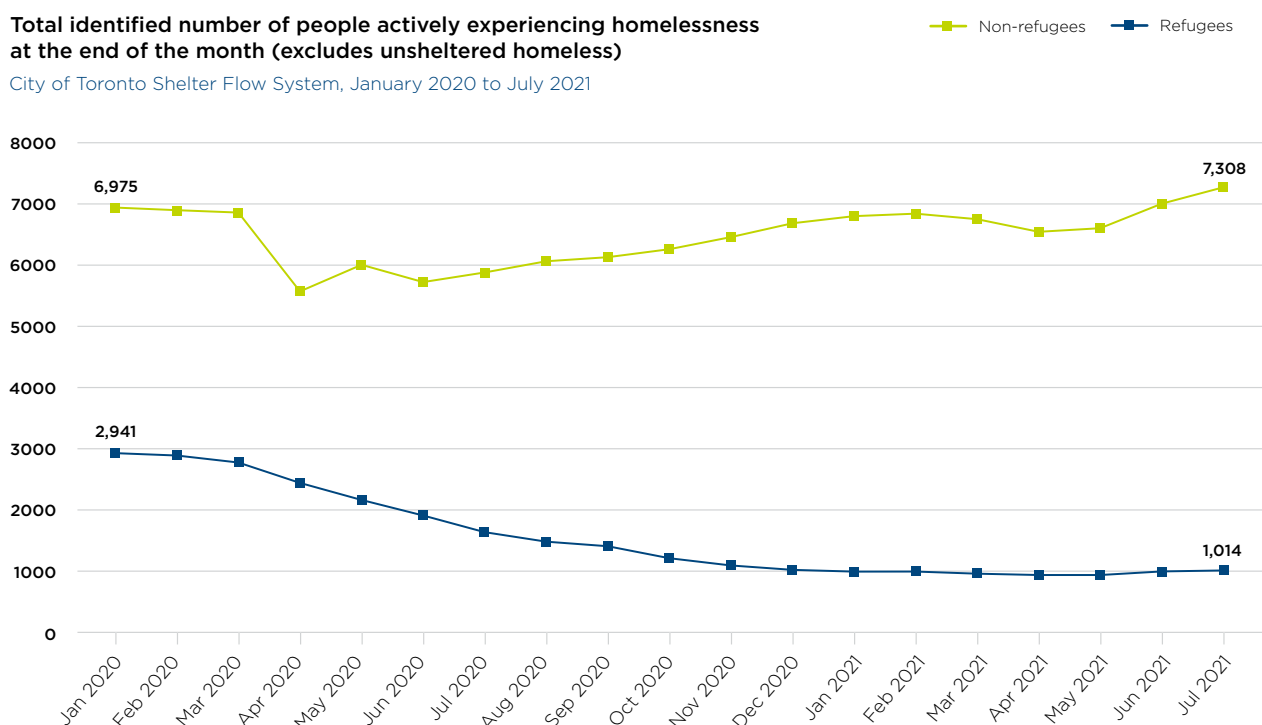
It is also noteworthy that more than six months into the pandemic, only 1% of total rent owed was in arrears, despite 11% of units being behind since the pandemic. This would suggest that renters were still making some or partial rent payments, or this amount of rent owed could have been orders of magnitude higher, in addition to the lower-rent apartments driving the rent arrears.

New rules implemented in Ontario around evictions allow landlords to work out arrangements to make up missed rent payments. These agreements between landlords and tenants are not regulated. If tenants subsequently are not able to make up their rent payments, eviction proceedings can be accelerated later. Considering that the average Canadian household saved just \$852 in 2018,²¹⁷ \$120 less than one month's rent in Toronto, the ability to meet deferral agreements could be unrealistic for many, especially given the likely slow return to a full employment market.

The likely ripple effects of this will be significant. The Great Recession was considered “over” in summer 2009. Yet, in each of 2011, 2012 and 2013, evictions were still at least 20% higher than they were in the first year after the recession.

Total identified number of people actively experiencing homelessness at the end of the month (excludes unsheltered homeless)

City of Toronto Shelter Flow System, January 2020 to July 2021



Source: City of Toronto Shelter System Flow.²¹⁸

Note: The shelter information flow defines active homelessness as people who have used the shelter system at least one time in the past three months and did not move to permanent housing.

SURGE IN HOMELESSNESS IN MONTHS AFTER REPEAL OF THE EVICTION BAN

The disruption to the shelter system was substantial and immediate.

The number of active homeless tracked by the City of Toronto's Shelter Information system almost immediately decreased in the pandemic, with the number of non-refugee homeless decreasing from 6,893 in March 2020 to 5,598 in April 2020.

Trends for refugee homeless and non-refugee homeless subsequently diverged, with declining refugee admissions corresponding with lower homeless refugee numbers.

For non-refugees, the number of identified homeless continued to increase steadily throughout the course of the pandemic.

After the expiration of the eviction ban in early June 2021, there were more new users to the shelter system than at any point since the new tracking system was created, with a net inflow of 515 newly identified homeless, up from the previous high of 215 in December 2020. July 2021 had a slightly smaller increase with 359 newly identified homeless, the second highest month of newly identified homeless since the new tracking system data became available.

The City of Toronto noted that it moved 3,600 people throughout the shelter system since the start of the pandemic to achieve physical distancing of two metres between shelter beds, through the creation of 40 new, temporary shelter and hotel locations, with more than half still active as of this writing in July.²¹⁹

The City of Toronto has budgeted to spend \$663.2 million on homelessness services and housing supports in 2021, almost double the amount spent in 2019, at \$365.8 million.²²¹

During the pandemic, the overall number of people using the shelter system dropped significantly, with the majority of that decrease coming from fewer numbers of refugees housed within the shelter system. While there was an initial dip in usage for the first nine months of the pandemic, by 2021 the number of non-refugee shelter users was more or less back to pre-COVID-19 levels.

