



**L'Observatoire  
de l'ACA**  
par et pour l'action  
communautaire autonome

# Breaking Point!

**IMPACTS OF THE COVID-19 CRISIS ON  
AUTONOMOUS COMMUNITY ACTION  
ORGANIZATIONS**

April 2022

Jointly initiated by the RQ-ACA and the TNDCDC, the [Observatoire de l'ACA](#) is an action research project that seeks to document the impacts of the COVID-19 crisis on Quebec's autonomous community action (ACA) organizations.

In the fall of 2020, community organizations in Quebec were invited to participate in a large-scale survey conducted by the *Institut de recherche et d'informations socioéconomiques* (IRIS) as part of the efforts carried out by the Observatoire de l'ACA (see the published [report](#)).

**One year later**, it became clear that an update was needed to document how the issues encountered by community organizations during the crisis have changed and evolved.

To better understand how the impacts of the crisis on community organizations have evolved and to support advocacy work by the ACA movement in 2022, a **second survey** was conducted at the end of 2021.

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◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ **SUMMARY:**

**THE CRISIS PUSHED COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS TOWARDS THEIR BREAKING POINT**

Unable to hire new staff due to lack of funding, community organizations were unable to meet the needs and demands increasing with the crisis. In addition, working conditions for existing staff were not especially attractive, and the work environment was marked by an excessive workload, leading to widespread burnout.

In this context, community organizations are approaching their **breaking point** which will lead to service interruptions, and even closures.

**INSUFFICIENT FUNDING**

**Chronic underfunding at the core-mission level**

**Ineffective emergency support funds**

**UNDER-STAFFING**

**Not enough staff to meet increasing needs**

**Low attractiveness and retention in existing positions**

**BREAKING POINT**

**DIFFICULT WORK CONDITIONS**

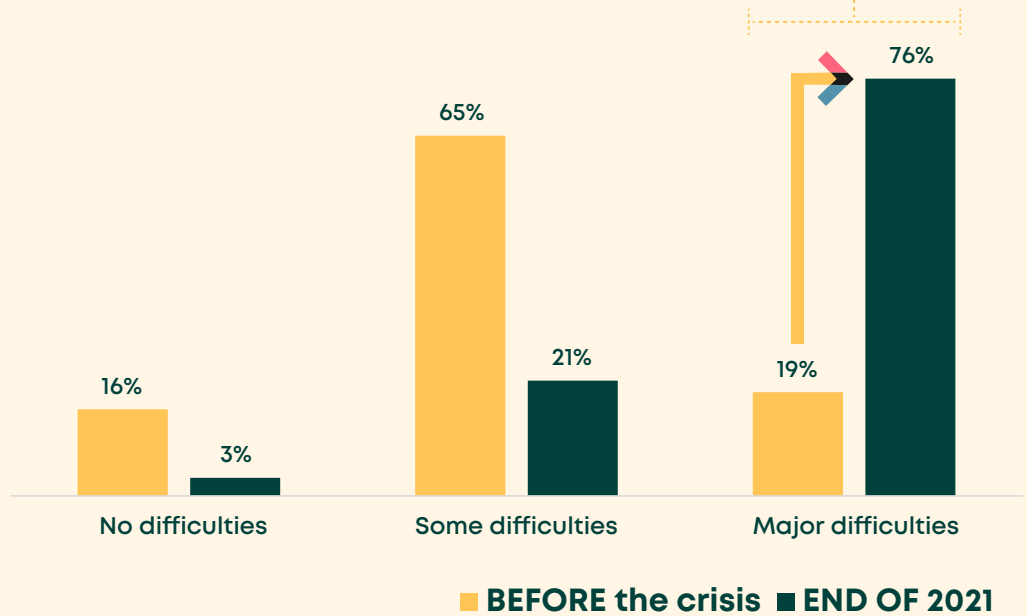
**Excessive workload**

**Burnout among staff**

## DIFFICULT WORK ENVIRONMENTS... MADE EVEN WORSE BY THE CRISIS

### Ever-more Crushing Workloads

**Major difficulties with workloads**  
19% before the crisis  
76% at end of 2021



Increase in the proportion of community organizations reporting difficulty with workloads among their staff:

