

# Service Matters

NUMBERS SPEAK VOLUMES



Office of the  
**TAXPAYERS' OMBUDSPERSON**

ANNUAL REPORT **2021-2022**

**Office of the Taxpayers' Ombudsperson**

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# Table of Contents

<b>4</b>	<b>Letter to the Minister of National Revenue</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>Holding the CRA accountable</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Foreword</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>Your top concerns</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>The Office of the Taxpayers' Ombudsperson</b>	<b>44</b>	<b>Our influence</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Principles of an Ombudsperson</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>CRA needs to serve you better</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>CRA serving you better, through its own initiatives</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Your rights</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>Improving ourselves to serve you better</b>
<b>15</b>	<b>CRA's 3-step service complaint process</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>Connecting with you</b>
<b>16</b>	<b>The service we provide</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>Update on our 2020–2021 Annual Report recommendations</b>
<b>18</b>	<b>How we help you</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>Our recommendations this year</b>
<b>20</b>	<b>Sample Cases</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>Our statistics</b>
<b>24</b>	<b>Thank you for trusting us</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>Financial statement</b>
<b>27</b>	<b>A need to serve vulnerable populations</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>Contact us</b>
<b>30</b>	<b>Systemic service issues</b>		

# Letter to the Minister of National Revenue

The Honourable Diane Lebouthillier, M.P.  
Minister of National Revenue  
7th Floor  
555 Mackenzie Avenue  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0L5

Honourable Minister Lebouthillier:

I am pleased to submit to you the 2021–22 Annual Report entitled “*Service Matters: Numbers Speak Volumes*”, which covers the Office of the Taxpayers’ Ombudsperson’s activities for the period of April 1, 2021, to March 31, 2022, pursuant to the Order in Council P.C. 2020-0703.

Yours sincerely,



**François Boileau**  
Taxpayers’ Ombudsperson



# Foreword

Taxpayers' Ombudsperson —  
**François Boileau**

This is another record year for our office. As stated in the following pages, our staff has received an impressive number of enquiries and received more complaints than ever before. More importantly, we made a significantly greater number of urgent requests for assistance to the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA), for all of our fellow citizens who told us they had experienced financial hardship and needed urgent action from the CRA.

Being an ombudsperson is quite a privilege. I have very interesting meetings where not only do I learn a lot about the issues that affect the most vulnerable populations, but I also leave with a head full of ideas to communicate to the CRA. Working with the CRA's senior management also allows me to better understand their issues and make recommendations that will benefit the CRA and Canadians. This year, like last year, I am making recommendations to help the CRA better serve the Canadian public in a timely manner, while taking advantage of every opportunity that technological advances allow.

Serving Canadians is the greatest privilege of my position. That said, I cannot accomplish this alone. I am fortunate to have a dedicated team striving to improve the service that is provided to Canadians. In this rather record year, it is worth highlighting

● ● ●

**Serving  
Canadians is the  
greatest privilege  
of my position.**

their work and that is what we will do in this report. Our officers listen carefully, every day, and take thousands of calls year after year from worried and often frustrated Canadians.

Due to our record number of enquiries this year, we have had all of our officers, even those who would normally not respond to enquiries, help assist our intake team. This allowed us to continue to help those who called, even when our resources were strained.

In addition, our small team of systemic officers continued to work in overdrive, especially with the examination requested by the Minister into concerns raised by certain Muslim-led charities. This examination is a first, in many ways, for our office and we want to get it right. With this examination, the process will certainly be as important as the results. This examination was not planned, but we have embraced it because if we can overcome the obstacles that stand in our way, we will come out ahead as a team and as an office, not only for ourselves, but for so many Canadians who are waiting for the results.



**Our officers listen carefully, every day, and take thousands of calls year after year from worried and often frustrated Canadians.**

Our communications team, far from being outdone, continued to be challenged on all levels, while meeting the expectations of a demanding ombudsperson, and always in virtual mode. The simple fact, for example, that we are now making public our service improvement requests requires constant exchanges to ensure that everything is in order. Meeting groups and individuals is one thing, but having to resort to doing this virtually requires significant changes and adaptation.

Then, our corporate services team continued to respond to the myriad of reporting requests of all kinds, budgeting, accounting, contracting and privacy inquiries. Not only that, they also deal with human resource tasks on an ongoing basis, in addition to managing office matters in pandemic times, and information technology needs. It is amazing what they accomplish and in doing so, they also help Canadians, just as much as their colleagues on the other teams.

I thank them from the bottom of my heart and I am pleased to highlight some of their work and thoughts in this annual report.



# The Office of the Taxpayers' Ombudsperson

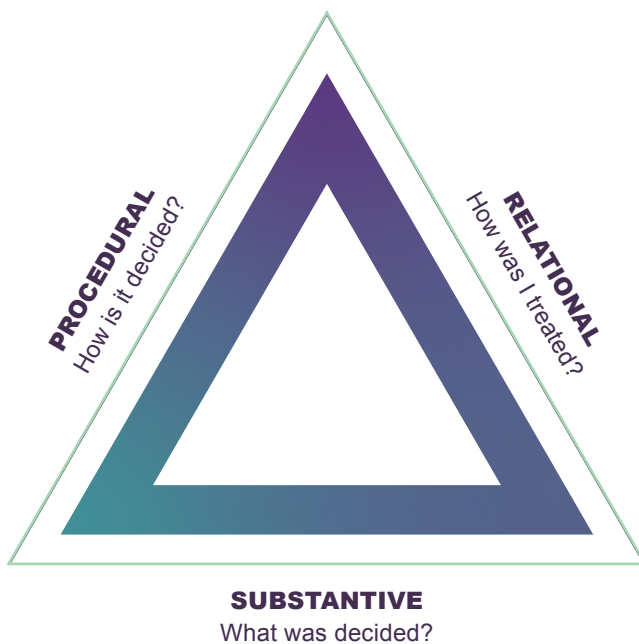
## MISSION

Our mission is to increase awareness of taxpayer rights and our services, influence positive change in the CRA's service, enhance or improve the accountability of the CRA, and ensure people can trust that an independent resolution of complaints about the CRA's service will be fair.

## VISION

Our vision is to ensure that in every interaction, the CRA provides fair treatment and professional service, to help the CRA improve its services, and to preserve our distinction for fairness, professionalism and effectiveness.

To assess fairness we use the [fairness triangle](#) developed by the [Saskatchewan Ombudsman](#) and we agree with him when he writes that "[f]airness is not always simple and it does not always mean that everyone gets the exact same thing."



### THE FAIRNESS TRIANGLE.

Source : Saskatchewan Ombudsman – Developed from the concept of the satisfaction triangle, in: Moore, Christopher (2003). *The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict* (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers



## ROLE

Our role is to improve the **service** the CRA provides to you. We do so by reviewing individual complaints and by conducting systemic examinations.

We fulfill this by **communicating, facilitating, examining and influencing**.

While we only have 30 employees to serve nearly 28 million tax filers, we strive to provide the best service possible. We do this by having everyone on our team playing an integral role, whether it is helping those who rely on the services we provide, managing our communications and social media, or ensuring the smooth running of our Office so that we have the necessary resources. Every employee in our Office pushes themselves towards our collective goal of improving the service the CRA provides while ensuring it is accountable, fair, and transparent.





# Principles of an Ombudsperson

The main principles of an Ombudsperson institution are set out in “The Venice Principles” and they were adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on December 16, 2020.

This represents the first international set of norms of the ombudsperson function. These principles serve as a guide for ombudsperson institutions by highlighting the importance of:

Ombudspersons’ mandates and powers vary, but the spirit and intent of these principles ensure their mandates may be achieved effectively.



A firm legal foundation



Confidentiality



Independence



Free, accessible services



Adequate resources



Non-binding recommendations, but moral-suasion powers by being transparent and public



Sufficient powers to conduct independent investigations

# The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson

**In 2007, the Government of Canada introduced the Taxpayers' Ombudsperson, along with the Taxpayer Bill of Rights. The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson is appointed by the Governor in Council for a five-year term, with no possibility of an extension.**

We work independently from the CRA, but we are administratively linked to it when managing financial and human resources. We also do not have direct access to taxpayer information found in CRA databases.

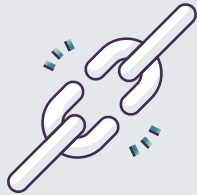
The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson's mandate is to assist, advise, and inform the Minister, to whom he reports, about any matter relating to services provided by the CRA.

The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson carries out this mandate by reviewing and dealing with complaints about service concerns with any of the eight rights we uphold. It is set out in Article 4 of the Order in Council P.C. 2020-0703.

If your complaint falls outside the eight rights we uphold, go to [canada.ca/cra-objections-appeals](https://canada.ca/cra-objections-appeals) to find your recourse options.

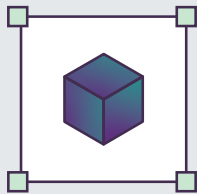
# PRINCIPLES

The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson is guided by four principles:



## Independence

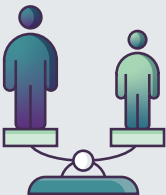
The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson operates at arm's length from the CRA in the fulfilment of its mandate.



## Objectivity

The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson is not an advocate for the complainant, nor a defender of the CRA.

The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson considers the position and perspective of both the taxpayer and the CRA when examining a complaint or issue.



## Fairness

The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson acts with equity and justice.



## Confidentiality

The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson holds all communications with those seeking assistance in strict confidence and does not disclose confidential communications unless given permission to do so.





# Your rights

**The Taxpayer Bill of Rights has 16 rights that describe the treatment you are entitled to when dealing with the CRA. These rights are composed of a mix of statutory, common law, and administrative rights.**

Standing alone, these rights under the Taxpayer Bill of Rights are simply declaratory in nature. Yet, they serve as a clear reminder to the CRA of their obligations towards the Canadian public. Our office is mandated, notably, to uphold rights 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14 and 15. The Taxpayer Bill of Rights also contains a Commitment to Small Business.



