



How has COVID affected funding of the Canadian charity sector? Part 4 – The Final Edition

By Mark Blumberg and Henri Pasha (September 28, 2022)

There have been many people wondering how COVID has affected the Canadian charity sector. On March 24, 2021, we released our [first report](#) which looked at 1676 registered charities. On June 9, 2021, we released our [second report](#) with 11,821 registered charities. On January 30, 2022, we released our [third report](#) with 80,015 registered charities. Now we have the complete dataset with almost all charities that will be reporting.

The high-level summary when comparing the charity sector in 2019 when there was no COVID effect on Canada to 2020 when COVID was significant is that total revenue for these registered charities is down by 3% and total expenditures before gifts to QDs is up by 4%.

As you can see, unfortunately, with the lack of data in the charity sector, we only know the impact of events such as COVID on the sector about two years after the actual events.

In the first two reports, we used data for 2020 and 2019 but we thought that the real impact of COVID was beginning to be felt around mid-March 2020. Therefore, a T3010 for March 31, 2020, is probably not going to reflect much of COVID. However, what if we took T3010 filings from August, September, October, November, and December 2020 that had already been filed and inputted by CRA and compared to 2019 filings by the same organizations?

So, in this second note, we looked at approximately 11,821 charities (previously 1,676 in the first note) that filed their 2019 and 2020 T3010 forms with August to December year ends.

In this third report, we are looking at the 80,015 registered charities that we have data on, and we are not excluding any charities.

In this report, we looked at 82,667 registered charities.

A few obvious caveats. This considers financial data but not issues such as need or the strain that COVID has placed on staff and volunteers, etc. Also, COVID had different impacts on sectors or subsectors and different individual registered charities.

At an elevated level comparing 2020 to 2019 we can see:

1. Asset of charities have increased by 4%
2. Receipts for donations decreased by 4%
3. Non-receipted fundraising down by 16% – makes sense with lots of fundraising activities like gala dinners cancelled
4. Sale of goods down by 4%
5. Total revenue from all sources combined down by 3% but expenses are down in many instances as well
6. Vehicle expenses down 9% which is not surprising
7. Office supplies down 1% – probably lots of savings in the office with no one there but also one-time expenditures to set up people at home with home offices
8. Occupancy costs, – 3% change – will probably see this drop further over the next few years as more switch to virtual or partially virtual workspaces but charities often have long-term leases, and this will only change when the leases are up or subleased
9. Compensation, which is a huge expenditure of charities, is up 5% – This is vitally important as the charity sector employs millions of people
10. Total expenditures before gifts to QDs – up 4%

11. Charitable expenditures up 8%
12. Administrative expenditures up 1%
13. Fundraising Expenditures down 9%
14. Gifts to Qualified donees up 33%
15. Other expenditures down 4%
16. So total revenue is down 3%

As public trust in charities declines and potentially governments cut back to respond to deficits in 2022 or 2023, the story might change significantly. That is a concern, but we are still trying to work out what 2020 was like.

Unfortunately, the information requested in the T3010 has been declining over the last few years. Unlike some other countries that ask charities once per year to provide significant information, Canada has not kept up and therefore the view we have of the charity sector is quite limited. As we have discussed elsewhere, there are [additional questions](#) that should be added to the T3010 so that the sector, policy makers and the public have a better idea of the importance of the sector.

Also, we have made a number of [submissions to the Finance Committee of the House of Commons](#) to improve transparency in the non-profit and charity sector.

Please review our caveats at the end about the reliability and usage of T3010 information.

Limitations and Caveats

There are a number of cautions in dealing with the information from the T3010. You can access on the CRA website directly information on each Canadian registered charity at:

<https://www.canada.ca/en/services/taxes/charities.html>

You can also find out more about registered charities on our [CharityData.ca](#) website.

Limitations and Caveats

- 1) The data in this note is based on the T3010 Registered Charity Information Return filings for some charities with fiscal year ends in 2019 and 2020. Although all charities are supposed to file their T3010 within 6 months of their fiscal year-end, some registered charities file their return late. In some cases, they do not file at all and then will lose their charitable status eventually. Depending on the dataset from CRA, not every charity may have filed their T3010 or CRA may have received the T3010 but not yet inputted it.
- 2) Registered charities complete the T3010, and one person signs the form. The T3010 information is not independently verified by CRA when it is received by CRA or placed in the CRA database and available to the public.
- 3) Although an important legal document, the T3010 is often completed by volunteers or others who may have little understanding of the nuances of the *Income Tax Act* (Canada), who may have limited language skills, and who may not have easy access to the correct information and are often in a hurry to file the form to avoid concerns about deregistration. In the case of larger institutions, they may have accountants or finance staff and the form may, or may not, be more accurate. However, with larger charities when mistakes are made, they can sometimes be very large mistakes. It is a good idea especially for larger charities for different parts of the charity to review the T3010 closely such as finance, program staff, fundraising etc., as well as their legal and accounting advisors, although sometimes this does not happen.
- 4) The T3010s are filed with CRA and in many cases need to be coded by hand at CRA which can also introduce mistakes. In 2019 CRA allowed registered charities to file online but still few are using this facility. Before 2019 only a small number of T3010s have been filed with 2D bar code technology which eliminates most processing errors on CRA's part.
- 5) In some cases, those completing the T3010 for a charity are deliberately deceptive. For example, an organization knows that it has substantial fundraising or administrative expenses but chooses to put them under charitable etc. Or an organization claims pharmaceuticals that it can purchase for \$50,000 are really worth \$50 million.
- 6) Don't rely on any of this information without checking with the charity and appropriate due diligence as required.
- 7) The T3010 is a tax form completed according to guidance provided by the CRA in a Guide (T-4033) and also various other CRA guidances and policies. The information inputted may not conform to Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) and may not match what is in a charity's financial statement which should be prepared according to GAAP. You can obtain copies of financial statements, whether audited or not, on any registered charity by requesting the financial statements from CRA. These financial statements are filed with CRA, but not placed on the CRA

website, and they sometimes add further important information. As well, for Federal corporations, you can obtain the financial statements from soliciting corporations if they are filed with Corporations Canada.

8) The T3010 asks certain questions. Many important questions are not asked on the T3010. Furthermore and most shockingly, CRA is prohibited from releasing any information on the approximately 80,000 – 100,000 non-profits that are not registered charities and many of them file the T1044 Non-Profit Information Return.

9) Relying on the T3010 to make decisions on whether a charity is efficient, effective, or worthwhile to support is prone to failure. We have established a website at www.smartgiving.ca which discusses in detail questions donors may want to ask before donating to charity. Also, we have prepared an article on how much should a charity spend on overhead. As well, Blumbergs has the CharityData.ca website with 19 years of information on every Canadian registered charity if it has been around that long.

This analysis was prepared as part of the Sean Blumberg Transparency Project.

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