



Federal Budget 2020

Written Submission to the Standing Committee on Finance

August 2019

*Building healthy
communities*

YMCA Canada



Recommendations

- **Recommendation 1:** Fund the revitalization of existing social infrastructure assets and invest in the development of new infrastructure, such as YMCA Centres of Community, in underserved communities across Canada.
- **Recommendation 2:** Offer funding programs to support the delivery of community-based programming that promote environmental education and responsibility in young people.
- **Recommendation 3:** Introduce financial incentives, such as grants and interest-free loans, for non-profits and charities to retrofit existing and build new facilities with green technologies.



Introduction

The YMCA is a powerful association of people joined together by a shared passion to foster a sense of belonging for all. In an age of complex social challenges, the YMCA is steadfastly dedicated to building healthy communities by inviting and encouraging Canadians to join in, to give back, and to gain the connections, skills, and confidence they need to thrive.

Across Canada, the YMCA is at the heart of communities serving evolving needs and providing vital programs, services, and connections to over 2.28 million people through 44 Member Associations. Together, we're unwavering in our dedication to achieving meaningful outcomes that matter to the communities we serve.

YMCA Canada is pleased to contribute to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance's consultation on the development of the 2020 Federal Budget. Our recommendations address the theme for this year's consultation and reflect our experience, expertise, and leadership. Should there be any questions or follow up required, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Supporting community resilience during environmental events through investments in social infrastructure

The effects of climate change in Canada are being felt from coast to coast and Canadians are deeply concerned about the future. Young people (ages 15 to 30) in particular, have told us that climate change is one of their top concerns, describing it as an extremely serious or very serious issue.¹

Across the country, we are experiencing an increasing frequency and intensity of floods, wildfires, extreme cold and heat, tornadoes, coastal erosion, and damage to seasonal ice roads. According to the Canadian Disaster Database, more than 195 natural disasters have occurred in Canada between 2008 and 2018.

These environmental events pose significant risks to communities, the health and wellbeing of individuals, the economy, and the natural environment. For example, climate change can lead to temperature related sickness and mortality among Canadians caused by extreme cold and heat events; injuries and illness as a result of a natural disaster; and community displacement due to damaged infrastructure following a weather-related event.² Geographic location, socio-economic challenges and, in certain instances, reliance on wild food sources, cause Indigenous

¹ Abacus Data. *Another Youthquake? Exploring the concerns, priorities, and political engagement of Canadian youth aged 15 to 30*. June 2019.

² Health Canada, Government of Canada. *Climate change and health: Populations at risk*. 2018.



Peoples, and northern, rural, and coastal communities in Canada to be particularly vulnerable and disproportionately affected.³

In response, during times of need, the YMCA opens its doors and offers a safe space to communities impacted by an environmental emergency.

Across the country, YMCA Centres of Community bring together health, social, cultural, recreational services, and most importantly, provide a sheltered and welcoming place for respite when people are at their most vulnerable. This includes offering access to electricity, heat, air conditioning, running water, and shelter, helping to build community resiliency, as well as supporting residents in their recovery following a significant weather-related event.

For instance, when the 2016 Alberta wildfire devastated Fort McMurray and surrounding areas, the **YMCA of Northern Alberta**, in partnership with the Canadian Red Cross, helped bring the community back together following the fire. The YMCA offered financial assistance for summer camp, launched teen programs, provided access to facilities through free memberships for children and youth, and hired Wellness Workers to provide supports to families.

At the other end of the country, the **YMCA of Greater Moncton** recognized the immediate need for an emergency warming shelter during the frigid 2018 winter. Working with partnering agencies, the YMCA quickly opened such a facility, the first of its kind in New Brunswick. The shelter provided more than 50 individuals experiencing homelessness with a warm place to sleep, hygiene products, guidance, and support.

More recently, the **YMCAs of Quebec** opened their doors to victims of the 2019 flood in the Montreal area. The YMCA offered a place where people could take a break, access exercise equipment, studios and gymnasiums, and a hot shower, at no cost.

These are just a few examples of our ongoing commitment to fostering a sense of belonging, connecting community, and helping individuals establish normalcy during and following an environmental disaster. Given the role of social infrastructure, like YMCA Centres of Community, in building community resiliency, and providing safe and welcoming spaces where individuals can connect and recover following an environmental event, we recommend the Government of Canada:

- Fund the revitalization of existing social infrastructure assets and invest in the development of new infrastructure, such as YMCA Centres of Community, in underserved communities across Canada.

³ Environment and Climate Change Canada, Government of Canada. *Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change: Canada's plan to address climate change and grow the economy*. 2016.



Foster environmental awareness through programming for young people

Research shows that opportunities to explore and experience nature have a positive impact on individual's physical health and mental wellness, as well as their environmental attitudes and behaviours.

The YMCA is dedicated to the growth of all persons in spirit, mind and body, and to their sense of responsibility to each other and the global community. YMCA programs that offer outdoor play and YMCA camp programs, where campers swim in lakes, canoe, observe plants and wildlife, sleep outdoors and follow trails, provide children and youth with the opportunity to connect with nature. Many of these programs incorporate an ecological curriculum which focuses on the natural ecosystem around them, and fosters environmental awareness and accountability. Additionally, YMCA community gardens and urban agriculture programs promote local food security and eliminate greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions caused by shipping long distances.