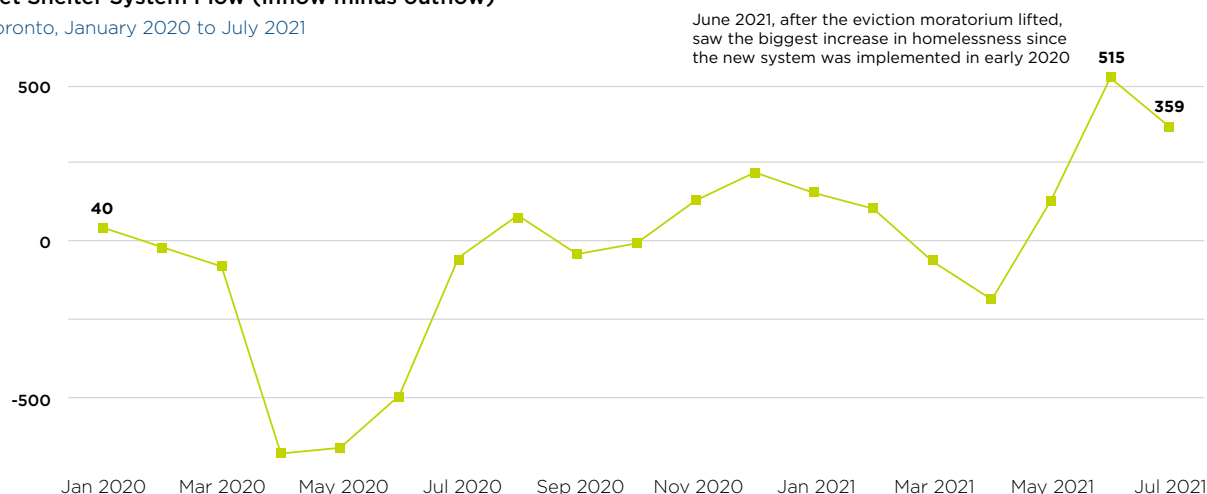
The pandemic also saw a huge increase in encampments, with more than 80 identified in the city of Toronto throughout the course of the pandemic. A recent survey found that the top reasons that people living outside were not in shelter was due to safety concerns in the shelter system.

Modular housing, prefabricated homes which can be rapidly built, is one solution for providing shelter to homeless individuals without relying on the shelter system. The City of Toronto has approved 1,000 units as part of its 2020–30 action plan, and construction of the first 250 units has been approved on City-owned sites in 2020 and 2021. The first two buildings, complete with 100 new units and support services, were finished in July 2021.²²² Organizations like the Toronto Alliance to End Homelessness, a network of organizations across Toronto, were strong advocates for these measures to be included in the City's plans and have highlighted how important these initiatives are in addressing the homelessness problems in Toronto.²²³

Also noteworthy, new data obtained by the Canadian Press discloses that violent incidents in the City of Toronto shelter system increased by more than 200% in the last five years, from 120 incidents per month in 2016 to 368 in January of 2021.²²⁴

Net Shelter System Flow (Inflow minus outflow)

Toronto, January 2020 to July 2021

Source: City of Toronto Shelter System Flow.²²⁰

A May 2021 report by Ontario Drug Policy Research Network found that the number of homeless residents who died of opioid overdoses across Ontario more than doubled during the pandemic, from 135 deaths to 323 deaths, compared to the previous year.²²⁵

Advocates call out that shelters without harm-reduction supports have contributed to growing opioid deaths, a topic discussed further in the context of the unprecedented increase in overdose deaths during the pandemic on page 128.

TORONTO ONE OF THE MOST EXPENSIVE HOUSING MARKETS IN THE WORLD

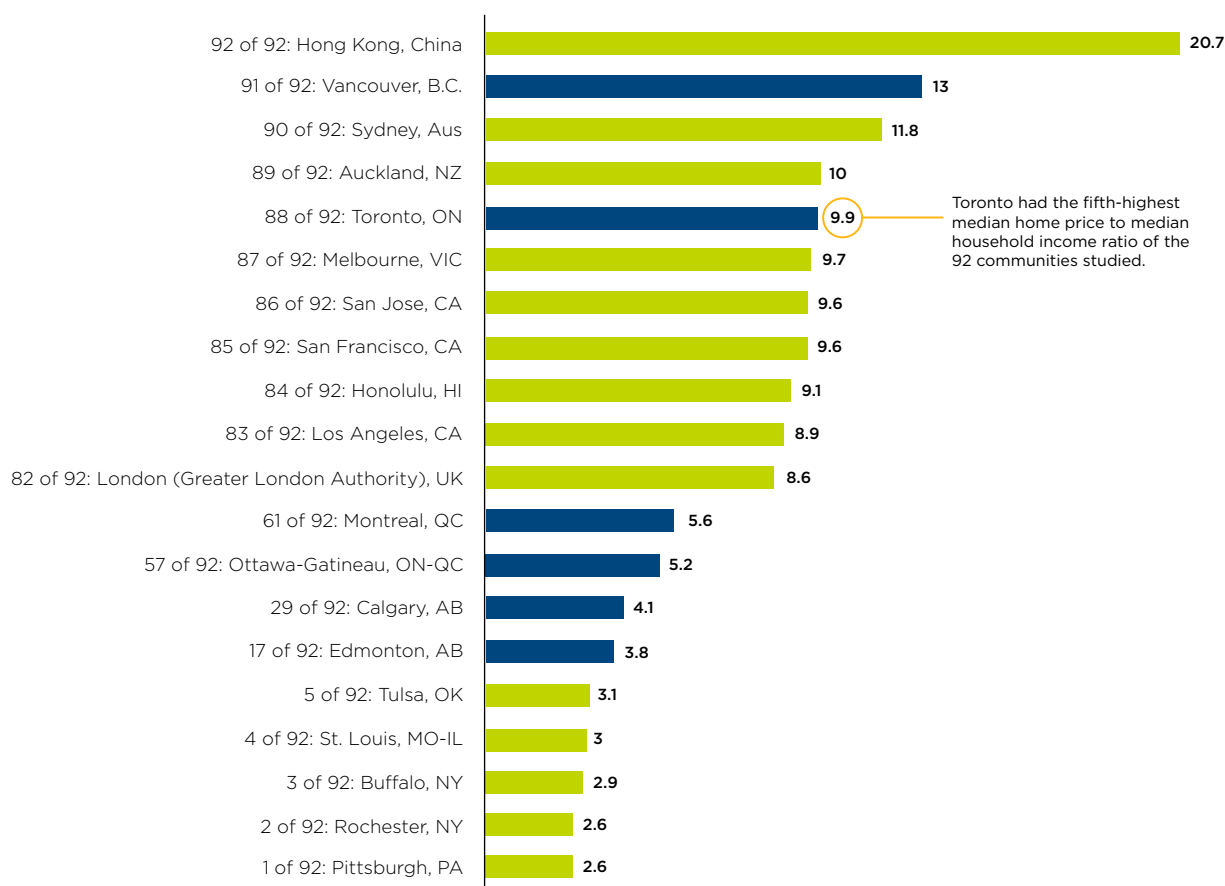
In the last year, housing prices and rent in Canada have gone from one of the top concerns for poverty advocates to one where Canadian banks are calling on the government to take action on reducing housing prices. A recent report published by RBC Economics noted, “Overheated markets threaten to destabilize the economy down the road if or when a correction occurs, with possible heavy costs for governments.”²²⁶