**1**

You have the right to receive entitlements and to pay no more and no less than what is required by law.

**2**

You have the right to service in both official languages.

**3**

You have the right to privacy and confidentiality.

**4**

You have the right to a formal review and a subsequent appeal.

**5**

You have the right to be treated professionally, courteously, and fairly.

**6**

You have the right to complete, accurate, clear, and timely information.

**7**

You have the right, unless otherwise provided by law, not to pay income tax amounts in dispute before you have had an impartial review.

**8**

You have the right to have the law applied consistently.

**9**

You have the right to lodge a service complaint and to be provided with an explanation of our findings.

**10**

You have the right to have the costs of compliance taken into account when administering tax legislation.

**11**

You have the right to expect us to be accountable.

**12**

You have the right to relief from penalties and interest under tax legislation because of extraordinary circumstances.

**13**

You have the right to expect us to publish our service standards and report annually.

**14**

You have the right to expect us to warn you about questionable tax schemes in a timely manner.

**15**

You have the right to be represented by a person of your choice.

**16**

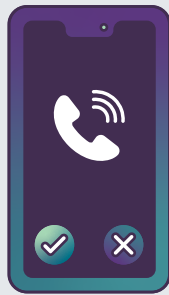
You have the right to lodge a service complaint and request a formal review without fear of reprisal.

## COMMITMENT TO SMALL BUSINESS

1. The CRA is committed to administering the tax system in a way that minimizes the costs of compliance for small businesses.
2. The CRA is committed to working with all governments to streamline service, minimize cost, and reduce the compliance burden.
3. The CRA is committed to providing service offerings that meet the needs of small businesses.
4. The CRA is committed to conducting outreach activities that help small businesses comply with the legislation we administer.
5. The CRA is committed to explaining how we conduct our business with small businesses.



# CRA's 3-step service complaint process



## Step 1

You can try to resolve your concerns with the CRA employee you have been dealing with and/or speak to their supervisor.

**Unsatisfied?  
Go to Step 2.**



## Step 2

Submit your [complaint](#) to CRA Service Feedback. CRA Service Feedback will review the complaint and work at resolving it within 30 business days.

**Still unsatisfied?  
Go to Step 3.**



## \*Step 3

Submit your [complaint](#) to us.

**\*If your situation is compelling,  
we will not ask you to  
complete step 1 and 2.**



# The service we provide

**If you are not satisfied with the service provided by the CRA, and should the CRA be unable to resolve your issue, we are the final step (Step 3).**

We know you deserve service excellence and our team is driven, empathetic, and resourceful. Further, we embrace diversity because we know it helps to serve you better.

By taking an empathetic approach to your concern, we listen to you without any judgment and hope we can assist in resolving your service issue.

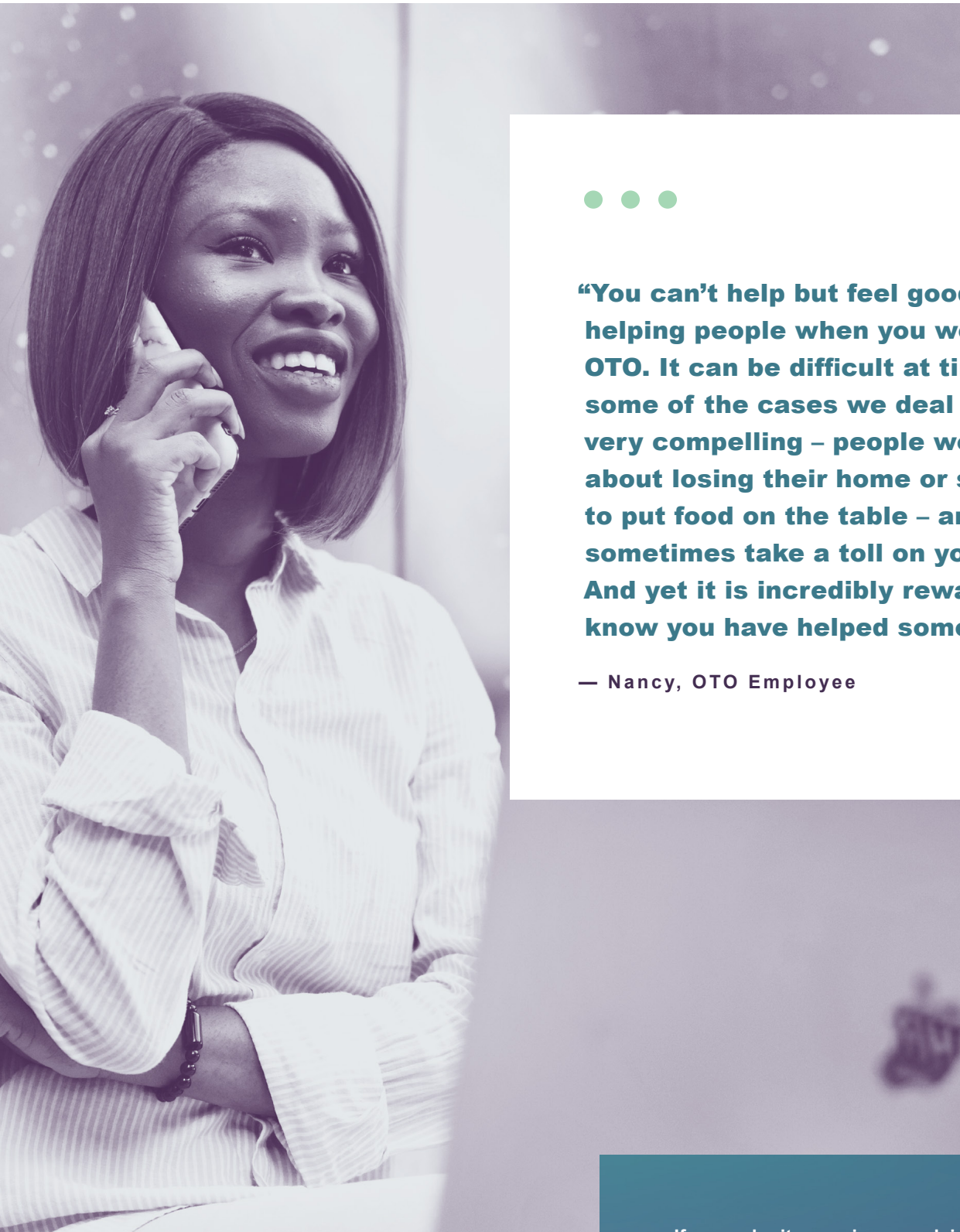
When you contact us, we are prompt to respond. All of our officers have toll-free numbers and we accept collect calls to make sure that we are available to the most vulnerable and to ensure that you don't incur any costs when trying to resolve your concerns with the CRA.

Our officers will listen to you and ask questions about your situation. This helps us determine if your complaint falls under our mandate, and what steps can be taken to resolve it. Even if your complaint falls outside of our mandate, we will try to help you find the correct redress mechanism.

We are committed to providing the best possible service when resolving complaints. We fulfill this commitment to service by:

- acknowledging complaints within five business days
- providing you with an update every 15 business days





**“You can’t help but feel good about helping people when you work in the OTO. It can be difficult at times, as some of the cases we deal with are very compelling – people worried about losing their home or struggling to put food on the table – and it can sometimes take a toll on you emotionally. And yet it is incredibly rewarding to know you have helped somebody.”**

— Nancy, OTO Employee

If you submit a service complaint to us and CRA Service Feedback has not had the opportunity to resolve it, we will refer it to the [CRA Service Feedback](#) on your behalf.

# How we help you

## URGENT PROCESS

We review complaints from people who are in a compelling situation, such as experiencing financial hardship. We understand that many of these situations require urgent action; therefore we prioritize these complaints and we will not direct you to complete Step 1 or 2 of the CRA's service complaint process. We address these complaints by facilitating contact between you and the CRA.

We generally consider a situation to be compelling if waiting for CRA Service Feedback to finish its review will:

- limit you from having the basic necessities of life
- limit your business from operating
- significantly impact your well-being and/or reputation

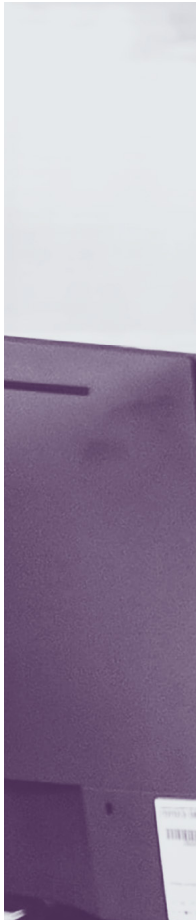
Once we determine your situation is compelling and we make an urgent request to the CRA, it will contact you within three business days.

## STANDARD PROCESS

If you are not in a compelling situation, and you have completed Step 2, yet you're not satisfied with the quality of service you received from the CRA, submit your complaint to us.

When examining your complaint, we may request information from both of you and the CRA as we do not have access to the CRA's databases. By collecting information from you and the CRA, we maximize our chances to better understand your concerns.

Our goal is to resolve your complaint within 120 days from when we start our examination. During this period you will have direct contact with the examination officer assigned to your case.







If we find the CRA did not respect one of your rights, we may recommend the CRA take specific action to resolve your complaint and will inform you of the result. If we make a recommendation, we will present our findings to the CRA and identify the service gap, along with a robust rationale supporting it.

We may recommend the CRA:

- provide further explanation
- implement additional training
- contact the taxpayer
- make corrections
- issue an apology
- implement a procedure or policy change
- send a letter to a taxpayer
- update or create a service



**“The taxpayers who call us are more often than not in distress, so we have to try to de-escalate the situation a bit and reassure the taxpayer that we are there to help them. Even if they are initially upset because they believe that we have access to their file and that we can make a difference immediately, the tone normally softens once you tell them that we are there to help them, and we end the call on a positive note. Every case is unique and keeps me constantly challenged and actively listening and paying attention. It is also easy to put yourself in the shoes of the taxpayers calling us because the situations are very real.”**

— Emile, OTO Employee

# Sample Cases

## **Winding Road to a Resolution: COVID-19 Benefit Payment Concern Resolved**

*The following story is based on actual events, but it has been changed to preserve the identity of the complainant, and to combine the common thoughts and feelings expressed by complainants. The names used are entirely fictitious.*



Fatima submits a complaint to us. In the complaint she indicates the CRA is not reviewing the supporting documents proving her eligibility for the Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB) in a timely manner. She indicates without the CRB she won't be able to make rent this month and could face eviction.