The **YMCA of Greater Toronto's** Climate Resiliency Strategy illustrates their ongoing commitment to mitigating climate change through the reduction of GHG emissions, and enhancing climate resilience in communities. One example of their leadership in advancing the Strategy's goals is **YMCA Cedar Glen**. Cedar Glen offers a robust educational component for young people, encompassing sustainable agriculture, nutrition, and gardening. Utilizing the site's certified organic farm, bee apiary and greenhouse, the YMCA promotes environmental responsibility, creates a food system resilient to climate change, supports food availability in underserved communities, and reduces GHG emissions. In addition to their own strategy, the YMCA of Greater Toronto is actively involved in the development and implementation of the City of Toronto's first Resilience Strategy.

Working in partnership with local school boards, the **YMCA of Simcoe/Muskoka's YMCA Geneva Park** delivers elements of science and technology curriculum through an experiential outdoor learning opportunity. Children and youth learn about Geneva Park's sewage lagoon system, which treats sewage through a natural filtration system. Additionally, starting this year, students will be able to learn about the Park's new 100% carbon neutral, winterized cottage, built in partnership with the Endeavour Centre by apprentices learning to utilize environmentally sustainable techniques.

Programs that instill environmental responsibility among children and youth help communities adapt to the impacts of climate change and sustain the future of our planet. Given the role of environmental education and youth leadership programs in fostering environmental stewardship, we recommend that the Government of Canada:

- Offer funding programs to support the delivery of community-based programming that promote environmental education and responsibility in young people.



Support the charitable sector to incorporate green technology

Offering supports and programs to communities is an important piece in responding to the climate emergency in Canada. But collectively, we can do more to create a sustainable future.

The Paris Agreement, Vancouver Declaration, and Pan-Canadian Framework on Clean Growth and Climate Change are all important steps forward. Canada has demonstrated its commitment to reducing GHG emissions, setting ambitious targets both internationally and domestically, as well as a course of action that will lead to a low-carbon and climate resilient economy. The YMCA supports the Government of Canada in this transition, including its efforts to promote a strong and diverse economy, create new jobs, and improve quality of life.

YMCA Centres of Community are well-positioned to take a leadership role in driving this transition. Over the past number of years, YMCAs have contributed towards the Government of Canada's targets for reducing national GHG emissions, and many have set their own goals and implemented initiatives to reduce their carbon footprint.

Our facilities offer early learning and child care, housing services, employment programs, newcomer services, health, fitness, and aquatics, among other programs. Within them, YMCAs across Canada are already making investments in new clean technology, waste conservation initiatives, and energy retrofit projects to promote resource- and energy-efficiency, improve air quality, and reduce GHG emissions.

For example, the new **YMCA of Greater Vancouver** facilities in Chilliwack, Coquitlam, Vancouver South and Surrey Centre align with federal, provincial and regional government initiatives to reduce GHG emissions through efficient, high performance building designs. These YMCAs exceed energy efficient requirements of the National Energy Code for Buildings 2015 by at least 25%. Energy efficient features include heat recovery chillers, exhaust heat recovery, double glazed windows, low window to wall ratios, and LED lighting.

The **YMCAs of Cambridge & Kitchener-Waterloo's Camp KI-WA-Y** promotes sustainable development by incorporating alternate energy sources and materials in its facilities. The camp's Solarium, for example, features its own waste management system, which uses living organisms to clean wastewater from the restrooms; and a greenhouse wall that provides passive solar heat in the winter, and uses an innovative ventilator system to draw cooler air from the earth to cool the building in the summer.

In Atlantic Canada, the **YMCA of Newfoundland and Labrador's Marystown YMCA** attained gold accreditation in Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) for its innovative approach to construction, the building's efficiency, and its ability to identify opportunities for energy efficiency and long-term operational savings. The facility, built with partial funding from the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, includes geothermal heating/cooling systems, a



reduction in water usage, electric car-charging stations, treated water and wastewater, and large windows to reduce the need for artificial lighting.

The evolution of social infrastructure, such as in YMCA Centres of Community, and the built environment to incorporate green technology, is critical to reducing GHG emissions and for Canada to successfully transition to a low-carbon economy. However, despite the immense cost-saving potential of energy-efficient technologies, the upfront capital cost associated with building new and retrofitting existing facilities to incorporate these technologies is a major hindrance for the charitable and non-profit sector.

For charities and non-profits to be able to incorporate energy-efficient initiatives, funding opportunities must be available to offset the upfront capital investment. Funding specifically tailored to our sector would provide greater opportunities for the YMCA and other charities to minimize their carbon footprint by installing green systems and technology like the examples described above. Additionally, any savings generated from incorporating conservation efforts could be reinvested in community programs that foster a sense of belonging, and support the health and wellbeing of Canadians.

Given the role of the charitable sector in supporting environmental sustainability and providing vital programs and services to communities across Canada, we recommend that the Government of Canada help to offset the upfront capital costs for charities and non-profits by:

- Introducing financial incentives, such as grants and interest-free loans, for non-profits and charities to retrofit existing and build new facilities with green technologies.

Contact Information

For more information on any of the initiatives described above, please contact:

Peter Dinsdale

President & Chief Executive Officer

YMCA Canada

601-1867 Yonge St

Toronto, ON M4S 1Y5

T: 416-967-9622

Peter.Dinsdale@ymca.ca