A 2021 study from the Urban Reform Institute and the Frontier Centre for Public Policy found that housing in Toronto was the fifth least affordable of any market they studied.²²⁷ Notably, Toronto was the second least affordable housing market in Canada (after Vancouver), and more expensive than Melbourne, San Francisco and London.

Their study compares the median home price in each market to the median household income, with home prices being just under 10 times higher than estimated median income in Toronto in the third quarter of 2020. While you need to interpret differences between countries with caution, since housing prices, income, currencies, data sources and the size of geographic areas vary, this clearly illustrates the challenge in Toronto: Toronto has become one of the most expensive housing markets in the world for local residents. The pace at which unaffordability is growing in Toronto is also staggering. In 2018, on a longer list of cities, Toronto was ranked the 21st most expensive. In just three years, it is now the fifth most expensive.²²⁸

Median home price/median household income

92 markets across 8 countries, Q3 2020

Source: Demographia International Housing Affordability 2021 Edition.²²⁹

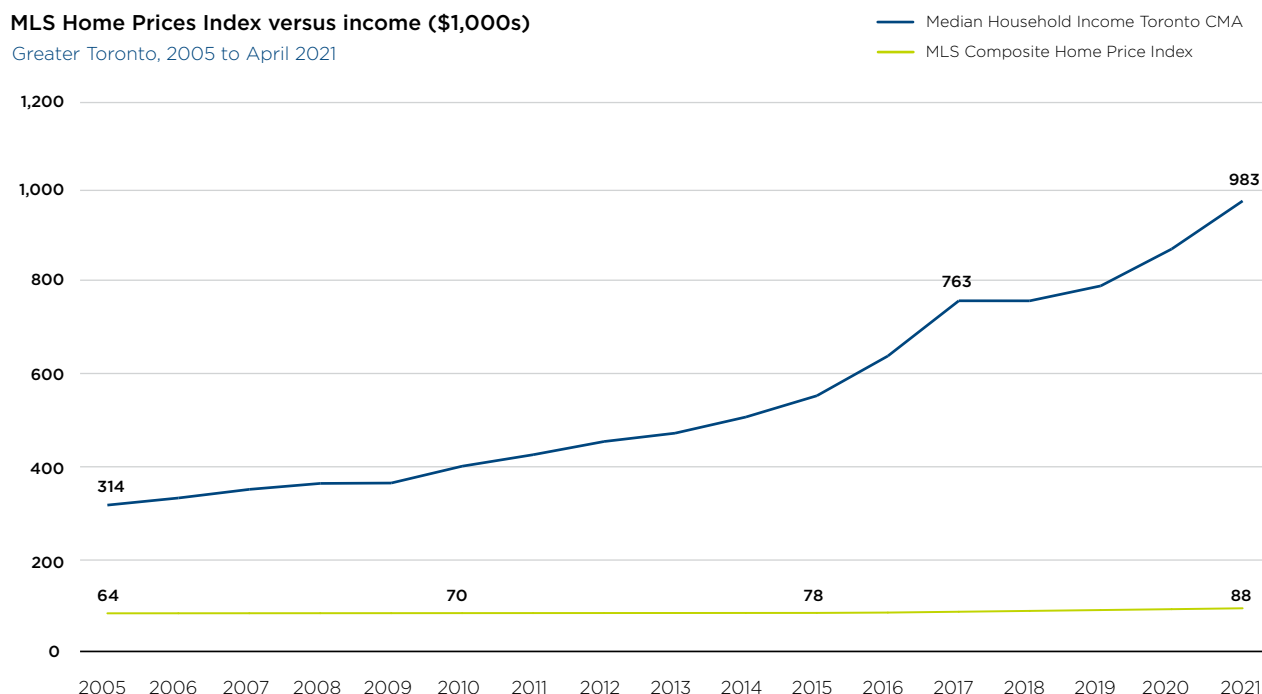
The current levels of housing unaffordability in Toronto are part of a long-term trend of rapidly increasing housing prices and almost stagnant income levels. Since 2005, housing prices in Greater Toronto have increased 213% according to the MLSE Home Price Index, while average household incomes have only increased by an estimated 37.5% (from about \$64,000 in income in the previous year in the 2006 Census to around \$78,000 for the 2016 Census and an estimated \$88,000 in 2021; see notes on the chart on the next page for details). Of course, interest rates have fallen at the same time, but RBC's most recent estimate was that average household purchasing in Toronto needs to spend 67.7% of its income to cover the costs of a typical home, more than twice what is considered affordable.²³⁰

A National Bank study recently noted that someone making more than twice the average household income of Toronto residents would still need to save for 24 years to afford a down payment on a house in Toronto.²³¹

Looking at data for Toronto over time, housing prices in 2021 were already at levels that would suggest that house prices to income were 11.2 higher than income, with the MLS composite home prices showing that the typical price of a house cost \$983,000 across the first four months of 2021. In 2005, the same index showed the typical house price at \$314,000, or about 4.8 times income.