We considered Fatima's situation as compelling, prioritized her complaint, and reached out to her as soon as we could.

**OTO  
officer**

Hi Fatima, I'm calling from the Office of the Taxpayers' Ombudsperson, my name is Will, I wanted to let you know we received your online complaint and we wanted to find out a little more information. Can you tell me more about your situation?

Yes! The CRA initially denied my Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB) in early 2021 because I had not filed my 2019 and 2020 income tax return. So I filed them and the CRA processed them in late March 2021. I spoke to the CRA in April 2021, and asked them to do a second review of my CRB but since then, I'm still waiting for my CRB payment. We're in August now and I just learned the CRA hasn't assigned my case to a reviewer yet. This is taking way too long and I'm no longer able to pay for my rent, food and utilities. I really need your help.

**Fatima**

**OTO  
officer**

Your situation sounds very serious. I will send an urgent request to the CRA and you should hear from a CRA agent within three business days. It does not mean your case will be resolved within that timeframe, but it will be reviewed promptly. Could you complete our [Permission to Disclose](#) form, this allows us to find out what action the CRA took?

Yes, I can! Thank you very much!

**Fatima**

**OTO  
officer**

I'll get back in touch with you soon.  
  
(few days later) Hi Fatima, I'm just following up with you. The CRA informed me that you are eligible for the CRB, and your payment will be issued in a few days.

Yes, the CRA called me and I was so happy to hear this news! Thank you so much for helping me.

**Fatima**

**Cascade Effect –  
Disability Tax Credit (DTC) Delay:  
Money Needed for Medication**

*The following story is based on actual events, but it has been changed to preserve the identity of the complainant, and to combine the common thoughts and feelings expressed by complainants. The names used are entirely fictitious.*



Carl contacted our [Enquiries](#) phone line.

**OTO  
officer**

Hello, Office of the Taxpayers' Ombudsperson, my name is Johanne, how can I help you?

Well, in August 2021, the CRA approved my application for the Disability Tax Credit (DTC) starting with the 2018 tax year. As soon as I got this news, I was anticipating the CRA would be reassessing my returns within 2 weeks, based on its service standard, as I originally filed my returns electronically. Now it's mid-October and the CRA still hasn't reassessed my returns. I have called the CRA several times, but I still haven't received my refunds. This situation is really causing me stress as I am no longer able to afford my medication. Can you help me?

**Carl**

**OTO  
officer**

Yes, we can absolutely try to help you! [Submit your complaint](#) to us using our online form and an examination officer will contact you shortly. We also have other methods to submit if the online submission is not suitable.

Thank you very much! I can send the submission online.

**Carl**

**OTO  
officer**

Hi Carl, my name is Armelle, I'm calling from the OTO, I am the examination officer assigned to your case. I want to let you know that we have received your complaint including your consent. I could not get a hold of you last week, because you were unavailable; however, with your consent I was able to make an urgent request to the CRA. We have since heard back from the CRA and the reassessments for your 2018, 2019, and 2020 tax years have been processed to include the DTC. We were told your Notices of Re-assessments will be issued next week and you should receive the refunds shortly thereafter. If you don't receive them, please call me directly and I will take action right away.

Thank you so much! I am so relieved.

**Carl**

# Thank you for trusting us

**We are touched by the fact that many of you have come to us showing your appreciation for how our officers have helped you. You have highlighted some of the best qualities of our Office. Your feedback drives us to do more and more every day for Canadians. We love hearing from you!**

**This year you have told us:**

“

I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for taking the trouble to help me with my rent and wage subsidy benefits. CRA really stepped up and I received all my subsidy payments that I was entitled to promptly.

Again sir thank you so very much for taking the time to sort this matter out for me and for my bakery. We now get back to baking.

— Received by Nicolas,  
OTO Employee

“

I would like to thank your department very much for resolving my situation with the CRA. I received my notice of assessment and refund very promptly after your intervention.

— Received by Emile,  
OTO Employee

“

I am writing to you to express my gratitude for your assistance in managing my [case]. Without your guidance, I feel the delay in processing my claim toward a favourable outcome would have continued for much longer. [...]

This is the third time in the past five years that I request the service of the Taxpayers' Ombudsperson against the CRA. I would like to acknowledge that my success record is three for three! With your assistance.

— Received by Gisèle,  
OTO Employee



I am so pleased with the service of this department. Within days of receiving my letter, I was telephoned by Will. Once I submitted a release, it took only days to hear from CRA who processed my CRB payments. I believe that whole process took under three weeks. The process was so quick [...]. Thanks again to everyone who helped

— Received by Will,  
OTO Employee



[A] representative of the Ombudsman Office called me personally to advise of receipt of the appeal, and to offer guidance, which I pursued.

I am writing today to advise that the CRA have also contacted me subsequently and, after further review, have recognized there were errors in the processing of my 2019 and 2020 tax returns. To my satisfaction, I now believe the current matter in question has been resolved, and was impressed with the CRA forthrightness on the appeal/objection. Process errors had indeed been made, but are now being rectified.

But I want to thank your office for getting back to me personally, and so quickly (given all things Covid nowadays). And to personally thank your agent for his engagement. Thanks for the work you do !!!”

— Received by Emile,  
OTO Employee



I am writing to thank you for your help with my CRSB claim. I received the funds on Tuesday.

— Received by Robert,  
OTO Employee



This comment is to thank the Ombudsperson’s Office (specifically in the person of David) for the most courteous and thoughtful treatment of my complaint that I might ever have hoped for.

I will heartily recommend to anyone I know that they contact the Office for any and all problems they may encounter with the CRA in future. Thank you again for the treatment I received at your hands.”

— Received by David,  
OTO Employee





Good morning Will it's [...] calling. You are my hero. I wish you an abundance of karma in your life. I spoke with [CRA] and everything seems to be getting sorted out just exactly what should be and I just wanted to call and say thank you so much. I'm very grateful and your professionalism is much appreciated. Hope you have a great day. Bye.

— Received by Will,  
OTO Employee  
(by voicemail message)



This is to express my gratitude for your effort in handling an urgent matter regarding the hurdles with my CRB application that has been delayed for more than three months. As of this writing, 6 out of 7 outstanding CRB applications have been processed and will be completed in 5-10 business days. Thank you for your attention on this matter.

— Received by Nicolas,  
OTO Employee

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The feedback showcased is based on actual events, but some situations may have been changed to preserve the identity of the complainant.



# A need to serve vulnerable populations

**Many Canadians feel very fortunate to live in Canada, a country with a wide array of social programs to support its citizens.**

This support was made abundantly clear at the beginning of the pandemic, when emergency COVID-19 benefits were rolled out quickly to alleviate some of the financial stress and uncertainty that many were facing. The nature of the benefits then evolved, as the pandemic continued into its second year.

Throughout the last year, we heard from many Canadians, including our most vulnerable populations, telling us how the pandemic had impacted them. While the CRA issued benefits quickly to the majority of eligible Canadians, many who reached out to our Office told us they experienced delays in receiving their COVID-19 benefits while the CRA validated their entitlement, and described to us the financial hardship they were experiencing as a result. Some people were struggling to put food on the table; were unable to afford their medication or to keep up with their bills. We referred a record number of these compelling cases to the CRA, and requested that officials communicate urgently with the taxpayer to try and resolve their concern. In response, the CRA quickly contacted these taxpayers to assist them.

While we modestly reflect on our success stories in serving Canadians, we should not forget about our vulnerable populations, particularly those who do not file an income tax return.

We define vulnerable populations as a collection of diverse individuals who are disadvantaged and/or marginalized in some way. This could be due to socio-economic factors, living situations, or difficulties accessing government services. In the present context, vulnerable populations may include:

- adults 65 years and older
- housing-insecure individuals;
- Indigenous Peoples;
- modest-income individuals
- newcomers;
- persons with disabilities;
- students.

The CRA has publicly reported that 93.5% of Canadians<sup>1</sup> participate in the tax system, while some academics have estimated the figure could be between 88–90%<sup>2</sup>. In any event, this means that there are people who are potentially missing out on programs and credits. The same could be said as well for many benefits that they missed out as many provincial/territorial and municipal levels rely on the T1 Return.

The CRA has made strides in recent years to identify the barriers to tax filing<sup>3</sup>, and has introduced initiatives to make filing easier. These include File my Return, an automated telephone service for eligible individuals with a low or fixed income, and the Let us help you get your benefits! initiative, an intergovernmental initiative to support all Indigenous peoples and address barriers to accessing benefits.

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1 <https://www.canada.ca/en/revenue-agency/corporate/about-canada-revenue-agency-cra/departmental-performance-reports/2020-21-departmental-results-report.html>

2 Who doesn't file a Tax Return? A Portrait of Non-Filers (Robson, Jennifer and Schwartz, Saul): <https://www.utpjournals.press/doi/full/10.3138/cpp.2019-063>


3 [Barriers Associated with Tax Filing in Vulnerable Populations Qualitative Research Executive Summary - Canada.ca](#)



As part of the Non-Filer Benefit Letter campaign for the fiscal year 2021-2022, the CRA issued approximately 175,000 letters with a positive message to promote filing behaviours and to ensure that Canadians receive the benefits and credits to which they are entitled.

As a result of these mailings, a total of 35,000 returns were filed, resulting in over \$24 million in tax refund payments and over \$24 million in credits/benefits paid to Canadians.





