



COMMUNITY  
FOUNDATIONS  
OF CANADA

**VitalSigns.**

2023 NATIONAL VITAL SIGNS REPORT

# RECONNECTING COMMUNITIES

**BELONGING, ENGAGEMENT  
AND WELL-BEING**



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# INTRODUCTION

When people belong, communities thrive. Across the country, people are reconnecting with one another and their communities as they move out of the pandemic. This National Vital Signs Report dives into a series of interrelated topics – belonging, engagement and well-being – vital to building communities where everyone belongs.

This report is based on findings from a survey that examined how people living in Canada felt, or didn't feel, connected to their communities. The data identifies some significant barriers to ensuring that as communities move out of the pandemic, no one is left behind.

The findings are surprising in some ways and not at all surprising in others. In stark terms, it is shocking to see the number of people who feel more isolated and less engaged in their community and the worrying trends around well-being. But those in the philanthropic and charitable sector feel and see the pandemic's significant and long-term impacts in their day-to-day work. For many in the sector, the data will likely confirm what they already knew.

At Community Foundations of Canada (CFC), our intent with this data and analysis is to provide statistics to communicate what the sector is observing. We also hope it shows the underlying threads that connect belonging, engagement and well-being.

From coast to coast to coast, in every community, connection is key. This research helps to ground the idea of connection and demonstrate how it is more than an amorphous concept. Connection is a crucial resource that impacts the well-being of individuals and, in turn, communities. The people most in need have the least access to support from family, friends and their community. This is true across the country, in every region, province, big city or small town, and has a real impact on their well-being. Funders need to ensure that communities have both the resources needed and the critical connections in place to enable people to thrive.

Community foundations are well-placed to foster connections that support the programming and services communities need. Community foundations are community connectors. They know the neighbours, the schools, the nonprofits and the local businesses.

**Together, through these connections and as a network of over 200 community foundations, we are relentlessly pursuing a future where everyone belongs.**

Photo Credit: The Toronto Bay Estuary Program





# ABOUT THE RESEARCH

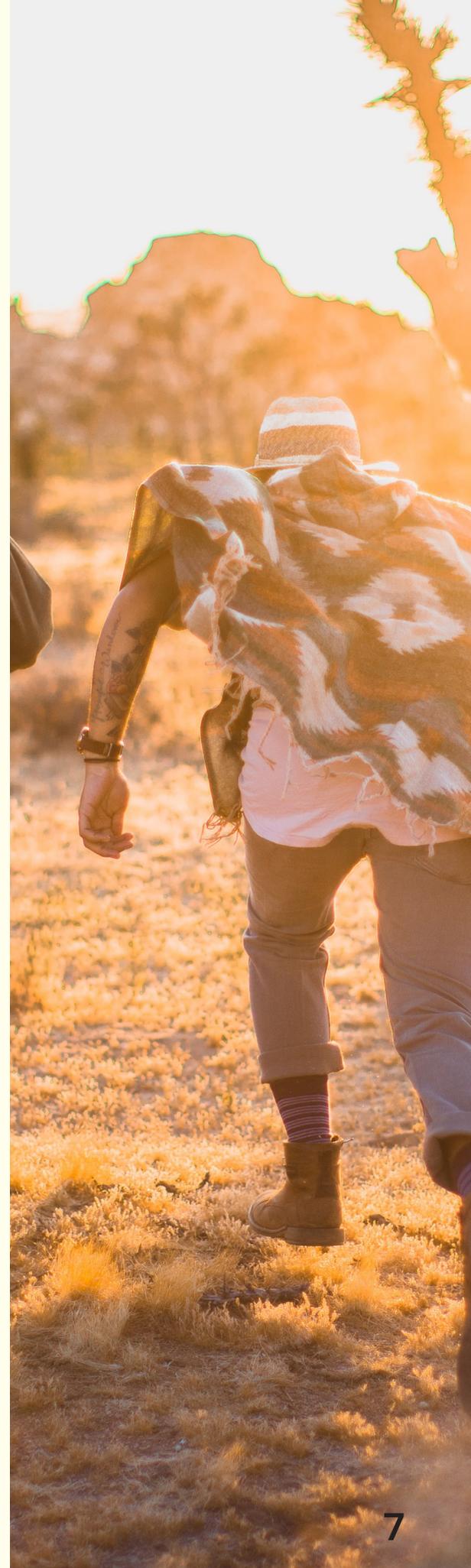
This 2023 National Vital Signs Report focuses on the extent to which people feel included in, connected to and supported by the communities in which they live.

Much of the analysis draws on the Social Capital in Canada Study results. CFC commissioned this survey, and the Environics Institute for Survey Research conducted it. It was a survey of a representative sample of 2,001 people in Canada aged 18 and over in all provinces, conducted online between June 15 and 27, 2022. The Environics Institute conducted the national survey in parallel with the [2022 Toronto Social Capital Study](#).

View the full research findings, along with the results of additional survey questions and detailed data tables and technical notes in the Research Report [here](#).

