

Legacy Giving in Canada

2025 RESEARCH ON CHARITABLE
BEQUESTS, GIFTS IN WILLS, AND
ESTATE PLANNING TRENDS





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Introduction

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Legacy giving is on the rise in Canada, bringing with it a powerful opportunity for impact.

Launched in 2020, the Will Power campaign was designed to help Canadians reimagine how a gift in their Will can create lasting change. Since then, we've seen a meaningful cultural shift. More people are open to giving in new ways, and more charities and professional advisors are stepping forward to support them.

This report builds on our original 2019 study conducted before the launch of the campaign. It offers a renewed perspective on how attitudes toward estate planning and charitable giving are evolving. We expanded the research to better reflect Canada's diversity, with a stronger focus on communities that have historically been underrepresented in this space. The goal is to surface new insights

and foster more inclusive conversations about legacy giving.

Change takes time. Yet over the past five years, we've seen clear growth in both interest and action. By listening carefully, asking better questions, and sharing what we learn, we can continue to move this work forward – together.



Research Methodology Overview

This research was commissioned by the CAGP Foundation for the Will Power campaign, a national, multi-year initiative launched in 2020 to encourage Canadians to leave a charitable gift in their Will. The findings presented in this report are based on research conducted in January 2025 by Nanos Research, in collaboration with our Data Equity advisor Meena Das of Namaste Data.

Data was collected through an online survey, conducted in English and French, of 1,246 adults aged 18 and older in Canada. This sample size yields a margin of error of 2.8 percentage points, providing statistically reliable insights into national trends.

The study was designed to reflect a broad cross-section of the Canadian population, including targeted sampling of respondents who identify as Black, Indigenous, Asian, and South Asian. This approach allowed us to better understand the perspectives and experiences of communities that are often underrepresented in legacy giving research.

Throughout the report, we present top-level findings and highlight notable differences only where relevant. When a specific group isn't mentioned, results were either broadly consistent with national averages or unavailable at a statistically reliable level.

It's important to note that the section titled "Who has already left a gift in their Will" on page 22 references a subsequent online survey conducted by Centiment in November 2025. Data was also collected through an online survey in English and French, with a sample size of 1,890. Here, targeted sampling included Black, Asian, and South Asian communities, but not Indigenous communities due to survey limitations.

It should also be noted that in some questions and charts, percentages may not total 100% because respondents were able to select multiple responses.

A Note on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Throughout this report, we discuss broad trends across diverse groups of people. Topics related to wealth, race, gender, culture, and identity are deeply personal and shaped by long-standing structural inequities. For this reason, the data should be approached with care, humility, and a willingness to listen.

The purpose of this research is not to stereotype or oversimplify, but to better understand the systems and experiences that influence people's choices and opportunities.

Research provides a starting point. It's up to us to explore nuance, deepen understanding, and uncover the real stories behind the data.

LANGUAGE KEY

To support clarity and consistency, the following terms are used throughout this report:

- > **Total population** refers to the full survey sample, including respondents from all ethnic communities.
- > **Canadians** refers to people living in Canada, regardless of current citizenship status.
- > **Men, women, non-binary** refers to how respondents self-identified. It should be noted that very few respondents identified as non-binary. As a result, we were not able to report any statistically reliable findings.
- > **English-speaking /French-speaking** refers to respondents who said they speak only English or French most often at home.
- > **Immigrant** refers to respondents who were born outside of Canada.
- > **Registered Fund** refers to plans registered with the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) such as a registered retirement savings plan (RRSP), a tax-free savings account (TFSA) or a registered retirement income plan (RRIF).

Executive Summary

Canadians' attitudes toward estate planning and charitable giving continue to evolve. Since the CAGP Foundation's original study in 2019 – and five years after the launch of the Will Power campaign – more Canadians have expressed interest in legacy giving, and the number who have already left a gift in their Will has doubled.

This is great news. But growth alone doesn't tell the full story. This report takes a deeper and more inclusive look at who's behind this shift and how today's legacy donors are thinking about giving in their Wills, what motivates them, and what barriers remain.

These findings highlight where momentum is building, where challenges persist, and where approaches may need to be adapted. They are intended to support gift planners, non-profit leaders, and professional advisors in engaging more effectively with the next generation of legacy donors.

A reminder of key findings from 2019.

- > The CAGP Foundation's 2019 research established an important baseline for legacy giving in Canada. At that time:
- > Just over half of Canadians (56%) had a Will, with many (59%) reporting that they had done some form of estate planning before writing it.
- > Only four in 10 said the option to include a charity was raised by their financial or legal advisor during the process.
- > A third of Canadians (31%) said they were likely to leave a gift in their Will to charity, particularly those aged 35 to 50 and 65 to 75. The biggest barrier? Concern over not leaving enough for loved ones.
- > Five percent of Canadians had already included a charitable gift in their Will in 2019.

A snapshot of key findings in 2025.

WILL WRITING	ESTATE PLANNING	CHARITABLE BEQUESTS
51% of Canadians report having a Will.	73% of Canadians report having done some form of estate planning before writing their Will.	44% of Canadians say they are likely to leave a gift in their Will to charity.
88% of those with a Will wrote it with a legal advisor, 10% wrote it on their own, and 7% used an online platform.	Canadians who engage in estate planning are twice as likely to express interest in legacy giving.	Likelihood of a charitable bequest is highest among Canadians under 50, and among Black, South Asian, and Asian Canadians.
4 in 10 say the option to include a charity was raised by their legal advisor when they made their Will.	Nearly 6 in 10 who planned their estate with a financial advisor or accountant say the option to include a charity was discussed.	Today, 10% of Canadians have included a charitable gift in their Will. Younger Canadians are now more likely than older Canadians to report having done so.
The most common barrier to leaving a charitable bequest remains a concern over leaving enough for loved ones.	73% of Canadians have a registered fund, and 53% have a life insurance policy, but only half are aware they can name a charity as a beneficiary of these assets.	Most Canadians cite supporting the charities they care about as the primary motivation for leaving a gift in their Will.

Will Writing

How Canadians approach Will writing is a critical starting point for understanding the state of legacy giving in Canada. This section explores several foundational questions about which professionals Canadians turn to for help, who has a Will, and which barriers may limit their participation.

