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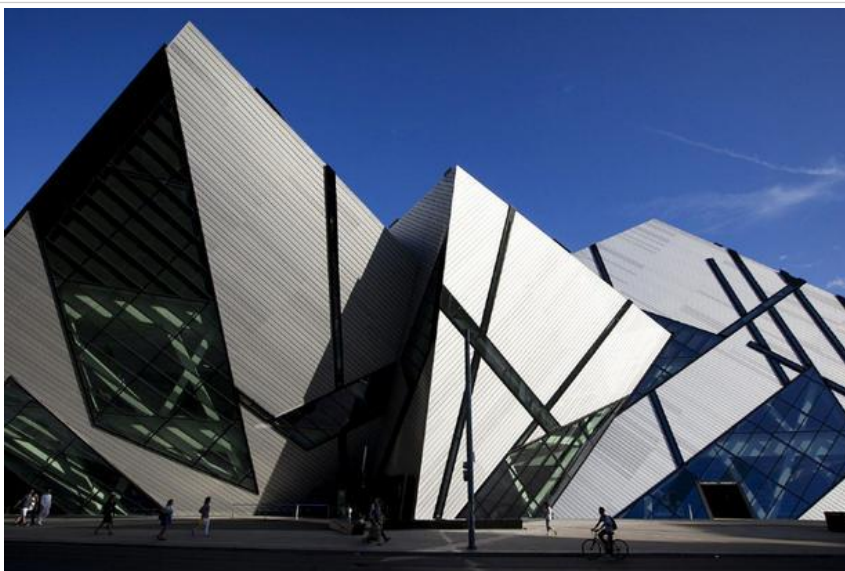
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Audit of charities encounters resistance

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The Royal Ontario Museum Foundation said it provides audited financial statements when requested. TARA WALTON/TORONTO STAR FILE PHOTO

Raveena Aulakh and Amy Dempsey
Staff reporters

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Nineteen of Canada's 100 largest charities do not release their full audited financial statements to the public and refused to provide them to an independent agency that evaluates charities.

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It took a special request to the Canada Revenue Agency to get detailed information for big-name charities such as the Aga Khan Foundation Canada, the Royal Ontario Museum Foundation and the War Amps of Canada.

This lack of transparency was just one of many surprising findings of Charity Intelligence Canada, an independent agency that on Tuesday launched a first-of-its-kind search engine to help Canadians decide where to donate.

The website, charityintelligence.ca, breaks down revenue, program costs and fundraising expenses in reports on each of Canada's 100 richest charities, measured by annual revenue.

There were some interesting, bizarre and downright inexplicable aspects to many charities, but nothing more concerning than the lack of transparency from the 19 which refused to provide financial information, said Greg Thomson, director of research for the agency.

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- ▀ [ROM, War Amps amongst charities that refuse to hand over financial statements](#)
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"There could be a number of reasons," Thomson told the *Star* in an interview. "In some cases, it's not high priority for them . . . others probably wondered who we are. Some might worry that someone will find something."

Charities are not legally bound to disclose their audited financial statements to the public, but it is considered ethical to do so because they take in public dollars, Thomson said.

"If a charity is not transparent, you may as well reconsider donating."

Other highlights from the agency's findings:

- The top 100 charities receive 37 per cent of total Canadian donations (about \$3.6 billion of the \$9.7 billion donated).
- One-quarter of the top 100 charities have enough cash on hand to run their current programs for three or more years without having to fundraise another penny.
- Fourteen of the richest charities spend more than 35 per cent of donations on fundraising, exceeding Canada Revenue Agency guidelines. Eight spent more than 40 per cent.

Heart & Stroke Foundation branches in B.C./Yukon and Ontario spend nearly 50 cents of every dollar raised on fundraising campaigns and events, Charity Intelligence found.

Thomson said overspending in this area has created a "fundraising arms race," where smaller and less profitable charities which want to compete for attention with the big guys — the Canadian National Institute for the Blind, for example — are forced to increase their own fundraising budgets.

"They are all competing for the same donor dollars," said Bri Trypuc, who handles donor services for Charity Intelligence.

She pointed out that charities spent an average 18 cents of every dollar on fundraising 10 years ago. "Today, the average is 35 cents."