Throughout the report are some rankings between 0 and 10; these are indexes. These indexes summarize and simplify data from multiple questions into a single number between 0 and 10. These scores measure things like how much people trust each other, how connected they feel, and how involved they are in the community. The report also has scores for how satisfied people are with their lives, how well they're doing, and whether they've experienced discrimination. These indexes allow us to better compare people's experiences based on different groups. Each index uses a scale from 0 (the worst) to 10 (the best). For more information on the indexes used and how they are calculated, visit the [Environics Institute for Survey Research](#).

For the team at CFC, this report does not answer all of our questions. It sparks more. Its scope, and therefore the data reported, has gaps and limitations. For example, the sample size for non-binary people was limited. As a result, we cannot detail, provide analysis or understand the intersectional impacts of non-binary gender identity on the data and findings. Another example is that the survey did not include participants from the territories, as it was out of scope for this study. We recognize that this omission represents an embedded colonialism that has under-researched remote and rural areas within Canada. Further research needs to include all regions of the country to reflect everyone's experiences. While it has limitations, this study provides insights and an opportunity to further explore areas where more data is needed to ensure everyone is included.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

CFC thanks Andrew Parkin (Environics Institute for Survey Research) and Steven Ayer (Common Good Strategies) for their research and collaboration in creating this report.

CFC is also grateful to the Toronto Foundation, a trailblazer of Vital Signs and the importance of social capital. They were also a gracious co-host of the RECONNECT 2023 conference, an opportunity to gather as community foundations and unpack many of the concepts explored in this report.

In addition, CFC is grateful for the support of Leith Wheeler Investment Counsel, the National Vital Signs Partner. Vital Signs is the largest community-driven data program in the country. Leith Wheeler's understanding of the value of data-driven and community-grounded research provides the resources and information to improve community well-being across the country.

CFC also thanks the over 200 community foundations that are part of the CFC network. Their dedication to the Vital Signs program and the research it produces helps to tell the stories of communities. It is just one way that community foundations consistently put people and belonging at the heart of their work.

Finally, thank you to the people who took the time to complete the survey and for sharing their perspectives and experiences. This time, effort and openness are the foundation of community data.



# RECONNECTING COM

## BELONGING

In ten years, a strong sense of **belonging** has dropped

12%

People who are financially insecure



don't have someone they can depend on

People who are financially secure



29% of people do not have close friends in their community

8%

of people have no close family



12%

of people have no close friends



50% of two-parent families feel like they live in a close-knit community...



but only 32% of single-parent families feel the same

People who have experienced high discrimination



don't have someone they can depend on

People who have experienced no discrimination



# MUNITIES SNAPSHOT



Photo credit: Jason Goodman

## ENGAGEMENT

In ten years, the proportion of people **engaging** in community groups has declined by

**19%**



In ten years, the proportion of people volunteering has declined by

**12%**



There used to be a pattern of young people becoming more likely to donate as they got older



In 2021, only **18%** of tax filers claimed donations on their income tax returns



**THIS IS THE LOWEST %  
EVER RECORDED**

**THAT'S NO  
LONGER THE  
CASE**

# WELL-BEING

In the last 12 months, 23% of people ate less than they should have **because there wasn't enough money to buy food.**



**42%**

of young people who identify as female have poor or fair mental health



This is 15% higher than those the same age who identify as male

**38%**



of people are living with a disability and they are...

**2 x**

more likely to feel financially insecure

Despite years of the pandemic, people are resilient



are satisfied with their lives



have a high well-being score



Photo credit: Nathan Dumlao





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# **BELONGING**

# BELONGING

What does it mean to ‘belong’? When people feel like they belong in communities, in neighbourhoods, they feel accepted, safe and connected.

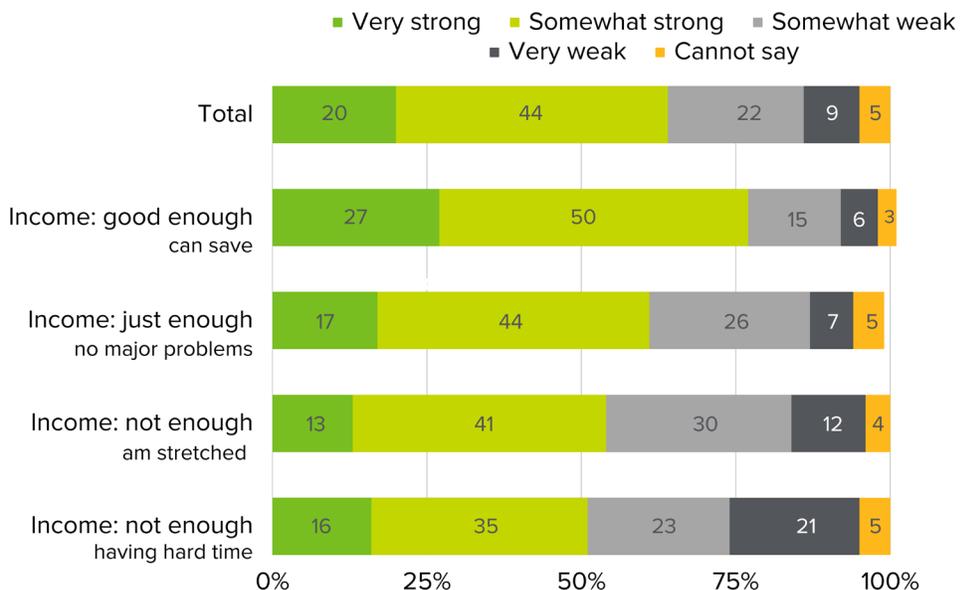
Belonging is in the connections people have with friends and family and in the neighbourhoods where people rely on each other. They are willing to ask a favour of their neighbours and develop reciprocal relationships of trust. But not everyone knows what it feels like to belong.

