



## United Way Centraide Canada

2023 Pre-Budget Submission

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## Recommendations

### 1. Housing and homelessness:

- a) expand the cost-shared Canada Housing Benefit
- b) pursue opportunities to acquire and redeploy existing properties and expand the stock of permanent supportive housing
- c) fund an effective Federal Housing Advocate and National Housing Council

### 2. Income security:

- a) Allocate funding to deliver the Canada Disability Benefit
- b) Increase funding for the Canada Social Transfer
- c) Expand access to Employment Insurance

### 3. Care economy:

- a) Fund childcare capital expansion; implement a comprehensive Canada-wide workforce strategy and adopt federal legislation
- b) Establish a National Care Economy Commission

### 4. Mental health:

- a) Take immediate steps to create a Canada Mental Health Transfer
- b) Invest in mental health support for frontline workers in the community services sector through a targeted program to prevent burn out and encourage employee retention, as outlined in the 2021 mandate letter for the Minister of Mental Health and Addictions and Associate Minister of Health

### 5. Community services and charitable sector:

- a) Resource a comprehensive workforce strategy to contribute to staff training, recruitment and retention within the community services sector
- b) Invest an additional \$400M in the Community Services Recovery Fund
- c) Create a home in government for the non-profit and charitable sector
- d) Create an action plan to implement the comprehensive recommendations in Catalyst for Change, the Report of the Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector

### 6. 211 community navigation:

- a) Leverage 211 infrastructure to increase benefit uptake among vulnerable communities, including seniors, as outlined in the Minister of Seniors' 2021 mandate letter.
- b) Investing \$27 million over 3 years to transform 211 into a digital and interoperable social infrastructure, and augment its emergency response

and recovery support, technological and data insights capabilities and services.

## **United Way Centraide Canada**

United Way Centraide (UWC) is Canada's leading national network of local social experts empowering people to make lasting social change in their community. With a presence across Canada, serving over 5,000 communities, our federated network of 70 local United Ways and Centraides (UWCs) tackle the important social issues of poverty and social exclusion locally. UWC is Canada's largest non-government funder of human and community services, investing over \$500M annually. We support 5,800 programs serving 10 million people to support our vision for everyone in every community to have the opportunity to reach their full potential. United Way Centraide Canada (UWCC) is the national office that provides leadership and services to UWC members.

### **Priorities for an Equitable Recovery**

The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated long-standing social and economic inequities, highlighting the importance of an equitable recovery more than a return to normal. We have developed five priorities for an equitable recovery that are based on data and the experience of our members. They are underpinned by equity and the need for a strong community services sector to create opportunities for everyone in our communities.

UWCC's pre-budget submission is guided by our priorities for an equitable recovery, which are to:

1. Ensure access to basic needs.
2. Address the housing and homelessness crisis.
3. Close the widening opportunity gap.
4. Increase access to mental health and substance use support.
5. Support equitable economic recovery and inclusive growth.

UWCs are mobilizing donors and investments to contribute to achieving these priorities. Success will require all levels of government to work with community-based funders to strengthen Canada's community services infrastructure with an unwavering commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion and reconciliation.

### **Current Context**

While all individuals and sectors in Canada grapple with record levels of inflation, low- and moderate-income people are especially impacted. The household budgets of people with fixed or stagnant incomes have little to no room to accommodate the soaring costs of necessities like food, heat, hydro and housing.

Millions of people rely on community service organizations to fill the gaps left by inadequate incomes to access food, shelter, mental health supports and community

connection. Canada's national service infrastructure has proven essential through the pandemic and will be critical for an equitable recovery. Due to precarious, often project-based funding, this infrastructure is already fragile. It is also reliant on low wage, precarious work, primarily performed by women. Higher program and supply costs are placing this infrastructure under further stress while it contends with a staff recruitment and retention crisis brought on by the pandemic. Many workers have faced burn out and mental health challenges and have left their professions for other sectors; moved to work in the public sector for better wages and benefits, or; exited the labour market altogether.

Inflationary pressures mean that these organizations are facing an enormous challenge in providing essential services in the context of flat-lined funding, staffing shortages and rising demand. The federal government's recent inflation support package provides important targeted, time-limited support for low- and moderate-income people. UWCC's budget recommendations address policy areas where federal investment can further support individual and community health and inclusion as well as stronger community services to achieve an equitable recovery. They are informed by our network's extensive mobilization of resources, strategic partnerships across sectors and expertise gained from fighting poverty locally.

## **Budget 2023 Recommendations**

### **1. Boost housing security and chart a pathway to eliminate homelessness by 2030**

The pandemic made the severity of Canada's housing crisis unignorable. Undoubtedly, access to housing and preventing homelessness will be essential for an equitable recovery. Effective, long-term solutions are critical to upholding Canada's commitment to the right to housing. We must boost housing supply and coalesce around the goals to reduce, prevent and end homelessness by 2030. We propose:

- a. Sustained funding for an expanded cost-shared Canada Housing Benefit with the provinces and territories.
- b. Enabling qualified non-profits to compete for acquisition of select buildings by providing them access to existing NHS funding.<sup>i</sup> This program would allow the government to save up to 7,500 units every year from becoming unaffordable, build long-term capacity in the non-profit sector, and deliver an additional measure of progress on the NHS.
- c. Funding for an effective Federal Housing Advocate and National Housing Council.