As mentioned earlier, there is also an initiative to assist free tax clinics, where volunteers from community organizations across Canada help eligible people do their taxes for free through the CRA's Community Volunteer Income Tax Program (CVITP) or through Revenu Quebec's Income Tax Assistance – Volunteer Program. The CVITP Grant Program is in its second year of a three-year pilot, and helps offset some costs incurred by community organizations that host free tax clinics and provide funding for income tax returns filed. It is not yet perfect, but this initiative is more than welcome.

We look forward to seeing the results of all the CRA's initiatives.

We want to reach vulnerable non-filers and make them aware of the importance of tax filing, and the role of our Office. Over the 2022–2023 fiscal year, we will increase our engagement with organizations who serve vulnerable populations, get their feedback on the steps the CRA has taken to make filing easier and more accessible, find out how they may have impacted the clients they serve, and solicit their ideas for service improvement. We are fully aware of our limits, either in resources and capacities. But as we strive to be an agent of change, this ongoing non-filers situation needs to be addressed, every year, so that the CRA can continue to improve, or create, new service programs to help lower the number of Canadians who do not have access to benefits because they do not file. After all, many of these benefit programs were intended to help our vulnerable populations the most. Therefore, we pledge to do more on this issue and to keep you informed of our progress. Look out in 2022–2023 as we plan to launch a dedicated webpage on vulnerable populations.

# Systemic service issues

## IDENTIFYING

We not only examine your complaints, but we also look at issues that may impact more than one taxpayer or a segment of the population. We are particularly focused on concerns that could affect Canada's vulnerable populations.

If we identify a systemic issue, we perform three steps before we reach a conclusion or make a recommendation. Specifically, we:

1. Research
2. Examine
3. Report

## EXAMINING

This year we opened an examination into the fairness of the CRA's audit process for registered charities. We continued our examination into the communication provided by the CRA when it locked our users from their CRA Account in February 2021 and closed our Canada child benefit (CCB) examination because the Office of the Auditor General issued a complete report on the same questions.



## FAIRNESS OF THE CRA'S AUDIT PROCESS OF REGISTERED CHARITIES

On July 22, 2021, at the [National Summit on Islamophobia](#), the Minister stated systemic racism and discrimination are important issues the CRA takes very seriously.

As part of the Minister's commitment, she requested the Taxpayers' Ombudsperson examine concerns raised by certain Muslim-led registered charities and engage other registered charities led by racialized communities about their experiences with the CRA. In particular, the Minister requested the examination focus on the concerns linked to the selection of audit files, the quality of the services offered and the efforts taken by the CRA to sensitize its employees to unconscious biases.

This year we took preliminary steps in this examination. These included:

- forming a Special Ombudsperson Response Team
- holding meetings with CRA officials and stakeholders
- requesting information from the CRA
- [calling on registered charities to share their experiences with us](#)
- launching a questionnaire
- keeping you in the loop on [what we are doing](#)

Given the depth and breadth of the examination, our research thus far, the volume of material we received, and desire to examine the audit process carefully and sensitively, we foresee this examination will continue throughout the 2022–2023 fiscal year.





## CRA ACCOUNT COMMUNICATION

In February 2021, we launched our review into the communications implemented by the CRA when it locked out 187,000 Canadians from their CRA account earlier that month. This issue became front and centre at our Office on February 16, 2021, when we saw a spike in complaints about CRA accounts, heard first-hand from Canadians, and saw reports in the media. Affected CRA account users were all reporting being locked out of their account after receiving an email from the CRA.

This year we made strides in this examination and we plan to publish our findings in the 2022–2023 fiscal year. Look out for our report on our [Influencing Change](#) website.





## CRA'S ADMINISTRATION OF THE CANADA CHILD BENEFIT (CCB)

Throughout the years we heard and received complaints about the CRA's requirements for proving eligibility for the CCB, therefore, in 2019 we opened an examination. In particular we heard issues with proving entitlement, validation, and the information the CRA made available. Specifically, we heard the requirements were often not clear and, in the cases of some vulnerable Canadians, difficult to fulfill.

While we were conducting our examination, we knew the Office of the Auditor General (OAG) was also conducting a performance audit, and in February 2021, it published Report 4 Canada Child Benefit — Canada Revenue Agency.

The CRA's implementation of the OAG's recommendations, including its review of acceptable documents, procedures, and communication tools, as well as potential information sharing will address many of the concerns we heard. Further, complaints we receive surrounding service issues from the CRA's administration of the CCB remains low. Therefore, we have decided to suspend this examination.

We look forward to the CRA's implementation of its action plan to the OAG's recommendations.

During our examination, we identified an issue that could affect vulnerable Canadians, including those residing in temporary shelters. Therefore, we made a service improvement request as we knew it required immediate action. Specifically, we found the CRA provided incomplete information and we recommended it update its information for Canadians in an abusive or violent situation.



# Holding the CRA accountable

**When we make recommendations, and they are accepted, the CRA creates an action plan. Then, annually, as the CRA completes its action plans, it provides updates. This keeps you, and us, in the loop on what the CRA is doing to improve the service it provides. It also keeps the CRA accountable.**

We monitor how the CRA is implementing our recommendations, including the ones that are ongoing. If we notice an issue, we can reach out to the CRA.

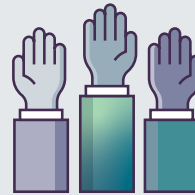
We are continuing to monitor the recommendations set out in the following reports:

We look forward to the CRA completing its action plans. Once it has, we will provide you with a final update on our [Influencing Change](#) page.



## **Sub-standard**

examined the delays and lack of transparency in the CRA's processing of individual income tax and benefit returns and adjustment.



## **Reaching out**

focused on the support offered to partner organizations by the CRA for the Community Volunteer Income Tax Program and the Income Tax Assistance – Volunteer Program (in Quebec).



## **Back to basics**

analyzed how, and to what extent, the CRA incorporates the Taxpayer Bill of Rights in its operations and makes taxpayers aware of their rights.



# Your top concerns

**We track every service issue you bring to us. This allows us to identify trends.**

When we identify a trend, we find out more information and question what the CRA is doing about it.

This year, we heard the same concerns you told us about last year. Specifically, we saw trends in service issues related to the following areas:

1. Delays in receiving COVID-19 benefits
2. Quality of service provided by CRA contact centres
3. Delays in income tax and benefit returns and adjustment requests
4. Access to CRA accounts
5. Delays in receiving the Canada child benefit (CCB)

## 1. DELAYS IN RECEIVING COVID-19 BENEFITS

For the second year, Canadians contacting us are identifying service issues when trying to receive COVID-19 benefits from the CRA. This year's COVID-19 benefits concerns account for 40% of what we heard. The most prominent reason is that many feel they need to wait too long to receive their benefit. Generally, this was because of delays in validating their eligibility by the CRA.

The CRA further exacerbated the problem because it was publicly informing Canadians to expect validation to take up to eight weeks (in normal times it is four weeks). We consistently flagged this concern to the CRA and questioned what it was doing to reduce these delays for Canadians. We even made a [service improvement request](#) in an attempt to influence positive change at the CRA.

Yet, there is still much room for improvement when the CRA is communicating transparently to Canadians and delivering timely services.

## 2. QUALITY OF SERVICE PROVIDED BY CRA CONTACT CENTRES

The CRA's contact centres continue to be a large complaint driver. For years, we have heard from Canadians about their dissatisfaction with this service. While most of the issues we hear come from dissatisfaction with the CRA's main line, the [Individual Tax Enquiries Line](#), we do hear about issues with its other contact centres. Some of the issues Canadians expressed to our Office related to excessive wait times, receiving conflicting or inconsistent information, or calls being prematurely disconnected.”

We hope our recommendation five of our [2020–2021 Annual Report](#) will begin to make a dent in these long-standing issues when put in place by the CRA.

The CRA has informed us that while it has made strides to improve its contact centre services, prioritize more complex calls by encouraging the use of self-serving options, and foster a culture of putting people first, there is still work to be done.



### 3. DELAYS IN INCOME TAX AND BENEFIT RETURNS AND ADJUSTMENT REQUESTS

Delays in the CRA's processing of income tax and benefits returns and adjustment requests have been a consistent complaint we have heard for many years; in fact, we wrote a report about it called [Sub-Standard](#). The CRA has created an action plan and has addressed many of the recommendations the Taxpayers' Ombudsperson made. However, some recommendations remain outstanding. Once the CRA completes its action plan, look out for a final update from us, and our thoughts on the action the CRA took on [Influencing Change](#).



## 4. ACCESS TO CRA ACCOUNTS

Throughout the year we heard from Canadians who could not gain access to their CRA account. They may have received a letter by registered mail indicating they were affected by a security incident, provided incorrect credentials too many times in a row, or were just a new CRA account user. One thing however, is that all these people need a security code to gain full access. Without it they only have limited access to their CRA account. Some of you expressed your frustrations about requesting a CRA security code, and never getting it. Others have come to us indicating they have waited weeks for it to arrive. We have also heard from the CRA that there have been exceptional circumstances where a code is provided through another method. The CRA website implies it is a choice to receive the code by mail; specifically it indicates “If you choose to have the code mailed, we will mail it to the address we have on file.” However, we have heard from Canadians that the CRA’s current desired method (by mail) is not timely enough and sometimes never comes.

While we acknowledge the essential commitment that the CRA has made to protect taxpayers’ online accounts and prevent fraud, we think the CRA needs to provide more convenient options for Canadians to receive a CRA security code, in a timely manner.

### **Recommendation 1 – CRA accounts: The security code**

**The Taxpayers’ Ombudsperson recommends to the Minister and to the Chair of the Board of Management the CRA look for ways in which a taxpayer can receive a security code the same day it is requested, allowing Canadians to have full access to their CRA Account in a timely manner.**

In addition, there are times when the CRA will not provide a security code until it verifies who you are and we have heard this can take many weeks. For a lot of Canadians, this can feel like an eternity when you need access to the information found in their CRA account. Many Canadians rely on the CRA to access their important tax information, such as their Notice of Assessment (NOA). Such documents are often used to apply for loans and mortgages which are time sensitive. Knowing this, the CRA could provide more convenient options for Canadians to prove their identity and find ways to do so in a timely manner.



