



United Way Centraide Canada

Pre-Budget Submission

to

The House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance

February 2016



The House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance:

Since 1917, the United Way Centraide Movement has been dedicated to creating opportunities for a better life for all Canadians. United Way Centraide Canada provides national leadership and supports United Ways Centraides in over 100 local communities across Canada to meet urgent human need and invest in long-term solutions that address challenging social, economic and cultural issues.

Each year, the desire to help others motivates over one million Canadians to support their local communities through the United Way Centraide Movement. Our donors and volunteers are your constituents. Annually, United Ways Centraides raise and invest over \$500 million to strengthen their communities. These funds support nearly 7,000 programs that touch the lives of hundreds of thousands of Canadians.

As Canada's largest non-government funder of community and social service initiatives, the United Way Centraide Movement's insights are based on direct experience of funding and implementing innovative solutions to challenging issues in communities throughout Canada. One of the greatest strengths of the United Way Centraide Movement is its deep engagement with local communities. We view government leadership and partnership with other sectors – civil society, business and labour - as critical to our collective goal of successfully tackling complex social, economic and cultural challenges we face and building strong healthy communities.

We are pleased to provide the Standing Committee on Finance with our recommendations for budgetary measures designed to help address urgent human needs and strengthen Canadian communities.

- 1. The federal government should join the collaborative partnership that United Ways and Centraides have developed with provinces, territories and municipalities to make 211 available to all Canadians.**

211 is the award-winning telephone help line (dial 2-1-1) and online service that provides Canadians with a single point of access to a full range of community, social, non-clinical health and related government services. It helps Canadians navigate through a complex environment quickly and easily, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, in over 150 languages.



In the U.S., over 93 percent of Americans have access to 211. In Canada, full telephone and online access to 211 is available to 62 per cent of the population, including those located in the lower mainland of British Columbia, Calgary, Edmonton, the Regional Municipality of Wood Buffalo, the Quebec City National Capital region, as well as all residents of Ontario and Nova Scotia. In addition, people in Saskatchewan, New Brunswick, and Nunavut have access to 211 on-line, but do not yet have 211 telephone service. In 2016, we anticipate that 211 telephone and online service will be implemented in Montreal and Laval, and online service will be extended throughout British Columbia and introduced in Manitoba.

211 is a shovel ready and shovel worthy 21st century social infrastructure investment that aligns with the work of a number of federal departments and generates value for a wide range of stakeholders, including:

- Families and Individuals – by connecting people with help, 211 reduces the number of personal issues that escalate into a personal crisis. Families can locate the help to manage children’s issues. Caregivers can find the support they need for loved ones. Lives are saved when persons in crisis receive immediate attention. By streamlining access to social and community services, 211 reduces the pressure on community and emergency services.
- Newcomers and Refugees – 211 provides direct support to assist immigrants, refugees and their sponsors, and works collaboratively with settlement agencies to complement and support their roles. 211 service providers are actively responding to Syrian refugees and their sponsors who need help navigating the complex web of social services that are critical to their resettlement and integration. They are also providing a “front door” for Canadians and businesses wishing to provide in-kind and financial donations.
- All Vulnerable Groups – excellent specialized programs exist through agencies dealing with seniors, veterans, newcomers, mental health and addiction, HIV / AIDS and others. 211 can strengthen the direct connection with these specialized programs and enhance public access.
- First Responders – 211 enables first responders to focus on containing a disaster or emergency. 211 assists communities by acting as a reliable channel for public safety announcements, including evacuation routes and safe gathering sites, as well as coordinating volunteers and donations.



- Funders and Planners – doing well is not good enough. 211 is in a unique position to capture data on the supply of and demand for social and community services and offer unique real-time business intelligence insights. The enormous potential of this data to drive adaption and spur innovation is largely untapped, but it is already being used to inform municipal planning decisions, local service provision, and funding investments.

The federal government is uniquely positioned to leverage 211's success and infrastructure to extend the service reach of 211 to all Canadians. A modest federal commitment would transform 211 from a network of regional and provincial services into a pan-Canadian system and greatly expand its impact. This would also provide a positive signal to provincial and territorial governments and spur their increased funding participation, while at the same time help leverage further corporate philanthropy.