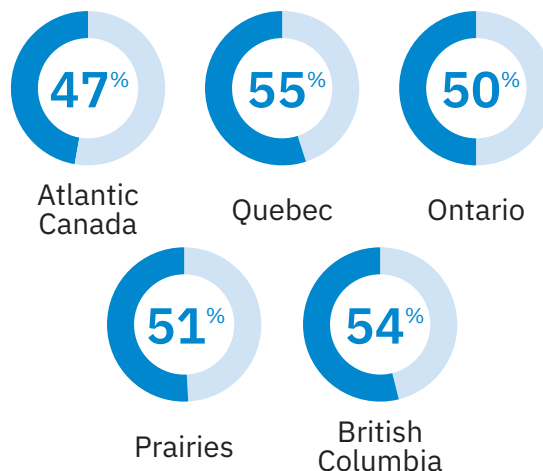
To establish a shared understanding, respondents were first asked what they believed a Will was. Across all demographic groups, the vast majority agreed with the following definition:

“A legal document by which a person, the testator, expresses their wishes as to how their property is to be distributed at death, and names one or more persons, the executor or liquidator, to manage the estate until its final distribution.”

WHO HAS A WILL – AND WHO DOESN'T?

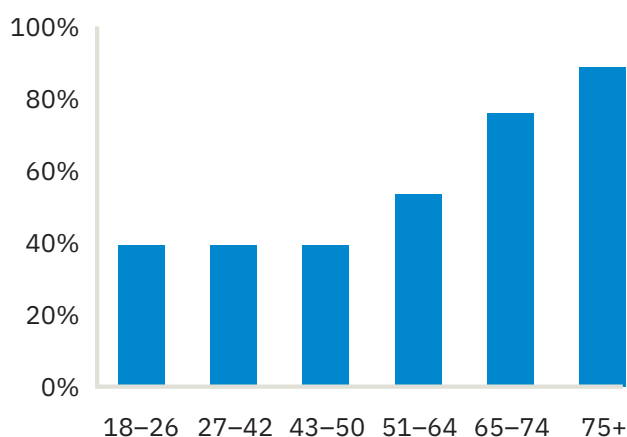
Only half of Canadians (51%) say they currently have a Will. This figure has remained largely unchanged since 2019.

WHO HAS A WILL, BY LOCATION



While these numbers may seem discouraging at first, it's important to realize they represent the population as a whole. When you drill down by age, you see that most Canadians do eventually write a Will. Indeed, Will writing increases steadily with age, with almost all Canadians aged 75 and older saying they have a Will in place.

WHO HAS A WILL, BY AGE



Similarly, Will writing increases with wealth. Canadians with household incomes under \$40,000 are less likely to have a Will than those earning \$150,000 or more. Homeowners are also more likely than renters to have a Will.

One notable disparity remains. Across the board, women are less likely than men to say they have a Will, a registered fund, or life insurance policy.

WHO HAS A WILL, BY GENDER

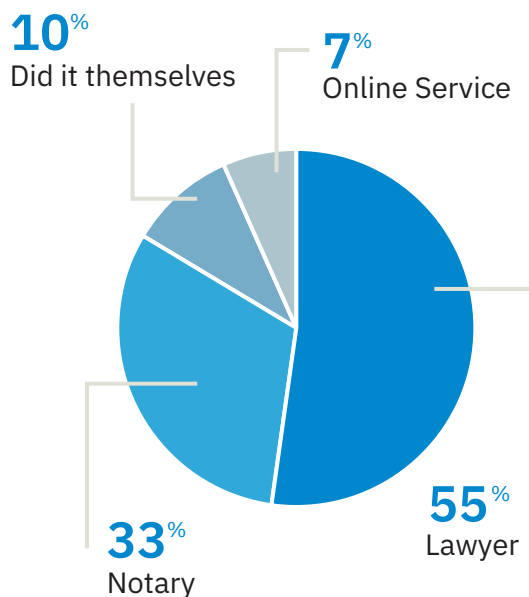


Looking ahead, the research shows that nearly 80% of Canadians without a Will plan to write one within the next 10 years, and roughly two-thirds of those with a Will intend to revise it over the same period. Regardless of their current status, respondents were similarly likely to say they would include a charitable gift in their Will.

HOW ARE PEOPLE WRITING WILLS THESE DAYS?

The vast majority of Canadians (88%) still rely on legal professionals when drafting a Will. Lawyers, and notaries in Quebec, remain the most popular option across genders, ages, incomes, and ethnicities.

HOW CANADIANS WRITE THEIR WILLS



WERE THEY ASKED ABOUT INCLUDING A CHARITY IN THEIR WILL?

Only 35% say yes, and notable gaps persist. Canadian-born respondents (37%) are more likely than immigrants (27%) to report being asked. Language differences are even more pronounced: English speakers (39%) are far more likely than French speakers (10%) to say the option was raised.

While this is one area where growth has been limited, there have been new developments since 2019. Online Will services have gained traction and are more consistent in presenting charity as an option.

Percentage of clients who recall being prompted to consider a charity during Will writing:



A note on Registered Funds and Life Insurance:

Canadians have access to several vehicles beyond Wills for planning charitable gifts. **The research shows that 73% of Canadians hold a registered fund, and 53% have a life insurance policy.**

While more than two-thirds of Canadians associate legacy giving with Wills, fewer than half (49%) are aware that charitable gifts can also be made through registered funds or life insurance policies.

Estate Planning

The research shows that estate planning – rather than Will writing – is where charitable giving decisions are most often made. **Indeed, Canadians who engage in estate planning are more than twice as likely to include a charitable gift in their Will compared to those who do not.**

Respondents were provided with the following definition of estate planning:

“The preparation of tasks that manage someone’s personal and financial situation in the event of incapacitation or death.”

For most Canadians, estate planning involves foundational activities like estimating the size of their estate and determining how assets will be distributed among beneficiaries. About one-third of Canadians go further, engaging in more sophisticated estate planning that includes legal tools and tax planning.

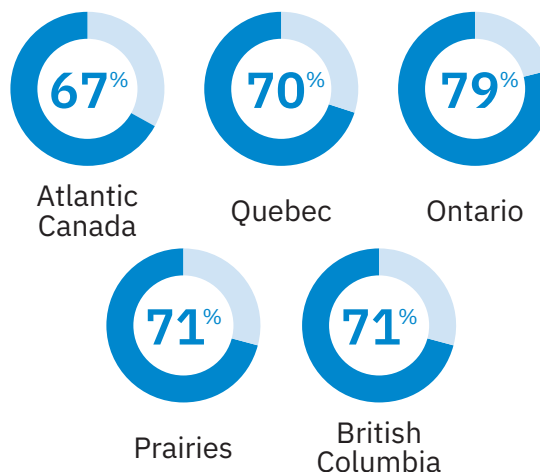
WHO ENGAGES IN ESTATE PLANNING?