MLS Home Prices Index versus income (\$1,000s)

Greater Toronto, 2005 to April 2021



Sources: MLS Home Price Index and Census of Canada.²³² Notes: Income from Census of Canada for 2005, 2010 and 2015 for the Toronto Census Metropolitan Area. The 2021 income amount was estimated based on the average increases over the previous three Canadian Census periods. Home prices were the average of the Home Price Index over every month of the year and 2021 data was through the first four months of the year. The home price index revised their numbers slightly for Greater Toronto after our analysis was completed, so subsequent analysis will derive very close but slightly different values.

For some, these home prices have led to staggering increases in wealth. From the first quarter of 2020 to the first quarter of 2021 was the greatest increase in Canadian wealth in history, though essentially all of the increased wealth went to home owners (about \$1.7 trillion of a \$1.865 trillion increase in wealth, see page 35 for a discussion).

It is perhaps unsurprising that these real estate trends and rental increases are leading to more interest in moving away from the region. A June 2021 poll by Abacus Data found that 38% of Greater Toronto Area (GTA) residents were considering moving outside the GTA or to another province (province 27%). More than half of GTA residents between 18 and 29 are considering moving out of the GTA, while 45% of youth across the province are thinking of leaving the province, including more than half of new immigrants.²³³

LIMITED TO NO RENTAL AVAILABILITY FOR BOTTOM 40% OF INCOME EARNERS

Housing prices in Toronto may dominate the headlines, but for lower-income individuals, and in particular for racialized newcomers, the high costs of rent are much more troubling.

While housing prices have increased by 213% since 2005, about 5.9 times faster than income, asking rent in Toronto has “only” increased by 93% since 2008 (note the different time horizons).

Already, according to the CMHC, renters in the bottom 20% of the income distribution can afford only one in 500 (0.2%) of the rental units on the market in Toronto as of October 2020, which means there are essentially no units that are considered affordable for those at the bottom of the income distribution.²³⁵

CMHC's figures on average rent, which exclude condos rented on the secondary market and other privately rented dwellings, showed that as of October 2020, asking rents were down by 4.3% year over year in Toronto.²³⁶ It also appears to be short-lived, especially given the ongoing housing price inflation.

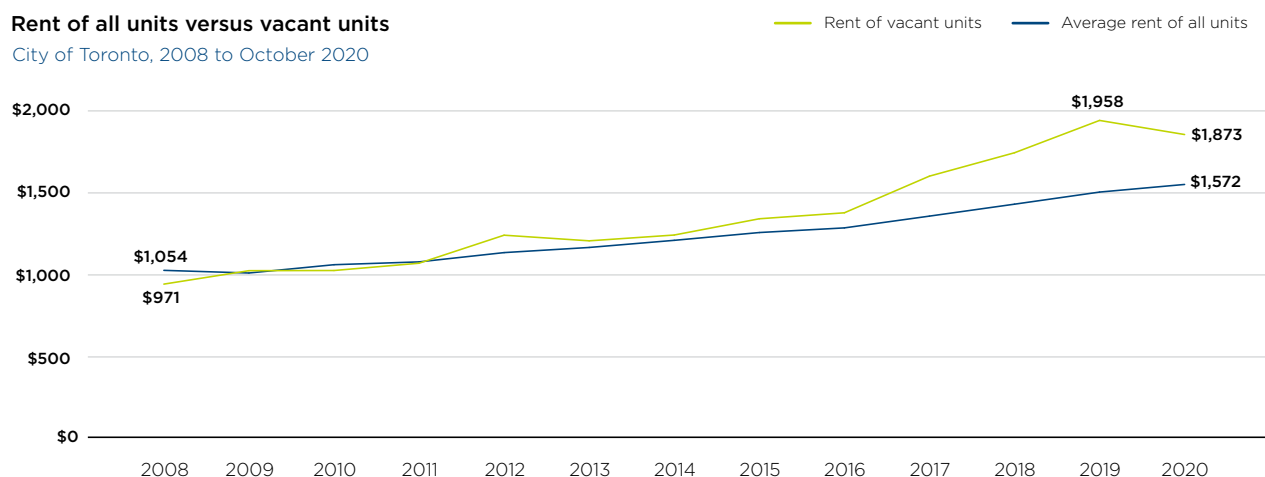
Rentals.ca, which tracks the asking price of units currently on its website, reported that asking rents were down 12.9% in May 2021 year over year, with the average one-bedroom listed on its site at \$1,833 in Toronto.²³⁷ The website noted that declining rents appeared to have stopped, with rents again increasing by between 1% and 2% in May 2021 versus April 2021.

The pandemic has brought with it increasing vacancy rates across Toronto, as many people moved out of the downtown core in particular and small, higher-priced apartments more broadly.

These lower average rents and higher vacancy rates seem like good news for affordability, but data from CMHC shows that nearly all the units that are vacant are not affordable to the bottom 40% of the population, who cannot afford more than \$1,174 in rent. While more than 11% of apartments renting for more than \$2,550 per month were vacant, only 0.6% of units renting for less than \$625 per month were vacant. For households in the bottom 20% of income, \$625 per month is the highest amount they can pay for their rent to be considered affordable.

