

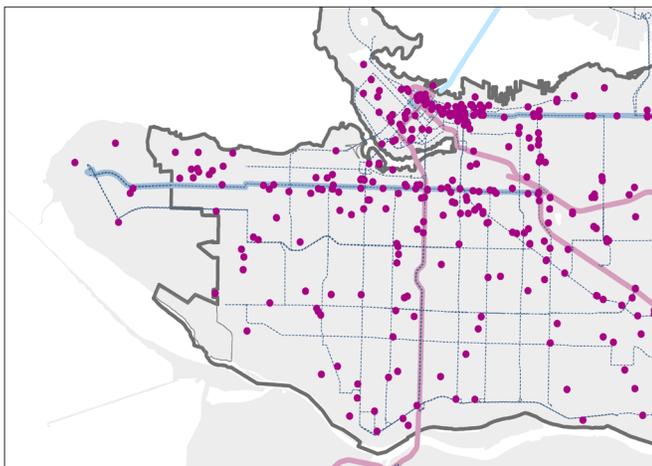
SOCIAL SERVICES NON-PROFITS

JULY 2020

This brief summarizes the impact of COVID-19 on Vancouver's Social Services and Community Development non-profit sector. It is a compilation of key excerpts from several surveys, reports and key informant interviews. Highlights have been thematically arranged to provide: an overview of the sector across Vancouver; a brief description of the role and contribution of sports and recreation non-profits; an outline of key issues, needs and barriers; and innovative and resilient responses adopted by the sector that show promise moving forward.

The Social Services and Community Development Non-Profit Sector in Vancouver: Overview

Social Services and Community Development Non-Profit Organizations
Unceded territories of the x'maḱəwəjam (Musqueam), Skwəwúmesh (Squamish), and səllwətəl (Tsleil-Waututh) nations



Locations of 326 Social Service and 86 Community Development organizations in Vancouver Data Source: BC211 service directory list accessed April 2020 and ACCS community non-profit partners inventory. Note that locations may reflect an organization's office location rather than where programs and services occur.

- Vancouver has a large social service sector. Thousands of Vancouverites, particularly members of groups experiencing marginalization, rely on the programs and services provided by the city's network of non-profit organizations to access basic needs, receive support, build skills and connect and engage with the community
- Social services are generally organized around the populations they serve and the conditions of vulnerability that they are trying to address. As such, social service non-profits include agencies which offer a wide range of supports, including childcare, newcomer settlement services, senior support groups, women, Indigenous people and persons with disabilities serving groups and community-based food programs among many others.
- In British Columbia, the larger non-profit agencies are primarily responsible for delivering social services under service agreements with provincial ministries and authorities. Local governments and the private sector also provide project funding to community-based organizations to support the delivery of additional social programs. The City of Vancouver provides approximately \$10M in grants annually which are primarily designed to support programs whose focus is reducing conditions that create vulnerability for residents.
- A recent inventory of non-profit organizations in the city mapped over 1,600 non-profits and charities in Vancouver. Following the International Classification of Non Profit Organizations (ICNPO) there are approximately 326 social service agencies in the city and 86 community development agencies that provide social services in Vancouver and for the purposes of this report, we will consider the two as one sector.

Contribution of Social Services and Community Development Non-Profit organizations in Vancouver

- Community social services have played a key role in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic, supporting thousands of residents. Interventions and programs run by social services have contributed to meeting the basic needs of the most vulnerable - from addressing threats to food security and fears of increased domestic violence, to continuing to provide a social safety net to Vancouver residents amidst increased stress, mental health strain, isolation, and overall service demand.
- Social services account for a large percentage of employment within the non-profit sector. According to a Step Up BC study in 2014, social services account for 29% of employment within the sector across the province, followed by religious (18%) and arts and culture (15%) organizations. The study reported an estimated 1,570 social service organizations in BC with approximately 24,000 people working in social services in the Province.
- The City of Vancouver currently funds over 250 programs through Social Policy Grants, providing approximately \$10 million annually. Activities supported by the grants

include (but are not limited to):

