

Federal departments failed to spend \$38B on promised programs, services last year

The federal government failed to spend tens of billions of dollars in the last fiscal year on promised programs and services, including new military equipment, affordable housing and support for veterans.

Federal departments are blaming a variety of factors for letting a record total of \$38 billion in funding lapse in 2021-22, including delays and disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

They also say much of the money remains available for future years.

The unspent funds also played a big part in the Liberal government posting a smaller-than-expected deficit in the year ending March 31, 2022. Canada rang up a \$90.2 billion deficit — \$2.6 billion less than had been projected in the budget.

The unprecedented amount of lapsed funding, much of which has been returned to the federal treasury, has one observer suggesting it is a sign of long-standing challenges delivering on big federal projects for the country.



The amount of lapsed funds across government is spelled out in the most recent iteration of the public accounts, a report on federal revenues and spending by every department and agency tabled in the House of Commons very early.

The \$38.2 billion that was reported as lapsed in the last fiscal year marks a new record over the previous year, which was \$32.2 billion. That was a dramatic increase over the previous record of \$14 billion in 2019-20.

That compares to around \$10 billion about a decade ago, when Stephen Harper's Conservative government was accused by political opponents and experts alike of using large lapses to make cuts by stealth.

Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada reported the largest lapses of all departments and agencies, with nearly \$11.2 billion of their combined \$28.2 billion budgets

going unspent.

Much of that had been set aside for COVID-19 initiatives that were not needed, said Health Canada spokeswoman Tammy Jarbeau. Those include vaccines, personal protective equipment and rapid tests.

"Both Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada have rigorous internal financial management controls designed to prevent, detect and minimize errors and financial losses, and ensure the funding is spent in the best interests of Canadians," she wrote in an email.

The pandemic figured in the responses and explanations from many other departments and agencies, with many blaming COVID-19 for delays.

One of them was the Defence Department, which reported a lapse of \$2.5 billion in the last fiscal year. Much of the money wasn't spent due to delays in the delivery of new military equipment such as Arctic patrol vessels and upgrades to the Army's armoured vehicles.

There were also delays on major infrastructure projects for the military, according to Defence Department spokeswoman Jessica Lamirande. Those include upgrading and rebuilding two jetties for the Navy in Esquimalt, B.C., and a new armory in New Brunswick.

'Hurricane Hazel' McCallion, longtime mayor of Mississauga, Ont., dead at 101

Hazel McCallion, the first woman to lead Mississauga, Ont., as mayor for 12 terms and into her 84th year, has died. She was 101.

Ontario Premier Doug Ford announced that McCallion died at home early Sunday morning.

"Hazel was the true definition of a public servant," Ford said in a statement announcing her death. "There isn't a single person who met Hazel who didn't have in awe of her force of personality. I count myself incredibly lucky to have called Hazel my friend over these past many years."

It is a statement, McCallion's successor, Bonnie Crombie said, "Hazel was not only my mentor and political role model but the reason why so many women were inspired to enter politics."

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said in a statement that he remembered the "unspeakable" McCallion.

"We will remember her as a trailblazer whose career in politics and service to her community will remain an inspiration to all of us. But mostly, we will remember her as a dear friend," he said.

McCallion lost her first political race. But after that 1966 contest for deputy reeve, she would not be defeated in her next 17 electoral campaigns in the city that adjoins Toronto to the west.

As mayor of Mississauga from 1978 to 2014, she went unopposed twice and was not seriously threatened by rivals in nine other re-election bids. One hapless foe likened taking her on to "challenging somebody's favourite grandmother."

He said that in 1985, she was not yet halfway into her term.

McCallion earned her nickname — after the Hurricane Hazel that battered southern Ontario in 1954 — soon after taking decisive action during an explosive train derailment in 1979. She emboldened the maverick through the decades: strong, fearless and sometimes indiscriminate in her targets.

She was not the first female mayor of a large city, nor the first woman to lead a smaller region — Mayor Charlotte Whitton of Ottawa and Reeve Mary Flix of Toronto Township held top municipal roles — but Hazel became a first name in Canadian mayors irrespective of



gender.

McCallion hated the term "maverick," however, and described her approach in a male-dominated field in typically impolitic terms: "Think like a man, act like a lady and work like a dog."

Jim Murray, a longtime friend and family spokesman, confirmed McCallion was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer around Christmas.