Among respondents who have a Will, 73% say they engaged in some form of estate planning before writing it, up from 59% in 2019.

Similarly to Will writing, estate planning tends to increase with wealth. While most respondents with a Will report engaging in some form of estate planning, **a majority of those with household incomes under \$40,000 say they did not.**

Unlike Will writing, however, estate planning does not increase with age. In fact, **Millennials (85%) outpace both Gen X (69%) and Boomers (58%) when it comes to planning their estate.**

ENGAGEMENT IN ESTATE PLANNING, BY LOCATION

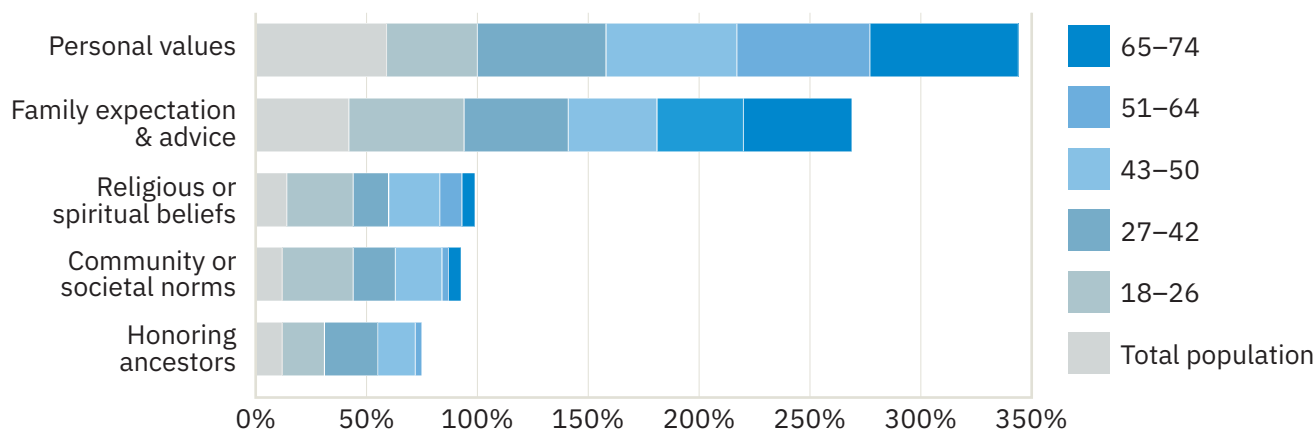


WHAT INFLUENCES ESTATE PLANNING DECISIONS?

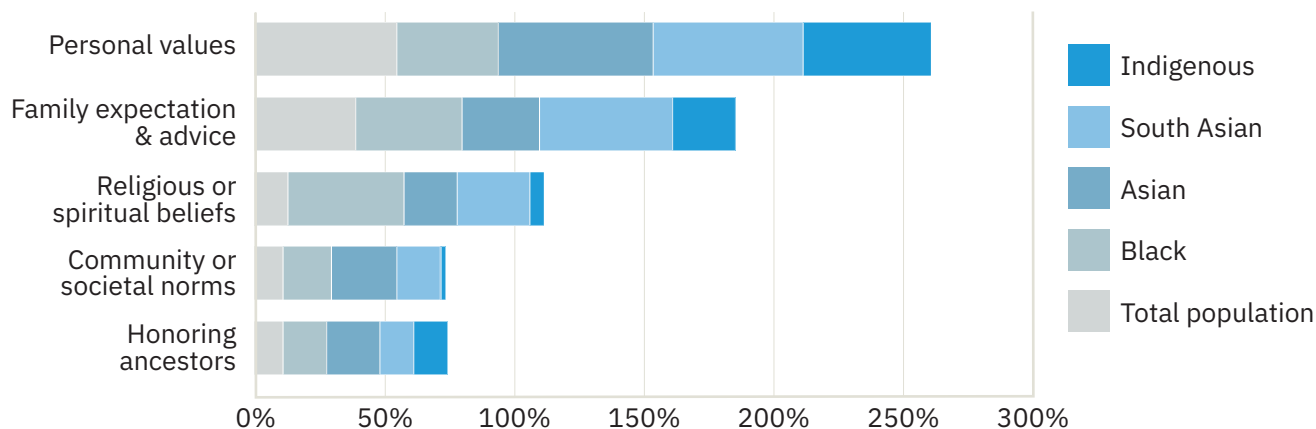
Respondents who had engaged in estate planning were asked about the cultural and family influences that shaped their decision-making. **Across nearly all groups personal values and family expectations/advice came out on top**, although the relative importance of each changes with life stage.

Across different ethnic communities, personal values and family expectations/advice also emerged as top influencers. One exception stands out: **among Black communities, religion or spiritual beliefs take precedence over personal values when it comes to estate planning decisions.**

INFLUENCES ON ESTATE PLANNING, BY AGE



INFLUENCES ON ESTATE PLANNING, BY ETHNICITY



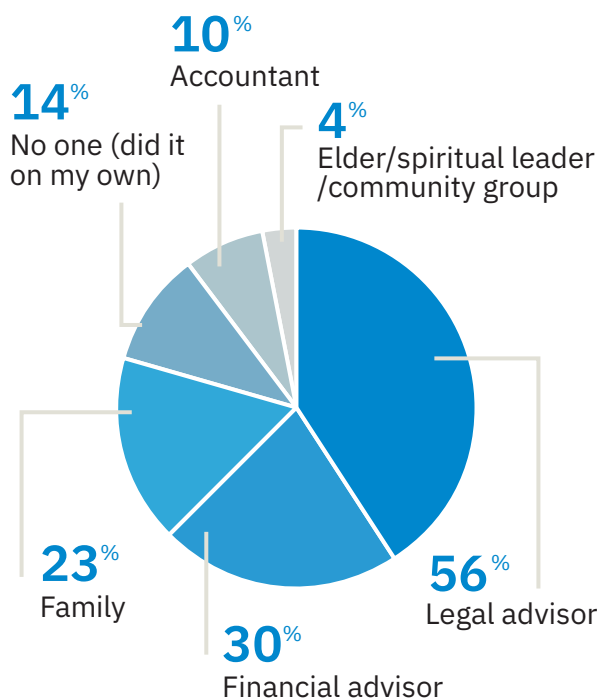
WHERE DO PEOPLE GO FOR ESTATE PLANNING ADVICE?