- Supporting City of Reconciliation objectives, including access to culture, healing and wellness;
 - Reducing poverty;
 - Actions to address systemic inequity;
 - Reducing social isolation and increasing safety;
 - The provision of high quality, licensed childcare and supports to families;
 - Homelessness prevention initiatives; and,
 - Building sustainable food systems.
- In a national review of social service non-profits, key strengths of the sector identified included their local community focus, their attention to specific populations, and the dedication of their staff and volunteers. Furthermore, more likely than other types of organizations, social service non-profits serve children and young people; parents and families; and people facing multiple barriers.

Impacts of Covid-19 on Social Services and Community Development Non-Profit Organizations in Vancouver

The Social Services and Community Development sector is facing significant operational challenges as a result of public health measures meant to stop the spread of COVID-19. Organizations are facing increased demand for service, the need for major program shifts and capacity restrictions, long term financial uncertainty and daunting workforce challenges. These pressures will have a compounding effect on issues that existed well before the pandemic including:

- Funding shortfalls and off-loading of services as a result of inadequate, unstable, short-term and patchwork funding practices by funders;
- Overreliance on program funding without stable and adequate resources to support core operations;
- Despite having a highly educated workforce, unstable working conditions due to high turnover rate generated by low wages and benefits and limited opportunities for career advancement;
- Staff recruitment and retention challenges amplified by limited opportunities for succession planning and leadership development as well as high levels of stress, burn out and strain on services; and,
- Increasingly complex service needs as people face multiple barriers worsened by increasing inequity and poverty levels.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created greater operational, financial and workforce challenges for social services and community development non-profits and the individuals who use their programs and services. Key informant interviews and surveys have identified the following specific impacts of the pandemic on the sector.

Operational Challenges: Shifts in the sector and the effects on impacted communities

- Disruptions to services: 121 Vancouver-based social service non-profits participated in the Vantage Point Non-Profit Survey in April 2020. Findings highlighted that social services are most likely to report disruption in services (92%) and increased demand for services and supports from clients (75%). Increased demand has been reported by those organizations primarily serving families (72%) and people experiencing poverty (75%). Survey results indicate that 20% of social service organizations don't know how long they can keep operating.
- Move to online services: With regards to shifts to virtual programming, organizations serving women (92%) and people with disabilities (72%) are more likely to be impacted by the shift from in-person to online services. The digital divide between organizations and among program participants has had significant impacts on many organizations' ability to effectively deliver programs. Social service non-profits are building digital literacy and capacity not only for clients but also for staff providing programs and services.
- Shifting programming: Furthermore, organizations are reporting significant shifts in the types of programs/ services they must offer, as they pivot to meet demand for basic needs such as meals/groceries. This shift has created challenges for some organizations as they navigate the pressures of mandate drift.

Financial Pressures

- Budget challenges and accessing reserves: 63% of social services in Vancouver indicated that, with increased demand for services, they will be facing budget challenges related to strains on the economy (Vantage Point, 2020). 20% of social service organizations had already accessed some of their operating reserve only a few weeks into the pandemic. Organizations serving people most impacted by the pandemic—including those living in poverty, Indigenous populations, and seniors—are the organizations most likely to have limited or no reserves to help cushion them (Vantage Point, 2020).
- Sustainability of long-term emergency funding: The sector has serious fears for the longer-term sustainability of organizations once emergency funding programs from the Provincial and Federal governments expire. The sector continues to lose multiple sources of revenue, including rental income, donations and proceeds from fundraising events such as galas, golf tournaments, etc.
- Increased expenses: Public health and safety measures aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 have resulted in increased expenses for agencies to meet public health protocols, including increased costs for personnel, personal protective equipment, enhanced sanitation measures, etc.
- Challenges accessing the CEWS: The Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS) has been a valuable support for

the sector. However, some organizations report difficulty meeting eligibility requirements, given increases in emergency funding during early stages of pandemic to address the urgent need for COVID-19 related program changes.

