

Calgary Foundation hits \$1 billion grant milestone, celebrates 70th year

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Eva Friesen, President and CEO of Calgary Foundation for 20 years is celebrating their billion dollar grant and 70th anniversary in Calgary on Monday, August 18, 2025. DARREN MAKOWICHUK/Postmedia

In a year of significant milestones, the Calgary Foundation is celebrating both its 70th anniversary and the recent granting of its billionth dollar.

For decades, the Calgary Foundation has partnered with organizations large and small to support local communities. Founded in 1955, it began with 20 donors and \$100,000 in

funds. In 2025, the organization has given \$83.5 million to 1,313 charitable groups throughout Calgary and the surrounding area.

“We are a what we call a 360-degree grant maker,” said Eva Friesen, president and CEO of the Calgary Foundation. “Whether it’s environment, human welfare, social services, health, education, arts ... We believe all those parts are important to building a healthy community.”

Some of its grants are given out by application, with committees of volunteers deciding where the funds will go. In other cases, donors will choose a cause that’s important to them, and other have left money to the Calgary Foundation in a will, to be donated to a specific cause.

“What we do well is look to the expertise of the leaders in the charitable sector who are seeking to solve problems and make this a better place, and support their work — putting our trust in their work,” Friesen said.

“We believe in them and trust that they know what they’re doing, and that they do it better than anyone.”

The foundation reached its \$1 billion feat with the awarding of grants in the spring.

Partners offers grants that range from \$1,000 for a neighbourhood initiative like a community garden or a gathering in a local park, to millions of dollars for organizations like the Alberta Children’s Hospital.

The Calgary Foundation has helped the Alberta Children’s Hospital Foundation to fund its research institute and a community-based mental health centre for youth, as well as a variety of other programs, services, equipment and research.

“We are deeply grateful to be among the many organizations uplifted by the extraordinary vision set in motion 70 years ago,” said Saifa Koonar, president and CEO of the Alberta Children’s Hospital Foundation.

Friesen has been with the Calgary Foundation for the past 20 years, and has seen the organization grow exponentially in that time. For her, seeing the generosity of Calgarians and the impact it makes is the best part of the job.

“I love that I get to learn something new every single day about what a charity is doing in this community to solve one of our most urgent problems,” she said. “There is no end of good that we can do, and there’s no end of great effort put on by so many in our community.”



Eva Friesen, President and CEO of Calgary Foundation for 20 years is celebrating their billion dollar grant and 70th anniversary in Calgary on Monday, August 18, 2025. Photo by Darren Makowichuk /DARREN MAKOWICHUK/Postmedia

Of the thousands of grants the Calgary Foundation gives out, one that Friesen has been most proud to support recently is the Urban Society for Aboriginal Youth (USAY).

“They do the most amazing work with Indigenous youth in the city,” she said. “We’ve been funding them in smaller grants for some time, and a while back, we gave them a grant for a feasibility study to build a youth centre. That feasibility study led to a whole lot of funding from levels of government, and they have just opened their youth centre for Indigenous youth in this city.”

Much has changed in Calgary over the past 70 years, and Friesen said this year, the focus has been on what the next 70 years will look like, and how the foundation can respond.

“There’s a lot of polarization, there’s a lot of stress in society. There’s a lot of discontent and disagreements,” she said. “It’s often said that a community foundation can be the bridge between differences in a community.”

“That’s a beautiful statement, and I’d like to use the next several years to figure out what that means and how that happens.”

Mayor Jyoti Gondek said she’s grateful for the impact the foundation and its many philanthropic contributors have had on the city.

“Reaching the milestone of \$1 billion in community grants is a testament to decades of generosity, vision and commitment by Calgarians who believe in lifting each other up,” she said.

“The foundation’s impact is felt in every corner of Calgary.”

Friesen said if she could solve just one problem in Calgary, it would be the mental health and addictions crisis.

“It is so intertwined with so many factors, and it just seems a hard nut to crack,” she said. “It’s so very evident on the streets in Calgary, and I wish we could solve that.”

What she loves most about Calgary, though, is how communities come together to solve problems.

“There’s just this sense, it seems to me, among so many Calgarians, that they just make it happen,” she said. “They look for the way, and they make it happen. They don’t take no for an answer.”