**People with lower incomes are much less likely than those with higher incomes to feel a sense of belonging in their local geographic community or to feel their neighbours are helpful and can be trusted.**

One of the main elements of community well-being is whether people feel connected to their neighbourhood and neighbours. One in five adults (20%) have a very strong sense of belonging to their local geographic community, and 44% have a somewhat strong sense of belonging. This sense of belonging varies a little across provinces, ranging from 61% to 68%.

But what is more significant is how the difference in people’s income relates to a sense of belonging. 77% of people who feel they have enough income have a strong sense of belonging, but only 51% of people having a hard time financially have a strong sense of belonging. The more financially secure people feel, the more likely they feel like they belong.

## SENSE OF BELONGING TO LOCAL COMMUNITY, BY ADEQUACY OF HOUSEHOLD INCOME



Along with a sense of belonging, the research shows that how people trust and rely on their neighbours varies. 63% of people think their neighbours are willing to help each other, and 59% feel they can trust their neighbours. About 35% felt their community was close-knit. If people feel less financially secure – these numbers go down. But income is not the only thing significantly impacting feelings of belonging – so do age, family structure and more. All three of these metrics go down for those who are younger or in a single-parent household.

**THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN COUPLES WITH CHILDREN AND SINGLE PARENTS:**

	Total	Couples with Children	Single Parents
Neighbours are willing to help each other out	63%	71%	58%
Neighbours can be trusted	59%	71%	56%
This is a close-knit community	35%	50%	32%

This data does not show how trust may differ between heterosexual and LGBTQ2S+ parents and more research would need to be done to see the intersectional relationship between family makeup and LGBTQ2S+ identity.



# FAMILY AND FRIENDS

## REFLECTIONS ON PUTTING DATA INTO ACTION

The lens of employment is an important dimension to belonging in community. Employment programs, such as skills training for employment, apprenticeship programs and others, both address employability and also support people to create broader connections within the community. For funders, how else might they support people seeking employment and also promote belonging?

Friends and family can lift us up on days when the world feels heavy and keep us connected. Many rely on these people, but not everyone has a network of family and friends. The data draws a connection between networks and employment income. More specifically, people with higher incomes and who are employed have larger networks of family and friends.

- 58% of people have between one and five family members they feel close to, and 8% have none.
- 63% of people have between one and five friends they feel close, and 12% have none.

**People who are less financially secure are more likely to have zero close family or friends.**

	People with a good enough income	People who are having a hard time financially
No close family	6%	15%
No close friends	7%	20%

## WHAT'S IMPACTING THESE RELATIONSHIPS?



## IMPACT ON MEASURES OF SATISFACTION AND WELL-BEING INCOME

Having fewer relationships with family and friends has a knock-on impact. People with few close family or friends have lower levels of satisfaction and well-being. They are half as likely as those with very many close family or friends to say they always or often feel they have something to look forward to in life or can bounce back quickly after hard times. They are also more likely to have low social trust and engagement levels. Therefore, people with fewer friends and family members are also less likely to participate in community activities.

Most people thrive with greater circles centred on trust and connection. Those with less trusted people near them have lower life satisfaction, well-being, community engagement and trust.

## REFLECTIONS ON PUTTING DATA INTO ACTION

Most community services often wait for people to come to them. If people with fewer friends and family are more likely to have poor mental health and less likely to participate in community activities, how can our engagement strategies adapt to better reach them?

	People with few close family or friends	People with very many family or friends
Have something to look forward to	30%	63%
Can bounce back quickly after hard times	35%	68%

A significant number of people also don't have close friends and family nearby. 32% of people do not have close family members in their community, and 29% do not have close friends in their community. This and other factors impact people's ability to connect with friends and family members, especially in person. About one in five people haven't seen or spoken on the phone to any of their close friends or family in the past month.



## TRUSTING AND SUPPORTING NEIGHBOURS

Social trust is faith in people. We have social trust when we expect people to have kind motivations, we assume people have integrity, we are willing to be vulnerable and rely on others, and we give people the benefit of the doubt when we interpret their actions. When communities build social trust, they build social connections.

**Trust is lower if people don't feel financially secure, they are living with a disability, they have poor mental or physical health, they're a single parent, or they've experienced discrimination.**

When people have faith in the reliability and integrity of those around them, they feel they have people they can depend on. But 13% of people rarely or never feel they have someone they can depend on to help them when they really need it. A lack of people they can depend on creates a lack of social trust.