He said work was always central to McCallion's life.

He believes the people of Mississauga should thank McCallion's children for giving most of their time with their mother to the city, where her schedule was often filled even on weekends.

A private family funeral is being planned in addition to the public memorial, with details for both still being finalized, he said.

"A very, very unique individual she was, the likes of which in this country very few people will ever see again," said Murray.

She set an agenda that saw all of Mississauga, not just land close to populated areas, open for business to developers. In turn, developers paid levies and helped provide libraries, arenas and community centres, but some critics dubbed her the "Queen of Spinoff" as a result.

City coffers brimmed, and McCallion was able to burnish her reputation for running government like a business. At one point, Mississauga taxpayers went a decade without seeing a property tax increase.

"I only spend the taxpayers' money like I spend my own, which is seldom," she said in 2014. "The people of Mississauga love me."

atmosphere, and she pressed the mill company and federal government for answers and action.

McCallion was hailed as a hero in 2006 during a police standoff involving a distraught man who was threatening to kill himself. The five-hour standoff came to a peaceful end when McCallion stepped down to police, paramedics and fire personnel could attend to more important matters.

Hurricane Hazel thrived in the spotlight and on going to battle — whether it was with her own city, the federal government over developments at Toronto's Pearson International Airport in the city, or the provincial government over transit funding.

Former Ontario premier David Peterson admitted that she "seems the jealous outcast."

McCallion scored points with her constituency this way, and Liberal, Conservative and NDP targets all felt her wrath at various points.

"I could never be the party line," she told CBC's As It Happens when asked why she never considered running provincially or federally. "I'd wear out the carpet crossing the floor."

McCallion's longevity was a testament to her prowess as a retail politician — she rarely missed a local shindig — and her control of council.

But public apathy played a part, with just 21 to 34 per cent turning out to vote when she faced a challenge. And with many vacant neighbourhoods, mobilization on issues was infrequent.

"We do not even see the embryo of a base or movement that could challenge the mayor on the way the city was being planned," Tom Urbaniak says of an extended period in the 1990s, in his book Her Worship: Hazel McCallion and the Development of Mississauga.

The media glare wasn't exactly withering, either. Mississauga is Canada's largest city without a daily print newspaper, and Toronto media coverage was as likely to be focused on McCallion's indomitable personality as it was on the details of issues facing the city.

Being in charge for 36 years, she committed some gaffes along the way, such as when she told the National Post in 2001, "If you go to the Credit Valley Hospital, the emergency is loaded with people in their native costumes." She later insisted she was only complaining about non-citizens affecting queues.

Conflict-of-interest concerns were also serious. She was the co-owner of interest probes.

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Election unlikely in 2023 despite recent political posturing, pundits say

Even though federal political leaders have been using some heated, election-style language to snipe at each other in recent weeks, pundits say it's unlikely Canadians will go to the polls in 2023.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau was active during the six-week parliamentary break, making stops in Saskatoon, Windsor, Ont. and Trois-Rivières, Que. to talk up his government's accomplishments. He also occasionally took shots at Conservative Leader Pierre Poilievre and his recent assertion that "everything seems broken" in Canada.

"Crossing your arms and saying 'Canada is broken' is not the way to build a better future for Canadians," Trudeau said.

Poilievre, meanwhile, toured Quebec in an attempt to boost his poll numbers in that province. He also met with Indigenous leaders in Vancouver to discuss a proposed op. in policy for First Nations to share the revenue generated by resource development on their lands.

The Conservative leader also hit back at Trudeau on Friday during an

address to his caucus prior to the House of Commons' return. He blamed the prime minister for inflation, the recent meat chaos and deficit spending while appearing to good Trudeau into an election battle.

"You're not responsible for any of those things, if you can't do anything about it, then why don't you get out of the way and let someone lead who can?" Poilievre said as his MPs cheered and applauded.

Speaking in his own caucus earlier this month, NDP Leader Jagmeet Singh touted his party's confidence-and-supply agreement with the Liberals, saying that the deal was "delivering for Canadians."

But Singh also indicated that he had his eyes set higher.

"We're going to fight for every bit of help and hope we can win for Canadians and then I'm going to run for premier of Canada," he said.

But Tim Powers of Sunnyside Strategies said he doesn't think any of the leaders are itching for an election right now, despite their recent posturing.