Estate planning presents a clear opportunity to introduce conversations about legacy giving, and the research helps illuminate what shapes people's decisions.

One key question remains though: who is guiding Canadians through this process?

The majority of Canadians (86%) say they turn to professionals for help when planning their estate.

WHERE CANADIANS GO FOR ESTATE PLANNING ADVICE

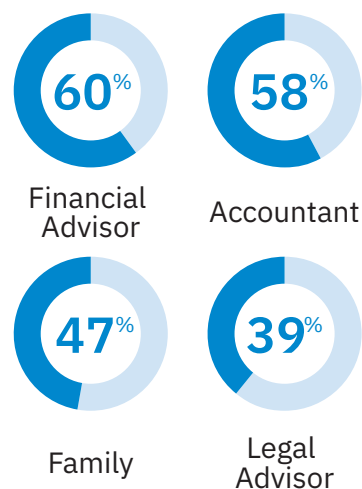


WHERE DO PEOPLE GO FOR ESTATE PLANNING ADVICE?, *continued*

Among those who received professional support, **43% said charitable giving was discussed during the estate planning process.** Again, we see that **Canadian-born respondents (48%) are more likely to say they were prompted than immigrants (39%).**

The biggest differences emerge by the type of professional consulted. **Legal professionals are far less likely to discuss charity with their clients than financial advisors or accountants.**

PERCENTAGE OF CLIENTS WHO RECALL DISCUSSING CHARITY DURING ESTATE PLANNING



Charitable Bequests

We've explored Will writing, estate planning, and the factors that shape people's decisions. Now let's look at the core questions around legacy giving: who's interested, what motivates them, and what barriers they face.

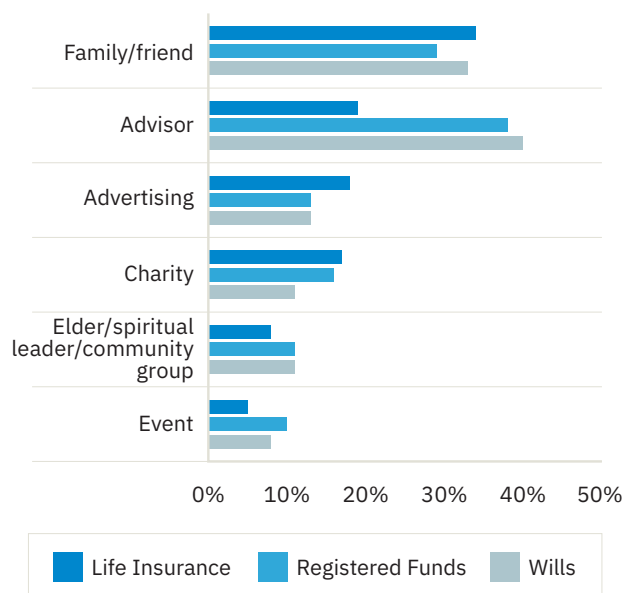
Canadians are broadly familiar with the idea of leaving a charitable gift in their Will. **Two out of three Canadians (68%) know this option exists. Awareness is notably lower among French-speaking Canadians, with less than half (42%) saying they are familiar with this option.**

The research shows that fewer Canadians are aware that legacy gifts can be made through other financial vehicles. Specifically, **only 48% know that a charity can be named as a beneficiary of a registered fund, and 50% know that this is possible through a life insurance policy.** Again, awareness is lower among French-speaking Canadians.

WHERE DO CANADIANS LEARN ABOUT LEGACY GIVING?

While professional advisors, charities, and broad-based advertising all play a role in raising awareness about charitable bequests, most Canadians recall learning about them through family and friends.

For gifts made through registered funds or life insurance however, most say that professional advisors are their primary source of information.

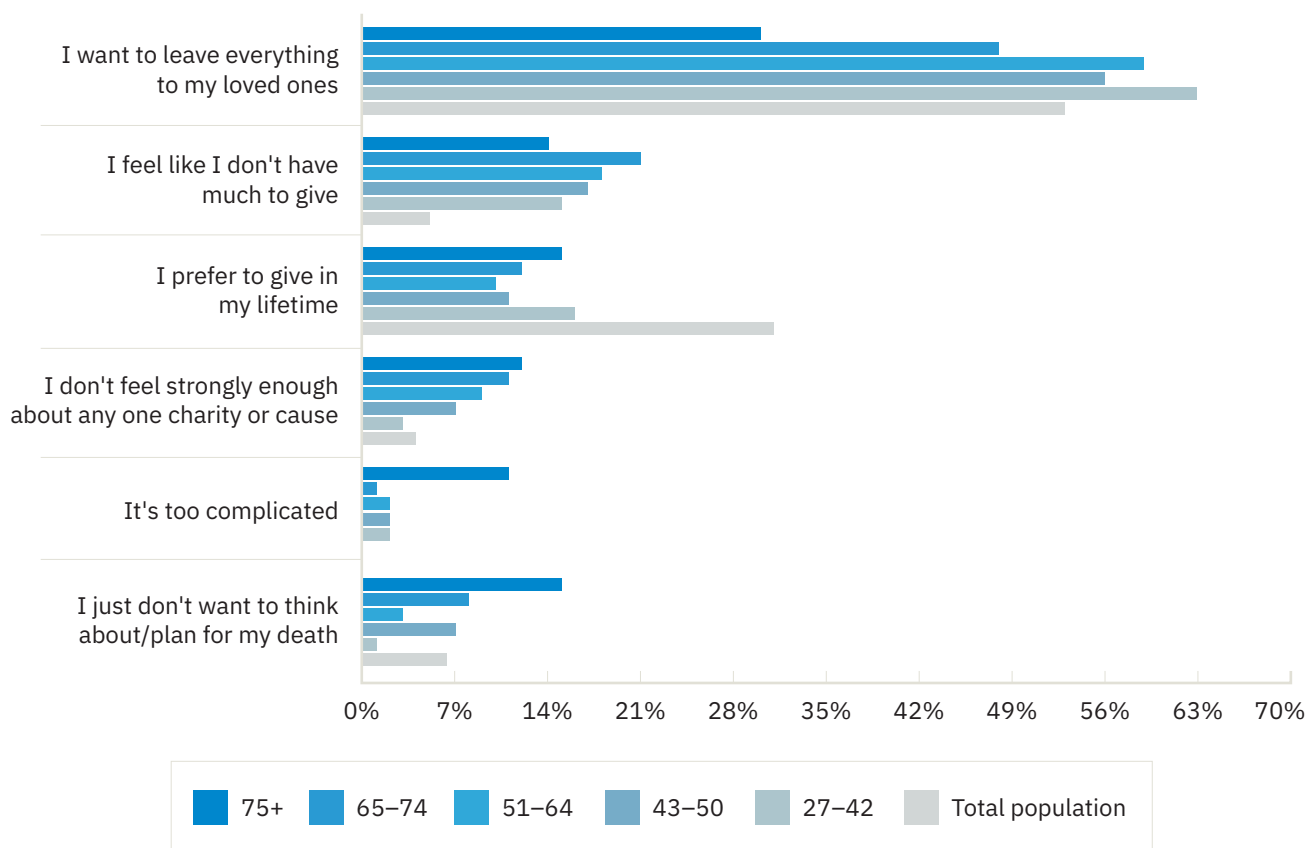


WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO LEGACY GIVING?