Rent of all units versus vacant units

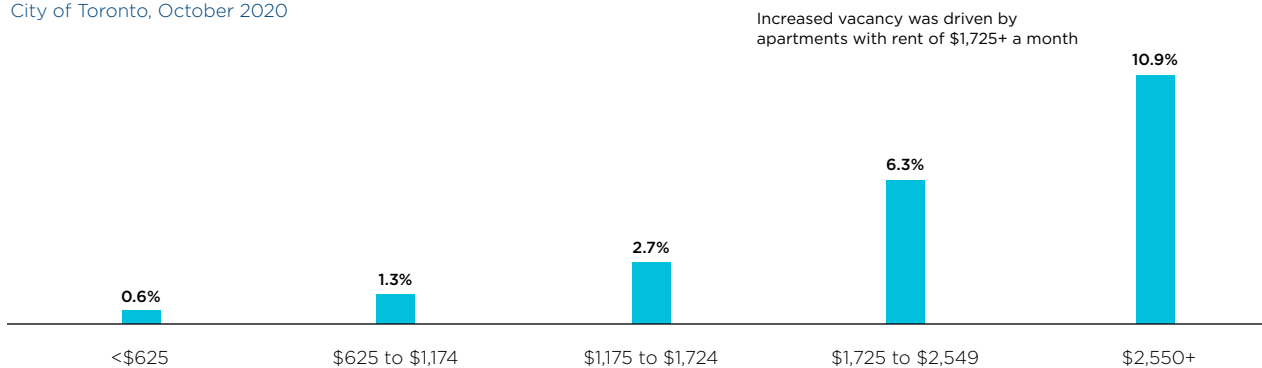
City of Toronto, 2008 to October 2020



Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) Rental Market Survey.²³⁴ Select data files for historical rent prices were provided directly by CMHC.

Vacancy rate by rent of apartment

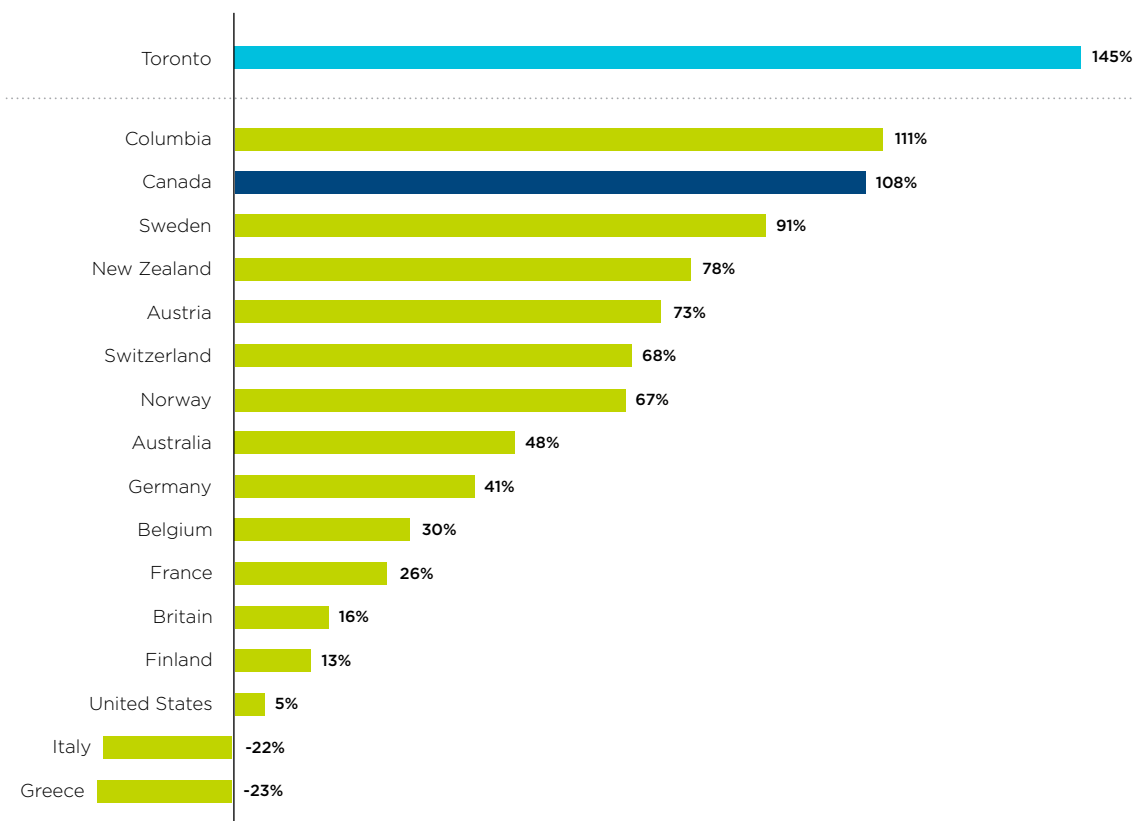
City of Toronto, October 2020



Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation Rental Market Survey.²³⁸

Increase in real (inflation adjusted) housing prices

2005 to Q4 2020



Source: The Economist Global House Prices.²³⁹

Note: Toronto was calculated by the author using the MLS Home Price Index for December 2020 and the real and nominal housing prices for Canada used by the economist.

LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING SUPPLY A PROBLEM YEARS IN THE MAKING

While Canada is hardly unique in making housing unaffordable for average citizens, data from *The Economist* shows that in real terms, Canada had the second-largest increase in housing prices in the world, with housing prices growing by 108% from 2005 to the end of 2020, far greater than in the United States (5%), Finland (13%) and Britain (16%).

The data from the MLS Housing Price Index also shows that prices in Toronto have been increasing faster than the rest of the country.

The only housing markets where prices are rising faster than Toronto are all in southern Ontario, with markets like Hamilton, Barrie, Oshawa and Kitchener-Waterloo having the greatest percentage price increases in the country. Toronto's unaffordable housing situation is spilling over into cities across southern Ontario.