The elimination of the CRA's counter service in 2014 has left a gap in service. The lack of in-person support makes it difficult for some Canadians to prove their identity. Comparatively, at financial institutions clients' identity can easily be verified by referring them to one of their branches. However, because the CRA has no in-person counter service, this leaves it having to verify a Canadian's identity in other ways. That said, we know there are some financial institutions that have no branches, yet they verify someone's identity through a trusted third party. This simplifies and expedites the process because their clients only need to go to the trusted third party to verify their identity. The trusted third party then instantly and securely communicates this to the financial institution.

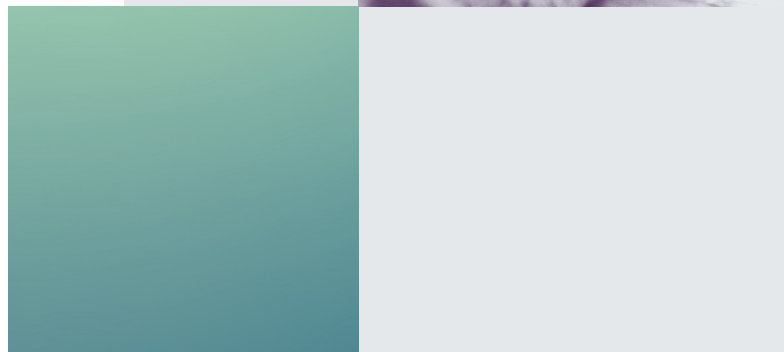
## **Recommendation 2 – CRA accounts: Identity verification**

**The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson recommends to the Minister and to the Chair of the Board of Management the CRA find a way to provide in-person same-day identity verification of a taxpayer, for example, through a trusted third party.**

## 5. DELAYS IN RECEIVING THE CANADA CHILD BENEFIT (CCB)

We continue to hear about concerns related to the CCB; however, it is important to note they only represent a small percentage of the complaints we received, less than 5%. Some Canadians told us they experience delays in the CRA processing of their CCB application, verifying their eligibility, or they were late because of delays in the CRA's processing of their tax and benefit return. This has left some of them waiting on a benefit they rely on.

We are continuing to watch out for any trending concerns, as we know that the CCB is one of the leading benefits the CRA provides to almost four million Canadians. As we indicated in our section on [Systemic service issues](#), we expect the CRA to continue to take action on the Auditor General's recommendations and look forward to seeing what it provides, in this regard, by its July 2022 deadline.



## OTHER CONCERNS

### GUARANTEED INCOME SUPPLEMENT (GIS)

Our Office received a few telephone enquiries and written complaints regarding the GIS starting around August 2021. Complainants indicated their receipt of COVID-19 benefits had impacted their GIS and Old Age Security (OAS) payments.

Canadians expressed a lack of understanding of why there were inconsistencies on how the GIS was impacted dependent on whether the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) payments were administered by the CRA or Service Canada. As the GIS is not administered by the CRA, our Office made sure to direct the complainants to Service Canada. Nevertheless, we had concerns over the clarity of the information on how receiving COVID-19 benefits administered by the CRA would impact the GIS payments administered by Service Canada.

This was because taxpayers who received the benefit from Service Canada could request reinstatement of the GIS which was not available to those who received it from the CRA, because the CRA indicates there is no regulatory or legislative authority for the CRA to take other steps or interim measures to have their GIS reinstated. Legislation provided for more flexibility to Service Canada CERB recipients as they could submit a form to Service Canada and get special consideration.

As this was a big concern for so many, especially in our outreach activities, we questioned the CRA to ensure clear communication had been provided. However, this situation fast became a concern to the Government of Canada as a whole and this issue was thoroughly debated in Parliament. The government set aside \$742.4 million to offset the GIS and OAS claw backs. These payments were intended to reimburse the losses suffered by affected taxpayers, and will not be counted as taxable income.

Additionally, An Act to amend the Old Age Security Act (Guaranteed Income Supplement) received Royal Assent March 3, 2022. This piece of legislation amends the Old Age Security Act to omit payments from COVID-19 benefits as income for the purpose of calculating GIS or “allowances payable” following June 2022. This includes deducting amounts received under the CERB, Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB), the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB), the Canada Recovery Caregiver Benefit (CRCB) and Canada Worker Lockdown Benefit (CWLB) from calculation for applicable benefits.





Canadians are relieved this situation was addressed by Parliament. However, the CRA's communication of the interaction between the COVID-19 benefits and GIS and OAS, including the availability of this information on the CRA webpage dedicated to these benefits, was still an element of interest. We found that:

- Call centre agents were provided with contextual information concerning the interaction between the CERB and GIS, and in most instances refer the taxpayer with queries regarding GIS to Service Canada.
- On May 15, 2020, a banner was present on the CERB webpage advising applicants:

**“The CERB may impact your social assistance benefits.**

If you receive provincial or territorial Social (Income or Disability) Assistance, you may want to consult your Provincial or Territorial Social Assistance Office before applying for the CERB. First Nations living on-reserve should contact the Band Administration Office.”

- From October 2, 2020, to December 22, 2021, a similar warning was present on the CRB webpage, which advised taxpayers:

“you may want to consult your Provincial or Territorial Social Assistance Office before applying for the CRB to make sure that your other benefits won't be affected. First Nations living on-reserve should contact their Band Administration Office.”

We felt the CRA's initial banners advising applicants of potential interactions between the COVID-19 benefits and provincial or territorial social assistance were unclear. Some taxpayers may not associate the term “social assistance” with the GIS or OAS. Additionally, referencing provincial or territorial benefits could have confused taxpayers, as the GIS and OAS are not provincially or territorially managed. While we recognize that obtaining clarity on the impact of all new programs on Canadian's benefits is an issue for the Government of Canada, the CRA does play an important role to adequately inform Canadians. The messaging the CRA provided on Canada.ca about the impact of receiving the CERB could have explicitly identified the GIS, OAS and other income-tested benefits.





To be clear, as an example, the CERB is a supplement of income that could affect other social benefits Canadians may rely upon. Canadians should be well informed that benefits, such as the CERB, increase an individual's income and by doing so, it could affect other benefits based on income.



### **Recommendation 3 – Clarity is key**

The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson recommends to the Minister and to the Chair of the Board of Management the CRA make it clear to Canadians that when it is administering a benefit that increases an individual's income that it sufficiently informs applicants that the increase could affect their other income based benefits.

# Our influence

**The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson can influence change at the CRA by sending requests directly to the CRA or by making recommendations to the Minister of National Revenue, or to the Minister and to the Chair of the Board of Management. The Ombudsperson can do this by sending a service improvement request to the CRA or by making recommendations in a Systemic Examination or Annual Report.**

## INFORMATION FOR CANADIANS IN AN ABUSIVE OR VIOLENT SITUATION

When carrying out our Canada child benefit (CCB) examination, we remained cognizant of a previous request the Minister made to us to assist her by examining if any service issues exist for women when trying to receive their CCB while residing in a temporary shelter with their children.

In addition, when identifying opportunities for service improvement, we try to focus our attention on helping Canadians who are the most vulnerable. This led us to identify an issue that could affect vulnerable Canadians, including those residing in temporary shelters.



To improve the clarity and completeness of information available to Canadians who are in an abusive or violent situation, as well as the service the CRA provides them, the Taxpayers' Ombudsperson requested the CRA create an active webpage on what a taxpayer should do when the CRA requires, or requests, information, or documents, that may put them in danger. For example, this webpage would inform taxpayers who are at-risk that:

- A spouse's signature is not required on the form [RC66 Canada Child Benefits Application includes federal, provincial, and territorial programs](#).
- A letter from a trusted third party, for example the Band Council, a resettlement agency, or a religious entity that can be provided instead of what the CRA requested.

The CRA accepted our request and launched the [webpage](#) in December 2021. The CRA now provides Canadians with information on a dedicated and easily accessible webpage. Further, it details what is required by the CRA if it requests documents or a signature and the respondent is in an abusive or violent situation. Specifically, it makes it clear the CRA will not require documents or a signature that could put them in danger. This information is also available to the CRA's contact centre agents, so they can help Canadians who call into its main contact centre. We were also pleased to see that the CRA [promoted](#) the page from its social media accounts.

That said, when the webpage was first released we had a few concerns in some areas. For example, the webpage indicated, "Your spouse's or common-law partner's signature is not required on Form RC66, Canada Child Benefit's Application, or any other benefit-related form." However, the RC66 still indicated that both signatures are required if your marital status is married or living common law. The webpage also did not contain information on how to remove an authorized representative which we felt was vital as the CRA recognizes that many authorized representatives are friends and family members and as a result could be the abuser in some instances.

On February 2, 2022, we questioned the CRA on these matters and were satisfied when the CRA updated its webpage on February 11, 2021, to include information on how to remove an authorized representative, and told us that it plans to update the wording for its signature requirements on the RC66 by July 4, 2022. While we would have liked to see the CRA take swifter actions in updating the RC66, we are cognizant that certain tasks may take longer than expected.

## INFORMATION FOR CANADIANS OWING MONEY

When researching information to prepare our [Ombudsperson Final Update](#) for our report [Fair Warning](#) — an examination that looked into the CRA practices on providing legal warnings to taxpayers when collecting a debt, we found Canadians were not sufficiently informed the CRA will be flexible in recovering COVID-19 benefit overpayments and we found the CRA's [Payments to the CRA](#) and [Collections at the CRA](#) webpages were not intuitive. We knew this would make it difficult for many Canadians to find the information they needed.

Therefore, we made a service improvement request for the CRA to:

- Review its [Payments to the CRA](#) webpages to ensure that the CRA provides consistent and relevant information to Canadians. This includes making Canadians aware that they have the options of repaying their COVID-19 benefits, over time.
- Centralize the information provided on [Payments to the CRA](#) and [Collections at the CRA](#) to ensure that the information provided is consistent, relevant, and easily accessible.

