

# Stronger With Every Step

## 2023 REPORT TO COMMUNITY

Calgary Foundation's  
Pandemic Recovery Report

## INTRODUCTION

For over 65 years, Calgary Foundation has demonstrated resilience advancing towards its vision to build a healthy and vibrant community where everyone belongs. In March of 2020, that resiliency was put to the test.

With shocking immediacy, our world faced unforeseen challenges as the COVID-19 pandemic propelled us into a new reality of being locked down to limit the spread of the deadly virus.

New restrictions forced the closure of everything deemed non-essential including schools, businesses, performance venues, restaurants, and recreational facilities.

The financial and emotional strain of the pandemic had a significant impact on the charitable sector as demand for services increased, while charities struggled to adapt to rapid changes with limited resources.

Calgary Foundation quickly mobilized to respond and support the charitable sector by:

- Shifting discretionary dollars to increase available funding
- Adapting the grants review process to get funding out the door fast
- Joining funding tables to work collaboratively with community partners
- Launching the Pandemic Recovery Program to support urgent community needs

This report showcases the resilience and adaptability of both the Calgary Foundation and the charitable sector to meet the changing needs of community during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

**As one of its first commitments, Calgary Foundation contributed \$1 million to the COVID-19 Community Response Fund established in partnership with the United Way of Calgary and the City of Calgary, including the Calgary Emergency Management Agency.**



In April 2020, Calgary Foundation launched the multi-phased Pandemic Recovery Program (PRP) to bridge gaps and provide essential support to a wide range of charitable organizations serving the Calgary and area community.

**The COVID-19 Community Response Fund provided \$13.1 million to 181 local agencies.**

## PROVIDING IMMEDIATE RELIEF

In the beginning stages of the pandemic, some charities were deemed essential services which required the adoption of strict health protocols to continue operations, while others had to quickly shift to working remotely.

The Pandemic Recovery Program provided rapid access to funding that allowed charities to accommodate the safety needs and ongoing concerns of their clients and staff.

To meet the increased demand for funding, Calgary Foundation engaged grants committee volunteers and reassigned several staff to assist with the weekly review of Pandemic Recovery Program applications. Granting decisions were finalized every two weeks. **Almost 700 funding requests** were received in phase one of PRP which highlighted three critical community needs:

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## Technology

Due to closures and work-from-home orders, charities had to quickly pivot their service delivery model to a virtual format. Funding supported the purchase of new laptops and upgrades, including virtual meeting software (like Zoom), allowing staff to continue serving their clients and maintain virtual connections.

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## Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and Disinfectants

For charities providing housing and other essential services that could not be offered remotely, PPE and sanitization supplies became vital operational necessities. Following the lifting of the first lockdown, funding of PPE and sanitization became an ongoing expense that allowed staff and clients to safely return to in-person programming.

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## Operational Funding

Closures of public gatherings forced the cancellation of charitable fundraising events, a devastating blow to many charities who rely on the revenue to cover operational costs. Bridge funding alleviated some of the uncertainty and anxiety that charitable organizations experienced during this time.



## Punjabi Community Health Services Calgary (PCHS)

To adhere to pandemic restrictions, PCHS rapidly modified their programs from in-person to a virtual format. With support from the PRP, they purchased new software and webinar technologies and trained staff on providing safe, secure and confidential support remotely. To help clients who also required assistance accessing virtual services and resources, PCHS created a digital literacy training program. PCHS also developed materials and created social media posts in South Asian languages to educate South Asian community members about COVID-19 health measures to stay safe during the pandemic.

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**“The development of online programming during the pandemic allowed us to reduce barriers by providing clients with convenient access to online therapy and wellness supports. We now offer a hybrid model and continue to offer online services.”**

— Sherri Shergill, Executive Director/PCHS



**The Pandemic Recovery Program provided \$2 million for PPE related requests.**



**The Pandemic Recovery Program provided funding to purchase over 200 laptops.**

## Calgary Zoo

After two months of closure, the Calgary Zoo lost 50% of its regular revenue and faced many unexpected costs associated with safely reopening.