When it comes to reasons for not including charity in a Will, the findings have not changed much since 2019. The most common barrier across all age groups, by far, remains the belief that there won't be enough left to support family.

Secondary factors do vary by life stage: younger Canadians are more likely to cite limited financial capacity as another reason for not including charity in their Will, while those 75 and older say they prefer to give in their lifetime.

THE BARRIERS TO LEGACY GIVING, BY AGE

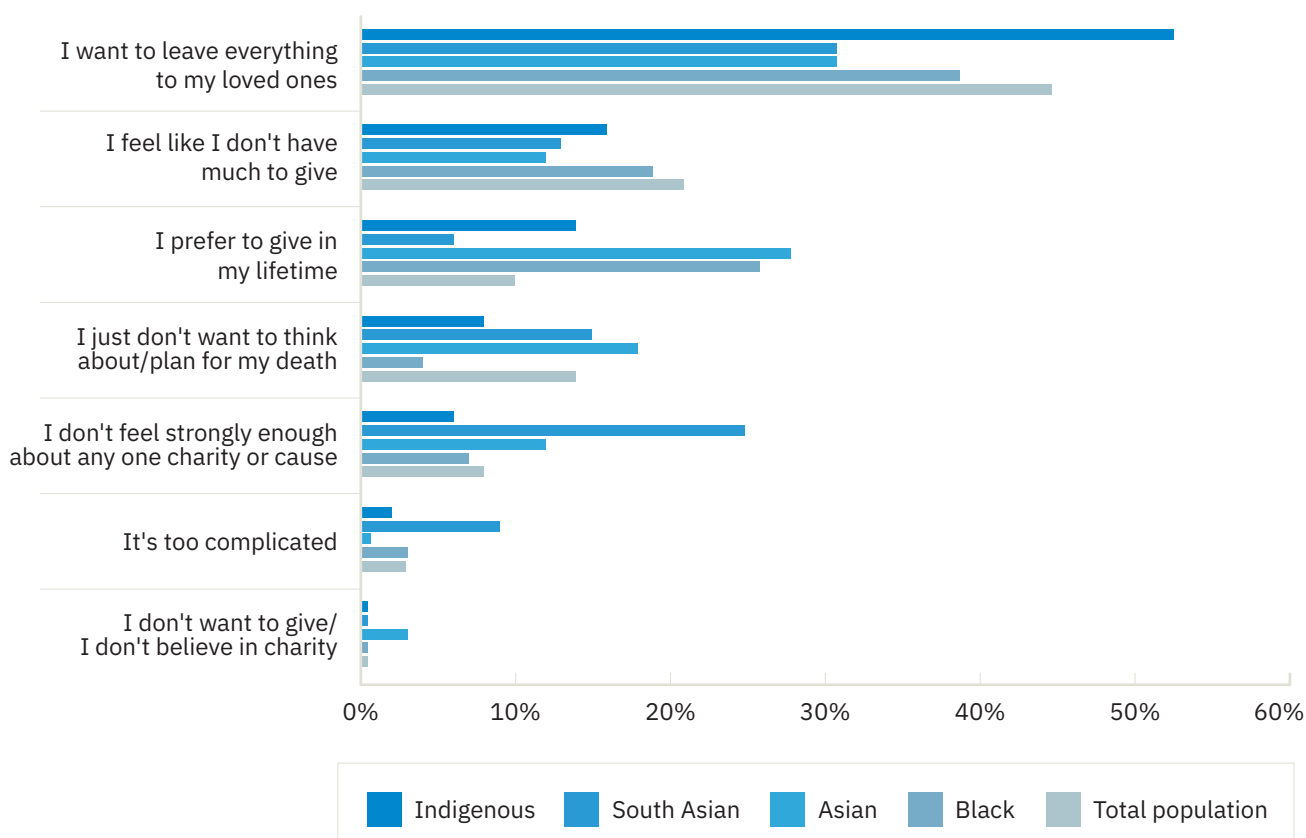


WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO LEGACY GIVING?, *continued*

Concern for family is also the top barrier among ethnic communities. Secondary considerations vary modestly: Asian and South Asian respondents show a somewhat stronger

preference for lifetime giving, while Black respondents are slightly more reluctant to consider end-of-life planning.