"In Parkdale, we're struggling to provide community members with homes because you've got other people who just see these spaces as opportunities to invest and generate profit," says Joshua Barndt, executive director of Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust. His organization purchases land in the Parkdale neighbourhood of Toronto, the land is held in community ownerships and they lease land to nonprofits that provide affordable housing and other social benefits.

"Between 2011 and 2016, the number of private rental units that were affordable to households earning less than \$30,000 per year went down by 322,600 units across the country," says Garima Talwar Kapoor, director of policy and research at Maytree, citing research from Steve Pomeroy, a researcher from Carleton University.²⁴⁰

This puts the federal government's plan to create 150,000 affordable housing units across the country in context: the plan does not even replace the units lost from 2011 to 2016, let alone all the affordable units that have been lost since 2016, or the additional units needed as the population grows.²⁴¹

"Going back three decades, the federal government played a significant role investing in affordable and deeply affordable housing; then it retracted its role and downloaded the responsibilities onto the provinces, and many provinces onto the municipalities," says Talwar Kapoor. "This is what happens when you depend on the marketplace to provide some of the necessities — in this case, housing — people need to live a life with dignity."

In Parkdale, we're struggling to provide community members with homes because you've got other people who just see these spaces as opportunities to invest and generate profit.

JOSHUA BARNDT

Executive Director, Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust



This is what happens when you depend on the marketplace to provide some of the necessities — in this case, housing — people need to live a life with dignity.

GARIMA TALWAR KAPOOR
Director of Policy and Research, Maytree

A significant challenge in Toronto is the rapidly growing population, with very little rental housing being created, and investors continually increasing rent on apartments, reducing the supply of affordable housing.

In 2019, the Toronto CMA was the fastest-growing census metropolitan area in Canada and the United States, adding more people than anywhere else in the two countries, and in 2020 Toronto was still third, even with decreased international immigration during the pandemic.²⁴²

Across the Toronto CMA, lack of affordable rental units is a huge problem.

Overall, the population increased 9.8 times faster than the number of rental units (see chart for notes and sourcing), contributing to significant price increases in both the rental and ownership markets.

Since 2007, the population of the Greater Toronto Area increased by 1.14 million. Over that time, the estimated number of purpose-built rental apartment units increased by less than 12,000, and the number of condos available for rent increased by just over 104,000. (As we discussed in the 2019–20 *Vital Signs Report*, this is just as problematic in the City of Toronto, and as population growth has increased the ratio of population growth to new rental supply has gotten worse, though this problem reduced during the pandemic, with much slower population growth.)

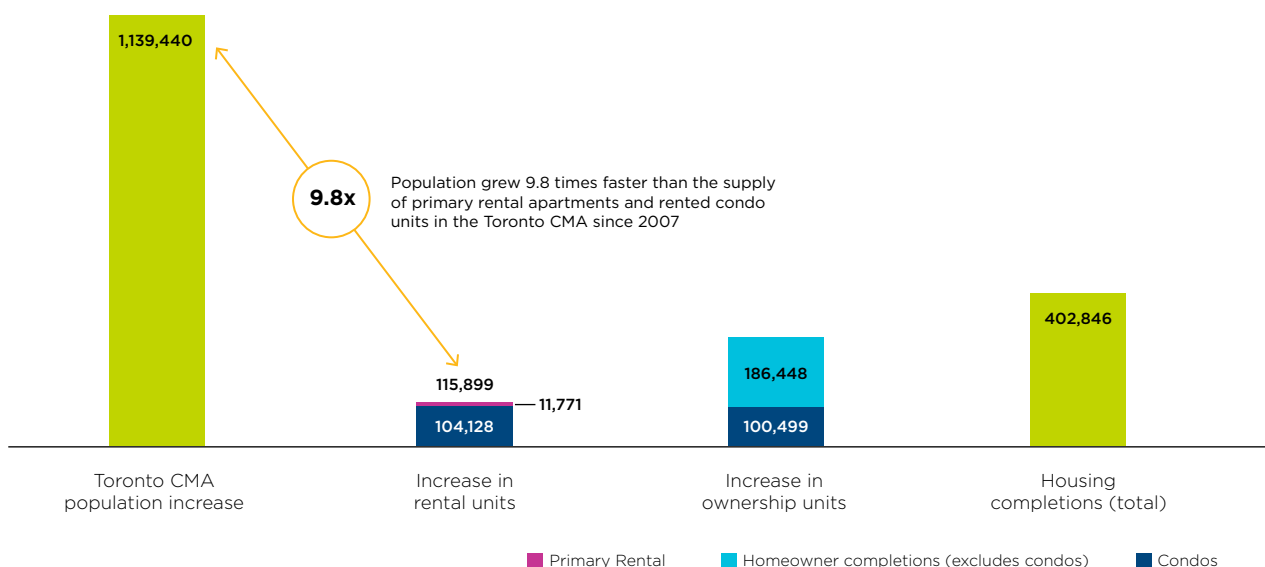
Talwar Kapoor is emphatic: “The bigger housing issue we’re facing is the kind of supply we are building and for whom.”

Barndt further explains: “The problem is affordability and access. The large majority of rental housing and other forms of housing that are being produced are unaffordable and inaccessible to low-income, middle-income, working-class and vulnerable residents. There’s almost no effort being undertaken to ensure that the existing rental housing stock is retained as affordable rental housing stock.”

The consequences of these challenges are clear in recent statistics published by Social Planning Toronto. Its analysis found that in the City of Toronto, 45% of racialized individuals living in rented units live in dwellings that are considered unsuitable (overcrowded), compared to only 16% of non-racialized residents.²⁴³ For newcomers, the challenge is even greater, with more than half (51%) of newcomers living in overcrowded conditions. Different home ownership rates by race are covered on page 37, in the Income and Wealth chapter.