Workforce and Human Resources

- **Shifting to remote work:** The Vantage Point survey reported that respondents serving women (100%) and youth (84%) in particular are the most impacted by challenges related to staff and volunteers shifting to remote work (vs 68% for all organizations). Among subsectors, arts and culture organizations (79%), followed by social services (77%), are struggling the most with this challenge.
- **Staff retention:** Organizations shared concerns about staff and volunteer retention as people may not be coming back to the organizations following the initial round of lay-offs and program closures. There is pressure on organizations to do major re-structuring and human resource planning related to staffing and working from home, while at the same time meeting service goals and increased demands for service.
- **Staff mental health:** Community-based workers report high levels of anxiety, exhaustion and stress resulting from a sense of helplessness when faced with the scale of needs of vulnerable clients. Organizations lack the capacity to address and support the mental health needs of staff and volunteers.

High Level Supports Needed

Sector informants identified several areas of support for recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic:

- Planning support, including consulting services, navigation of financial support programs offered by government and foundations, financial analysis and planning.
- Access to publicly-owned facilities such as schools and community centres to run programs. Agencies could collectively share the responsibility for developing, implementing and monitoring safety plans, purchase/sourcing of equipment and supplies, etc.
- Clear guidance about health and safety plans for re-opening social programs, engaging with volunteers, or supporting food and meal services
- Organizational capacity to support mental health of staff and volunteers that continue to support the community
- Operational funding to support collaborations and partnerships
- Training, expertise and supplies for safety protocols

The City's role and requested support for the sector

- Stable (multi-year), core operational funding;
- Support and advocate for a shift away from project funding towards organizational funding, debunking the "overhead myth" for non-profit operations;
- Reduce reporting requirements and move towards trust-based funding;
- Facilitate access to City facilities to deliver community-based programs by non-profit partners.

Resiliency in the Social Services and Community Development Sector: Innovative responses to the crisis and positive outcomes

Despite these significant challenges the sector has shown the ability to adapt and meet the needs of community members.

- The pandemic has raised the profile of social services and has increased appreciation for the role, value and contribution that the sector provides.
- Social services have been able to show adaptive capacity through their ability to pivot and support clients and participants with emerging needs such as food security, isolation and challenges with digital literacy.
- There has been a new sense of collaboration among agencies and a push towards community-led solutions.
- Vantage Point has been recognized by community agencies for their work on collecting and prioritizing resources and support non-profits with research, information sharing and webinars on re-opening the sector and understanding government funding and supports.
- "Safe Seniors, Strong Communities" is a partnership between the United Way's Better at Home Program, BC 211 and the BC Government Ministry of Health. The program matches seniors who need support with non-medical essentials to volunteers in local communities that are willing to help. In BC, more than 8,850 volunteers have donated their time to make almost 11,000 grocery deliveries to over 10,000 seniors since late March.

Specific Impacts on Social Services for Disproportionately Impacted Populations

Many population groups served by Vancouver's community and social services sector have been and continue to be disproportionately impacted by COVID-19, and the organizations that serve them face unique recovery challenges. This section examines unique operational, financial and workforce impacts faced by these specific service providers, and explores how the City can support these organizations through the recovery process. Information in this section has largely been collected by focus groups between City staff and organizational contacts.

