

*Addressing the deficit in grief services:  
A response to pandemic-related grief*

**Written Submission to the  
Pre-budget Consultations for the  
2021-22 Federal Budget**

August 1, 2020

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**List of Recommendations:**

**Recommendation 1:** That the government provide funding in the amount of \$75,000 to the Canadian Virtual Hospice for the rapid development of a consultation-driven National Pandemic Grief Response Strategy.

**Recommendation 2:** That the government invest \$100 million over three years to sustain and expand existing grief and bereavement services, and to undertake a national public awareness campaign and grief education initiatives to address pandemic-related grief.

**Recommendation 3:** That the government invest \$10 million in the Canadian Institutes for Health Research and the Social Sciences Humanities Research Council for pandemic-related grief research.

The Canadian Grief Alliance, coordinated by the Canadian Virtual Hospice and supported by more than 140 health-related organizations across Canada (see list below), respectfully submits recommendations for *A National Response to Pandemic-related Grief* to the Pre-budget consultations by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance.

The recommendations will enable the Government of Canada to proactively anticipate, mitigate and address the health and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic for the more than 2 million grieving Canadians who will be impacted each year of the pandemic. The two-phased approach includes, in the first phase, the development of a consultation-driven national strategy to encompass policy, programs, research and education initiatives. The second phase will immediately implement initiatives to increase access to grief supports for the public; support frontline healthcare providers with their COVID-related work trauma and grief; improve public understanding of grief, healthy coping strategies and resources; and fund research to better understand and respond to pandemic-related grief.

Canada's fragmented, under-resourced and inadequate grief services are already being overwhelmed by the volume and complexity of the COVID-related grief of Canadians whose common form of support – personal connection – has been severed. Lack of tailored services for underserved populations including Indigenous Peoples, seniors, those living in rural and remote areas, immigrants and refugees, children and youth, Francophones, the precariously housed and those in the Corrections system will compound social, health and economic impacts.

The pandemic has brought to the forefront the urgent need to respond to and support grieving Canadians. The scholarly literature anticipates the dire social, physical and psychological consequences of deaths and other losses (jobs, financial security, life as we know it) incurred during the unique circumstances of the pandemic for the public, healthcare workers, first responders and others delivering essential services. This can lead to increased instances of complicated and prolonged grief, depression, and the risk of suicide. Robbed of final goodbyes, tormented by reports of poor conditions in some facilities, unable to undertake grief rituals, and forced separation from the critical support of family, friends and community, Canadians grieving all deaths are at elevated risk of unresolved, complicated and prolonged grief. This grief will affect their health, ability to work and maintain relationships; encourage unhealthy coping; and create additional pressure on health systems and the economy.

Canada's 2019 death rate of 7.8/1000 population equates to 293,280 deaths annually. The pandemic is increasing Canada's death rate, and the public health restrictions are negatively impacting the grief of those directly affected by each death. A recent study by Pennsylvania State University found that each death directly impacts nine people – some 2,700,000 million Canadians annually. This doesn't include impacts on extended family, friends, workplaces, schools, communities. Neither does it account for people grieving other pandemic-related losses nor those grieving pre-pandemic deaths, whose grief has been prolonged by physical distancing and social isolation.

While the Government of Canada has announced significant pandemic-related investments in mental health, grief is outside the mandate of the Canadian Mental Health Commission and mental health associations. To date, there has been no acknowledgment of unresolved grief as an additional mental health crisis by the Government of Canada, no planning to address the severe deficit in grief services, nor recognition of the impact that failing to act will have on our society and the economy. In many provinces and territories, publicly funded grief support is minimally available with long waiting lists, or entirely absent. Many of the free grief services available are offered by not-for-profit organizations that are struggling with sharp declines in charitable donations. Job losses and financial insecurity are creating a significant barrier to accessing private grief counselling. The level of distress and complexity of grief created by the pandemic will warrant immediate access to publicly-funded programs.