THE BARRIERS TO LEGACY GIVING, BY ETHNICITY



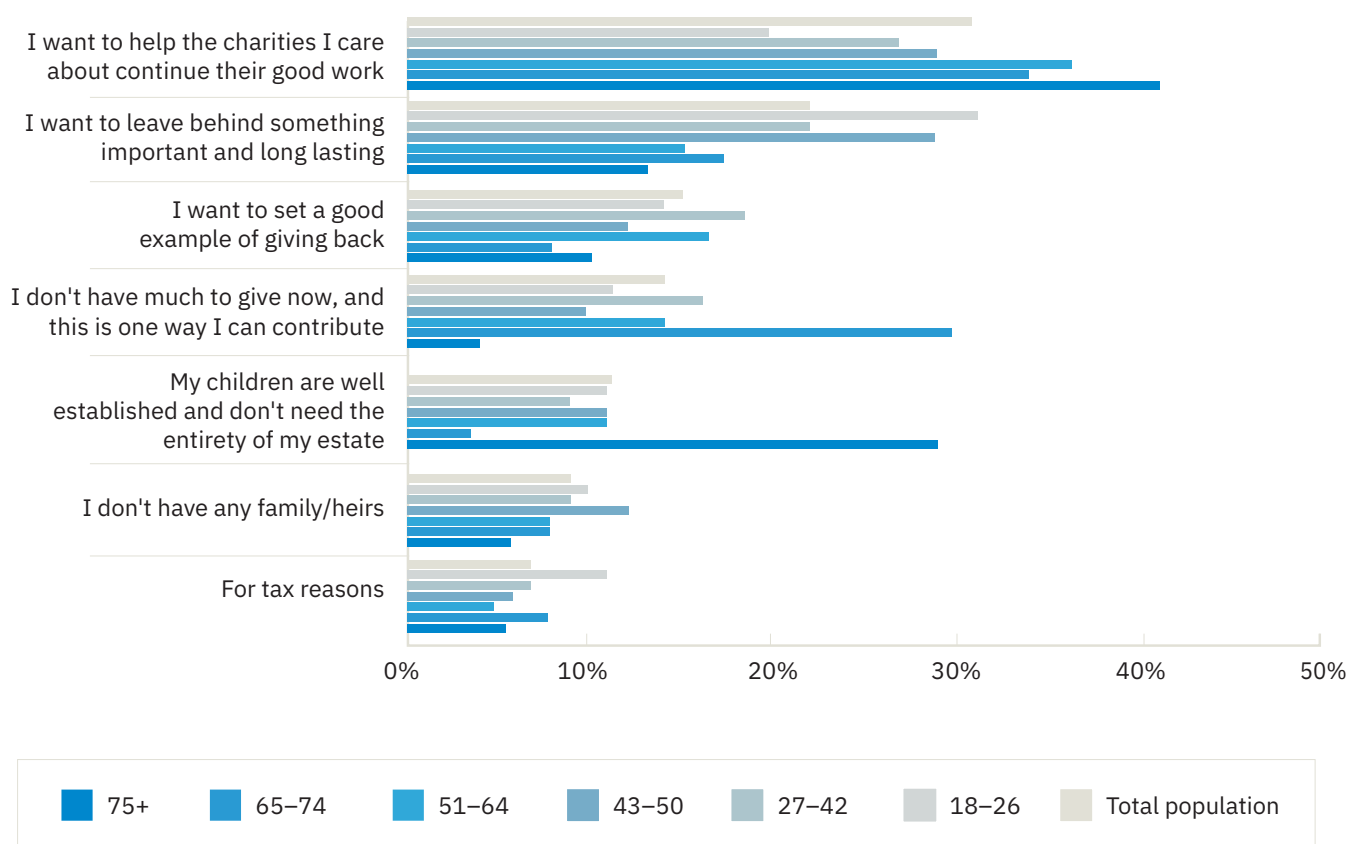
WHAT MOTIVATES LEGACY GIVING?

Legacy giving is most strongly influenced by personal values, family considerations, and a sense of impact. This was true in 2019 and remains true in 2025.

When asked about their primary motivation for leaving a gift in their Will, respondents cited their desire to support the charities they care about. This was followed by a desire to leave a meaningful legacy and a wish to set a good example for family and future generations.

Although core motivations remain consistent across age groups, their relative importance differs modestly. Younger Canadians place greater emphasis on leaving something important and long-lasting, while older Canadians show stronger emphasis on helping charities continue their work.

THE MAIN MOTIVATOR FOR LEGACY GIVING, BY AGE

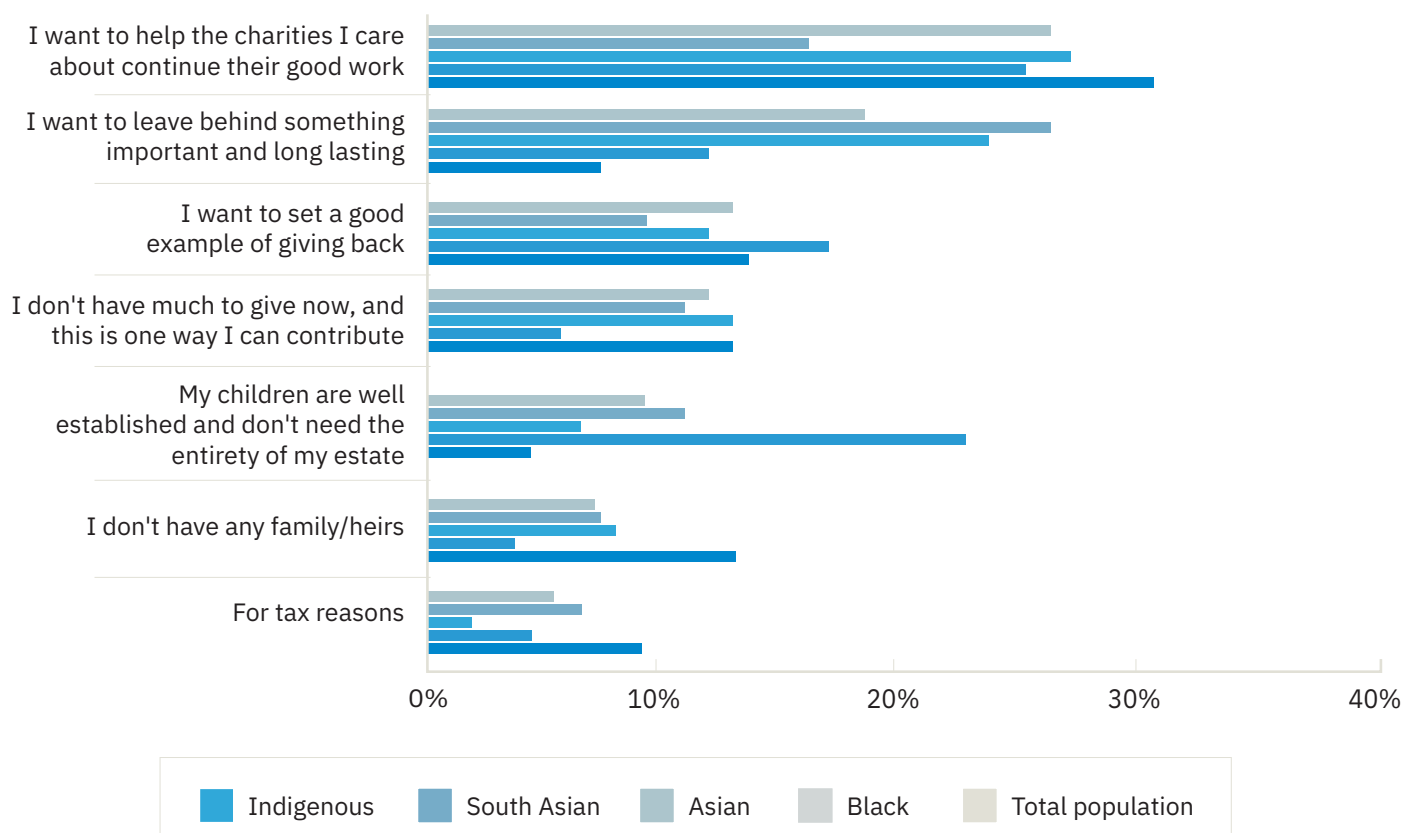


WHAT MOTIVATES LEGACY GIVING?, *continued*

Across ethnic communities, motivations follow a similar overall pattern, with supporting charities' ongoing work cited as the core reason for leaving a gift in a Will. However, the

emphasis shifts slightly in some communities. Black respondents, for example, place comparatively greater weight on leaving something important and long-lasting.

