



**Heart & Stroke
Submission to the Standing
Committee on Finance and
Economic Affairs**

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For more information, please contact:

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Key Recommendations

The primary recommendation, aligned with the Ontario Nonprofit Network, is the creation of a nonprofit stabilization fund which will allow Heart & Stroke to continue our critical work, while we work to build new approaches to fundraising.

In addition to the stabilization fund, we ask that the Government of Ontario consider the following measures:

- Program funding for organizations, such as ours, which provide **peer support, information services, and psychosocial support for people from vulnerable populations**, such as those with chronic illness and conditions and their caregivers
- Ensure the **Ontario-Canada Emergency Commercial Rent Assistance Program** works for non-profits and charities renting properties in Ontario and provide additional assistance to offset overhead costs of transitioning staff to work from home
- **Double the provincial portion of the Charitable Donation Tax Credit** through to the end of 2021 and make the credit refundable so charitable contributions are treated the same as a contribution to a political party in Ontario
- Commit to **matching donations from all Ontarians** to provincial charities or national charities with provincial offices

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic has created unprecedented challenges to all sectors of our society and economy. In Canada, governments at all levels have responded swiftly to contain the impact of the pandemic to the greatest extent possible, grounded in the advice of experts and prioritizing those most severely affected, either by the virus itself or by the resulting economic and social consequences.

By necessity, this response has been a process of triage and prioritization. Now, as Ontario looks to recovery, there must be a deliberate approach which will ensure that individuals and sectors that have not yet been addressed are included, both in the solutions themselves but also in the development of those solutions. This is why the consultation process being conducted by the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs is so critical to the future of our province.

The charitable health sector is an important area that has been devastated by the pandemic, has not been able to access the relief measures introduced so far at either the federal or provincial level (with the exception of the federal wage subsidy), and which brings expertise and insights that are of critical value in the COVID-19 response.

Heart & Stroke is a prime example of the both the devastation of COVID-19 on the charitable health sector, as well as the innovation and value that our organizations provide.

Impact of COVID-19 on Heart & Stroke

Historically, Heart & Stroke has depended on donations from hundreds of thousands of Canadians for **95 percent of our funding**, especially through participation in key community events. These many small donations allowed us to be the largest funder of research into heart disease and stroke after the federal government, leading directly to pioneering advances such as the 'clot-busting' drug TPA, and EVT, the breakthrough procedure to remove blood clots, among many others.

These donations have also meant that Heart & Stroke could lead significant systems change efforts, such as the transformation of Ontario's stroke system, which has been a model for other jurisdictions across Canada and around the world. It has allowed Heart & Stroke to be a leader in healthy public policy by working with government to reduce smoking rates in Ontario over the last 20 years, improve regulation of vaping products and most recently, to improve access to AEDs through a mandatory registry.

COVID-19 has forced us to cancel many community events and while our team has worked hard over the last three months to increase digital fundraising efforts, we are still seeing **an immediate revenue loss of more than \$25 million**. It is a loss that is in line with the projected average across the charitable health sector, and one that is unlikely to be reversed in the short term. It has resulted in:

- Layoffs of about **45 percent** of our employees, and with vacant positions unfilled, an overall loss of approximately half our team
- A **35 percent reduction** in our research funding, which has also forced us to move to **single-year grants**, instead of multi-year commitments, an impact that is being felt most acutely by early-career researchers who Heart & Stroke was particularly committed to supporting

We don't yet know the impact that the reduced capacity of our organization will have on our other programs and initiatives, such as the development of clinical best practice guidelines to support the treatment of stroke in Ontario, the work we do to support people with lived experience of heart disease and stroke through peer support and self-advocacy resources as well as CPR training.

COVID-19 and Vascular Disease

These are stressful and perilous times for people living with heart disease and stroke, as they are at an increased risk of becoming very ill and dying if they contract COVID-19. Daunting figures, becoming available just now, suggest, if infected with COVID-19 as compared to people with no underlying conditions:

- People with heart conditions have a **four times higher** risk of dying
- Those who've had a previous stroke are **three times** more likely to die
- People with high blood pressure, the number one risk factor for stroke, and a leading risk factor for heart disease, have nearly **two and half times** higher chance of dying

And public health measures, including physical isolation, are particularly difficult for people with our diseases, people that require ongoing care, rehabilitation, assistance with daily activities and regular medical appointments.

We are also learning that the virus can **damage an otherwise healthy heart and impact the brain**:

- New data shows that COVID-19 can cause injury to the heart muscle and cause abnormal heart rhythm
- One in two hospitalized COVID-19 patients (51%) die if they have developed cardiac injury.

It is possible that previous infection with COVID-19 will be eventually considered an increased risk factor, like smoking, high blood pressure or obesity, for heart disease and stroke. The research funded by Heart & Stroke is even more critical in this context.

How Heart & Stroke has responded

Despite vastly reduced resources, Heart & Stroke pivoted quickly to address the emerging and urgent needs of our constituents. Within the first three months of the pandemic, Heart & Stroke:

- Launched a **public awareness campaign** to remind people that heart attack and stroke remain medical emergencies, and that those experiencing symptoms should continue to call 9-1-1
- Released a **'Virtual Care Checklist'** to help people navigate online appointments with their caregivers
- Held a series of **webinars** for people with lived experience of heart disease and stroke and their caregivers and clinicians, to help address questions and concerns they identified to us
- Adapted our **Stroke Best Practices** to COVID-19 as stroke care is rapidly evolving in response to the pandemic, and our guidance helps stroke patients and their families get quality care
- Worked with institutions to help create online **CPR learning opportunities** for health care providers to help ensure high-quality CPR can be delivered safely to patients in all settings

Our recommendations

Across the charitable health sector, organizations like Heart & Stroke are struggling. Given the intersection of the impacts of COVID-19 both on our organization and those we serve, as well as the unique ability of Heart & Stroke to respond to the needs of people experiencing heart disease and stroke at this critical time, we are calling on the Government of Ontario to respond by creating a **stabilization fund for the nonprofit sector**. This request is aligned with that of the Ontario Nonprofit Network. This fund will allow us to continue our critical work, while we work to build new approaches to fundraising that take our society's new reality into account.

In addition to the stabilization fund, we ask that the Government of Ontario consider the following measures:

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