## WHAT'S IMPACTING FEELINGS OF SOCIAL SUPPORT?

### Financial Security

People with greater financial security feel more supported.

#### ENOUGH INCOME



8% of people with a good enough income don't have someone they can depend on

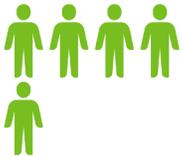
#### NOT ENOUGH INCOME



31% of people who are having a hard time financially don't have someone they can depend on

### Mental Health

#### GOOD MENTAL HEALTH



5% of people with excellent or very good mental health don't have someone they can depend on

#### POOR MENTAL HEALTH



24% of people with fair or poor mental health don't have someone they can depend on

### Experiences of Discrimination

Structural racism and unconscious bias are embedded in communities. The discrimination that people face has a direct impact on their social trust. Discrimination can be based on someone's race, religion, gender, age, abilities or sexual identity. People can experience discrimination based on several of these at the same time. For example, someone may experience racial discrimination and transphobia with compounding impacts.

## REFLECTIONS ON PUTTING DATA INTO ACTION

Mental health supports, such as counselling, support groups and other wellness activities like yoga are often seen as addressing individual challenges but poor mental health has a knock-on impact on social trust. What role can these and other mental health programs play in broader community building?

## NO DISCRIMINATION



8% of people who have no experience of discrimination feel like they don't have someone they can depend on

## HIGH LEVELS OF DISCRIMINATION



22% of people who have experienced high levels of discrimination feel like they don't have someone they can depend on

## LOCAL VITAL SIGNS REFLECTIONS

Community foundations know that belonging is intertwined with equity. In a 2021 Vital Signs report, the Saskatoon Community Foundation emphasized the systems change needed and the active role that community foundations can play in challenging discrimination. “Valuing diversity and inclusion does not truly change systems in society. When systems cause inequity, we need to work together to disrupt and challenge them. To achieve equity, we must actively address the ongoing effects of colonialism, racism, power, and privilege in society.”

[Read their full Vital Signs report.](#)



Photo credit: Joel Muniz

# JOINING IN COMMUNITY

**When people feel disconnected from family and friends, they are less likely to access community spaces, such as libraries or community centres, or to join community organizations, such as sports clubs or cultural groups.**

When people are physically isolated from close friends and family, it can be compounded with isolation from the broader community. Only 28% of people with few close family or friends participate in community groups like professional associations, sports organizations, cultural groups or political groups. This is less than half of the 64% of people with many close family or friends who participate in community groups.

Overall, people with few close family and friends are also less likely to volunteer. Only 15% of community members with few close family or friends have volunteered in the past 12 months. This is almost three times higher among community members with very many close family or friends, where 43% have volunteered.

People with fewer friends and family are less likely to be part of a community group or to volunteer. These people with fewer family and friends are also less likely to trust their neighbours.

## LOCAL VITAL SIGNS REFLECTIONS

In a 2022 Vital Signs report, the Victoria Foundation asked community members, ‘What does community mean to you?’ The most common responses centred on being connected with friends and family. Networks of friends and family are at the heart of the community. [Read their full Vital Signs report.](#)

## SOCIAL CONNECTEDNESS: 10 YEARS ON

The following shows responses to questions asked by Statistics Canada in 2013 and as part of the General Social Survey in 2022. Full information about both surveys is available in the [Research Report](#).

- 2x the proportion of people reporting having no friends has doubled from 6% to 12%.
- Declined 11%: The proportion of people with 6+ close family members declined from 43% to 32%.
- Declined 14%: The proportion of people with 6+ close friends declined from 36% to 22%.
- Declined 10%: The proportion of people who know many or most of their neighbours declined from 42% to 32%.
- Declined 12%: The proportion of people with a very strong sense of belonging to their local geographic community dropped by 12 percentage points.

## TAKEAWAY

Networks of family and friends are critical to creating a sense of belonging and connection. People feeling financially insecure, people who have experienced discrimination, and people with poor physical and mental health are less likely to have the social connections to get support. As the philanthropic and nonprofit sector is addressing a livability and housing crisis, a mental health crisis and embedded colonialism and racism, social connections and programs that strengthen the bonds of friends and family need to be part of how the sector supports communities.

**People who are most in need are least likely to have support from friends, family and the community.**



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# ENGAGEMENT

When people engage in communities, they gather, share and work together to find collective solutions. People engage in communities through social connections but also through groups, volunteering, and financially supporting the charitable sector.

## ENGAGING IN COMMUNITY GROUPS

Community isn't only based on geographic location. A community can be cultural, religious, interest-driven and more. Community groups such as cultural and newcomer groups, sports associations, hobby clubs and religious organizations are important in community connection. But people across the country aren't joining these communities like they once were, and after the pandemic, there may be a long road ahead before they restore pre-pandemic engagement.

