

NEWS RELEASE - November 6, 2018

First-Ever Toronto Social Capital Study Released

New insights on social trust, social networks, civic connection, and neighbourhood support

TORONTO, Nov. 6, 2018 – Today, **Toronto Foundation** and the **Environics Institute for Survey Research**, released the **Toronto Social Capital Study**, a benchmarking report assessing the city’s social capital levels. The study’s key findings, as well as the announcement of nine resident-led projects to strengthen social capital and urban resilience at the neighbourhood level, were shared with the audience of over 400 city builders and philanthropists. A PDF of the **Toronto Social Capital Study** is available at <https://torontofoundation.ca/vitalsigns/>. Watch the **Toronto Social Capital Study** video that describes the importance of social capital in building a resilient city here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tegt16Fkzc>

The study found that Toronto’s social capital levels appear to be solid, and have been mostly stable over the past five years, based on comparable research conducted by Statistics Canada. At the same time, data shows that a substantial number of the city’s residents are reporting lower levels of social capital. This shows up most clearly among Torontonians who are isolated from their neighbours, those with low incomes and financial insecurity, residents in their late 20s facing the challenges of establishing themselves, and in some cases racialized minorities.

“Social capital is critical to a good quality of life, a healthy population, safe streets, and economic prosperity,” said **Sharon Avery, President & CEO, Toronto Foundation**. “While some residents are experiencing high levels of social capital, we cannot ignore the very real differences in our experiences of it. The **Toronto Social Capital Study** will be a valuable tool for city builders and philanthropists to understand how to best invest in communities and help people reach the full potential they see for themselves. Together, with the support of those working across sectors and neighbourhoods, we can build a more resilient Toronto.”

Social capital is an important driver of life satisfaction and resilience, and is often described as the essential “lubricant” that binds people together as a city. The **Toronto Social Capital Study** measured residents’ responses city-wide, across four dimensions:

- **Social Trust**, the sense of trust Torontonians have in one another and city institutions;
- **Social Networks**, the strength of residents’ informal and formal relationships;
- **Civic Connection**, the extent to which people are civically engaged; and
- **Neighbourhood Support**, how citizens see their neighbourhoods as supporting the type of life and environment they want for themselves.

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE STUDY'S KEY FINDINGS:

The findings of the *Toronto Social Capital Study* do not portray a single story and are in large measure defined by how social capital is experienced within groups that may be defined by who people are, where they live, and the circumstances of their lives. The strength of social capital varies by such characteristics as age, household income, race or culture, neighbourhood area, and whether or not people know their neighbours.

- **Toronto as a whole appears to have solid levels of social capital** and this has remained notably steady since 2013, on most measures.
- **Knowing one's neighbours is one of the most significant factors** impacting who does and does not have higher levels of social capital.
- Given the diversity of the city's population, connecting with people who are different from oneself is an important component of strong social capital (in this case defined as "bridging capital"). Study results show that **significant proportions of Torontonians report at least half of their recent friend contacts are with those who are different from them** (in terms of mother tongue, age, sex, education level, and/or ethnic background). It is also notable that such contact has increased over the past five years and is especially widespread among the city's younger residents.
- **Across generations, residents aged 65 and older have the strongest levels of social capital.** While social isolation is an issue for many seniors, especially those living alone, the study reveals that Torontonians of this generation have the highest levels of social capital on most dimensions. In contrast, **residents aged 25 to 29 exhibit the lowest levels**, likely due to life stage and the particular challenges young adults in Toronto face with respect to employment and housing affordability.
- Social capital differs across the city's largest ethno-cultural populations, but not in a uniform way. In some cases there are few differences, while in others they are significant. In particular, **the city's Chinese community as a whole exhibits lower levels of social capital on many dimensions**, such as engagement with other people in groups beyond their family and friendship networks. The reasons for this are not clear, and may be related to a vulnerability (e.g. social isolation, an unsupportive neighbourhood), or may reflect choices based on cultural background and/or social interactions from a historical perspective.
- **Residents are more likely than not to express confidence in the various local institutions serving their community.** This is most likely to be the case for the police, neighbourhood associations and local businesses, in comparison to the media and local government. However, **it should be noted that this confidence has declined in the past five years, especially in the police, the school system, and the justice system and courts.** In this instance, trust is lowest among Torontonians who are struggling financially, and/or who identify as Black.
- While much is said about declining voter turnout, the study indicates that **Torontonians' political engagement has strengthened over the past five years**, and their volunteer participation and charitable giving has remained stable over the same time period.