Support from the PRP allowed the Zoo to purchase COVID-19 safety materials including traffic flow signage, sanitizer dispensers, plexiglass barriers, face shields, facemasks, gloves and wipes for staff.

PRP funding also supported website updates including information on safely accessing the Zoo and a new feature that offered staggered booking times to manage visitor capacity. The Zoo's reopening certainly provided Calgarians with a refuge during highly uncertain times.

## Trellis

For Trellis' group homes, shelters and COVID-19 response sites, the PRP supported an agency wide response program that included the purchase of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) for staff and clients. Funding also allowed Trellis to purchase laptops which were distributed to staff and clients, keeping Indigenous youth connected with Elders and reducing isolation. Additionally, staff received training in trauma informed practices and as crisis intervention increased, Trellis developed a training curriculum that was adapted for online learning.



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**“Zoo staff made the online programs fun by sharing lots of interesting facts and opportunities for students to ask questions. The variety of animals made it a pretty good substitute for not being able to go in-person.”**

— Kelly F. / Grade 4 Teacher

## SERVING COMMUNITY

As the pandemic stretched into 2021, our resilience and ability to adapt to challenging guidelines and needs remained strong. Charitable organizations kept their staff employed and continued to deliver services and programming to their clients while operating during this difficult time.

However, due to ongoing restrictions and fear of infection, Calgarians were staying home. This led to feelings of disconnection and isolation, especially amongst the most vulnerable members of the community including seniors and racialized individuals. With no end in sight, the sector found itself at a crossroads.

Food insecurity, domestic violence and mental health issues escalated in isolation while simultaneously staying invisible. Recognizing the importance of connecting to their clients, many organizations developed creative solutions by adjusting their program priorities and adopting virtual delivery models.



**The Pandemic Recovery Program provided \$6 million for technology-related requests.**



## Urban Society for Aboriginal Youth (USAY)

PRP funding allowed USAY to address emerging and often urgent needs. With their doors closed due to restrictions, USAY hired Indigenous workers to maintain their office but discovered isolation amongst their membership of Indigenous youth and children as a major immediate need. To provide moments of social connection, USAY staff and their children visited members in costume at a safe social distance. USAY also supported the spiritual wellbeing of its members by delivering instructional smudge kits so they could practice meaningful cultural traditions safely at home.

## Unison at Kerby Centre

To combat isolation, the PRP funding helped Kerby Centre leverage the knowledge of youth to help seniors develop online skills. The move to virtual programming left some seniors struggling to adapt to computer technologies. Kerby Centre designed a program where youth volunteers taught seniors how to connect to their loved ones and access information online, effectively bridging the intergenerational digital divide.



**The Pandemic Recovery Program supported 24 community-focused organizations in meeting food security needs including gift cards, food hampers, and pre-packaged meals.**



**Calgary Foundation, along with Community Foundations of Canada, participated in the Government of Canada's Emergency Community Response Fund that administered \$350 million across Canada.**



**To support the arts sector, Calgary Foundation contributed \$200,000 towards the Rozsa Foundation Collaborative Funding Table.**

## Brown Bagging for Calgary's Kids (BB4CK)

When schools were open, food could be prepared and delivered but when schools were closed due to COVID-19 outbreaks, hungry kids became less visible and BB4CK had to pivot their service delivery model. With PRP funding, they were able to purchase grocery gift cards to distribute to families when children were at home due to an outbreak. BB4CK continued to feed 5,000 kids every day, regardless of where learning was happening.



