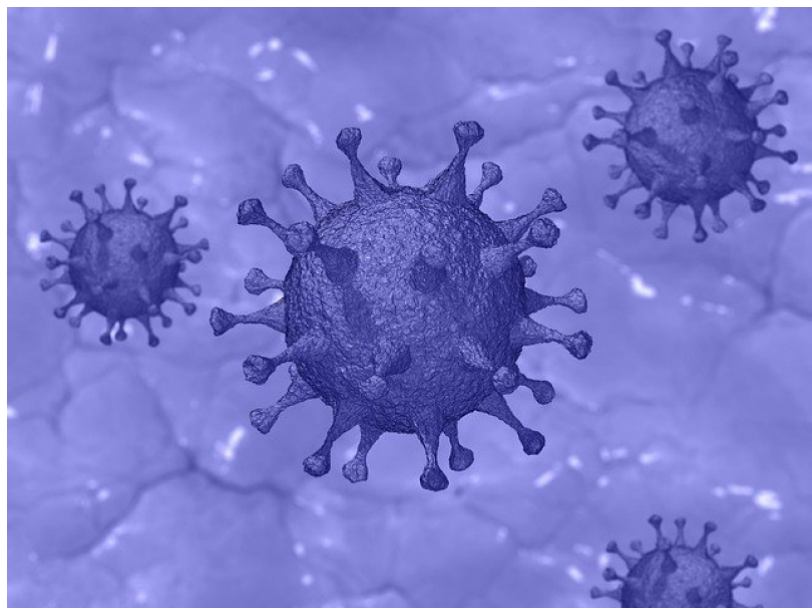


Cancer Society losing millions, closes offices, lays off workers to hold on

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COVID-19 illustration (Stock image)

The Canadian Cancer Society is projecting losses of \$80-to-\$100 million this fiscal year, and has laid off one-third of its workforce in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, says a director for the charity's Atlantic region.

The layoffs amount to about 300 employees nationally, said Kelly Cull, director of public policy, while the losses are equivalent to more than half of its annual revenue. This has led to the closure of seven of its offices across the country.

There are no New Brunswick closures to date, but several were in smaller Canadian cities, including Prince Albert, Saskatchewan and two in Newfoundland. Cull said decisions were made based on which locations were renting month to month.

“And the really challenging thing,” said Cull, “is we’ve seen a significant increase in terms of service demands for our virtual and telephone based programs.”

For example, under pandemic protocols, cancer patients undergoing treatment are unclear who is allowed to accompany them, or how COVID-19 impacts their treatment options, Cull said. “That takes a huge toll from a mental health perspective,” she said.

The charity's fundraising calendar has also been hard hit by the timing of the COVID crisis. The Cancer Society relies heavily on face-to face community-based events and campaigns, especially in the spring.

“Typically, this is the time of year when Canadians would see a lot of our volunteers at the grocery store selling daffodils and pins. Our Daffodil month events have obviously been cancelled,” Cull said.

Annual Relay for Life events are held in June. Last year in New Brunswick, the charity held 11 events involving 234 volunteers that raised more than \$500,000, she said.

This year, in an effort to re-imagine the fundraiser, the Cancer Society has announced Relay at Home, an online event, to be held on June 13 across Canada. It will feature all the staples of Relay for Life events, Cull said, minus the physical gathering.

In terms of service delivery during COVID-19, the organization has been forced to consider what requires face-to-face contact and what doesn't, Cull said.

In New Brunswick that has meant a wig program for chemotherapy patients who have lost hair is on hold because it requires close contact, she said. But other virtual support programs that existed prior to the pandemic have been able to continue.

“The Canadian Cancer Society and many other organizations are probably going to look different coming out of this crisis,” said Cull. “But we are looking at ways that we can reduce administration and overhead costs so that more money can be redirected to cancer patients.”