### **Recommendation 1: Developing a National Strategy**

Canada has never had a national grief strategy. Sound, impactful investment is based on understanding need and identifying cost-effective opportunities for meeting those needs. The consultation-driven process managed by Canadian Virtual Hospice will be chaired by Paul Adams, former journalism professor, Carleton University, formerly of the CBC and The Globe and Mail, supported by an Advisory Committee of grief and related experts. The consultation will engage individuals and organizations delivering grief supports; provincial, territorial, and federal governments; organizations representing underserved groups including: seniors, Francophones, Indigenous Peoples, immigrants and refugees, 2SLGBTQ+ communities and other key informants.

The strategy will:

- Define gaps and shortages in services and resources.
- Identify innovative programs to scale and spread to address gaps.
- Address the specific needs of underserved populations including but not limited to those living in rural and remote areas, Indigenous Peoples, immigrants and refugees, children and youth, 2SLGBTQ+, Francophones, those living in correctional facilities.
- Identify grief needs of people working in healthcare.
- Consider technology solutions.
- Outline approaches for building capacity within individuals and communities to enhance resilience and support healthy grieving.
- Deliver a detailed set of recommendations for implementation.

**Recommendation 2: Invest \$100 million over three years in accessible, inclusive grief services for Canadians.**

Invest \$100 million for community-based, provincial and/or regional grief and bereavement programs to support innovation, best/leading edge practices, capacity building initiatives, and identification and scale and spread of innovative programming. The fund will be administered by the Government of Canada. Immediate investment will enable a time-limited, three-year response to pandemic related grief, providing early interventions to reduce downstream costs and multi-year funding to address the needs of the second wave of the pandemic. The term of investment will encompass the anticipated length of the pandemic and 12 – 18 months of post pandemic support. The investment will:

- Sustain and expand services to ensure that existing grief programs are adequately resourced and that services and resources are accessible.
- Develop and implement a national public awareness campaign to inform and educate the public on grief, healthy coping strategies and community resources with tailored campaigns for Indigenous Peoples and immigrants and refugees that meet their unique histories, needs and experiences.
- Develop tailored grief services and resources to meet unmet needs of underserved and disproportionately impacted populations.
- Curate, develop and make available a suite of grief services for people working in health care for their grief-related work trauma at no cost.
- Curate novel practices adopted by health facilities to create connection between patients and families separated by visiting restrictions, geography or other barriers.

These initiatives will:

- Mitigate the adverse outcomes of unsupported or poorly supported grief, including clinical depression and suicide ideation.
- Assist Canadians and our communities to better support grievers.
- Provide accessible grief resources and services to support and retain people working in healthcare.
- Reduce significant downstream costs to the healthcare system and the economy that will result if the lack of grief services are not addressed.

### **Recommendation 3: Invest \$10 million in Canadian Institutes for Health Research and Social Sciences Humanities Research Council to support grief research.**

This investment will enable Canada to rapidly scale up research capacity to better equip healthcare providers, communities and our country to better respond to the evolving, unique and long-term grief/bereavement needs resulting from the pandemic.

The Canadian Grief Alliance (CGA) began as a group of 36 national leaders in grief and bereavement and has grown to more than 140 health-related organizations requesting that the Government of Canada #MakeGriefAPriority. The CGA is convened by The Canadian Virtual Hospice, a charitable organization with a track record for delivering innovative programming to support more than 2.4 million visitors annually.

### **Supporting Organizations**

## **National**

Canadian Medical Association  
Canadian Nurses Association  
Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians  
Canadian Association of Social Workers  
Canadian Association for Spiritual Care  
The Enchanté Network  
Young Adult Cancer Canada  
Canadian Association of Psychosocial Oncology  
Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada  
Canadian Aboriginal HIV/AIDS Network  
All Nations Hope Network  
Dying With Dignity Canada  
Canadian Association for Marriage & Family Therapy  
End of Life Doula Association of Canada  
The Leukemia & Lymphoma Society of Canada  
Canadian Alliance for Grieving Children and Youth  
Canada Bereavement Registry  
Canadian Integrative Network for Death Education and Alternatives  
Schizophrenia Society of Canada  
Melanoma Network of Canada  
Canadian Health Advocates Inc.  
Canadian Medical Hall of Fame

## **Alberta**

Alberta Hospice Palliative Care Association  
Covenant Health Palliative Institute  
Caregivers Alberta  
Hospice Calgary  
Red Deer Hospice  
Hospice Society of Camrose and District  
Children's Grief Centre  
Healthy Directions  
Transitions Music Therapy  
Oliver's Funeral Home

