



Canadian Police Association  
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The tragic death of George Floyd on May 25, 2020, sparked a polarizing call to action in North America to "*defund the police.*" Activists across Canada and the United States believe that cutting police budgets and reallocating funds to other social services, is a more effective means to tackle social issues and the root causes of crime.

The term "defund the police" is open to interpretation. For some, it is merely a hashtag. For others, it has many definitions: abolish the police, reduce police budgets, reallocate police funds to social services, or a move towards a social work model - replacing police officers with trained social workers or specialized response teams.

While there is universal acceptance of the need for reforms, arbitrary cuts to police funding are not the answer. Proposals to cut budgets by 10% to 20%, for example, have been put forward, with no plan on replacing the services currently delivered by the police. Also missing from the discussion is whether other health or social agencies can take on added responsibilities.

We support increased funding for social services, more focused approaches to addiction and substance abuse and measures to address socio-economic inequality. What we are opposed to, is a reactionary debate ignited by regrettable police events and driven more by ideology than by evidence.

Canada currently has the lowest police to population ratio (185 officers/100,000 population) of any comparable G7 or Commonwealth country. It is important to note that the demand for police service has evolved organically and continues to increase. Police services have never lobbied any level of government to expand their mandate. During the past thirty years, there have been several judicial decisions, legislative changes, and new policies and procedures that have redefined the role of the police officer. Many factors continue to contribute to the rising cost of policing, including increasingly complex crimes such as human trafficking, gangs and guns, organized crime, cyber-crime and child sexual exploitation.

No one in policing could agree more that police officers should not be the only agency available to respond to calls that generally are not criminal in nature. We recognize that police and mental health professionals need to work together to respond to those in a mental health crisis. That is why many Canadian police services have collaborative partnerships with other agencies. For example, the Mobile Crisis Intervention Team (MCIT) pairs mental health nurses with specially trained police officers that provide a community response to individuals in crisis. However, it is unrealistic to expect that when someone presents a danger to themselves or members of the public, that police would not be the first responders. Even with increased social supports in place, there will always be a need for front-line policing, particularly when the safety of the public is at risk.

Police use of force in our country is exceptionally rare. Each year Canadian police officers respond to almost 13 million calls for service and have millions of additional undocumented interactions with the public. Despite those numbers, the overwhelming majority of formal and informal interactions are resolved peacefully. These positive, or at the very least neutral interactions, are primarily due to Canada's remarkably well trained and professional officers.

There is no other profession in Canada outside of policing that is subject to such a high standard of accountability and transparency. Police officers perform their duties and must comply with federal and provincial regulations, criminal law, civil litigation, human rights, labour and employment law, coroner's inquests and other levels of accountability; there are many different processes exclusive to policing.

A productive dialogue around the future of policing requires a sustained focus on the entirety of the social safety system. In 2013 and 2015, for example, national summits were held in Canada to address the cost of policing and public safety, leading to significant reform across the policing sector. If Canadians are to continue to have trust and confidence in police services, the discussion requires a holistic, informed approach that engages all stakeholders, including; the police, the public, and all levels of government. The role of the police must be clearly defined, encompassing the public's expectations around police attendance at a crime or incident and how the police interact with the public.

All levels of policing, including police boards, executive ranks, and police associations also need to work collaboratively with our communities to seize this opportunity to address the systemic issue of racism highlighted by recent protests that is not exclusive to policing, but part of a broader, societal problem, and a discussion that we cannot afford to shy away from.

We believe that proactive policing and building community relationships are a better approach to addressing social issues and the root causes of crime. However, community policing is resource-intensive and requires a consistent, sustained approach. Community policing's success hinges on an adequately funded and staffed police service where officers have proactive or uncommitted time during their shift to engage in day-to-day interactions in priority neighbourhoods. Budget cuts will weaken a police service's ability to engage proactively with the community and deliver community policing where it matters most in Canada's most vulnerable communities.

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