"The conditions don't exist for an

election this year," he told CBC. "I don't think anybody's really going to have a breakthrough moment."

Powers said the Liberals are unlikely to seek a new mandate with the threat of an economic slowdown this year hanging over the government's head.

"We will only have an election this year if Justin Trudeau sees the winning conditions exist for him," Powers said.

"I don't think the Liberals are yet ready to make a breakthrough election."

Shane Kasur of SEK Consulting agreed that an election is unlikely this year. She suggested the Conservatives will still use the economy to needle the Liberals and position themselves as a government-to-wait.

"I would say the biggest looming issue of 2023 is going to be cost of living, a potential recession, and that will probably be the main pivot point for the Conservatives," she said, adding that she thinks the Conservative Party is the only one that wants an election this year.

But Powers said Poilievre might be happy to wait and give himself more time to pitch himself to Canadians.

"I think Poilievre is content to have

the time to let the Liberals age and build a brand and a platform that can be useful to him," he said.

If the Liberal-NDP deal holds for its intended duration, the next election won't happen until 2025.

But the agreement may face a tougher test in 2023 than it did in 2022 because it includes more benchmarks for progress - including a commitment to table pharmaceutical legislation, Singh also threatened to pull out of the deal if the Liberals don't address health-care issues.

"The confidence-and-supply agreement gets a little bit more muscular this year," said Brad Lavigne of Constellation Public Affairs.

NDP MP David Blaney told CBC News this month that the 2023 federal budget will be a key factor in deciding whether the Liberals are holding up their end of the deal.

But even if the deal falls apart this year, Lavigne said, it wouldn't necessarily trigger an election.

"If you look back at recent history, [former prime minister Stephen] Harper had minority Parliaments in which he had no such supply agreement with any one opposition party, yet he maintained the confidence of the House for many years," he said. "That is an option that is open to Mr. Trudeau as well."

Canadian doctors spend millions of hours on unnecessary paperwork each year: report

Dr. Leisha Hawker reserves a full work day each week just to do paperwork. She sees no patients and works through form after form, so she can get home in time to put her daughter to bed.

She's not alone in this routine.

The Halifax family doctor, who is also the president of Doctors Nova Scotia, said it's estimated that most physicians in the province spend about 10 hours a week dealing with unnecessary paperwork.

This means someone else could do it, or it doesn't need to be done at all. She said this work accounts for about 500,000 hours of physician work per year in Nova Scotia, and often falls on nights and weekends.

"A lot of younger physicians that have a family will do two shifts," Hawker said. "You'll go home and take your kid to judo or swimming or whatever it is, put them to bed and then log back in and do more work and then go to bed late at night."

In 2019, the provincial government partnered with Doctors Nova Scotia to research physician administrative burden and how to reduce it. A new report released Monday builds on this research and draws conclusions that apply to the whole country.

The Canadian Federation of Independent Business's report, Patients Before Paperwork, shows Canadian doctors spend 18.5 million hours annually on unnecessary administrative work - the equivalent of 55.6 million patient visits.

"Health ministries across Canada are facing many complex challenges," the report said. "A chronic shortage of health professionals, an aging population and capacity constraints all have put pressure on the health-care system and the physicians who support it."

Target to reduce administrative burden.

An Angus Reid poll from September 2022 found half of Canadians are either unable to see their family doctor within a week, or they can't find a doctor at all.

Monday's CIB report concludes that if governments across Canada set



a target to reduce physician administrative burden by 10 per cent, they could reduce fatigue and burnout, improve the quality of patient care and open the equivalent of 5.5 million patient visits a year.

"We know that all of the premiers are working with the federal government on hashing out a new deal on the health-care side, that is very important," said Ryan Mallough, CIB's vice-president of legislative affairs.

"But we want to make sure that we're not forgetting about the other things that we can do in the system ... if it's eliminating a form that doesn't need to be filled out by a doctor or if it's reducing a 12-page form to a three-page form. That adds up and it is going to free up doctors' time to see their patients."

Nova Scotia leading the way

Nova Scotia has been working on reducing physician administrative burden since 2019.

Mallough said this is trailblazing work, and he hopes other provinces will follow suit.

"We know that medical

often piled with forms, which he'll "pick at it during the course of the day."