## **British Columbia**

BC Hospice Palliative Care Association  
BC Centre for Palliative Care  
Family Caregivers of BC  
Island Health  
Vancouver Island Health Authority

BC Bereavement Helpline  
Camp Kerry  
Kilala Lelum (Urban Indigenous Health & Healing Cooperative)  
Abbotsford Hospice Society  
Vancouver Hospice Society  
Delta Hospice Society  
Hospice Society of the Columbia Valley  
Prince Rupert and District Hospice Society  
Victoria Hospice Society  
Peace Arch Hospice Society  
Burnaby Hospice Society  
Crossroads Hospice Society  
100 Mile District Hospice Palliative Care Society  
Sea to Sky Hospice Society  
Desert Valley Hospice Society  
West End Seniors' Network  
Moving Forward Family Services  
Life and Death Matters  
Honour End of Life Care  
Pacific Well-Being

### **Manitoba**

Palliative Manitoba  
Rainbow Resource Centre  
Two-Spirited People of Manitoba Inc.  
Cancer Care Navigation Services - Northern Regional Health Authority  
Rock Lake Palliative Care  
Peguis Home & Community Care  
Robert Smith School

### **New Brunswick**

NB COPES Child and Family Grief Center

### **Newfoundland and Labrador**

Newfoundland and Labrador Palliative Care Association

### **Nova Scotia**

NS Hospice Palliative Care Association  
Doctors Nova Scotia  
Caregivers Nova Scotia  
Hospice Halifax  
Colchester East Hants Hospice Society

Good Grief Halifax

## **Ontario**

Hospice Palliative Care Ontario  
RNAO Palliative Care Nurses Interest Group  
Centre for Education and Research on Aging & Health at Lakehead University  
de Souza Institute  
Hope House Community Hospice  
Dundas County Hospice  
Hospice Outreach Programs of Elgin  
Hospice Muskoka  
McNally House Hospice  
Madawaska Valley Hospice Palliative Care  
Hazel Burns Hospice  
Hospice Wellington  
Dr Bob Kemp Hospice and Bereavement Services  
Heart House Hospice  
St. Joseph's Hospice Sarnia Lambton  
St Joseph's Hospice London  
Hospice Northwest  
Roger Neilson House  
Evergreen Hospice  
Hospice Peterborough  
Matthews House Hospice  
Doane House Hospice  
Kensington Health  
Near North Palliative Care Network  
Bereavement Ontario Network  
Bereaved Families of Ontario - South Central Region  
Bereaved Families of Ontario – Ottawa  
Bereaved Families of Ontario – Kingston  
Bereaved Families of Ontario - Midwestern Region  
Healing Broken Hearts  
Good Grief! Bereavement Healing Services  
Gilda's Club of Greater Toronto  
The Hummingbird Centre for Hope  
Grief Recovery Ontario  
Dr. Jay Children's Grief Centre  
Children and Youth Grief Network  
The Lighthouse Program for Grieving Children  
Seasons Centre for Grieving Children  
Jewish Family and Child Service of Greater Toronto  
Victorian Order of Nurses - Oxford  
Unity Health Toronto  
Selah Resources

Hulse, Playfair & McGarry

**Prince Edward Island**

Hospice PEI

**Quebec**

Association québécoise de soins palliatifs

McGill Council on Palliative Care

Maison Michel Sarrazin

Réseau Québécois de recherche en soins palliatifs et de fin de vie

Regroupement des Infirmiers-Infirmières Ressources en don d'organes et de tissus du Québec

Palli-aide accompagnement en soins palliatifs Saguenay inc.

Parents Orphelins, l'Association des parents qui vivent un deuil périnatal

Albatros Montréal

Groupe des Aidants du Sud-Ouest Myra's Kids Foundation

West Island Cancer Wellness Center

Hope & Cope

ORA Loss & Living Program, Ste. Genevieve United Church

Unitarian Church of Montreal

ADATH Congregation

Connexions Resource Centre

**Saskatchewan**

Prairie Hospice Society

Morning Star Lodge, University of Saskatchewan

Augustana Lutheran Church

The Good Foundation Inc.

**Territories**

Hospice Yukon

and 15 private enterprises.