### LOCAL VITAL SIGNS REFLECTIONS

The West Vancouver Foundation framed its 2021/22 Vital Signs Report around The Power of Connection and how themes such as reconciliation, belonging, housing and well-being are addressed. "One of the fundamental truths about humans is that we are driven to be part of something greater than we are—the simplest expression of this desire is our need to be connected to our families, friend groups, and community." [Read their full Vital Signs report.](#)

**Since 2013, there has been a 19% decrease in community group participation.**

This trend is shown through the responses to questions asked by Statistics Canada in 2013 and as part of the General Social Survey in 2022. Full information about both surveys is available in the [Research Report](#).

In 2022, only 42% of people participated in a community group within the last 12 months, down from 63% in 2013.

The decline is undoubtedly partly because of the pandemic, as many group activities were suspended, and people did not always feel safe participating.

Participation in sports and recreation organizations, unions and professional associations, and cultural, education and hobby organizations declined by over 60% between 2013 and 2022. This decline is significant as participation in sports and recreation fosters inclusion.

Racialized people were more likely than those who identified as white to participate in at least one type of group (55% compared to 39%). The gap was particularly pronounced in immigrant/ethnic groups (9% compared to 1%), religious-affiliated groups (17% compared to 9%) and cultural organizations (12% compared to 7%).

## LOCAL VITAL SIGNS REFLECTIONS

The Edmonton Community Foundation's 2022 Vital Signs report on systemic racism found that sports can foster inclusion. 87% of newcomers said that watching their children play sports or volunteering for their children's teams made them feel more connected to the community.

[Read their full Vital Signs report.](#)

## VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering puts boots on the ground in the community to address social challenges. Through the pandemic, volunteering rates have declined, creating a crisis of community engagement.

**Fewer than one in four people are volunteering.**

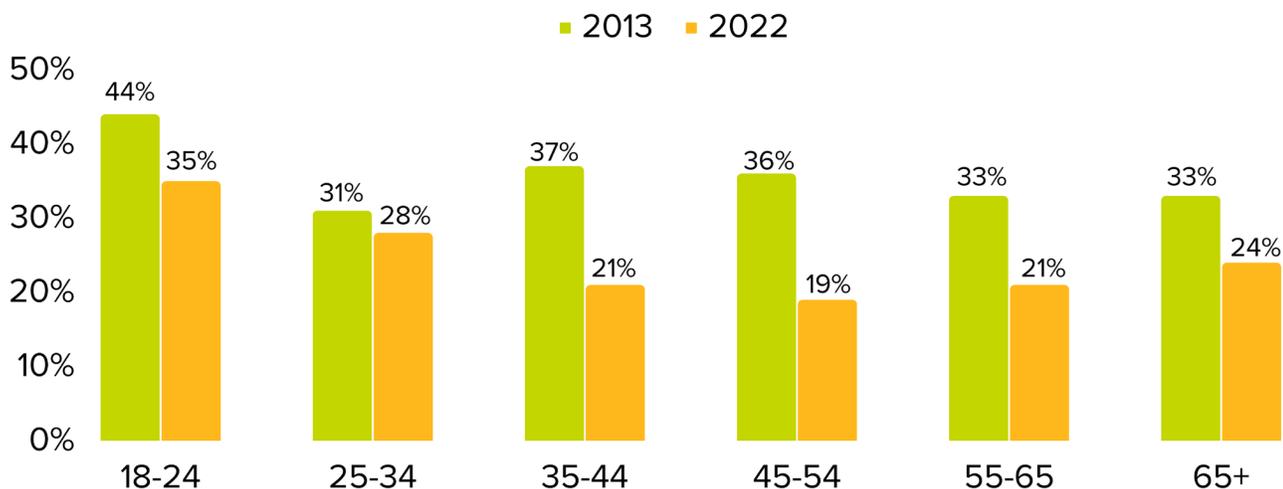
Only 24% of community members volunteered for any organization in the past 12 months in 2022. Rates of volunteerism are higher among religiously active people (51%), those aged 18 to 24 (35%) and people who are racialized (31%).