**BEFORE the crisis**  
84% of community organizations

**END OF 2021**  
97% of community organizations

**83%** of community organizations reported an increase in the level of difficulty related to workloads.



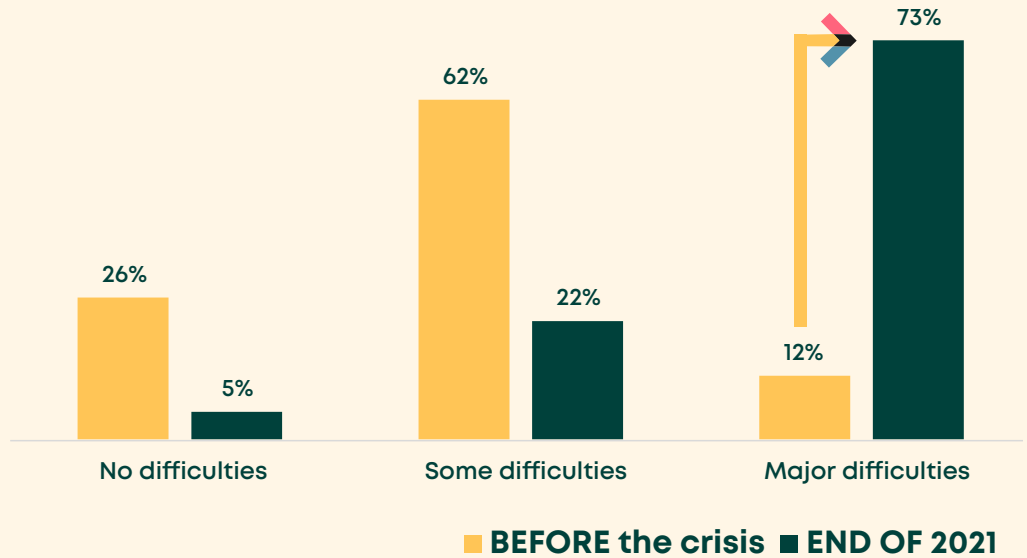
The community sector can't keep on always doing more and always getting less. Every year the quality of life for workers in community organizations gets worse. We need a change. \*

**Group in the Centre-du-Québec  
Health and Social Services Sector**



## Widespread Feelings of Fatigue or Exhaustion among Staff

Major difficulties with issues related to fatigue and burnout  
12% before the crisis  
73% at the end of 2021



Increase in the proportion of community organizations reporting that they are experiencing difficulties with feelings of fatigue or burnout among their staff:

**BEFORE the crisis**  
74% of community organizations

**END OF 2021**  
95% of community organizations

**85%** of community organizations reported an increase in the level of difficulty related to feelings of fatigue or burnout.



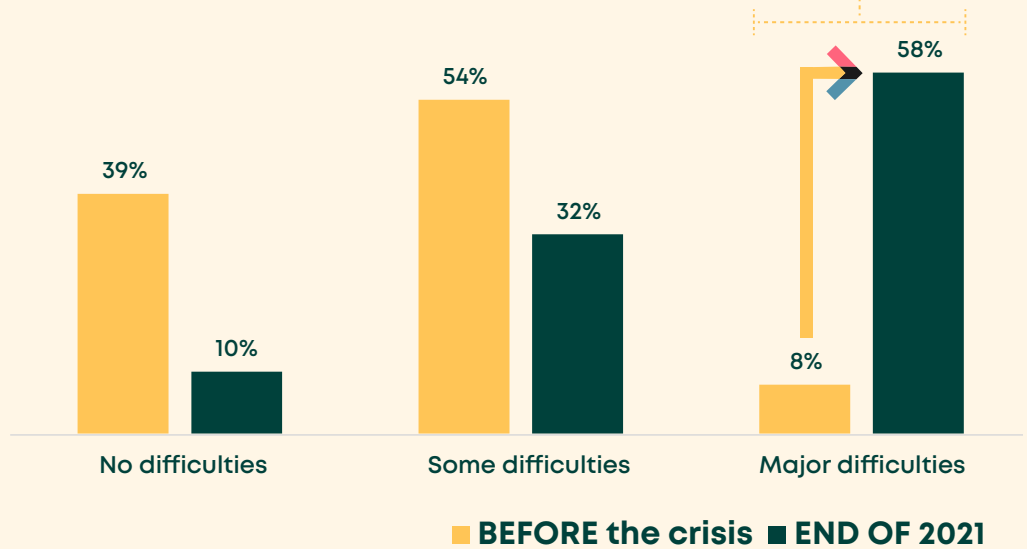
More and more demands with fewer staff in place. This endless pressure to keep our beds “open” while the team was exhausted. \*