Increase in population versus increase in supply of housing since 2007

Toronto CMA



Sources: Population: Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0135-01 Population estimates, July 1, by census metropolitan area and census agglomeration, 2016 boundaries. Rental units: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) Rental Market Survey. Housing Completions: CMHC Starts and Completion Survey. Other data: CMHC Secondary Rental Market Surveys. Note: Calculations by the author. These numbers would not cover when existing units are split between more people.

SOLUTIONS AVAILABLE WHEN WE CONSIDER HOUSING A HUMAN RIGHT

Both the federal government and the City of Toronto have recognized that housing is a human right. The City of Toronto committed to a right to housing in its 10-year housing plan in 2019.

“I’m very encouraged by the reframing of this housing conversation around human rights principles, because it has the capacity to change the approach to the problem. Maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but over the long term,” says Brierley of CERA. “When something is a human right, it has to have more weight in policy conversations.”

The City of Toronto is currently debating an inclusion zoning (IZ) bylaw that would require affordable housing as part of new housing developments. “We can have reasonable arguments about what are the appropriate percentage of affordable housing units and what affordable means. But, it’s important that these conversations are starting from the standpoint of housing being a human right, and everything has to flow from that,” Brierley adds.

An opinion piece in the *Toronto Star* published by Beth Wilson of Social Planning Toronto, Melisa Bayon of Progress Toronto and Jeremy Withers, a PhD student at the University of Toronto, argued that the City of Toronto’s current draft policy for inclusionary zoning falls short of what it needs to be: “It would only require 5 to 10% of the floor area of new high rise condo buildings and 3 to 5% of new high rise rental buildings to be affordable to lower-income residents, depending on the area Inclusionary Zoning was required.”²⁴⁴

They note that the City of Toronto's own feasibility study found that typical condo projects could be required to set aside 20% of their floor area for affordable housing in the vast majority of the city and still have a 15% profit margin. Other cities like New York, Montreal and London all have policies that require 25% to 50% of high-rise spaces to be affordable in some neighbourhoods.

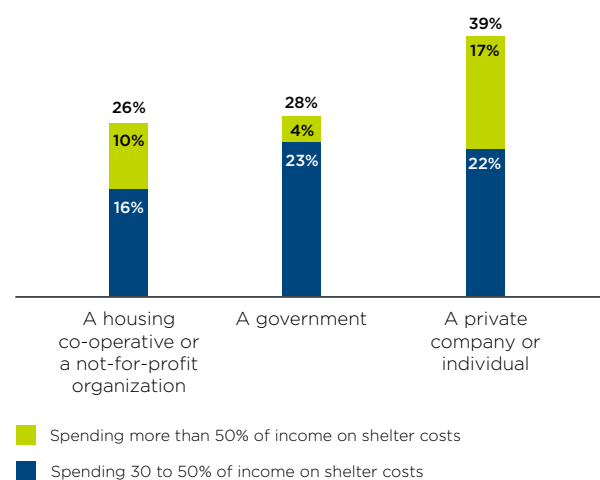
Talwar Kapoor of Maytree notes that while these discussions are important, "in the definition of affordable, we're talking about affordability for mostly middle-income households and not people living in deep poverty."

"We need to heavily invest in the acquisition and conversion of existing rental housing stock into nonprofit permanently affordable rental housing. It's the most impactful, economically efficient and just response to the housing crisis," says Barndt.

Recent data from the 2018 Canadian Housing Survey shows the importance of both nonprofit and government-provided housing.

Percentage of income spent on housing, by type of landlord

Toronto Census Metropolitan Area, 2018



Source: The 2018 Canadian Housing Survey Public Use Microdata File. Note: Analysis by the author.

In the Toronto CMA in 2018, 39% of people living in housing provided by a private company or individual reported they spend more than 30% of their income on housing — the point at which housing is considered unaffordable, compared to only 26% of those living in a housing provided by a nonprofit or a housing co-operative and 28% of those living in housing provided by the government.²⁴⁵ For deeply unaffordable housing, where tenants were spending more than half of their income on housing, the differences were even more stark, with 17% of those in the Toronto CMA living in private rental units spending more than half their income on housing, compared to 10% in nonprofits and co-operative housing and 4% in government housing.

Parkdale Neighbourhood Land Trust (PNLT) is working to buy rooming houses in its neighbourhood. Rooming houses are multi-tenant houses, where four or more people rent rooms and share a kitchen and/or washroom. According to Barndt, increasingly rooming houses are going on the open market and "corporate landlords are buying the properties up, evicting the tenants to upscale the building with minor renovations and then renting them out to students and young people at much higher rents, often triple what the previous tenants were paying."

PNLT conducted a study in 2017 that found that there are 198 rooming houses in the Parkdale neighbourhood alone, more than in any other part of the city.²⁴⁶ "In 2017, we documented in the past 10 years, we had lost 28 rooming houses in Parkdale through this process, and about 350 tenants have lost their housing." PNLTL recently conducted a survey of residents of rooming houses. It found that the average rent paid was \$685, with half paying \$650 or less, well below market rent.

Buying and renovating existing rooming housing as they enter the market is “from our understanding, the most economically efficient means to secure deeply affordable rental housing,” says Barndt. We can “acquire and renovate existing rooming houses in Parkdale for between \$180,000 and \$250,000 per unit, which is less than half of the cost the federal government is spending per unit on new affordable housing with its Rapid Housing Initiative.”

Barndt says PNLT has a “very significant interest” in investing in bigger projects, but that “government programs don’t support acquisition of existing rental housing at a large scale. We haven’t been able to invest in the mid-rise or high-rise space. There are just no programs that support it yet, so we’ve focused on smaller buildings.”