THE MAIN MOTIVATOR FOR LEGACY GIVING, BY ETHNICITY



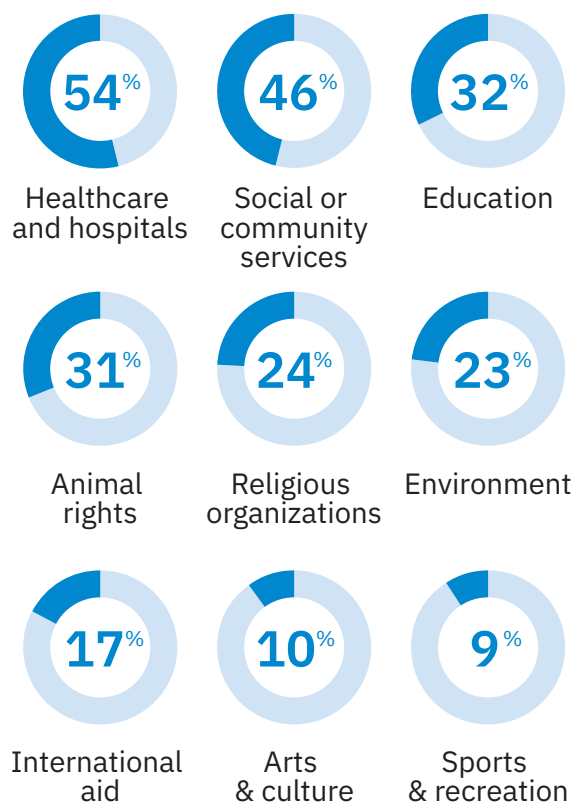
WHAT CHOICES ARE CANADIANS MAKING WHEN IT COMES TO GIFTS IN WILLS?

Respondents who said they are likely to leave a gift in their Will were asked which types of charities they'd consider. Healthcare and social services were the most frequently cited.

On average, respondents intend to include two charities in their Will, which reinforces an important point: legacy gifts are rarely an either-or decision. There's space for more than one cause in an estate plan.

Donors do not see their legacy gift as a substitute for annual giving either. A majority (57%) of those who intend to leave a gift in their Will say they expect their lifetime donations to remain the same, and 17% expect their donations to increase.

TYPES OF CHARITIES CANADIANS ARE CONSIDERING FOR THE WILL

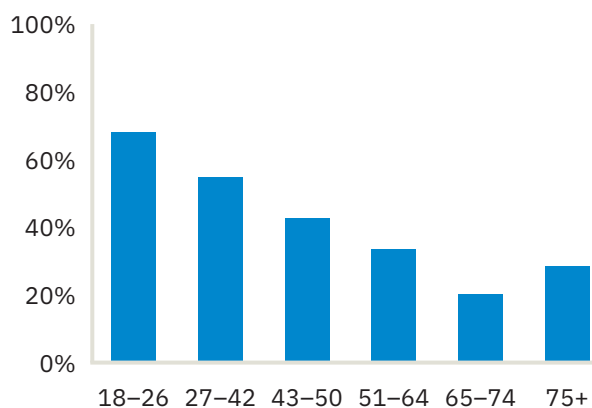


WHO'S LIKELY TO LEAVE A GIFT IN THEIR WILL

The good news is that interest in legacy giving continues to grow in Canada. **In 2019, 31% of Canadians said they were likely to leave a charitable gift in their Will. Today, that figure has risen to 44%.**

One of the most significant shifts since 2019 is generational. Earlier research showed a growing interest in legacy giving among Canadians under 50. **Now, Canadians under 50 are the most interested and likely to give through their Will, registered funds, or life insurance policy.**

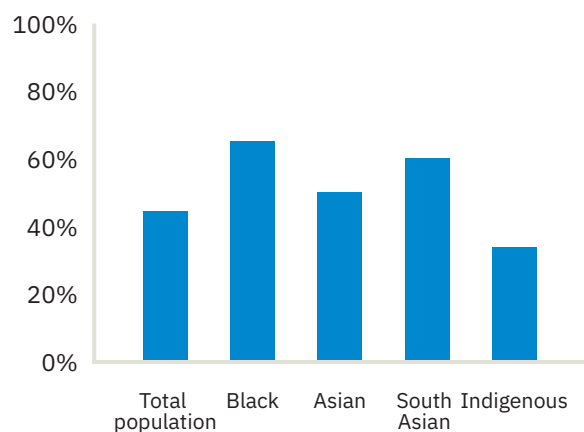
LIKELY TO LEAVE A GIFT IN THEIR WILL, BY AGE



The 2025 data also challenges a long-standing assumption that legacy giving is driven by wealth. In fact, **middle and upper-middle-income Canadians, those with household incomes between \$60,000 and \$200,000, are most intent on giving this way.** These are people who have accumulated some assets, but don't necessarily identify as wealthy.

The research also offers encouraging insights across racial and cultural groups. **Interest is higher among Black, South Asian, and Asian communities**, all of whom are more likely than the national average to include a charity in their Will. The same is true of immigrant versus Canadian-born respondents, despite being prompted less often about charitable giving.