**Group in Estrie  
Health and Social Services Sector**



## Mental Health Issues Hit Workers with Full Force

Major difficulties with mental health issues  
8% before the crisis  
58% at the end of 2021



Increase in the proportion of community organizations reporting difficulties related to mental health issues among their staff:

**BEFORE the crisis**  
61% of community organizations

**END OF 2021**  
90% of community organizations

**79%** of community organizations reported an increase in the level of difficulty related to mental health issues.



We were told how important it was that we not close because we are an essential service and many people count on us to be able to eat. We were also told that if there was an outbreak in our space among our employees, we'd have to make sure that the meals would still be delivered. It was a lot of useless pressure that put a huge amount of stress and anxiety on our whole team. \*

**Group in Laval  
Health and Social Services Sector**



# CHALLENGES IN ATTRACTIVENESS OF WORKING CONDITIONS EXACERBATED BY THE CRISIS

## Working Conditions That Need Improvement

**76%** of community organizations reported a need to improve working conditions in order to maintain their staff during the crisis.

### AMONG THEM:



**75%**

**increased wages**  
(60% permanently and 15% temporarily)



**41%**

**offered additional time off**



**35%**

**offered one-time cash bonuses**



With what little budget we have, we can't really give more...

And giving us a treat just to take it away after... no thanks!

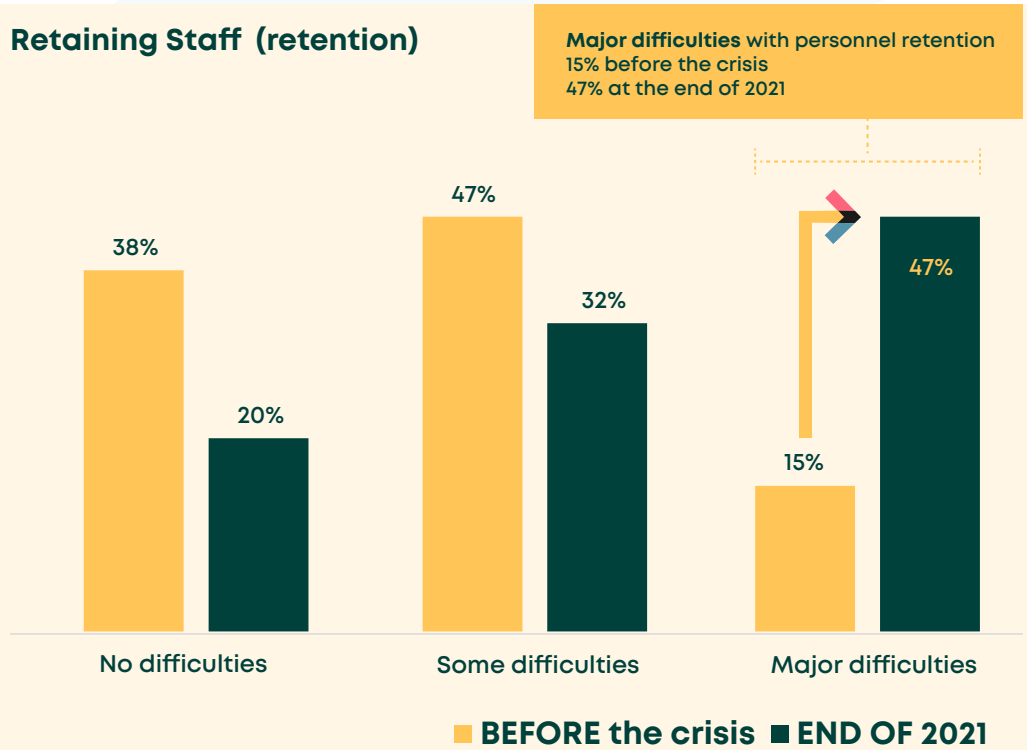
The crisis made it clear that we needed another approach, more jobs with adequate wages, especially with the huge increases in the cost of living! \*