Following our request the CRA made updates to many of its webpages. It now sufficiently informs Canadians they have options to repay their COVID-19 benefits over time. However, while some of its pages are more comprehensive, we continue to collaborate with the CRA, to ensure that it fully implements our request and ensures its webpages are intuitive for Canadians.





## VIEWING UNCASHED CHEQUES IN MY ACCOUNT — REPRESENTATIVE ACCESS

A legal representative contacted our Office with a service issue. They indicated the CRA only allowed taxpayers or their legal representatives to view and request uncashed cheques from the CRA. Which left authorized representatives, who were not legal representatives, unable to view or request unclaimed funds. They told us this could affect vulnerable Canadians who could not manage their own income tax affairs.

We raised this issue with the CRA and were told it was exploring ways to facilitate better access to uncashed cheques for all Canadians who have representatives. We were therefore pleased when the CRA indicated that in the spring of 2022, it planned to expand access. They explained the change will allow Level 1 and 2 representatives with view access of uncashed cheques and Level 2 representatives with the ability to request a duplicate payment.



**Interesting fact: Since the uncashed cheque feature was launched in February 2020, as of March 31, 2022, over 1.8 million payments valued at \$763M were requested by Canadians.**



## COMMUNITY VOLUNTEER INCOME TAX PROGRAM (CVITP)

As noted in our Office's 2020 report, [Reaching Out](#), the CVITP is an important program that assists many Canadians, particularly the most vulnerable. We made many [recommendations](#) in our report and we are pleased the CRA continues to adapt and innovate while it takes action to address them. The assistance in filing their income tax and benefit returns not only helps Canadians comply with their income tax obligations but can help open the door to many benefits and credits.

The CRA continued support to partner organizations hosting virtual clinics for those that rely on this service is vital. This allowed the CRA to continue to provide support for Canada's vulnerable populations through unforeseen circumstances, while addressing some of the concerns we raised in our report about access.

The CRA is also administering the [CVITP Grant program](#), a three-year pilot project to help offset costs incurred by community organizations that host free tax clinics and provide funding for income tax returns filed. The CRA began accepting grant applications for funding on May 1, 2021.

The program's goal is to improve recruitment and retention of volunteer organizations, which was another concern we raised in the report. Definitely, more needs to be said about the program and how it can be improved, but for the moment, the CRA is going in the right direction. We will continue to monitor this key program throughout our outreach activities and will provide you with a final update when the CRA completes its action plan on our [Influencing Change](#) page.



# CRA needs to serve you better

## EMERGENCY BENEFIT VALIDATION DELAYS

One of our major complaints drivers this year was caused by delays Canadians faced with the CRA validating their eligibility for COVID-19 benefits.



**40%**

**Over 40% of the complaints we received (over 1500) this year were largely attributed to the delays Canadians experienced getting their eligibility validated.**

While we recognize that the vast majority of Canadians did not face delays in receiving their COVID-19 benefits, in the beginning of 2021, many of the Canadians who contacted us expressed their frustration with their inability to obtain COVID-19 benefits in a timely manner.



This was because the CRA did not allow Canadians to apply for COVID-19 benefits without first validating their eligibility. As a result, many Canadians were left in limbo and could not apply for, or receive the vital COVID-19 benefits which many relied on to provide the basic necessities of life for themselves, and their families.

On many occasions, Canadians' frustrations were further exacerbated after they spoke to CRA validation contact centre agents, because the agents were initially not sufficiently empowered to provide meaningful responses, or take action on specific cases.

Specifically, some complainants told us that agents were unable to provide a specific timeframe for processing their application, would refuse to identify themselves, or sometimes even hung up on them.

Later in the year, the CRA reviewed this process, adjusted it to focus on confirming the \$5,000 of eligibility income, and put in place an attestation approach for the remaining eligibility criteria. This provided greater authority to agents, yet, validation issues persisted. The issues only subsided later in the year, and the CRA indicated this is because it added resources and made efforts to streamline the process, but the discontinuation of the CRB, following the easing of pandemic measures was also a significant contributing factor.

Our Office took many actions to try to address the issues surrounding validation. We sent a record number of urgent requests to the CRA for Canadians in compelling situations. In addition, we requested briefings from the CRA to better understand the problem. However, we heard the lack of meaningful, complete, accurate, clear, and timely information being provided was a problem to those who reached out to us.




Further, the lack of action by the CRA to effectively inform Canadians of the expected timeframe to validate their information address this issue became apparent. Therefore, we submitted a service improvement request, which detailed some suggested actions the CRA could take to help address the situation. We requested the changes so the CRA could set realistic expectations for Canadians, which we felt would go a long way towards alleviating some of their frustrations. We heard from many complainants who indicated the CRA advertised a four-week processing time, but that was not in line with what they were being told by COVID-19 validation contact centre agents, and it did not represent the time they had already been waiting. Many Canadians who contacted our Office told us that over eight weeks had passed since they sent in supporting documents, yet no action had been taken by the CRA on their application, their cases had not been assigned to a validation officer, and they had not heard anything.

We gave the CRA the opportunity and time to address this issue, on its own; however, it did not. Instead, on April 14, 2021, the CRA released a Tax Tip, [Pre-payment validation for COVID-19 recovery benefits](#), which indicated it may take up to eight weeks to process an application. This was in direct contradiction to the information it had on its own COVID-19 validation webpage which indicated it may take up to four weeks to process an application.

Therefore, to address the conflicting information, increase transparency, and to improve the service the CRA provides to Canadians the Taxpayers' Ombudsperson made another request for [service improvement](#).





Specifically, the Taxpayers' Ombudsperson requested the CRA publish the received date of the submission it is currently working on to its webpage. This would have allowed Canadians to check the webpage to see if their submission is currently being processed. For example:

If someone submitted supporting documents on May 20, 2021, and the webpage indicated the CRA is currently reviewing submissions sent the week of May 7, 2021, then they would know there was no need to contact the CRA, because it is not looking at their documents yet. However, if they had not heard from the CRA, and their submission date had passed, they would know to enquire about the delay.

We believe Canadians should be provided with real-time information about processing timeframes, so accurate expectations can be set.

This would help to ensure Canadians are not left feeling anxious or wondering why their submission has not been processed. In addition, it would also reduce the necessity of them contacting the CRA.

However, the CRA did not implement our request. It informed us that this was because the CRA had to focus its information technology resources on delivering COVID-19 benefits to Canadians.

While it updated its webpage to reflect that applications can take up to eight weeks to process, it did not accurately provide realistic timeframes.

Soon thereafter, we began to hear from complainants who indicated they had been waiting over 12 weeks for their application to be processed.

In our communications with the CRA, it identified two streams for applications:

- Non-complex (up to a four-week processing time)
- Complex (up to an eight-week processing time)



The CRA considered all applications processed within those standard timeframes. However, applications were only considered non-complex or complex once a validation officer reviewed the case. When carrying out our research, we found there were many unassigned cases, which were neither identified as non-complex or complex, but exceeded the service expectation provided on the CRA's webpage.

Further, we were informed in June 2021 that 40% of the unassigned cases exceeded an eight-week processing time. While the CRA significantly reduced the backlog to 2% by September 2021, the CRA indicated to us that it increased in January 2022, with 4% of its unassigned cases exceeding the eight-week processing time.

Each unassigned case that exceeds the eight-week processing time is one Canadian that is left in the dark with no clear understanding as to why their case is not being processed.

We are cognizant of the workload strain this program has put on the CRA's resources, yet we feel communication is key and keeping Canadians informed should be a top priority for the CRA. It has the capacity to do so individually, and on its webpages, therefore it should have processes in place to adequately inform Canadians.

Our Office realizes validating a person's eligibility for COVID-19 benefits was a new program. The CRA also knew it had to protect the integrity of their program. As such, validation should have been considered when it implemented the benefits. Therefore, the CRA should have been prepared with the increased workload and should have ensured it had appropriate resources and support to operate efficiently and effectively for Canadians. And if they could not have access to more resources and support, then they should have been upfront with Canadians. Applicants claimed to our Office they were left in limbo in extremely difficult times. What is difficult to understand is the CRA lack of transparency as it was more than aware receiving these benefits on time was pressing for so many.

We hope the CRA takes a step back to assess how it carried out this program so it can improve and provide better service to Canadians going forward, as we know lessons learned from this could help to improve its service to Canadians in many other areas. Transparency and clear communication lines throughout are essential in building trust with Canadians.

# CRA serving you better, through its own initiatives

There are many times when the CRA makes improvements without our influence and we want to highlight some of those below:

## DISABILITY TAX CREDIT CERTIFICATE — FORM T2201

We were pleased when in October 2021, the CRA launched a new digital application for medical practitioners to complete their portion of a disability tax credit (DTC) application. This coincided with the release of an updated version of Form T2201, [Disability Tax Credit Certificate](#), and the DTC Guide, RC4064 [Disability-Related Information – 2021](#).

By simplifying the form, applying for the DTC was made easier for persons with disabilities as well as for medical practitioners. There are still a number of issues as referred to in the two reports made by the [Disability Advisory Committee](#), but it is a step in the right direction nonetheless.



## “LEARN ABOUT YOUR TAXES”

The CRA launched a new online learning tool called “[Learn about your taxes](#)”. The tool is a helpful aid for Canadians who might be learning about income taxes for the first time, or just want a refresher. It has lessons on various topics, such as preparing to file the tax return, how to complete it, as well as what to expect after the return has been filed. It also includes lessons on using My Account, and includes quizzes. We found the series to be informative and well-thought out — we even learned a thing or two ourselves!

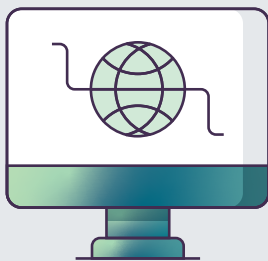
## CRA SERVICE FEEDBACK

At the start of the pandemic, CRA Service Feedback was not operational for approximately three months as the CRA focused on delivering critical services to Canadians. This meant that many of the service complaints you submitted or were referred by our Office experienced delays in being actioned. We are very pleased to learn that the CRA eliminated this backlog of service complaints, and the CRA is back to its goal of resolving service complaints within 30 business days.