But he said if he doesn't keep on top of it, things like insurance and income assistance forms, medical reviews for drivers and disability tax credits can "get out of control."

Said he's happy to see the government committing to reducing this type of extra work, but the province has a long way to go.

"Health care is difficult right now, both as a patient and provider," Gillis said. "And I think anything we can do to alleviate that difficulty is just a step in the right direction for everybody."

He said he's already heard about some notoriously long and cumbersome forms being shortened, but he hopes more technology will be used in doctor's offices to further reduce paperwork.

"Taking a fork and chipping away at an iceberg

The provincial Office of Regulatory Affairs and Service Effectiveness has less than a year to complete their goal of a 10 per cent reduction.

Hawker said the office's physician impact assessment tool shows they're halfway there, but she believes they'll meet the target, or even surpass it.

"Sometimes it does feel like you're taking a fork and chipping away at an iceberg because there is so much," Hawker said. "What we have to do is start, show some success, make sure that physicians feel the impact and then start to do more."

She said the focus is saving minutes of work for each physician.

"But when you build that up to 2,500 physicians that may be doing it 50 times a year, those minutes add up to a lot of big hours and so annual patient visits."

Hawker said the 10 per cent reduction target is the equivalent to about 150,000 patient visits per year. Currently, there are nearly 130,000 Nova Scotians on the primary-care wait list.

"That would be a visit for every single person that would be on the wait list," Hawker said. "So even a 10 per cent reduction in administrative burden could have significant impacts on patient care and the health-care system."

Hawker said her office has acted as a liaison between doctors and provincial departments to help them work together and make changes.

Joe Gillis, a physician in Yarmouth, N.S., said his desk is

Majority of affordable homes approved under federal program not yet constructed

The federal government has set aside billions of dollars to quickly build affordable housing across the country, but delays in construction suggest many of the projects approved for funding are missing their deadlines.

The Rapid Housing Initiative is a federal program launched in 2020 that provides funding to cities and non-profit organizations to build affordable homes for vulnerable Canadians, including those experiencing homelessness.

The federal government offered \$2.5 billion during the first two rounds of project funding, with the condition that approved units must be built within 18 months in most places or 24 months in northern or remote communities.

But a document put together by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corp. in response to a written question from a member of Parliament shows the majority of units approved have not

yet been constructed.

The first round of applications closed at the end of March 2021 and resulted in 4,792 units approved for funding, while a further 4,473 got the green light during the second round that closed a year later.

The response from CMHC, which is dated Nov. 30, says only 1,449 units have been completed.

Neither CMHC nor Housing Minister Ahmed Hussein's office would say how many projects missed the 12- or 18-month deadlines. A CMHC spokesperson, however, acknowledged some projects have been delayed.

"Due to unprecedented circumstances faced by housing developers over the last few years including supply chain disruptions, rising costs and severe weather-related events, some projects are expected to and will take longer, mainly due to infrastructure and construction challenges," said Leonard Canning,

Carolyne Whitzman, a housing policy expert and adjunct professor at the University of Ottawa, says the federal government has touted the Rapid Housing Initiative as a success story because more units than anticipated have been approved for construction. The first two rounds of approvals exceeded targets by a combined 2,600 units, she noted.

But Whitzman says there are several obstacles hampering many affordable housing projects, including pushback from residents and a lack of support from provincial governments.

"In order to get supportive housing through rapid housing initiative or any other program, you need really strong collaboration between all three levels of government," Whitzman said.

"If you say housing construction has also been affected by rising costs and labor shortages.

In November, the federal government announced the third

round of the program, which will provide an additional \$1.5 billion in funding.

The federal government has extended the construction timeline for that round to 18 months for most homes and 24 months for projects in northern or remote communities.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's government made affordable housing a cornerstone of its agenda to support and expand the middle class. It announced its national housing strategy in 2017, which is a 10-year plan that pours tens of billions of dollars into affordable housing.

But the Liberals have faced criticism for the execution of its plan.

In a report published in November, auditor general Karen Hogan found the government was not tracking its progress on reducing chronic homelessness, despite a stated goal of reducing such conditions by 50 per cent by 2028.

Hogan's report found there are data gaps across the federal government that make it difficult to assess the success of programs.

CMHC, in its capacity as leader of the national housing strategy, has spent \$4.5 billion since 2018. But the report found the corporation doesn't know who is benefiting from its program.

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