**Group in the Côte-Nord  
Family Sector**

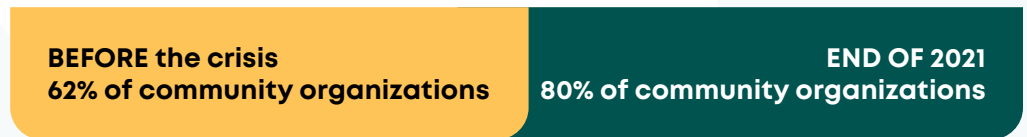


## Impossible to Retain Staff without Additional Resources

### Retaining Staff (retention)



Increase in the proportion of community organizations reporting difficulty with maintaining their staff:



««

Our sector is becoming less and less attractive, and the more staff we lose, the more our new staff will experience difficult conditions during their onboarding... which will make them want to quit.

The biggest threat to the community sector is not the pandemic, but the labour shortage and chronic underfunding. \*

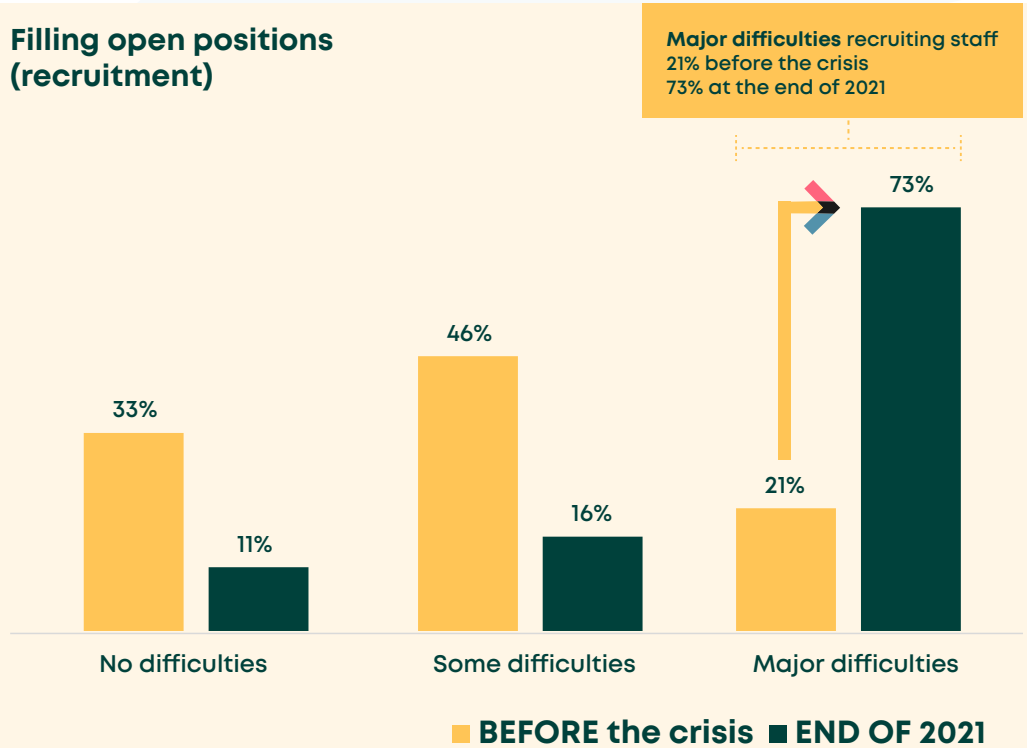
**Group in Estrie  
Health and Social Services Sector**

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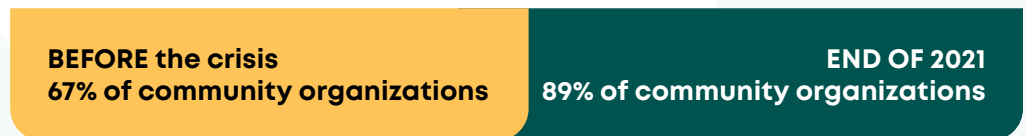