Even more exciting is that since the spring of 2022, you are able to submit your service feedback online, without needing to go into your CRA account. While delayed, the CRA has assured us that it is on track for this release.

# Improving ourselves to serve you better

**We want taxpayers to receive the best possible service, not just from the CRA but from us. Over the past year, we improved our processes and services to serve you better.**



## Web Optimization

Optimizing our webpage content and features has been a priority for us. We are always working at improving the information that is available so you are provided with the information you need, when you need it.

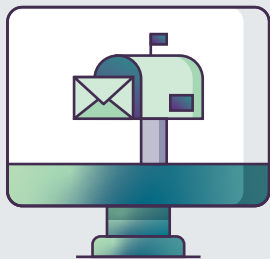
For example, we found that our webpages were not clear in providing you with information on the complaints we can review. Therefore, we updated our webpage [Complaints we review](#) page.

In addition, we found that because we weren't clear with you, some of you mistakenly sent us complaints for concerns we cannot review, whether it was because the service complaint was about another federal department or agency or it was an issue that was before a court. Therefore, we made our most visited page, [How to submit your Complaint](#), intuitive. Now it easily directs you on how best your concern can be addressed.



### **Client Satisfaction Call Survey**

Launching in April 2022, we will be implementing a post-call survey. After making a call to our general enquiries line, you are now able to provide us with feedback. This feature will help us measure and improve your experience and help us assess the quality of service you were provided.



### **Connect from Canada Post**

Launching in May 2022, you will now be able to communicate with us and provide documents electronically in a safe and secure environment. Connect from Canada Post will bridge the gap for us to those wanting more immediacy that cannot be provided by traditional mail. We are thrilled to finally be able to provide and receive correspondence in a timelier manner.



# Connecting with you

**Outreach is an important part of our annual communications plan. Meeting with non-profit organizations, government officials and tax specialists allows us to learn of issues or situations their members, constituents or clients experience when interacting with the CRA.**

It is very important to hear about these issues and situations that are not always brought forward through complaints to the Office. On occasion, recurring issues are identified during these meetings and we can determine whether there exists a systemic issue that creates a barrier to many Canadians. Being able to meet with individuals, groups and organizations helps them to better understand the role of the Taxpayers' Ombudsperson and how we can effect change with the CRA. As well, meeting with provincial, federal and international ombudspersons, allows us to better understand best practices.

This year, we have met with most federal/provincial ombudsmen and made some new connections with international tax ombudsmen in Mexico and Chile. In addition to these meetings, we continued to pursue collaborations and partnerships

with multiple stakeholders and organizations that put the vulnerable populations a priority.

Outreach can bring to light gaps in access, availability of information and supports required to fulfill our tax obligations and access benefits and credits. Many of these groups and individuals represent our most vulnerable citizens and are the voice for many who experience barriers in accessing services and benefits. Northern and rural communities have proven to experience these challenges, therefore, they will be our priority for the upcoming year.



We also had a greater media presence this year through national, provincial and regional media outlets across the country.

We launched our own [YouTube channel](#) and increased our presence on social media. On [Facebook](#) for example, our page engagement increased dramatically.

The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson also gave multiple media interviews and recently ventured into the podcasting world. For example, the Ombudsperson was a guest twice on the podcast "Moolala," which aims to increase personal financial and fiscal literacy.

**Quote: (talking about non-filers on [Moolala Podcast in March 2022](#))**

**Bruce Sellery**  
(podcast host)

"Can you give us an example of a benefit, or a tax credit, that is triggered by tax filing?"

"Well the most common one is certainly the Canada Child Benefit (CCB). If you don't file, you don't get. [...] Another one would be the Goods and Services Tax (GST)/Harmonized Sales Tax (HST) credit, or the Guaranteed Income supplement (GIS)."

**François Boileau**

**Our Office remains largely unknown to many Canadians and it is an important goal for us to improve our visibility.**

# Update on our 2020–2021 Annual Report recommendations

**Last year’s report was unprecedented. It was the first of its kind from our Office that contained recommendations to the Minister of National Revenue and the Chair of the Board of Management. This section will provide an update on each recommendation we made.**



# 1

## Recommendation

The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson recommends that the CRA provide a link, from its landing page [canada.ca/revenue-agency](https://canada.ca/revenue-agency), and [canada.ca/taxes](https://canada.ca/taxes), to our landing page [canada.ca/taxpayers-ombudsperson](https://canada.ca/taxpayers-ombudsperson). These webpages get millions of visitors. Providing a link to our Office will help connect with more Canadians and increase exposure.

## The CRA's response

The CRA agrees with the notion of including links to the Office of the Taxpayers' Ombudsperson (OTO) landing page from some of the CRA's pages. However it will conduct an analysis to determine the best locations for the link placement to meet the goal of increasing the visibility of OTO. The CRA will complete an analysis and publish the links on Canada.ca based on this analysis within 4 weeks of the OTO's 2020–2021 Annual Report being tabled.

## Ombudsperson's update

Soon after releasing last years annual report the CRA updated [canada.ca/revenue-agency](https://canada.ca/revenue-agency), and [canada.ca/taxes](https://canada.ca/taxes) to include links to our webpage. This has exposed our Office and the services we offer to more Canadians. Therefore, the CRA has addressed this recommendation.



## 2

### **Recommendation**

The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson recommends that the CRA make Canadians aware they can complain or provide feedback about the service it provides, as many Canadians (and sometimes even CRA employees) are not aware the CRA has a three-step service complaint process. Starting with including this information in products by providing a link to [Service feedback, objections, appeals, disputes, and relief measures on its homepage canada.ca/revenue-agency, on canada.ca/taxes](#), on social media, as well as in correspondence to taxpayers.

### **The CRA's response**

The CRA will add a generic verse for raising awareness of complaint and feedback mechanisms as a standard verse in many different types of responses that are issued to taxpayers in December 2021.

The CRA will determine the best locations for links to meet the goal of increasing awareness of service feedback mechanisms at the CRA on other CRA webpages in December 2021.

### **Ombudsperson's update**

Swiftly after releasing last years annual report the CRA took action to update its webpages and some of its correspondence to inform more Canadians about its three-step service complaint process. It also informed our Office that it would be preparing social media content that would be ready for Summer 2022.

While the CRA has informed our Office that it has updated some of its correspondence, we encourage the CRA to continue this effort to inform Canadians about its service complaint process in **all** of its correspondence.







### 3

#### **Recommendation**

The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson recommends that the CRA create a process to ensure that any unclassified information that is provided by a CRA area to assist contact centre agents is also made publicly available. For example, it should also be made available on the CRA website. Having current, clear, and accessible information available to all Canadians could reduce the calls to the CRA, and therefore, save time, resources, and energy for all.

#### **The CRA's response**

As part of an **evergreen** web optimization strategy, the CRA will continue to analyze call drivers and use them to steer proactive communications and web optimization projects, in order to help provide relief for known or anticipated call traffic.

This recommendation is an ongoing initiative.

#### **Ombudsperson's update**

We agree with the CRA that its web optimization strategy will help to address this recommendation and we consider the recommendation satisfied.

However, we reserve the right to identify future opportunities for service improvement in situations where we believe the CRA's web optimization strategy may not capture an issue.

## 4

### **Recommendation**

The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson recommends that the CRA develop a way for people to securely submit documents electronically, without the need for them to access their CRA account. With the CRA workplace transitioning due to the pandemic, in person counter service no longer being offered, as well as the lack of access to drop boxes, the CRA has an opportunity to reimagine how Canadians provide their documents and other information.

### **The CRA's response**

The CRA is continuing to explore new opportunities to accept documents from taxpayers electronically without accessing their accounts, while maintaining the integrity of CRA systems and taxpayer data.

The CRA is reviewing its processes to determine which types of documents can be submitted electronically safely outside the secure portals.

The CRA plans to continue to expand the usage of our portal services, with various phases of implementation slated for February 2022, and May 2022.

### **Ombudsperson's update**

The CRA has informed us that this recommendation is still in progress. We encourage the CRA to expedite this progress to ensure Canadians are provided with more options as soon as possible.



# 5

## **Recommendation**

The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson recommends that the CRA provide Canadians with the opportunity to request a callback, without the need to call the contact centre first.

## **The CRA's response**

The CRA will explore various options to provide assistance without having to call the CRA, such as online chats and scheduled a callback. A proof of concept for online chat will be launched in December 2021 with further expansion in 2022.

## **Ombudsperson's update**

The CRA has informed us that this recommendation is still in progress. We expect the CRA to find a solution to provide Canadians with the opportunity to request a callback, without the need to call the contact centre first.

# Our recommendations this year



## Recommendation 1

The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson recommends to the Minister and to the Chair of the Board of Management the CRA look for ways in which a taxpayer can receive a security code the same day it is requested, allowing Canadians to have full access to their CRA Account in a timely manner.



## Recommendation 2

The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson recommends to the Minister and to the Chair of the Board of Management the CRA find a way to provide in-person same-day identity verification of a taxpayer. For example, through a trusted third party.



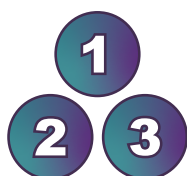
## Recommendation 3

The Taxpayers' Ombudsperson recommends to the Minister and to the Chair of the Board of Management the CRA make it clear to Canadians that when it is administering a benefit that increases an individual's income that it sufficiently informs applicants that the increase could affect their other income based benefits.

# Our statistics

**For the last two years our statistics have increased, and as said in our last Annual Report, we hope to grow our exposure even more.**

We want to make sure that all Canadians are aware of our services. By looking at where complaints come from, and where they don't, we hope to continue to target our outreach activities to better serve all Canadians.



## Complaints

Received online, by mail, fax, or phone. Once we receive a complaint we will review it to see which step it is at in the CRA's Service Complaint Process, or if there is a compelling situation.