- The city's **Neighbourhood Improvement Areas (NIAs)** as a group have social capital levels comparable to the rest of the city on many measures; they are lower in some cases but also higher, notably in residents' sense of social agency. Residents in NIAs are more likely than Torontonians in other areas to believe that people working together as a group can make a big difference in solving local problems.
- **Social capital is strikingly similar across generations living in Canada.** On most dimensions, immigrants and first-generation Canadians have social capital levels similar to those for residents whose families have been in Canada for several generations.
- While most residents have people they can rely on, **6% of Torontonians report having no close family members they can rely on to call for help or talk about what's on their mind, and a similar proportion say they have no close friends.** While this is a small percentage of the total population, it is a sizeable number of adult residents (over 100,000) who lack this essential form of social support. Furthermore, those least likely to have no close friends or family, include those with the lowest levels of education and income, and those that live in the downtown core.

The **Toronto Social Capital Study** is the first study of its kind in Canada. Its insights are intended to provide city builders and community leaders with data, which may inform policies and philanthropic investments that can improve the quality of life for the city's residents. Allocating resources to address the vulnerabilities experienced by specific groups or neighbourhoods, as well as investment focused at building public confidence in local institutions and promoting active engagement among all residents in civic and political life, are a few of the ways that social capital can be supported in the city.

The event also saw the announcement of nine projects selected to receive **Toronto Foundation Resilience Builder Grants** aimed at strengthening social capital and urban resilience at the neighbourhood level. These one-time grants of up to \$25,000 foster resident-led initiatives that build mutual support among neighbours, share knowledge and help neighbours develop skills, and build new relationships and expand networks of support. The organizations that will champion Resilience Builder Grant projects are: **Agincourt Community Services Association, Black Creek Community Health Centre, Boys & Girls Club of East Scarborough, East Scarborough Storefront, North York Community House, Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre, Rexdale Community Health Centre, Scadding Court Community Centre, and The Neighbourhood Organization.**

The **Toronto Social Capital Study** is a partnership of leading civic organizations. The research was conducted by the **Environics Institute for Survey Research**, in partnership with **Toronto Foundation**, as well as **TAS Design Build, Community Foundations of Canada/Canadian Heritage, United Way Greater Toronto, MLSE Foundation, Ontario Trillium Foundation, and the Wellesley Institute.** Additional support has been provided by the **National Institute on Ageing, Environics Analytics, CanadaHelps, and the City of Toronto and Toronto Public Health.** Project partners have provided quotes on the value and importance of social capital that can be found in the background section of the press release.

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About Toronto Foundation

Established in 1981, Toronto Foundation is one of 191 Community Foundations in Canada. We pool philanthropic dollars and facilitate charitable donations for maximum community impact. Our individual, family and organizational Funds number more than 500 and we administer more than \$400 million in assets. Through strategic granting, thought leadership and convening, we engage in city building, mobilizing people and resources to increase the quality of life in Toronto. The Toronto Social Capital Study is a part of the Toronto's Vital Signs program. Visit www.torontofoundation.ca and follow @TorontoFdn and #TOSocialCapital

About Environics Institute for Survey Research

The Environics Institute for Survey Research is a non-profit public interest research organization that conducts relevant and original public opinion and social research on important issues of public policy and social change. It is through such research that organizations and individuals can better understand Canada today, how it has been changing, and where it may be heading. <https://www.environicsinstitute.org>.

BACKGROUND

QUOTES FROM TORONTO SOCIAL CAPITAL STUDY PROJECT PARTNERS

TAS Design Build

"We're proud to contribute to this ground-breaking research and its findings will inform our city-building work," said **Mazyar Mortazavi, President & CEO, TAS**. "With real estate as our platform, we build thoughtfully and deliberately within the community, and with an eye to fostering long-term social and economic resilience."

Community Foundations of Canada/Canadian Heritage

"This ground-breaking research will help take our understanding of people's sense of belonging to the next level. It has the potential to significantly impact how we think about community and social cohesion," says **Andrew Chunilall, CEO of Community Foundations of Canada**. "The *Toronto Social Capital Study* not only provides us with new data and fresh insights, but will also help inform important conversations about trust, reciprocity and connection as key ingredients of a community's wellbeing. We're delighted to partner on this work and congratulate the Toronto Foundation for its leadership in this study."