## Recruiting Staff Has Become a Conundrum

### Filling open positions (recruitment)



Increase in the proportion of community organizations reporting difficulty filling open positions:



You might ask, does our organization have the budget to provide good wages? Sure, but it's a temporary and exceptional budget. If we offer a certain wage over a given period, we have to be able to maintain it afterward or else employees will quit. \*

**Group in the Capitale-Nationale region  
Health and Social Services Sector**



## EXTERNAL PRESSURE ON MANY COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS

### Internal Challenges Exacerbated by External Expectations

#### PROPORTION OF ORGANIZATIONS THAT FELT PRESSURE ACCORDING TO THE SOURCE:

# 50%

of community organizations reported feeling pressure from external parties to modify their activities during the crisis.

**53%** from public networks (health, education, etc.)



Increase in referrals from CIUSSS due to overcrowding in different sectors. Pressure to serve people that weren't covered under our mission. We were left to our own devices, but with pressure to provide services quickly, without taking our mission into consideration. \*

**Group in Saguenay – Lac-Saint-Jean Health and Social Services Sector**



**45%** from provincial ministries



Overall we felt a lot of pressure to modify our operations and approach, particularly from provincial ministries with strict guidelines that were constantly changing. This had an impact on our autonomy, in addition to generating a lot of stress. \*

**Group in Montréal Collective Rights Advocacy Sector**



**28%** from municipalities



Our organization is located in a space that belongs to the city. During the pandemic, it was difficult to understand one another and make it clear that our activities were an essential service. \*

**Umbrella organization in Montréal Collective Rights Advocacy Sector**



**21%** from elected officials (federal, provincial or municipal)



We had to revisit all of our practices to offer online services to teenagers, as stipulated by our premier at his press conferences, without any consideration for what we were doing on the ground. \*

**Umbrella organization in the Capitale-Nationale region Health and Social Services Sector**



**16%** from public and private foundations



The biggest pressure came primarily from foundations, via the neighbourhood COVID prevention plans, with activities that were more or less imposed on us and added to our own action plan, without really being part of our mission. \*

**Group in Montréal Collective Rights Advocacy Sector**



## TEMPORARY AND LIMITED FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO WEATHER THE CRISIS

### Very Complex Emergency Funds Accessibility Issues and Excessive Administrative Obligations

Moderate increase (+10%) in the proportion of community organizations with access to **additional funding** related to the crisis as compared to the previous year:

END OF 2020  
61% of community organizations

END OF 2021  
71% of community organizations



What we're denouncing is that additional funding was very present in 2020, while in 2021, despite the fact that we had to increase our human resources costs to support our staff in managing the health guidelines, there was no additional financial support available to us. Pathetic. \*

**Group in Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine  
Health and Social Services Sector**



**29%** of community organizations **did not receive any financial aid** related to the crisis, nearly two years after it began.



We had to develop new things to get access to funding (e.g., Centraide's Youth Project). \*

**Group in Montréal  
Education Sector**



**54%** of community organizations had access to **government-issued emergency funds** related to the crisis.



The announcement of the emergency fund came very late and we were only allowed to apply for reimbursement of expenses that had already been incurred. Therefore, the organizations that didn't already have the money to spend didn't spend it and couldn't apply for reimbursement.

**Quebec-wide umbrella group  
Education Sector**



## Financial Needs Remain High

**77%** of community organizations reported needing **additional funding** for the current year, **\$132,835** per organization on average.



The temporary emergency funds are never really helpful. What we need is recurring funding. \*

**Group in the Centre-du-Québec Health and Social Services Sector**



Additional funding needs related to **staff** are the most frequently mentioned:

**83%** of community organizations need additional funding to **hire new staff**.

On average, staffing needs are equivalent to **2.8 people** per organization.