### **2. Strengthen Canada's income security infrastructure**

Enabling an equitable recovery requires addressing the prevalence of low income. Investments in income supports, such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit and temporary increases in the Canada Child Benefit, helped stabilize incomes in the face of pandemic-related job loss, business closures and increased family care responsibilities. To further reduce poverty, Canada should strengthen its income security infrastructure so no one is left behind. We propose:

- a. Allocating funding to deliver an inflation-indexed Canada Disability Benefit to prevent and eradicate poverty among people with disabilities.
- b. Increasing funding for the Canada Social Transfer (CST) by \$4 billion annually. Boosting the CST and targeting funding to social assistance expenditures will improve income adequacy, health and social outcomes.
- c. Modernizing and broadening access to Employment Insurance (EI). Comprehensive reforms will provide a stronger, fairer and more agile EI system, including more access for self-employed workers and improved benefit rates of at least 60% of earnings.<sup>ii</sup>

### **3. Invest in the care economy**

The social and economic wellbeing of our communities is underpinned by paid and unpaid care work primarily performed by women. High quality care – for children, seniors and people with disabilities - will be critical to an equitable recovery. We propose:

- a. A capital program to support public childcare expansion.
- b. An in-depth, comprehensive, Canada-wide childcare workforce strategy.
- c. Adopting federal legislation to ensure that, at maturity, the Canada-wide system of early learning and childcare entitles and provides all children and families in Canada with equitable access to high-quality, inclusive and culturally-safe programs
- d. Establishing a National Care Economy Commission—as recommended by the House of Commons Standing Committee on the Status of Women—to examine, paid and unpaid care work, changing demographics and care needs and best practices in community and public support models.

#### 4. Mental health Services

The lack of timely, equitable, accessible, inclusive, and affordable mental health and substance-use health care has long been a serious problem in Canada. The pandemic greatly exacerbated mental health challenges for people already receiving or awaiting care and additional cohorts of people are newly effected. The need for services and support are both urgent and foundational for an equitable recovery. We propose:

- a. Creating the Canada Mental Health Transfer as committed to in 2021. This should entail permanent, ongoing federal funding for mental health services.
- b. Investing in mental health support for frontline workers in the community services sector through targeted programs to prevent burn out and encourage employee retention, as outlined in Minister Bennett's 2021 mandate letter. This workforce requires support in order to meet growing service demand from the public.

#### 5. Support a strong community services and charitable sector

Canada's community service infrastructure provides essential support for vulnerable peoples' personal, social, and emotional wellbeing. This infrastructure plays an essential role in Canada's social safety net, yet existing funding models too often focus on short-term projects and do not provide the necessary capital to renew and strengthen organizations for the future or to provide sustainable livelihoods with living wages, benefits, pensions or sick time for workers. We propose:

- a. Resourcing a comprehensive workforce strategy to contribute to staff training, recruitment and retention within the human and community services sector.<sup>iii</sup>
- b. Investing an additional \$400M in the Community Services Recovery Fund to support ongoing sector transformation
- c. The federal government lead by example as a funder by providing longer- term and operating funding that supports higher wages, benefits, pensions and greater job security to enable talent retention and talent pool support.
- d. Creating a distinct home in government for the non-profit and charitable sector to drive strategic, long-term collaboration and to develop a sectoral policy infrastructure which ensures a coherent mandate, incorporating these sectors in policy decision-making and legislative development.<sup>iv</sup>
- e. Creating an action plan guided by targets and timelines to implement the comprehensive recommendations in Catalyst for Change, the Report of the Special Senate Committee on the Charitable Sector.

## 6. Leverage 211 to connect vulnerable community members to benefits and services

Founded in Canada by UWCC in 2002, 211 is Canada's primary source of information on government and community-based health and social services. It helps people navigate the complex network of human services quickly and easily, 24/7/365 in over 150 languages. 211 enables people to access non-emergency health services, virtual mental health support, financial counselling and food and has been critical to communities grappling with floods, fires and other emergencies.

In April 2020, the federal government provided 211 project funding to UWCC. The project expanded 211 access to unserved regions, enabled a more integrated omni-channel pan-Canadian system and helped address pandemic-related surges in call volume.

211 is uniquely positioned to support emergency response and management efforts, and equitable recovery, by providing personalized navigation support to people in vulnerable circumstances, including seniors and Indigenous communities. The pandemic and recent natural disasters have exacerbated longstanding inequities across gender, race, income, age and ability, among other factors. Through targeted outreach to vulnerable people, tailored referrals, inclusive service provision and innovative case management, 211 can help ensure hard to reach populations are not left behind in accessing important government benefits and community services. In turn, this can help reduce the prevalence of poverty, improve health outcomes and build community connections that build resilience.

UWCC's long-held belief is that 211 should be a fundamental part of Canada's social infrastructure. Navigation services and data insights are ready to be leveraged to contribute to stronger communities, policies and programs. We propose:

- a. Government leverage 211 infrastructure to increase uptake of federal benefits among vulnerable community members, including seniors, as outlined in the Minister of Seniors' 2021 Mandate letter.
- b. Investing \$27 million over 3 years to transform 211 into a digital and interoperable social infrastructure, and augment its emergency response and recovery support, technological and data insights capabilities and services.

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<sup>i</sup> [Canadian Housing Policy Roundtable](#)

<sup>ii</sup> Inter-provincial EI Working Group. 2021 HUMA Committee Submission.

<sup>iii</sup> [United Way Centraide Canada. 2022 HUMA submission.](#)

<sup>iv</sup> [Nonprofit Coalition.](#)