**In 2013, 36% of people volunteered, which means volunteering rates have declined by 12% in the past 10 years.**

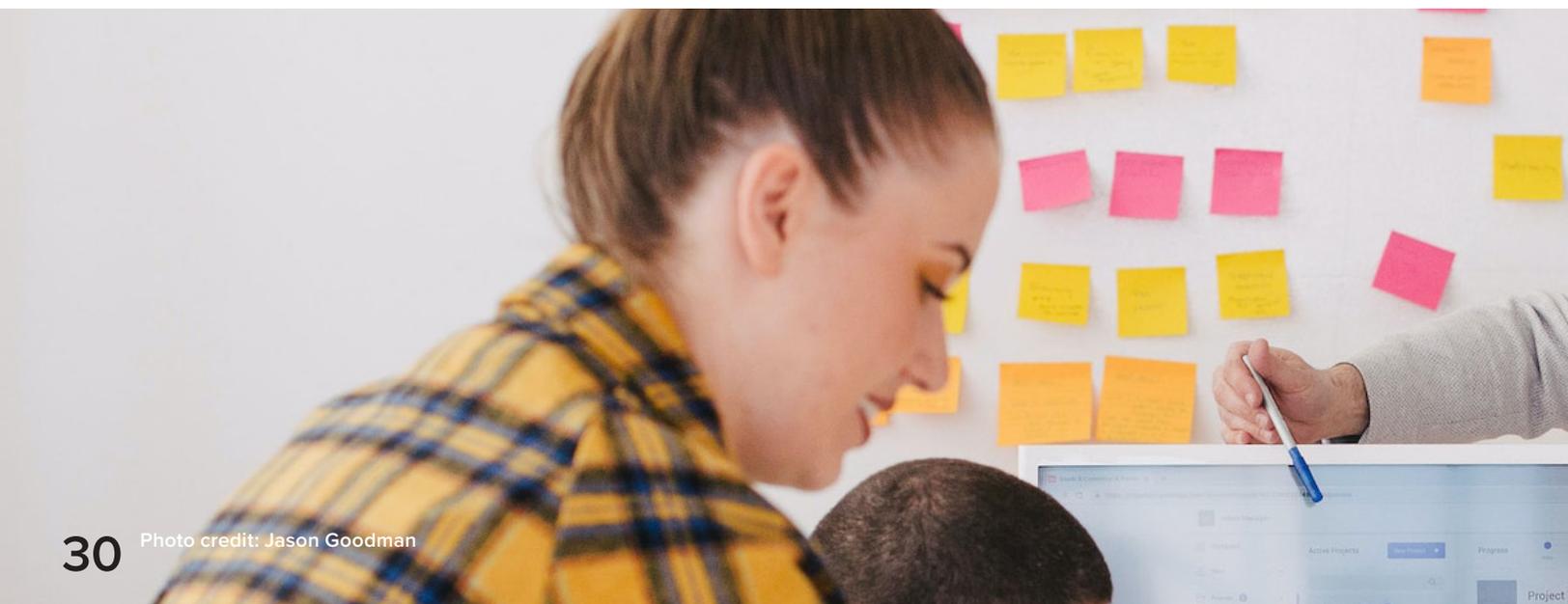
Volunteerism has dropped among all age groups, but the youngest people continue to volunteer at the highest levels.

### **VOLUNTEERED IN THE PAST YEAR BY AGE**



### **REFLECTIONS ON PUTTING DATA INTO ACTION**

Volunteers are a critical part of the philanthropic and charitable sector. In 2018, almost 13 million Canadians volunteered, and more than half (58%) of charities were completely volunteer-run. Declining volunteerism directly impacts charities and nonprofits' ability to survive and serve their communities. How do young people stay engaged in volunteerism as they move into other stages of their lives? Would we benefit from a volunteerism strategy that supports charities and nonprofits across the country?



# DONATIONS

**In 2021, only 18% of tax filers claimed donations on their income tax returns. This is the lowest percentage ever recorded.**

Canadians can claim their charitable contributions on their tax returns and receive a tax credit from the government. Data from these tax files show that the donation rate has fallen almost yearly between 2013 and 2022. The decline in donation rates on tax returns accelerated from 2020 to 2021.

Self-reported donations are significantly higher than what is recorded in tax filings. In 2022, 56% of people said they donated in the past 12 months. This is still a 19 percentage point decline since 2013.

This drop in charitable donors stands as a warning signal for the charitable sector.

A 19 percentage  
point drop

reflecting 6M  
fewer donors

and an ongoing  
downward trend.



**There is no pattern to suggest that youth will become more likely to donate as they age.**

### **WHO IS MORE LIKELY TO DONATE?**

- **People with higher income:** People with \$100,000 or more in household income are more likely to donate (63%) than those who have household incomes below \$30,000 (44%).
- **Older people:** More than three-quarters of those aged 65 and older are donating (76%) compared to fewer than half of those aged 25 to 34 (46%).
- **Religiously active people:** Donation rates are also higher for people who participate in religious activities at least once a month (72%) compared to those who are not religiously active (51%).

Donation rates are dropping among every age group, but for people aged 25 to 54, the donation rate dropped between 26% and 30%. Ten years ago, people aged 25 to 34 were considerably more likely to donate than people aged 18 to 24, but this isn't the case anymore.

Photo credit: Centre for Ageing Better



### **REFLECTIONS ON PUTTING DATA INTO ACTION**

Declining donations impact charities across the board, and inflation is compounding the impact. It is also well known that the pandemic impacted different charities differently. In August 2021, 56% of charities were finding it challenging to meet the demands on their services, while 44% were meeting the demands. Post-pandemic, where do demands continue to increase while donations fall?

# TAKEAWAY

**People are less engaged in their community, which leads to a significant decline in support for the charitable sector through donations and volunteering.**

Some of this is because people have still not returned to the activities interrupted by the pandemic. However, looking at earlier surveys suggests community engagement was declining before the pandemic. This lack of engagement, combined with the drop off in connections to friends and community outlined in the previous section, paints a picture of a society where it has become more difficult to develop and maintain social connections and where the charitable sector has fewer resources to support communities in managing the fallout.