**80%** of community organizations need additional funding to **improve salaries** for current staff.



The problem is mainly the workload, so hiring for our open positions would likely do the most good. \*

**Group in the Capitale-Nationale region Health and Social Services Sector**



Additional funding needs related to **operations** are also present for several community organizations:

**63%** of community organizations need additional funding to **improve existing activities**.



Prices have gone up for items and products we need in order to carry out our operations (food, containers, gas...). \*

**Group in Laval Health and Social Services Sector**



**50%** of community organizations need additional funding to **develop new activities**.



We needed to develop new points of service because the area is very large, and it's hard to create the feeling of belonging that's needed to retain volunteers. \*

**Group in Mauricie Health and Social Services Sector**



## Persistent Under-funding

In this unprecedented crisis, marked by increases in requests for aid and large-scale adaptations to their activities (see the [other reports](#) from the Observatoire de l'ACA on the impacts of the crisis), community organizations' incomes have only increased by an average of \$25,775 in 2019-2020 and \$31,601 in 2020-2021.

Thus, a **very limited increase in total income** for community organizations is noted over the past two years, considering that this income includes emergency funds related to COVID-19, as well as all other sources of revenue.

### SUPPORT RECEIVED

#### Actual increase in TOTAL income:

**2019-2020 = \$25,775**  
on average / organization

**2020-2021 = \$31,601**  
on average / organization

Government-issued COVID emergency funds,  
private donors and foundations

One-time wage subsidies,  
Emergency funds, SAB, etc.

Core-mission funding

### NEW REALITY

#### Need for additional funding:

**2021-2022 = \$132,835**  
on average / organization

Exhaustion among staff

Adjustment of existing activities  
New activities

Increase in demands  
New needs

Understaffing

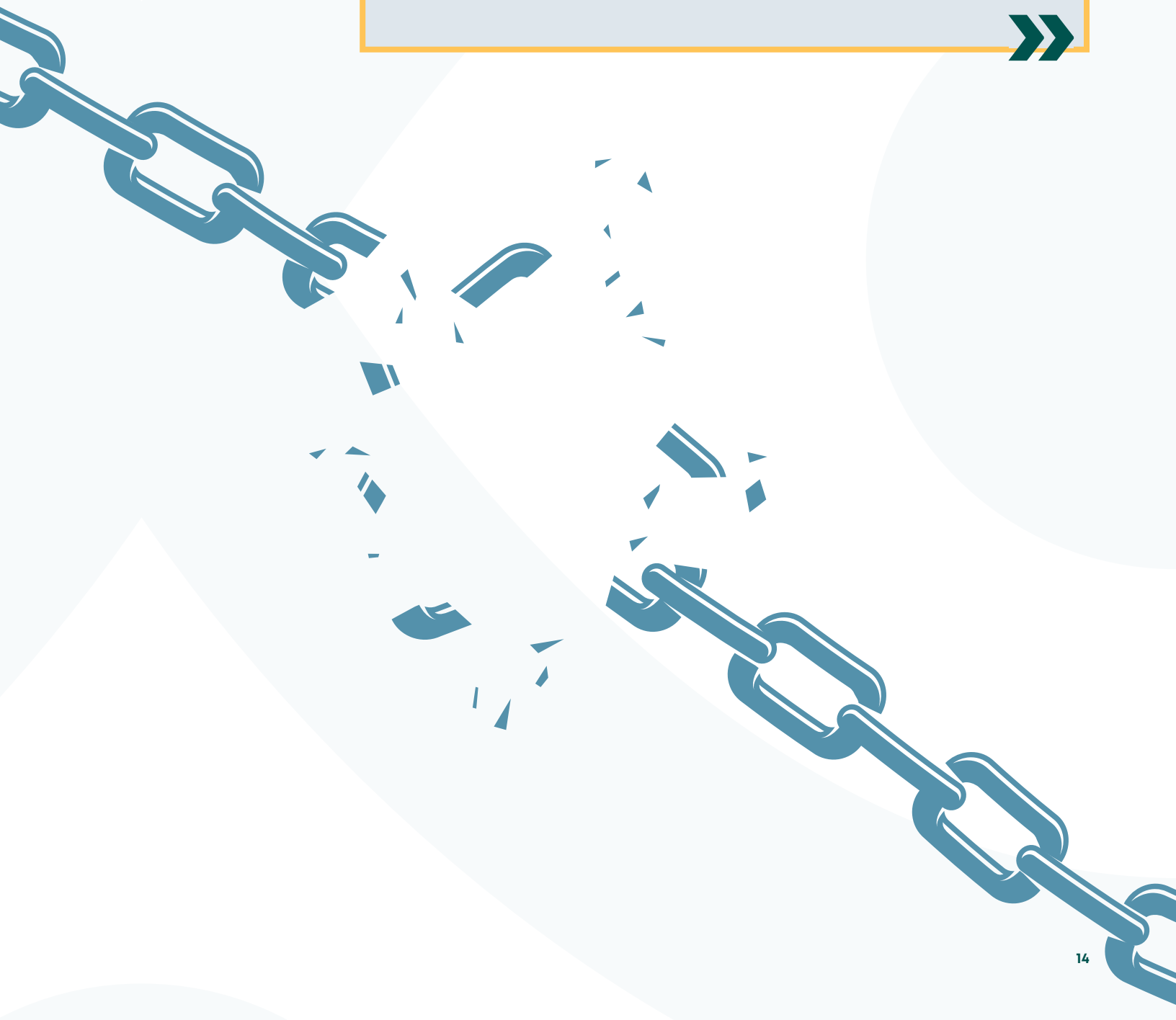
In conclusion, considering the many challenges that community organizations have had to confront over the past two years (increase in demand, adaptation of activities and lack of staff), the additional funding received **did not measure up to their actual needs**, which averaged \$132,835 per organization in 2021-2022.



