



**Tell us a bit about your co-operative – its origins, purpose and what needs/value your organization provides to the community.**

The Co-operators Group Limited is a leading Canadian multi-line insurance and financial services co-operative with \$47.3 billion in assets under management. Our subsidiary companies provide solutions in four core areas: property and casualty (P&C) insurance, life insurance, institutional asset management and brokerage operations. We are supported by 6,249 employees and a dedicated financial advisor network with 2,530 licensed insurance representatives throughout Canada. We also serve 241 credit unions with more than 5.8 million members.

Our member organizations include co-operative organizations, credit union centrals and representative farm organizations.

Our vision to be a catalyst for a sustainable society is reflected in all aspects of our operations including our community investment programs, which support people in need and help build community resiliency. We support and fund the development of community-oriented co-operatives and social enterprises, and we work hard to contribute to communities across Canada.

**How is your co-operative responding to the current needs of the community?**

2020 has presented complex challenges. But as we work together to find solutions, we've seen these challenges lead to new understandings, insights, opportunities for growth, and hopefully, progress towards a stronger, more sustainable, and resilient society.

So many of the relationships we have established in neighbourhoods across Canada are grounded in face-to-face conversations with our clients and communities. With physical distancing in place, we've enhanced connections with our online tools, while still meeting client needs. The crisis has expanded the possibilities of digital interaction, shed light on what needs improving, and accelerated progress towards new ways of doing business.

## **What is your vision for co-operatives in rebuilding the economy post-pandemic?**

In addition to allocating funds to the provincial co-operative associations in 2020 to support their member's in addressing the challenges of COVID, The Co-operators announced the following initiative in late 2020:

Pathways to Employability (P2E) is a \$2 million Co-operators Community Funds initiative dedicated to supporting the employability of marginalized Canadian youth who have lost jobs or educational opportunities due to COVID-19 shutdowns.

"We know that young Canadians have been significantly impacted by COVID-related job losses and educational disruption, primarily due to impacts of the economic shutdown of schools and many of the sectors that primarily employ youth. Marginalized youth have been especially hard hit and some face additional challenges to employability that make them particularly vulnerable to these unprecedented unemployment levels," explains Rob Wesseling, President and CEO, The Co-operators. "The goal of The Co-operators Pathways to Employability Initiative is to create a brighter, more sustainable future for youth and small businesses by taking an innovative approach to developing solutions to respond to the urgent unmet needs created by the pandemic."

In the early months of COVID-19 shutdowns, 43% of working Canadian youth lost their jobs or had work hours reduced, according to an April 2020 Statistics Canada Labour Force Survey. Our new P2E initiative will connect these youth to quality opportunities with small businesses looking to hire, train and retain youth, including co-operatives, non-profits and social enterprises.

The pandemic had a dire impact on opportunities for youth in our communities and put a strain on the capabilities of small businesses. P2E is committed to connecting these employers to marginalized Canadian youth who will receive life skills, employment and psychosocial supports along their path to employability.

Through the P2E initiative, The Co-operators is proud to be a founding partner of the Canadian Council for Youth Prosperity's (CCYP) #ImpactCOVID: Road to Recovery Project; a two-phase, youth-led employability program. Youth will co-design a pandemic economic recovery plan with small businesses and then evaluate the plan through employment and participation in community programs across Canada. #ImpactCOVID will help marginalized youth move into higher quality, sustainable, and secure jobs, and gain valuable and impactful work experience with small businesses, including co-ops, non-profits and social enterprises. In return, these organizations will build capacity to hire, train and retain youth.

**What does the future of the co-operative sector in Ontario look like to you?**

The future is strong. More than ever we need purpose-built co-operative organizations to help solve the economic and social challenges we face in Ontario, across Canada and throughout the globe.

**What aspect of OCA's mission/strategic programs do you think is most important as a way to rebuild a more co-operative economy?**

They are all so important; without education, support and advocacy there won't be development. The time is ripe - more than ever - to demonstrate how the co-op difference can be part of the solution to our collective challenges.

**Anything else you would like to add?**

The Co-operators offers Co-op Guard insurance solutions designed specifically for the co-operative sector. Learn more about how we can help at [cooperators.ca/en/insurance/business/coopguard.aspx](https://cooperators.ca/en/insurance/business/coopguard.aspx)