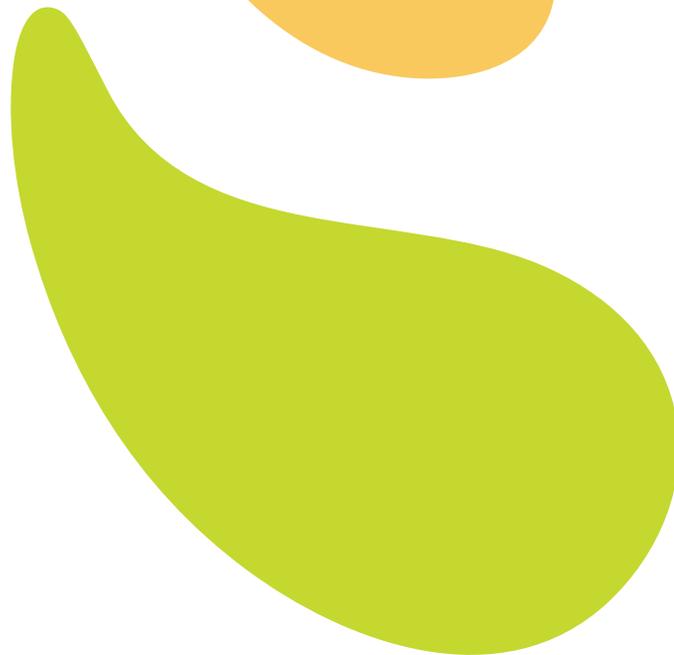




Photo credit: Joel Muniz

The background of the page is a light yellow color. It is decorated with several abstract, teardrop-shaped elements in various shades of yellow and orange. These shapes are scattered across the page, some overlapping each other. The shapes vary in size and orientation, creating a dynamic and organic feel. In the center of the page, the words "WELL-BEING" are written in a bold, dark blue, sans-serif font.

# WELL-BEING

With fewer social connections to friends and family, people feel less like they belong and more isolated. With these fewer connections, people feel less engaged with their community. They are less likely to join a club or to volunteer. They are also less likely to donate to charity. As a result, communities have lower levels of belonging, and the charitable sector has fewer resources to address challenges.

How is this impacting the well-being of our communities? There is more research to do on any direct relationships between belonging and engagement and the metrics of community well-being. However, the trends on belonging and engagement mirror those in broader community well-being.

## LIFE SATISFACTION AND WELL-BEING INDEX

**The pandemic impacted us all, but the research shows—people are resilient.**

More than two years into the pandemic, people tended to express satisfaction with their lives. 59% of people indicated a relatively high satisfaction with their lives, compared to 12% who said they had a low satisfaction with their lives.

63% of people had a well-being score higher than 6, whereas only 9% had a low well-being score of 3 or lower.



**59%**

of people are satisfied with their lives



**63%**

of people had a high well-being score



## LOCAL VITAL SIGNS REFLECTIONS

The Guelph Community Foundation's 2023 Vital Signs Report showed how all the different themes explored came back to well-being. "Everyone in our community should have access to the right supports and resources to be resilient and maintain their well-being through difficult or stressful times. But challenges and inequities throughout our community mean that not everyone does. We all do better— when we all do better." [Read their full Vital Signs report.](#)

## WHAT'S IMPACTING WELL-BEING?

- **Financial Security and Health:** People with lower financial security and poorer physical and mental health have a lower well-being score.
- **Family Structure:** Couples with children have a higher well-being score (7.0) than single parents (5.8).
- **Age:** As people get older, well-being goes up. People aged 18 to 29 have a score of 6.1, and those 65 or older have a score of 7.0.
- **Gender:** People who identify as male have a higher well-being score (6.6) than people who identify as female (6.2). Young women have the lowest well-being score (5.9). The [2020 National Vital Signs Report on Gender Equality](#) in Canada dives further into how well-being is gendered. The data did not have a sufficient sampling of people who are non-gender binary to provide a score, and this remains an area for further research.
- **Experiences of Discrimination:** The more people have experienced discrimination, the lower their well-being score.

**Racialized people, people who identify as female, young people, people living with a disability, people who practice a non-Christian religion, and members of the LGBTQ2S+ community are more likely to experience discrimination.**

In this national survey, people were asked about the type of discrimination they experienced. For the purposes of this survey, this was defined to include being treated with less courtesy and respect, receiving poorer customer service than others, being treated as if you are unintelligent, threatening or dishonest without reason, being insulted or called names and being threatened, harassed or abused.

The more a person has experienced discrimination, the lower the well-being score. Those who have experienced no discrimination have a higher than average well-being score (7.4), and those who have had the most frequent discrimination have a significantly lower score (5.7).

## WELL-BEING INDEX SCORES, BY EXPERIENCE OF DISCRIMINATION



## REFLECTIONS ON PUTTING DATA INTO ACTION

How can the perspectives of philanthropy better reflect the intersectional experiences of communities? Are there ways to continue to push [trust-based approaches](#) forward to ensure processes and decision-making of funders reflect the diversity of life experiences, situations and identities that members of communities have?