United Way Greater Toronto

"In a region with growing inequality, it's important to have a picture of what social capital looks like: who has how much, and what they can do with it. We know that social capital impacts people's access to opportunity – from things as tangible as the kinds of jobs you can get, to as intangible as what you imagine your future to hold." – **Michelynn Lafèche, Vice-President, Strategy, Research & Policy, United Way Greater Toronto**

MLSE Foundation

"To MLSE Foundation, social capital represents the shared strength that comes from people coming together," said **Tanya Mruck, Executive Director, MLSE Foundation**. "We believe that when neighbourhoods are built to foster activity and connection, it creates opportunities for people to learn from each other and rise together. This is the inspiration behind our investments in neighbourhood recreational facilities, helping social capital grow through sport and physical activity and we are proud to be a part of this initiative with Toronto Foundation."

Ontario Trillium Foundation

"This research is a landmark in exploring the role of social capital on sense of belonging and wellbeing across communities. Understanding how this impacts interconnectedness and social cohesion, enables us to better support and invest in positive change with the goal of making Ontario healthy and vibrant. The Ontario Trillium Foundation is proud to be a partner in this important study." – **Katharine Bambrick, CEO, Ontario Trillium Foundation**

Wellesley Institute

"Toronto is seeing a period of rapid growth, and while this has many advantages, it also contributes to our city's widening inequality. We live in siloes which has damaging effects on our health. We all know that having a core group of people we can count on for support keeps us healthy – but what many people may not realize is that a society where different groups are better linked is actually more important for your health. Building these links between groups is called bridging social capital and it is a vital component of wellbeing. We need to ensure that we build better links between groups in the city if we want good health for everyone." – **Dr. Kwame McKenzie, CEO, Wellesley Institute**

National Institute on Ageing

"Cities rightly consider the built environment in relation to future prosperity and inclusiveness, but social capital - our connections to our institutions, services, community, and to one another - is equally vital as we collectively work to make Toronto a great place to live and to age. Understanding how well connected our citizens are will help us understand where residents are thriving and where more work needs to be done to combat social and civic isolation." – **Michael Nicin, Executive Director, National Institute on Ageing, Ryerson University**

CanadaHelps

"We can never forget that we are all connected, and our relationships with our families, friends, and communities are driving forces in making our world better. In our work at CanadaHelps, I see the critical role that community-based charities play, and those community connections allow us to build the social capital that we are learning is the glue that allows us to function together, socially rather than economically. Building trust, goodwill, honesty, and respect strengthens our cities, our connections to others, and our souls." – **Marina Glogovac, President and CEO, CanadaHelps**

City of Toronto/Toronto Public Health

"The conditions in which we live and work impact our health and also our relationship networks," said **Dr. Eileen de Villa, Toronto's Medical Officer of Health**. "Our work in public health is to reduce health inequities and improve the health status of residents. Strengthening social capital helps to achieve this goal in part by enhancing our relationships. By taking the time to engage and connect with those around us, this can help promote positive mental health and strengthen our capacity to advocate for important policy changes that can improve health, which in turn build stronger and more resilient communities."

ABOUT THE TORONTO SOCIAL CAPITAL STUDY PROJECT PARTNERS

TAS Design Build

TAS Design Build is a developer of mixed-use buildings, and its people are entrepreneurs for the public good. We build to connect, not isolate, and fundamentally believe that connected communities lead to beautiful, more resilient cities. As city builders, we have the opportunity to contribute positively to the city. We aim to support the local economy, celebrate diverse forms of art and culture, and foster positive relationships within our neighbourhoods. In addition, our buildings are designed to minimize their environmental footprint over the course of their life cycle. For more information, please visit www.tasdesignbuild.com and follow us [@tasdesignbuild](https://twitter.com/tasdesignbuild).

Community Foundations of Canada/Canadian Heritage

Community Foundations of Canada is the national network for Canada's 191 community foundations. Together we are a philanthropic movement working across sectors to help Canadians invest in building strong and resilient communities. [Twitter](https://twitter.com/commfdnscanada) and [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/commfdnscanada): @commfdnscanada, and [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/commfdnscanada) and [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/community-foundations-of-canada): @Community Foundations of Canada. Visit is at <http://communityfoundations.ca>.