LIKELY TO LEAVE A GIFT IN THEIR WILL, BY ETHNICITY

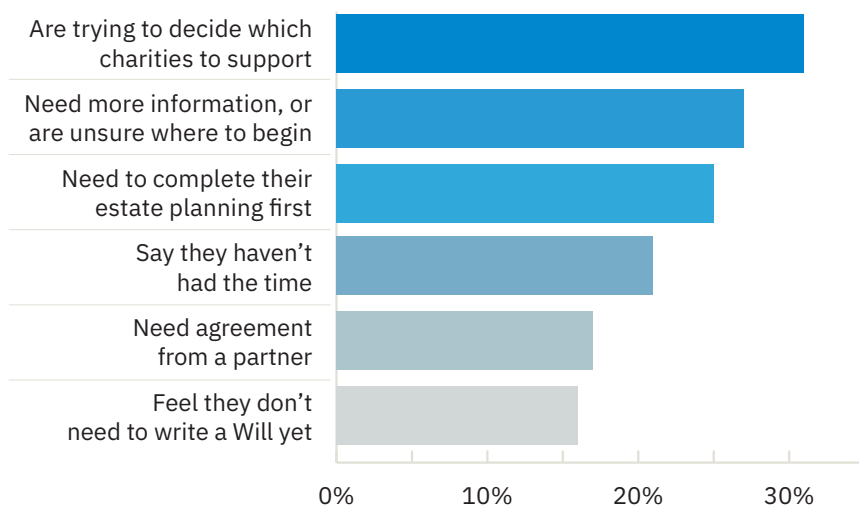


WHAT'S HOLDING PEOPLE BACK?

Among those who are interested in leaving a charitable gift in their Will, about half (52%) say they have given it some serious consideration over the past five years.

The findings show that they are not resistant to the idea of leaving a gift in their Will. Instead, many remain in the decision-making phase or cite practical barriers.

WHY INTERESTED CANADIANS HAVE NOT YET FINALIZED A LEGACY GIFT



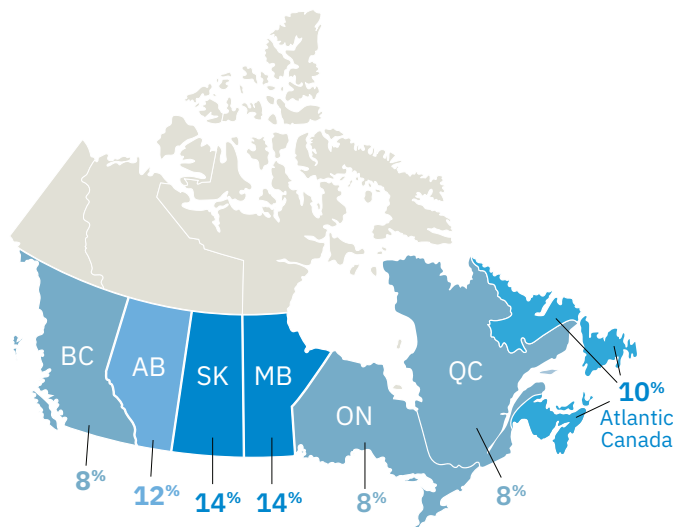
A note on registered funds and life insurance:

Among those with registered funds, 29% said they were interested or somewhat interested in naming a charity as a beneficiary. When it comes to life insurance, 27% of respondents said the same.

Here again, we see that Canadians under 50 are more likely to include charity on their registered funds or life insurance policy. Higher levels of interest are also seen among Black, Asian, and South Asian respondents, as well as immigrants.

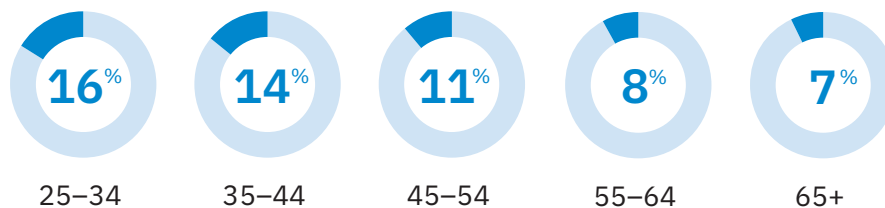
WHO HAS ALREADY LEFT A GIFT IN THEIR WILL?

Polling conducted by the Will Power campaign in 2025 shows a significant increase in charitable bequests over the past five years. **The proportion of Canadians who have left a gift to charity in their Will has doubled, rising from 5% in 2019 to 10% in 2025.**



A generational shift is also evident in who has already left a gift in their Will. In 2019, older Canadians were far more likely to report having already done so. Today, that pattern has reversed. **Canadians under 50 outpace older generations when it comes to participation in legacy giving.**

ENGAGEMENT IN ESTATE PLANNING, BY AGE



Welcome to the Gift Planning Era!

This research makes one thing clear: legacy giving in Canada is no longer a future opportunity, it's a present one. Since 2019, awareness has increased, interest has grown substantially, and more Canadians have already taken action. The proportion of Canadians who say they are likely to leave a charitable gift in their Will has risen from 31% to 44%, and the number who have already done so has doubled.

The growth is not happening evenly. It's shaped by who we engage, when we engage with them, and how. Canadians under 50 now show the highest levels of interest across all legacy gift types, and are already leaving gifts at higher rates than previously understood. Interest is also strong among middle- and upper-middle-income Canadians and across Black, South Asian, Asian, and immigrant communities. These findings challenge outdated assumptions about who legacy donors are.

At the same time, the research highlights missed opportunities. While most Canadians eventually write a Will, many are not asked about charitable giving during the process. Estate planning, rather than Will writing, emerges as the moment when values, family priorities, and financial decisions intersect. Yet conversations about charity remain inconsistent.

The gap between interest and action is not driven by resistance. Most Canadians who have not yet acted remain engaged and motivated, but often uncertain. They are deciding which

causes matter most, balancing family and charitable priorities, and looking for trusted guidance. These are barriers of confidence and clarity, not opposition.

Legacy giving is no longer a niche or end-of-life activity. It's an evolving mindset rooted in purpose, impact, and care for both family and community. By meeting Canadians where they are, and by asking better questions at the right time, the sector can help more people turn intention into action and generosity into lasting impact.

For both gift planners and advisors, the path forward is clear:

- > **Engage earlier:** talk about gifts in Wills during estate planning, not just at the point of Will writing.
- > **Broaden the conversation:** normalize gifts beyond Wills, including registered funds and life insurance.
- > **Reflect real lives and values:** speak to diverse motivations, life stages, cultures, and financial realities.



ABOUT THE CAGP FOUNDATION

The CAGP Foundation's mission is to financially support the development and promotion of excellence in strategic charitable giving in Canada. Our work is grounded in four core areas: education, public awareness, advocacy, and research and resources. We would not be able to do this without the generosity of donors.

We work in partnership with the Canadian Association of Gift Planners (CAGP), a national professional association that brings together charitable fundraisers and professional advisors who advance strategic charitable giving in communities across Canada.

We believe we can build a better world by placing the power of philanthropy in the hands of more Canadians – through gifts in Wills and other forms of legacy giving.

AN ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We're grateful to everyone who helped shape this report, whether through their charitable gifts, guidance, partnerships, or the ideas that continue to inform and inspire this work.

