

Ontario Community Support Program

Summary of Lessons Learned

Over the pandemic, the community support sector rose to the challenge of COVID-19 at every turn. With emergency funding, over 84,000 low-income seniors and people with disabilities received deliveries of meals, medications and other essentials.

Here are some things the sector learned along the way:

5 Ways Community Support is Vulnerable

While the pandemic brought its own challenges, it has also exposed and, in some cases, exacerbated, pre-existing vulnerabilities and challenges within the sector.

- 1. Over-Reliance on Older Volunteers**
Many CSS organizations counted on volunteers over 70 who were no longer available in the pandemic.
- 2. Uneven Technology Capacity, Access, and Impact**
Access to technology, tech literacy, and internet were issues for staff, volunteers, and clients.
- 3. Precarious, Inflexible Funding**
Emergency funds came with many restrictions on use, which can create operational challenges.
- 4. "Invisible" Food Insecurity**
The pandemic called attention to people that need services but can't afford even a small co-payment.
- 5. No Prioritization for CSS Organizations**
CSS organizations struggled to access PPE, immunizations, background checks and more.

3 Ways the Sector Got Stronger

The community support sector seized the opportunities created by the pandemic to strengthen itself while overcoming some of the challenges of the "old normal."



Resilience and Capacity for Rapid Change

Leaders, staff and volunteers adapted quickly, learned to think outside the box, and tapped into creativity.



Innovation

Some adaptations and innovations made operations smoother. Those will endure past the pandemic.



Partnerships

Relationships with municipalities, regional partners, food banks, and others helped CSS organizations increase community involvement and collaboration.