Extensive work was done over the past 18 months with federal officials to develop a fully costed and fully vetted proposal to expand 211 Canada-wide and facilitate its transformation into a national information navigation system for human services.

The proposal has two components:

- The 211 expansion and transformation proposal is predicated on leveraging and expanding the existing \$10.5 million annual investment base provided by the United Way Centraide Movement, municipalities and provinces, and augmenting that with a new \$18.5 million federal investment over five years.
- Enhancements, leveraging the 211 national platform, to address the particular needs of three priority groups – veterans, caregivers, and vulnerable seniors. We would propose adding a fourth enhancement designed to aid in the successful integration of Syrian refugees. These four enhancements would require an additional \$12.5 million over five years.

The total federal investment for 211 service expansion, national transformation, and implementation of the four enhancements, is \$31 million over five years.



2. The federal government should move forward, on a priority basis, with key initiatives designed to address poverty and expand the opportunities for low-income Canadians to join the middle class.

Canadian United Ways and Centraides pursue community impact in three Movement-wide focus areas – *Poverty to Possibility, All that Kids Can Be, and Healthy People Strong Communities*.

While these focus areas are interrelated, the bulk of our collective financial investments and community leadership and engagement is devoted to Poverty to Possibility. Our efforts in this regard centre on advancing three strategic objectives – housing, food, and financial/employment security.

United Way Centraide Canada understands that the government has committed to develop a National Poverty Reduction Plan, and creating such a plan will take time and require extensive consultation with stakeholders. As such, we would urge the Standing Committee to recommend a two-track approach – moving forward immediately with key initiatives promised as part of the government’s election platform, while taking the time needed to develop the more comprehensive and long-term NPRP. This will avoid delay in moving ahead with measures designed to address urgent needs, and subsequently allow initiatives already in-train to be incorporated into the NPRP as it takes shape.

Similarly, while we support the need for Canada to develop a comprehensive National Housing Strategy, we would encourage the Standing Committee to support immediate action in the upcoming budget to fast-track affordable housing initiatives, particularly those that address social need and job creation.

We note that the government has recently announced initiatives designed to increase summer job opportunities for students. UWCC urges the Standing Committee to endorse additional initiatives designed to expand opportunities for young workers and increase training and retaining for other priority groups including aboriginal Canadians, veterans, newcomers, and older workers who have been displaced by technology and economic upheaval.

UWCC also requests that the Standing Committee support action to address the income needs of families with children, particularly single parent and low-income households, and seniors.

Specifically, the 2016-17 Budget should introduce the proposed Canada Child Benefit and increase the Guaranteed Income Supplement for single low-income seniors.



3. The federal government should encourage charitable philanthropy by implement a 'stretch tax credit' designed to incite Canadians to increase their level of giving.

While Canadians give to charities in order to assist others and contribute to the community, the tax treatment of donations can also play a significant incentive role in people's philanthropic decision-making. The number of Canadians making charitable donations is declining. As such, we believe more can be done to inspire those who already donate to increase their level of giving.

The proposed Stretch Tax Credit is designed to boost the federal tax credit on charitable giving for a donor who increases their previous highest level of giving.

This provision would encourage donations made to one charity or more charities, and would benefit taxpayers regardless of their income or family situation. Expanding the revenue available to charities will help organizations increase investments in a wide range of community priorities which contribute to improved opportunity, greater citizen engagement, and stronger communities.

We note that the Finance Committee has previously conducted a detailed study on tax incentives for charitable giving, and recommended consideration of the Stretch Tax Credit.

Our colleagues at Imagine Canada have also studied the impact of the proposed Stretch Tax Credit and have concluded it would generate at least \$234 million per year in new and increased giving, and could generate a minimum of 3,500 new full-time jobs across Canada.

We hope the Standing Committee will continue to support this and other measures designed to increase charitable giving.

Thank you for consideration of these recommendations. We wish the Standing Committee well in its important work on behalf of Canadians, and look forward to seeing its Report and recommendations for the 2106-17 Budget.