There are multiple factors which have a clear impact on people's well-being. This shows the importance of taking an intersectional approach and the need to consider the compounding impacts of people's life experiences, situations and identities.

## MENTAL HEALTH

The intersectional impacts of people's life experiences, situations and identities are also clear in mental health. Overall:



41%

of people say their mental health is excellent or very good



31%

of people say their mental health is good



26%

of people say their mental health is fair or poor

People are more likely to have fair or poor mental if they:

- identify as female
- are younger
- are financially insecure
- are a single parent
- are living with a disability
- have experienced frequent discrimination including for race, religion and LGBTQ2S+ identity

As before, the intersection of multiple factors has a compounding impact. For example, 42% of young people who identify as female have fair or poor mental health. This is 15% higher than those in the same age bracket who identify as male.

## WELL-BEING AND MENTAL HEALTH: 10 YEARS ON

The following shows responses to questions asked by Statistics Canada in 2013 and as part of the General Social Survey in 2022. Full information about both surveys is available in the [Research Report](#).

- Declined by 1.3: people's life satisfaction score was 7.9 in 2013 and has decreased to 6.6 in 2022
- 4x: The proportion of people with the lowest life satisfaction has increased x4. In 2013, 4% of people placed themselves in the 0-4 range, but in 2022, that number rose to 16%.
- 4x: The number of people with fair or poor mental health has increased more than 4x. In 2013, 6% of people had poor or fair mental health, but in 2022, that number rose to 24%.

## FINANCIAL SECURITY

Research often looks at household income as a measure of financial security, and that's part of the picture. But as communities face livability challenges, people's needs vary depending on their circumstances, such as where they live and their stage of life. For this reason, it is important to look at not just household income but also how adequate people felt that their income was. This gets closer to understanding any financial strain they may be experiencing.

Overall:



**33%**

of people say their mental of  
people say their income is  
good enough



**37%**

of people say their  
income is just enough



**26%**

of people say their  
income is not enough

38% of people are living with a disability and they are two times more likely to feel financially insecure than those people without a disability.

	Income is not enough
No disability	18%
Living with a disability that occasionally limits their activity	35%
Living with a disability that often or always limits their activity	43%

## FOOD SECURITY

**Almost one in four people have difficulty consistently affording food.**

### LOCAL VITAL SIGNS REFLECTIONS

The Muskoka Community Foundation is one of the many community foundations that have been exploring food security as a Vital Signs report theme. The 2021 report explored how national trends that showed increased use of food banks were reflected in their community. [Read their full Vital Signs report.](#)

23% of people ate less than they should because there wasn't enough money to buy food. Food insecurity has been a significant and persistent problem in Canada. This survey did not include people from the territories where the [Canadian Income Survey](#) from Statistics Canada shows it is even more of a challenge. In 2020, 30% of people living in the territories faced food insecurity, including 50% of people living in Nunavut.

Along with geographic impact, other aspects of people's life experiences, situations and identities impact food insecurity. The number of people who are facing food insecurity is higher among:

- people who say their income is not enough (51%);
- people living with a disability that always or often limits their daily activity (33%);
- single parents (39%), and;
- young people (36%).

# TAKEAWAY

**People's well-being is strongly linked to the intersection of their life experiences, situations and identities. Charitable efforts to address well-being need an intersectional approach. There is also more to explore on how people's connections to family, friends and community are related to well-being.**

As mental health in communities worsens and food security remains a persistent problem, philanthropy must use an intersectional approach. Taking an intersectional approach would support people to achieve better well-being and, in doing so, would support the community.

As communities reconnect post-pandemic, there is an opportunity to explore how a strong sense of community and belonging improves the measurements of well-being.



# COMING TOGETHER: A NOTE FROM ANDREA DICKS

At Community Foundations of Canada, we are relentlessly pursuing a future where everyone belongs. This purpose is our north star; we know that belonging starts with us. We centre belonging in all that we do while responding and adapting to the changing needs of community foundations and communities.

Tracking and measuring belonging is complex. We are keen to monitor and understand our own activities, and we also believe it is important to consider how the broader landscape within which we work is evolving. Initiatives like this survey and report help inform or challenge key assumptions and generate insights that instruct continuous improvement and adaptation.

The world around us has changed rapidly—and it continues to do so. As communities emerge from the pandemic and face significant social, economic and environmental shifts, philanthropy is at a watershed moment—one of opportunity and urgency. This data shows that the pandemic dealt a difficult blow

to belonging. It also makes clear that regardless of where you are in Canada, people have more in common than they think. Communities, as defined using a geographic description, often face similar challenges. Communities all see the impact of broken connections with friends and family. Communities all face the strains of financial insecurity and discrimination.

It's our opportunity and responsibility to take this data and use it to guide our efforts and activities.

**At CFC, and within our network of over 200 community foundations, we know that when people feel like they belong, they are healthier, happier and more engaged. And when people belong, communities flourish.**



**Andrea Dicks**

President, Community  
Foundations of Canada