United Way Greater Toronto

United Way Greater Toronto is dedicated to fighting local poverty in all its forms, working with communities in Peel, Toronto, and York Region. Together with our partners, we create opportunities for a better life for everyone across our region. As the largest non-governmental funder of social services in our region, United Way Greater Toronto mobilizes people and resources to support a network of agencies that help people when and where they need it most. Join United Way's #UprisingofCare and help us build a region where poverty has no power. To learn more, visit unitedwaygt.org.

MLSE Foundation

MLSE Foundation believes all kids should have access to sport and the opportunity to develop lasting dreams on the playing field. With the support of MLSE's teams, MLSE Foundation funds the refurbishments of local athletic facilities and funds charities that support kids through sports and recreational programs. Since launching in December 2009, MLSE Foundation has invested more than \$35 million into our community. For more information visit mlsefoundation.org and follow @MLSEFoundation on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/MLSEFoundation), [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/mlsefoundation) and [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/mlsefoundation).

Ontario Trillium Foundation

The Ontario Trillium Foundation is an agency of the Government of Ontario and one of Canada's leading grantmaking foundations. The mission of the Foundation is to build healthy and vibrant communities in Ontario by investing in community-based initiatives and strengthening the capacity of the public benefit sector. OTF awarded more than \$120 million to some 700 projects across the province last year. Visit us at www.otf.ca and follow us on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/ONTrillium) / [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/ONTrillium) / [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/ONTrillium) at @ONTrillium and [LinkedIn](https://www.linkedin.com/company/ontario-trillium-foundation) at Ontario Trillium Foundation.

Wellesley Institute

Wellesley Institute is the leading research and policy organization in the GTA to improve health and health equity through action on the social determinants of health. For more than a century, it's been working for a healthier and more equitable Greater Toronto Area for all through applied research, effective policy solutions, knowledge mobilization, and innovation. Find more information about how Wellesley Institute is advancing population health and reducing health inequities at www.wellesleyinstitute.com.

National Institute on Ageing

The National Institute on Ageing (NIA) is a university-based think tank focused on leading cross-disciplinary research, thought leadership, innovative solutions, policies, and products on ageing. The NIA's mission is to help governments, health care systems, pension plans, businesses, and Canadian families to best meet the challenges and opportunities posed to ageing Canadians and by an ageing demographic. The NIA is dedicated to enhancing successful ageing across the life course. It considers ageing issues from a broad range of perspectives, including income and retirement security, health and wellbeing, and social inclusion and participation. <https://www.ryerson.ca/nia/>

CanadaHelps

CanadaHelps.org allows donors to quickly and safely donate and fundraise online for any registered Canadian charity and provides charities the secure online fundraising platform they need to succeed. CanadaHelps has facilitated over \$970 million in donations to Canadian charities online since it launched in 2000. Over 1.8 million Canadians have donated to charities using CanadaHelps and over 18,000 Canadian charities fundraise using the CanadaHelps online tools. The mission of CanadaHelps is to inform, inspire, and connect donors and charities and to democratize access to effective technology and education in the charitable sector. For more information, visit www.CanadaHelps.org.

City of Toronto/Toronto Public Health

Toronto is Canada's largest city, the fourth largest in North America, and home to a diverse population of about 2.8 million people. It is a global centre for business, finance, arts and culture and is consistently ranked one of the world's most livable cities. For information on non-emergency City services and programs, Toronto residents, businesses and visitors can visit toronto.ca, call 311, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, or follow us on [Twitter](https://twitter.com/TorontoComms) at twitter.com/TorontoComms, on [Instagram](https://www.instagram.com/cityofto) at [instagram.com/cityofto](https://www.instagram.com/cityofto) or on [Facebook](https://www.facebook.com/cityofto) at [facebook.com/cityofto](https://www.facebook.com/cityofto). Our corporate Twitter handle is: [@TOPublicHealth](https://twitter.com/TOPublicHealth)

TORONTO FOUNDATION RESILIENCE BUILDER GRANT RECIPIENTS

Agincourt Community Services Association

The Health Resiliency Project will build mutual support, provide opportunities for shared learning, and foster new connections by working with ten resident leaders to implement health and wellness initiatives throughout the Steeles-L'Amoreaux neighbourhood. The goal is for residents to have a solid health and wellness roadmap to follow so that they can learn how to be healthy, practice making healthy choices with regards to eating healthy and exercise and impart this knowledge to other community members.