IMPACT ON SEX WORK ORGANIZATIONS

| OPERATIONAL | FINANCIAL | WORKFORCE |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Virtual/online outreach has been inaccessible to most clients due to a lack of technology and access to internet</p> | <p>Sex work/sex workers are not eligible for CERB or other pandemic-related emergency income support programs. Organization supporting sex workers were forced to address their clients' nearly complete loss of income.</p> <p>Sex work organizations may be even more likely than the sector as a whole to lack stable, core operating funding.</p> <p>Some funders (such as the Law Foundation) have postponed expected grants indefinitely.</p> <p>Sex work organizations have suffered as most funders have not taken the flexible or supportive approach the City's social grants programs adopted in releasing 2020 grant funds.</p> | <p>Grassroots peer groups that organized most quickly to respond to the pandemic are the least likely to be able to access any funding – grant processes are huge barriers for small organizations.</p> |

What the City can do

- Adapt application processes to include grassroots peer organizations.
- Advocate with other funders (including the Federal and Provincial governments) to take a more flexible and supportive approach to grant funds.
- Advocate strongly with the Federal and Provincial governments to provide core funding for organizations supporting sex workers.
- Advocate with Vancouver Coastal Health to establish better communication and support with organizations with whom it does not already have a relationship (e.g., through service contracts). This could extend to include provision of PPE as well as advice and support with safety plans.
- Increase financial support for the grassroots peer-led groups who reacted immediately and proactively in the earliest days of the pandemic. These groups have been consistently left out not only of funding but of consultation and planning processes aimed at supporting them and their peer workers.

IMPACT ON IMMIGRANT SERVING ORGANIZATIONS

| OPERATIONAL | FINANCIAL | WORKFORCE |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Digital and language literacy have had a compounding effect limiting access to online programs.</p> <p>Immigrant Serving Agencies have shifted programming to focus on basic needs, particularly food security.</p> <p>A multi-faceted approach is required to provide effective support for clients with multiple distinct needs.</p> | <p>Contract renewal and negotiations with Federal funders have been paused. This affects deliverables that are tied to Federal funding</p> <p>Immediate term emergency crisis response grants have been made available.</p> | <p>Lack of childcare is a significant barrier to accessing services and gaining employment for both participants and staff.</p> <p>Staff burnout has been a particular concern. Contributing factors include changing working conditions and ongoing uncertainty.</p> |

What the City can do

- Increase access to internet. Clients lack access to affordable internet services, which leaves them excluded from virtual programming.
- Private businesses are open, but public community centres are still closed. Open access to spaces where people can focus on wellness

IMPACTS ON ORGANIZATIONS SERVING PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

| OPERATIONAL | FINANCIAL | WORKFORCE |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Many programs have shifted online, but technology limitations prevent people from accessing these programs.</p> <p>Some organizations have shifted to doing outreach and providing support virtually; much support has been triage to those in immediate need.</p> <p>Organizations have become primary sources for information that is accessible (ASL, simple language, etc.).</p> <p>Due to the high medical risk from COVID faced by PWD, many non-profits will not re-open for in-person services or programs until there is a vaccine.</p> | <p>Revenues have decreased precipitously. Organizations are impacted by the loss of earned and special event revenue, while at the same time fundraising has also decreased. Organizations are concerned this may lead to a financial crisis this fall.</p> | <p>A reduction in volunteers has led staff to take on additional roles. Some staff have been furloughed. The extreme medical risk people with disabilities face from the virus has led to significant levels of physical and social isolation which, in turn, has increased pressure on already stretched organizations to provide basic necessities (food, PPEs) and mental health supports. Staff see emotional and physical decline in some clients, due to social and physical isolation.</p> |

What the City can do

- Identify City or park board programs or resources that will be available to counteract impacts of depression/isolation as seasons change.
- Support technical device access (and training) for PWD to help with online access - internet access to use them - expand public WiFi spots to increase access by PWD - provide ASL and simple language information.
- Advocate with senior levels of government and with telecommunications providers, for lower-cost home internet access. Cost is currently a huge barrier to access for many.
- Support organizations to shift programs online - renewal of hardware and software.
- Update City website to provide ASL translation and simple language version of COVID information.
- Advocate for an increase in funding for BC211 to better meet current service requests and expand to be more inclusive of PWD.
- Advocate with senior levels of government for improved financial support for PWD.
- Assist with the coordination of PPEs which is an on-going issue, and will only worsen if there is a second wave.
- Assist with the procurement of food - food security issues persist.