It feels like with the increase in financing we have to meet all the needs... and needs have skyrocketed! Not to mention, everything's going up: the price of food, transportation costs, wages, insurance, etc.

Yes, funding is increasing, but when you look at increases on all these levels, we are no richer... in fact, we're poorer than before! \*

**Group in the Capitale-Nationale region  
Health and Social Services Sector**



## DATA SOURCES

The quantitative data presented in this report are taken from an online questionnaire distributed to all autonomous community action (ACA) organizations that received core-mission funding from the Quebec Government, from **November 5 to December 17, 2021**.

The citations presented here were extracted, and edited for ease of reading, from the written responses of community organizations to the open-ended questions asked in the survey. General information was provided to describe the organization that provided the quote, such as the type of organization, its region, and its sector (based on the core-mission funding program). Quotes followed by an asterisk were translated into English from French. The original quotes can be found in the [French version of this report](#).

## Who participated?

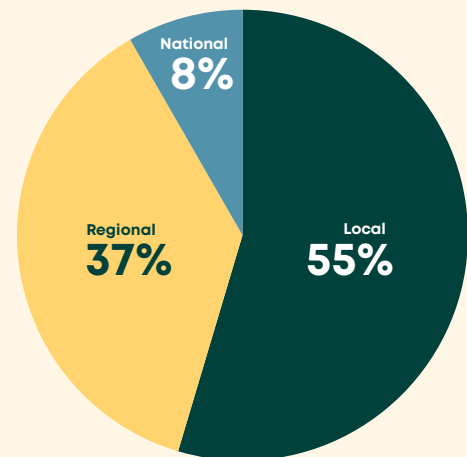
### 549 COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS RESPONDED TO THE SURVEY

The number of respondents ensured the representativity of data for the entire ACA movement, with a margin of error of  $\pm 3,92\%$  for a 95% confidence interval (19 out of 20).