<https://www.agincourtcommunityservices.com/>

Black Creek Community Health Centre

PEACH Radio will address issues that are not talked about (high attrition rates, police brutality, youth trafficking). It will provide an open opportunity to bridge the gap between the north side and south side of Finch, and create a voice to be heard, to mitigate risk factors, and to discuss conflicts. This radio station will help create dialogue and squash issues that youth face and want to improve in this community. It will also hold other agencies accountable because youth will have their own creative medium to demonstrate their needs.

<http://www.bcchc.com/>

Boys & Girls Club of East Scarborough

Youth will be engaged through training opportunities with coaches who serve as role models, focusing on both academic and athletic successes and through sharing similar lived experiences. The core element of our program is on-going mentorship. Youth are engaged with interactive learning opportunities which transcend the boundaries of the field and benefit them in their daily lives. By collaborating with community agencies who specialize in mental health, social skills development and educational supports, the program aims to ensure that student athletes are adequately equipped and prepared to be successful in the post-secondary journey. <https://esbgc.net/>

East Scarborough Storefront

The *Diversity, Dialogue & Disruption* initiative asks the question, what would happen if youth disrupted dominant narratives of being, seeing, feeling, and acting, to build healthy spaces for resilient youth from diverse backgrounds and with diverse perspectives to engage in honest, healing dialogue? In collaboration with community organizations, youth will facilitate deep community conversations on a variety of topics under the umbrella of mental health. There are three categories of dialogue - peer to peer, youth to police, and community. <https://thestorefront.org/>

North York Community House

The *Team of Ten* program aims to continue building connections between two different groups of youth who do not otherwise have the chance to meet each other. By working together, youth will be able to take action on similar interests that they have discovered they have. As they learn about how to be good leaders, the youth will join together to fill some of the gaps that they have identified, by organizing activities that youth are interested in. By creating a way to make good connections youth will be able to continue to connect with each other in the future. <https://www.nych.ca/>

Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre

The *Parkdale Women's Leadership Group* aims to create a monthly community-led drop-in space for peer-to-peer mental health training, support, and resources. Parkdale has the highest rates of hospitalization for mental health in the West Toronto sub-region, yet there is a lack of training for community members to know how to respond when someone is in crisis or how to support oneself through self-care. With the rise of violence and mental health crises in the city, the community needs to build alternatives to police interventions through community-based response training. Parkdale already provides many institutional supports for mental health through organizations such as the Parkdale Queen West Community Health Centre and Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, but there are limited spaces for community-driven, peer-based emotional support and recovery. <http://parc.on.ca/>

Rexdale Community Health Centre

Food insecurity is a major issue in the Rexdale community. Toronto Public Health and partners, including Rexdale Community Health Centre, are in the process of implementing Toronto's first *Social Supermarket* at the Rexdale Community Hub. This initiative would reduce food insecurity by enhancing access to affordable food. This project will allow for potential training opportunities for the Rexdale community. Through assessments conducted in the community, residents have identified not only the necessity for this initiative, but also the skills and training opportunities that can arise from its implementation. In this sense, Rexdale Community Health Centre is looking to strengthen community connections, by having residents take on a leadership role in developing and implementing the Social Supermarket. <https://www.rexdalechc.com/>

Scadding Court Community Centre

The Scadding Court Community Centre is interested in creating initiatives that will support residents and community members of the Alexandra Park / Atkinson Co-op neighbourhood and wider city of Toronto in building their social capital as a way to promote economic growth. Over the course of 12 months, the Scadding Court Community Centre will host 10 networking sessions that will offer increased economic opportunities by providing access to mentors, peers, industry-experts, and other resources related to employment and entrepreneurship. <https://scaddingcourt.org/>

The Neighbourhood Organization

In consultation with some senior and youth community members from Thorncliffe Park and Flemingdon Park, the community has proposed the *Colours of our Voice* project which will focus on creating a mural project in the Thorncliffe Park community on the foundation of mutual support of different generations of people in the community from diverse backgrounds. It will create opportunities for shared learning among community members and build new relationships which will contribute not only to stronger social connections, but also a more resilient and vibrant community. This project will be accomplished with collaborative efforts by residents from Thorncliffe Park and Flemingdon Park. <https://tno-toronto.org/>