Jim Balsillie's Centre for International Governance Innovation in Waterloo and Toronto's SickKids Foundation are among several that could stop fundraising tomorrow and continue operating on reserve funds for five years or more, according to Charity Intelligence.

It does not advise against donating to charities with large reserve funds but it does tell donors who don't want their money to sit in a bank account for several years to go with a charity that has a more immediate need.



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“Every charity has a cash cushion,” Trypuc said. “What we’re questioning is how much of a cash cushion they need.”

The *Star* asked four charities why they did not provide their full audited financial statements to Charity Intelligence when asked.

The Aga Khan Foundation and the Royal Ontario Museum Foundation said they provide audited financial statements when requested. A spokesperson for the Aga Khan Foundation in Ottawa said they couldn’t recall any requests by Charity Intelligence.

A spokesperson for York University’s foundation said it posts summarized financial statements on its website.

The Centre for International Governance Innovation said it posts summarized financial statements online and will file with Charity Intelligence in the future.

Meanwhile, Charity Intelligence wants to expand the charities on its website and is inviting suggestions from the public. It aims to have 1,000 charity reports online within the next three years.

LACK OF TRANSPARENCY

19 of Canada’s 100 richest charities refused to make their audited financial statements public, forcing Charity Intelligence to ask the Canada Revenue Agency to dig them up:

VGH & UBC Hospital Foundation, Vancouver

Ducks Unlimited Canada, Stonewall, Man.

Crossroads Christian Communications, Burlington

Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Canada, Georgetown, Ont.

Aga Khan Foundation Canada, Ottawa

War Amps of Canada, Ottawa

Children’s Wish Foundation of Canada, Pickering

The Malvern Rouge Valley Youth Services, Scarborough

Help Eliminate Disease and Addiction Canada, Toronto

The Royal Ontario Museum Foundation, Toronto

United Israel Appeal of Canada, Toronto

United Jewish Appeal of Greater Toronto

United Jewish Welfare Fund of Toronto

York University Foundation

Centre for International Governance Innovation, Waterloo

Canadian Cancer Society Quebec Division, Montreal

Cancer Research Society, Montreal

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Source: Charity Intelligence Canada

HIGH FUNDRAISING COSTS

14 of Canada's 100 richest charities spend more on fundraising than the Canada Revenue Agency's recommended limit: 35 per cent of revenue:

Heart & Stroke Foundation of British Columbia and Yukon — 49.3%

Heart & Stroke Foundation of Ontario — 49.1%

Canadian National Institute for the Blind — 48.8%

Multiple Sclerosis Society of Canada — 48.4%

War Amps of Canada — 46.2%

Canadian Diabetes Association — 44.4%

The Kidney Foundation of Canada — 44%

Canadian Cancer Society BC & Yukon Division — 41.1%

Leukemia & Lymphoma Society of Canada — 39.3%

Canadian Cancer Society Ontario Division — 37.1%

Canadian Cancer Society Alberta/NWT Division — 36.9%

Cancer Research Society — 35.3%

Alberta Cancer Foundation — 35.1%

Canadian Breast Cancer Foundation — 35.1%

Source: Charity Intelligence Canada

CASH ON HAND

One-quarter of Canada's top 100 charities have enough cash on hand to cover three or more years of annual program costs. This list shows the number of years those charities could operate for without having to raise a single penny, according to Charity Intelligence calculations. The estimates leave out donor endowed funding.

Vancouver Foundation — 14 years

Centre for International Governance Innovation — 9 years

Aga Khan Foundation Canada — 8 years

Montreal Heart Institute Foundation — 8 years

London Health Sciences Foundation — 8 years

Alberta Children's Hospital Foundation — 7.5 years

Toronto General & Western Hospital Foundation — 6.5 years

Alberta Cancer Foundation — 5.5 years

SickKids Foundation — 5 years

Terry Fox Foundation — 5 years

The Salvation Army — 4.5 years

Ottawa Hospital Foundation — 4.5 years

Sunnybrook Foundation — 4 years

Princess Margaret Hospital Foundation — 4 years

VGH & UBC Hospital Foundation — 4 years

Source: Charity Intelligence Canada

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