Types of organization<sup>1</sup>



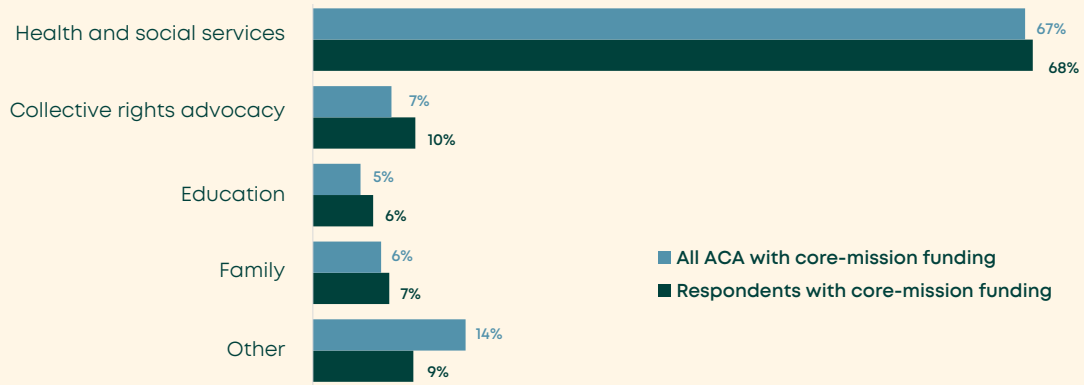
Territorial scope



<sup>1</sup> A community group is an organization whose members are primarily individuals, while an umbrella organization mainly brings together organizations.

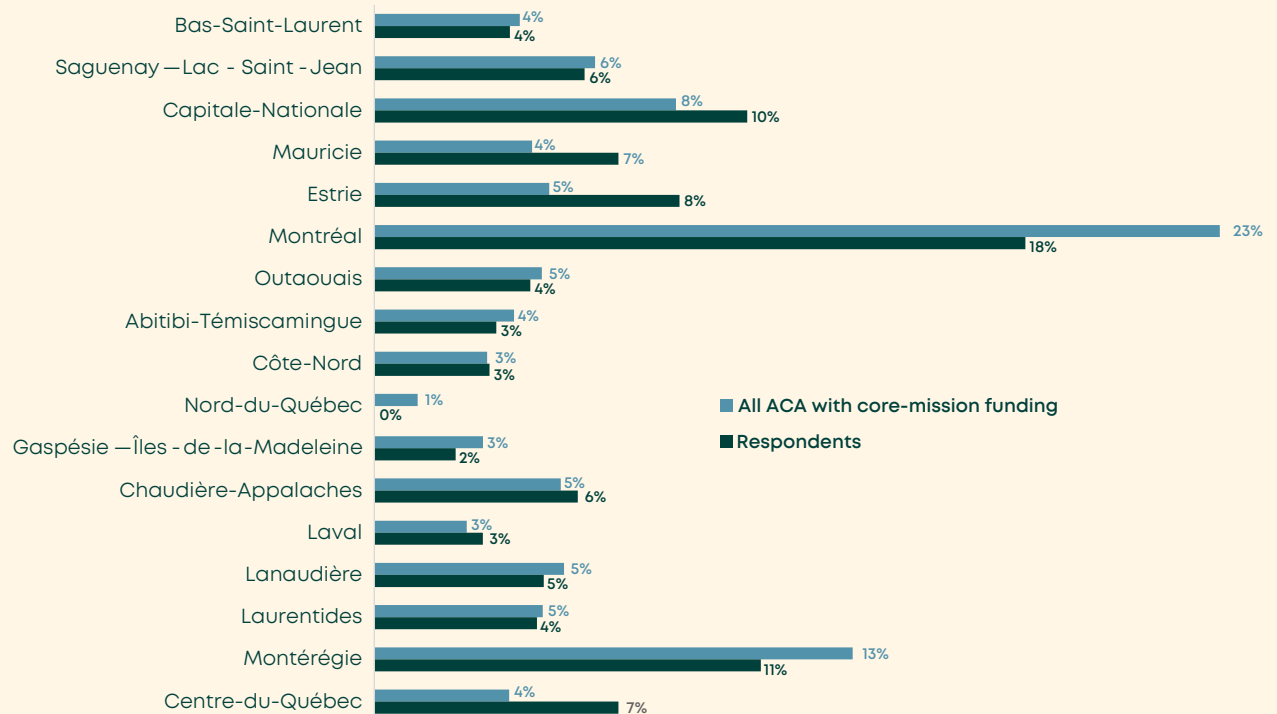
**11 CORE-MISSION FUNDING PROGRAMS REPRESENTED**  
(all except for the Environment and International Relations sectors)

Distribution of Community Organizations According to the Core-Mission Funding Program



**16 REGIONS REPRESENTED** (all except Nord-du-Québec)

Regional Distribution of Community Organizations



To learn more:



[observatoireaca.org](http://observatoireaca.org)



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