For philanthropists, foundations and investors, supporting organizations like PNLT and other affordable housing projects with capital contributions are an opportunity. “We partnered with Vancity Community Investment Bank to launch a new impact investment program, where institutional investors can invest in an impact GIC and sign an additional contract to allow it to be a guarantor. That allows the bank to provide acquisition loans to the land trust,” says Barndt. “Then, we can act quickly to acquire buildings when they come to market. If we don’t respond immediately, we lose these buildings to speculative investors.”

Currently, rooming houses are only legal in the former cities of Toronto, Etobicoke and York, meaning they are illegal in Scarborough and other parts of the city.²⁴⁷ However, a city staff report proposes legalizing rooming houses throughout the city by November 2022, with a six-room maximum in most neighbourhoods and up to 25 rooms in denser areas. These changes offer an opportunity to create more affordable housing throughout the city.

Working on providing deeply affordable housing is a strategy also being implemented by Na-Me-Res, an Indigenous organization seeking financial support to help sustain its growth. It has acquired two properties in the past year that together will provide 29 new deeply affordable rental units, at more than 50% below market rate. “Providing stable housing means more Indigenous men who have experienced homelessness will have the opportunity to grow roots in a community,” explains Steve Teekens, executive director of Na-Me-Res. “For some of our clients it also means they have the stability to go back to school, commit to steadier work or retire more comfortably in their senior years.”

WoodGreen Community Services is another charity that has taken on the challenge. “In an effort to advance access to affordable housing, WoodGreen set an ambitious goal of increasing from our current 900 affordable housing units to 3,000 within this decade,” says Michelle German, vice-president of policy and strategy at WoodGreen Community Services. It recently partnered with developer Daniels Corporation, Sun Life Financial and the City of Toronto to add 34 new affordable housing units to an existing 346-unit building through a unique tri-sector partnership. WoodGreen is providing wraparound supports to mother-led families who will be living in these units to give them numerous other types of support. “The partnership brings new affordable units into the marketplace in less than a year. Normally... it takes four years,” said Anne Babcock, president and CEO of WoodGreen in a statement. German adds that “developing 34 units is only a small step in addressing the affordable housing crisis. However, it’s great proof of concept that we can apply going forward,” and WoodGreen is are looking for more partners to help with its plans to scale affordable housing.

PRIORITIES FOR DONORS, FUNDERS AND POLICYMAKERS

01

Advance funding and innovative financing tools to enable more nonprofits to acquire and manage deeply affordable units.

02

Increase access to more timely data on rent arrears and evictions, both in the short and long term, along with better tracking of how communities that are being marginalized are coping financially.

03

Put in place stopgaps to avoid the risk of mass evictions.

04

Support research and advocacy for policy solutions such as revised rent controls, inclusionary zoning and others designed to lower housing costs and protect them for lower-income residents.

05

Embrace housing as a human right by putting the needs of the homeless and the precariously housed first.

06

Recognize that accessing and keeping housing is predicated on a range of factors, including employment, income supports, ability and mental health, and fund the wraparound supports.

07

Prioritize mixed income in new housing developments.

TIPS FOR ENGAGED TORONTONIANS

01

Support with money and time the ability of community organizations to own and lease property.

03

Use your influence to advocate for systemic changes to reverse the runaway costs of housing.

02

Consider providing rental housing in your home or lowering the rent you charge to make it more affordable.

Whatever it is, coronavirus has made the mighty kneel and brought the world to a halt like nothing else could. Our minds are still racing back and forth, longing for a return to “normality,” trying to stitch our future to our past and refusing to acknowledge the rupture. But the rupture exists. And in the midst of this terrible despair, it offers us a chance to rethink the doomsday machine we have built for ourselves. Nothing could be worse than a return to normality.

Historically, pandemics have forced humans to break with the past and imagine their world anew. This one is no different. It is a portal, a gateway between one world and the next.

We can choose to walk through it, dragging the carcasses of our prejudice and hatred, our avarice, our data banks and dead ideas, our dead rivers and smoky skies behind us. Or we can walk through lightly, with little luggage, ready to imagine another world. And ready to fight for it.

— *Arundhati Roy*

APPENDIX

2021 TORONTO NONPROFIT SURVEY

Toronto Foundation conducted the 2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey from May 21, 2021, to June 16, 2021. The survey was distributed to organizations that Toronto Foundation had granted to or had past relationships with and known to have substantial operations in Toronto. The survey was also distributed via social media, by 211 Central Region, the Toronto Arts Council and by select funder organizations that work in Toronto. The survey was focused on how nonprofits had been affected by the pandemic. The survey took most respondents approximately 10 to 16 minutes to complete.

The 2020 survey was conducted from July 29 to August 24, 2020, and distributed through similar channels.

SAMPLE SIZE

The 2021 Toronto Nonprofit Survey had 261 fully completed responses and 372 partial responses. The 2020 Toronto Nonprofit survey had 233 full completes and 286 partial completes.

QUESTIONS

For more information or questions, please get in touch with Steven Ayer at steve@goodstrategy.ca.

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

All organizations that completed the survey indicated they had substantial operations in Toronto. More than two-thirds (68%) described themselves as charities, while 29% described themselves as registered nonprofits.

Arts organizations were the most likely to complete the survey (88 in 2021 and 41 in 2020), followed by social services organizations (76 in 2021 and 93 in 2020). Responses from community development and housing, education and research, and health were the next most common, though all in the range of 20 responses each year.

One in five organizations said they were focused on a local neighbourhood or several neighbourhoods; 35% described themselves as focusing city-wide or on much of the city, while 11% were regional, 10% provincial, 12% national and 5% international.

Half of the respondents identified themselves as a CEO or executive director, 26% were middle management and the rest were a variety of other staff and volunteer positions.

Almost half of the organizations had revenues of more than a million per year, with the other half with less, and 25% had revenues of less than \$250,000 per year.

Results are distributed throughout this report with an emphasis in the “Civic Engagement and Belonging” chapter. While statistical significance testing was not discussed throughout this report, only significant findings were presented as key findings in the report.

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