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Emergency Management Policy and Governance Branch
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Submission to the engagement on Proposed Modernization of the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act

To Emergency Management Ontario:

We are writing to share our feedback to the proposed modernization of the Emergency Management and Civil Protection Act. Nonprofit organizations across Ontario play a crucial role ensuring Ontario is prepared to respond to emergencies, from social emergencies, public health emergencies, and natural disasters, to other types of emergencies that carry risk to the social fabric and wellbeing of communities. A supportive emergency management legislative framework to facilitate strong partnerships with nonprofits will greatly enhance Ontario's development and deployment of emergency management capabilities.

ONN is the independent nonprofit network for the 58,000 nonprofits and charities in Ontario, focused on policy, advocacy and services to strengthen the sector as a key pillar of our society and economy. We work to create a public policy environment that allows nonprofits to thrive. We engage our network of diverse nonprofit organizations across Ontario to work together on issues affecting the sector and channel the voices of our network to government, funders, and other stakeholders.

Summary of feedback

Emergency management involves various levels of emergency responses. From the preparation work before an emergency happens and the immediate action during an emergency (e.g. evacuations), to short term responses (e.g. emergency shelter and food distribution,) and long term responses (e.g. mental health care), each stage is important to prevent, mitigate, prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies.

Nonprofit organizations across Ontario play a crucial role in every stage of emergency responses. They have a strong connection with volunteers that no other sectors do - the sector has dedicated a significant amount of time and resources building trust and long-term relationships with their volunteers. The sector's breadth and depth of expertise in coordinating

and delivering services, especially with hard to reach populations, is also vital during emergencies. This was evident during the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, where nonprofits took the lead doing outreach and education in hardest-hit communities and leading [vaccination efforts](#) in hard-to-reach populations. During natural disasters like flooding and forest fires, when families are forced to evacuate from their homes, and when grocery stores are empty from the sudden surge in demand, food banks [spring into action](#) to help secure individual donations and serve the community. When everything is shut down, food banks are able to provide meals for families who are stranded. In addition, nonprofits can help ensure the unique needs of vulnerable communities are considered throughout the emergency management cycle.

To better help nonprofits supporting communities before, during, and after emergencies, we recommend Emergency Management Ontario:

1. Work with nonprofits to develop a framework for the roles of nonprofits in emergency preparedness and response.
2. Work with nonprofits to create formal partnerships and agreements with nonprofit organizations to deliver essential support and services in the emergency management cycle.
3. Ensure the partnerships and agreements are reciprocal by providing dedicated and consistent support and resources to nonprofit partner organizations.

Our comments are a response to the questions in the discussion guide, under focus area 3: *Enhancing coordination between government and emergency management partners* and focus area 4: *Improving the consistency, quality and inclusivity of emergency programs*

Questions and answers

Focus area 3: Enhancing coordination between government and emergency management partners

7. How can the province's emergency management legislative framework support the effective coordination and oversight of partnerships with NGOs and other stakeholders to enhance the development and deployment of emergency management capabilities?

Ontario's emergency management legislative framework can support the effective coordination and oversight of partnership with NGOs by working with nonprofits to develop a framework for the role of nonprofits in emergency preparedness and response, and creating formal partnerships and agreements between the Ontario government and nonprofits.

Nonprofits are an important source of nongovernmental aid for communities during disaster response and recovery, whether the organization has an emergency preparedness and response mandate or not. From organizing public health promotion campaigns, delivering vaccination programs, and rescuing animals after natural disasters, to deploying emergency supplies, providing shelters and feeding communities through food banks, nonprofits act fast to care for their communities. In addition, nonprofits are stewards of volunteers. The Ontario Volunteer

Centre Network (OVCN), for example, is an association of 15 local volunteer centres whose independent efforts support, promote, and enhance volunteerism across Ontario. Their extensive lists of skilled, committed, and diverse volunteers can be mobilized quickly to meet specific emergency needs.

Despite their crucial role, there is currently a lack of collaboration and coordination between the provincial government and nonprofit organizations when it comes to emergency preparedness and response. Nonprofits' roles are often forgotten by government agencies, and on the occasions where they are included, organizations are often pulled into these conversations in an ad hoc manner, with limited context or support.

To tap into the full potential of nonprofits in the emergency management cycle, the government should work with nonprofits to develop a framework for nonprofits' roles in emergency preparedness and response. The framework will help highlight and clarify nonprofits various roles in emergency preparedness and response.

In addition, formal partnerships and agreements between the Ontario government and nonprofits will improve coordination and collaboration. These agreements should clearly outline the roles and expectations from nonprofits, including the type of support needed from nonprofits for each type of emergency.

The partnerships between the Ontario government and nonprofits should be reciprocal as nonprofits require support to be prepared for emergencies themselves and to create or oversee their organizational emergency preparedness programs. This could include providing training and exercises to enhance nonprofits emergency preparedness. The Community Emergency Preparedness Grant, for example, can be helpful for nonprofits to purchase and upgrade emergency supplies and equipment. During emergencies, nonprofits might need additional support to maintain essential services. Extreme weather, exacerbated by climate change, and cyber attacks can leave nonprofits themselves vulnerable and impact their ability to deliver essential services. Flooding for example, can damage food banks' fridges and storage spaces, destroying food inventories. Nonprofits need to be able to turn to the government for consistent and dedicated support in these instances. Nonprofits are also likely targets for cyber attacks as many nonprofits store sensitive personal information and medical records of clients and patients, as well as donor data and banking details. Cyber attacks can significantly disrupt essential services delivered by nonprofits. Although cybersecurity risk is relevant to every nonprofit, many nonprofits do not have the capacity or resources to prepare for and respond to cyber attacks. Having a provincial centralized resource that all stakeholders, including municipalities and nonprofits can leverage in times of an emergency will be helpful.

Focus area 4: Improving the consistency, quality and inclusivity of emergency programs
10. How can the province's emergency management legislative framework support effective coordination with emergency management partners and inclusive emergency management programs that consistently and effectively consider the needs of specific populations who may experience unique challenges during emergencies?

It is important for the province and municipalities to leverage the expertise and relationships of those already working with and for vulnerable populations. In an emergency, people will turn to those they know and trust, and often that will be the nonprofits in their communities (food banks, community health centres, shelters and more). Even before an emergency takes place, vulnerable populations are often already at a disadvantage: they might not have the resources, like cellphones and wi-fi, to stay informed, or the social networks or transportation to evacuate when necessary. In addition, during and after an emergency, the number of vulnerable people might increase. Nonprofits that serve vulnerable populations on a daily basis should be actively involved in readiness, response and recovery efforts to ensure vulnerable people do not fall through the cracks.

Conclusion

Emergencies can have widespread impacts on many parts of society and managing them requires provincial collaboration and coordination on hazards and risks across government in coordination with emergency management partners, including nonprofits. The 2023 annual report [Provincial Emergency Management Strategy and Action Plan](#) identified nonprofits as key partners during emergency preparedness and response, and listed “partnering with non-governmental organizations to support local emergency preparedness and response to enhance the province’s emergency response capabilities” as one of the next steps.

A framework for nonprofits roles in emergency preparedness, along with formalized partnerships and dedicated resources and support for nonprofits will unleash their power in providing care and support to communities and the government in the emergency management cycle. As the Ministry considers how to move forward on these recommendations, ONN would be pleased to convene the sector or join further discussions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'P. Uppal-Sandhu', followed by a period.

Pamela Uppal-Sandhu
Director of Policy
Interim Co-Executive Director
Ontario Nonprofit Network