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Philanthropy and the Coronavirus crisis : Making the shift towards a preventive model

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The COVID-19 pandemic has provoked an unprecedented state of emergency in Quebec, Canada, and the rest of the world. Reassuringly, we are also witnessing a wave of solidarity, mutual aid and generosity that rises to the challenges emerging alongside the coronavirus SARS-CoV-2. The strength and resilience of philanthropy, when faced with large scale international issues, has already been discussed this past January during the Australian bushfires (<https://philab.uqam.ca/blogue-accueil/philanthropie-crise-climatique/>)^[1].

Manifestations of solidarity will continue to increase with the recent announcement of the UN's "Global Humanitarian Response Plan" paired with a 2 billion dollar call for donations. The Secretary-General, António Guterres, who has already spoken out against the "million" deaths caused by lack of solidarity, has reinforced his claim, on March 25th of this year, by calling out the inevitable need for solidarity at the global level, as "countries' individual responses will not be enough". Within this global pandemic, what role does philanthropy play?

Four strategies

Faced with the scale of needs to be met, philanthropy can resort to four strategies.

First, they must reconsider the philanthropic act itself: revise the notion of 'donation' and broaden the scope of solidarity. The main effect of the coronavirus crisis is everyone being forced into confinement. However, people's on-going needs have not disappeared even though others have manifested themselves. Maintaining services to the most vulnerable populations relies on neighbourhood solidarity. Volunteers and caregivers make up philanthropy's pool of first respondents and have widened the scope of philanthropic action. Examples of this broader conception of philanthropy are plentiful and are multiplying daily.

Next, philanthropy must join in on the efforts to end the crisis. Major actions are being taken on an international scale. First, the alliance between the United Nations Foundation, the Swiss Philanthropy Foundation and the World Health Organization (WHO), in order to implement the *COVID-19 Solidarity Response Fund* (<https://www.who.int/news-room/detail/13-03-2020-who-un-foundation-and-partners-launch-first-of-its-kind-covid-19-solidarity-response-fund>) on March 13th, 2020. Now, the UN has announced their 2 billion dollar “Humanitarian Response Plan”. Their objective is to collect donations from a variety of donors on the global level to support the actions being taken in every country to curb the spread of the virus^[2]. Regarding large-scale campaigns, this is a historic moment for philanthropy, and it has the financial capacity to support the work of organizations both locally and internationally.

Thirdly, philanthropy will have a role to play in post-crisis recovery and support regarding social justice. Let us be reminded that the pandemic's effects are felt differently depending on the social group in question^[3]. While some people benefit from quite favourable conditions, others, less privileged, find themselves on the front lines, defending the public wellbeing. Also, beyond the varying health risks from one profession to another, it is important to highlight that the impacts of confinement – and the social crisis it is causing – will be more strongly felt by certain at-risk individuals and groups. The dynamics of inequality challenge the philanthropic system with the actions to be taken to think up innovative ways to tackle social injustice.

Finally, along with other social actors, philanthropy will have the difficult task of identifying the lessons to be learned from this pandemic in order to become a key actor in prevention strategies, including participating in the transformation of our current economic paradigm. We are now facing the brutal reality of our economic model's flaws. For this, foundations can pitch in their financial capital. Via impact investment strategies and solidarity-based finance, they will become, if they so wish, major agents of change.

The shift to preventive philanthropy

As with the Australian bushfires, this global pandemic requires philanthropy to adapt to this century's challenges while going beyond the charitable and reactive dimensions. We encourage a more preventive philanthropy to support the actions to be taken by visionary and committed political decision-makers to bring about the necessary transformations of our current economic paradigm. The coronavirus crisis has shown us how fragile our current lifestyle is. Before reaching the much anticipated 'back to normal', we must inevitably go through an improvement in the moral and ecological spheres of our normality. A focus on preventive philanthropy can help us take the first steps down that path.

Translated by Katherine Mac Donald (<https://philab.uqam.ca/membre/katherine-mac-donald/>)

Consultez la version longue de cet article ici:

Face au coronavirus, une mobilisation sans précédent des organisations de bienfaisance (<https://philab.uqam.ca/blogue-accueil/face-au-coronavirus-une-mobilisation-sans-precedent-des-organisations-de-bienfaisance/>)

La version française de cet article a été publiée dans Le Devoir et The Conversation Canada:

Le Devoir: Face au virus, l'apport de la philanthropie (https://www.ledevoir.com/opinion/libre-opinion/576341/face-au-virus-l-apport-de-la-philanthropie?fbclid=IwAR0XNnavneZm7B3NgL1otCLpxzIP5ExZn5apSQ-_hwy_-FHTKBlaco4bgUc)

The Conversation Canada: Covid-19: comment aider en temps de crise ou le grand défi de la philanthropie (https://theconversation.com/covid-19-comment-aider-en-temps-de-crise-ou-le-grand-defi-de-la-philanthropie-134837?fbclid=IwAR24CBTMHbnyvJxAbiBla9YAfh3dOXVY-Or_QpwBMj8ICXQpQNU3LNea8YI)

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