**“The pandemic brought out the best in each of us with all the challenges we encountered. Our burden became lighter because of this program.”**

— Grocery Card Program Participant, BB4CK



**Over 100 organizations were supported to adjust to a virtual program delivery model.**

During the pandemic,

**150+**

**Calgary Foundation donors contributed over \$4 million to support the Pandemic Recovery Program.**



**Calgary Foundation's Community Knowledge Centre developed a new Urgent Needs section for charitable organizations to request support by highlighting their immediate needs.**

**This online resource also featured information for charities on how to access funding through the Pandemic Recovery Program.**



## LOOKING FORWARD

Nearing the end of 2021, our world began to open up as the pandemic transitioned into a new normal. Government mandated health restrictions were lifted and the realities of living with COVID-19 became an ongoing part of life.

Charities still required support as doors re-opened and programs continued to be offered in-person, virtually or as a hybrid option. The transition period meant it was not going to be ‘business as usual’, but a continuation of discovering and adapting to our new post-pandemic reality.

While the adaptations were born out of necessity, individual organizations uncovered some invaluable lessons which informed programs and services that were offered through the pandemic and beyond.

## Sagesse

The pandemic presented many challenges for Sagesse which provides support for those who experience domestic violence. The lockdown and stay-home mandates created tensions at home, eroded access to safe spaces and left many with nowhere to go. Sagesse saw an increase in the demand for their services and used the opportunity to develop other methods to support women. While continuing to maintain the confidentiality and safety of clients, through virtual interventions they adapted to create new pathways for victims and survivors to access help at their fingertips.

## Hospice Calgary

While Hospice Calgary was initially forced to implement virtual options due to the restrictions, they have found the format to be advantageous in their role of offering compassionate end-of-life and bereavement care. For individuals with advanced illnesses, an online peer support group is far more accessible and means family caregivers no longer needed to leave loved ones to attend in-person programs. Adopting virtual practices has been so helpful that Hospice Calgary intends to keep it as part of their regular programming.

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**“As panicked and afraid as I started out feeling, I felt excited for the possibilities of a new life without abuse and trauma, or at least with better tools to manage it.”**

— Client, Sagesse

**Nearly 100 organizations reported they would develop future operational plans with a renewed understanding of the importance of emergency planning and adaptability.**



## Calgary Seniors Resource Society (CSRS)

To eliminate the waitlist for their Essential Transportation program which assisted over 1,600 seniors, CSRS recruited 150 volunteers to drive seniors to their critically needed vaccination appointments. In addition to partnering with Age-Friendly Calgary, new volunteer sharing agreements were established with the Unison at Kerby Centre, Meals on Wheels, Calgary Chinese Elderly Citizens' Association, and 211 - Distress Centre Calgary to recruit volunteer drivers, exchange services and program delivery knowledge and streamline client referrals for vaccination transportation, partnerships that currently continue.

**60% of charities that received PRP funding to deliver programs virtually reported they will continue to deliver online programming post-pandemic.**

## CONCLUSION

From 2020 – 2023, the restrictions our world faced left a lasting impact on all of our lives. A rollercoaster of emotions and guidelines for public and private life challenged individuals, families, and communities in ways that we, as a collective society, had never encountered. Throughout this unprecedented time, Calgary and area charities demonstrated creativity and innovation as they shifted programming and delivery models to ensure that individuals and families could access much needed supports.

Calgary Foundation launched the Pandemic Recovery Program, partnered with multiple funders on the United Way of Calgary's Community Response Fund, and joined with Community Foundations across Canada to administer the Emergency Community Support Fund. In addition to simplifying the application forms, timelines were changed to get funding out the door faster during the early stages of the pandemic, and restrictions were relaxed to allow more charities access to Calgary Foundation resources. Many of these lessons and adaptations are carrying over into current granting streams post-pandemic.

**Calgary Foundation walked alongside many charities to build a community where everyone belongs.**

**Calgary Foundation provided over \$19 million in funding that supported 450 organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic.**





**CALGARY  
FOUNDATION**  
FOR COMMUNITY, FOREVER



**PANDEMIC  
RECOVERY  
PROGRAM**

[calgaryfoundation.org](https://calgaryfoundation.org)