

# Religious charities cost Canadian taxpayers billions, reports find

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A Canadian organisation has called for charity law reform after finding religious charities cost taxpayers billions every year.

Canadian taxpayers subsidise religious activities by as much as \$3.2 billion annually as a result of income tax relief available to Canadians who donate to religious charities, according to Centre for Inquiry Canada (CFIC).

This violates a Supreme Court ruling that freedom of religion includes freedom from religion, because every Canadian is required to subsidise religious activities, CFIC said.

The findings were made in a [series of reports](#) arguing that organisations whose sole purpose is the advancement of religion should no longer be granted charitable status. The concluding report was published earlier this month.

In 2019 the National Secular Society released a [report](#) which also argued for a change in UK charity law to remove religious privilege.

Canada's criteria that determine which organisations qualify as a charity were inherited from British law, which recognises "the advancement of religion" as a charitable purpose.

This means organisations can register as charities if they exist only to evangelise and promote religion, without offering social or community benefits such as foodbanks.

More than 32,000 charities in Canada identify under the category of "advancement of religion", possessing assets exceeding \$47 billion.

In addition to tax relief, Canadian governments transferred slightly more than \$1 billion to charities incorporated under the category of advancement of religion in 2018.

CFIC said that organisations that require people to adhere to a particular faith or evangelise to recipients of their services should not be funded by the government.

The NSS has expressed [similar concerns](#) regarding religious charities funded by the UK government to provide public services. Last year the government announced a new [£1 million pilot fund](#) exclusively for religious organisations. The government has failed to respond to repeated requests from the NSS to justify excluding non-religious organisations from this fund.

CFIC also raised concerns about harms caused by religion, including discrimination against particular communities and restrictions on reproductive rights.

The NSS's report also highlighted how some religious charities promote harmful ideology and activities, including [extremism](#), [non-stun slaughter](#) and ['conversion therapy'](#).

Both CFIC and the NSS have concluded many charities registered under 'the advancement of religion' that do other charitable work could register under a different charitable purpose if 'the advancement of religion' were removed. Those whose activities are exclusively religious could become non-profit organisations, similar to sports and community clubs.

### NSS comment

NSS head of policy and research Megan Manson said: "When Canada inherited Britain's charity laws, it also inherited the problems accompanying the religious privilege within those laws.

"Now as both countries become increasingly irreligious and religiously-diverse, those problems are becoming ever more acute.

"The notion that taxpayers should fund overtly religious activities that serve no tangible public benefit is incompatible with secular democracy – especially when some of those activities harm people and society. The advancement of religion must therefore be removed from the list of charitable purposes in the UK and other countries with a similar charity system."

### Notes

[Centre for Inquiry Canada](#) is a not-for-profit educational organisation promoting the application of critical thinking skills, good science, and secular decision making.

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