## Enquiries

Received by phone, mail, or fax. This is the first step a complainant might take to see if we can help. It also gives us the opportunity to find out what the issue is. We can then direct the complainant to the appropriate service recourse.



## Urgent requests

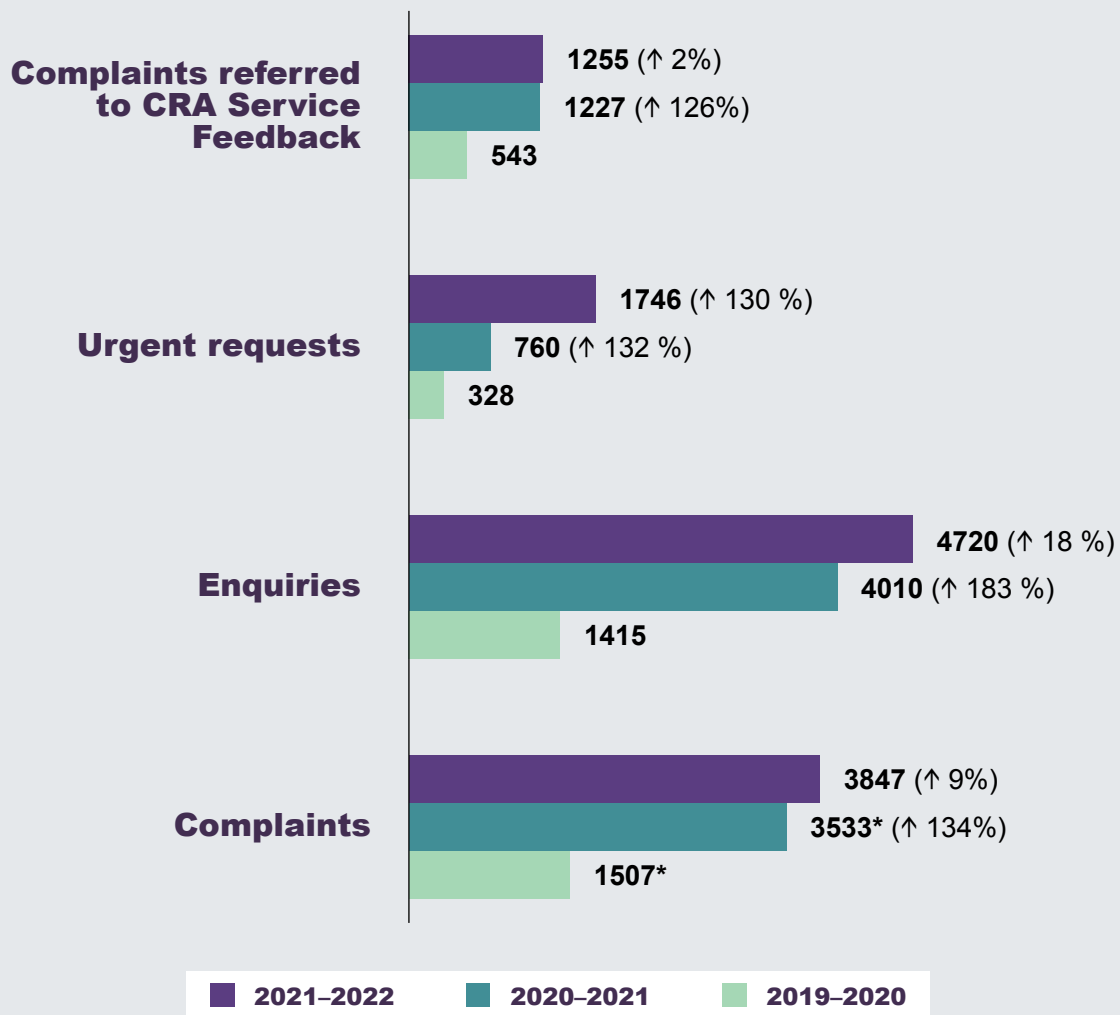
If we identify an urgent compelling situation in a complaint, we make an urgent request to the CRA by facilitating contact between the complainant and the CRA.



## Complaints referred to CRA Service Feedback

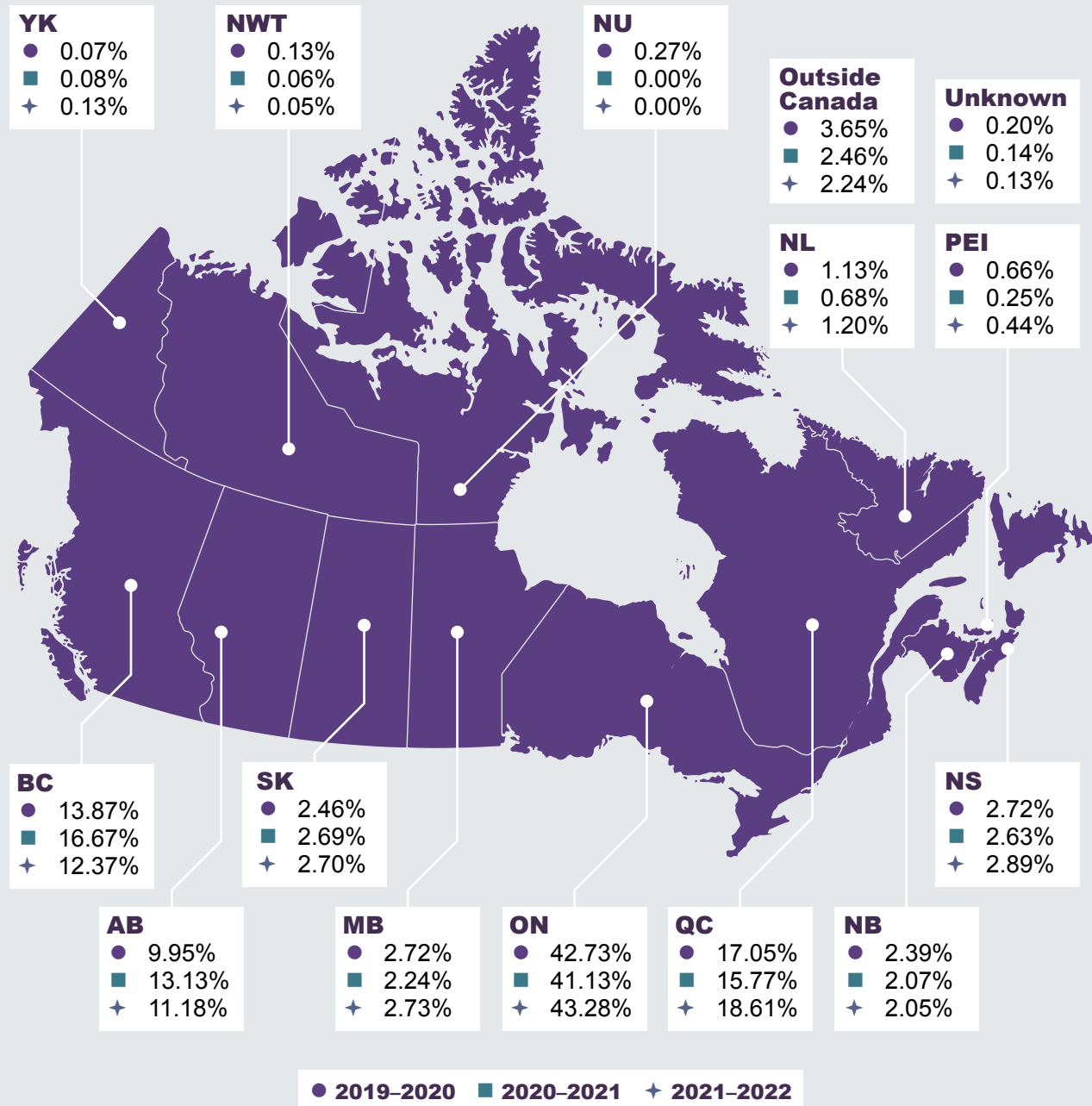
When we receive a complaint and the complainant is not in a compelling situation and has not completed Step 2 of the CRA's Service Complaint Process, we refer their complaint to CRA Service Feedback.





\* Complaints that were received between March 14 and 31, 2020, were considered received in the 2020-2021 fiscal year, unless there was a compelling issue.

# Where complaints come from



# Financial statement

## 2021–2022 Summary of Expenditures

(in thousands of dollars)

Personnel (includes employee benefits)	2,843
Transportation and communications	5
Information	50
Professional and special services	112
Utilities, materials, and supplies	3
Acquisition of machinery and equipment	9
Real property accommodations	180
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>3,203</b>

### Internal services expenditures\*

Technologie de l'information	636
Publication	211
<b>Total**</b>	<b>4,050</b>

### Related Party Transaction\*\*\*

Finance	53
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\* Represent internal services expenditures that relate to the support of the Office of the Taxpayers' Ombudsman (OTO). As of April 1, 2019, internal services expenditures that relate to the support of specific programs are being reported under the applicable core responsibility in compliance with the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat's Guide on Recording and Reporting of Internal Services Expenditures. As a result, starting in 2019–2020, the OTO's expenditures also include a portion of information technology and publishing costs.

\*\* Please note that amounts may not balance to total due to rounding.

\*\*\* The amount shown under related party transaction represents funding that has been transferred by the OTO to the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) for corporate services rendered by the CRA in the area of financial management advisory services.

# Contact us

**We are available 8:15 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.  
Eastern Standard Time, Monday to  
Friday (except public holidays).**

## Phone

1-866-586-3839 (Toll-Free)

613-221-3109 (outside Canada  
and the United States  
(collect calls accepted))

## Fax




1-866-586-3855 (Toll-Free)

418-566-0321 (outside Canada  
and the United States)

## Address

Office of the  
Taxpayers' Ombudsperson  
Suite 1000  
171 Slater Street  
Ottawa, ON, K1P 5H7  
Canada

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## Visit us online

[canada.ca/taxpayers-ombudsperson](https://canada.ca/taxpayers-ombudsperson)







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