IMPACTS ON SENIOR ORGANIZATIONS

| OPERATIONAL | FINANCIAL | WORKFORCE |
|--|---|--|
| <p>Both language and digital literacy challenges are proving to be big barriers to seniors accessing online programs and services.</p> | <p>High cost of home internet excludes many low-income seniors from online service/connection leaving organizations struggling to resume 'safe' in-person operations.</p> <p>Not all organizations have been able to access funding opportunities (for example the Federal Canada Wage Subsidy Benefit) leading to fears of a financial crisis this fall.</p> | <p>Concern from at-risk older adults with underlying health issues has led to significant levels of physical and social isolation, which has increased pressure on organizations to coordinate basic necessities such as food.</p> <p>Seniors organizations rely heavily on volunteers who are themselves seniors to deliver programs and services. Most of these volunteers have now withdrawn due to fear of COVID-19.</p> <p>There is pressure on already small staff teams that are trying to ensure seniors on existing caseloads are being adequately supported in this time of increased need.</p> <p>Senior-serving organizations have noted increased instances of physical and emotional deterioration in their clients as pandemic measures stretch on.</p> |

What the City can do

- Identify City or Park Board programs and resources that will be available for seniors to counteract impacts of depression and isolation as the seasons change. This includes use of community centre space (e.g., gymnasiums) that will lend itself most readily to 'safe' in person service.
- Support technical device access (and training) for seniors to help with online access, and provide internet access to use these services. Expand public Wi-Fi spots to increase access for low-income seniors and others.
- Advocate with senior levels of government and with telecommunications providers for lower-cost home internet access. Cost is currently a huge barrier to access for many seniors and other low-income people.

IMPACTS ON CHARITABLE FOOD PROVIDERS

| OPERATIONAL | FINANCIAL | WORKFORCE |
|---|--|---|
| <p>Organizations that provided free or low cost food programming (such as meal programs, community kitchens, hampers/food banking) faced challenges to rapidly redesign these programs to be “COVID safe”. Also struggled with a lack of clarity regarding safe procedures and issues accessing PPE.</p> <p>Organizations creating or scaling up food programs experienced strains as they worked to fill a huge gap, many lacked adequate staff, funding, space, delivery capacity, and supplies to scale up to meet community needs.</p> <p>Programming that is not focused on emergency food provision has not resumed.</p> <p>Many organizations that stepped up to fill emergency food needs do not have the capacity to continue in this role</p> | <p>Challenges to annual fundraising goals.</p> <p>Lower donations of supplies and food because of supply chain shortages and lack of surplus.</p> <p>Grant streams are focused on emergency programs, concern about how and when to transition back to “regular” work. Concerns regarding the longevity of emergency funding programs.</p> | <p>Reduction of volunteer availability.</p> <p>Staff, volunteer, and board burnout and fatigue from the pandemic response effort.</p> |

What the City can do

- Sustained and reciprocal relationships between the City and NPOs, rather than the dropping in and out when we need their input. NPOs would appreciate more regular contact.
- Need for space to pack groceries, which will become an increasing concern when mixed-use space is no longer available when other programming re-opens. Other space is no longer available due to social distancing concerns.
- Support in navigating back to fulfilling their original mandate and normal operations/programs, and planning for how to stay this course in a second wave.
- Organizations would be less burdened with responsibility of providing food security response if more government support was provided in the form of income support (providing meal vouchers, grocery vouchers, and guaranteed income) rather than charitable food support.
- Commitment to food justice, food sovereignty, and dignity in food access. Commitment to creating opportunities to support community members receiving services to be part of the solution and part of the leadership.
- Longer term grants, consistency of availability, reduced reporting and application procedures
- Advocacy for universal basic income and other income supports such as increases to disability and welfare rates.
- Greater integration of food policy into departments outside of Social Policy to ensure a food lens is applied to community planning.

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