

Canadian Red Cross transitioning swimming and lifeguard training to Lifesaving Society Canada

(OTTAWA, ON) January 12, 2022 – The Canadian Red Cross announced today it is winding down its swim and lifeguard programming to direct more attention to surging humanitarian demands in other areas – such as disaster and pandemic response, opioid harm reduction and caregiving for seniors.

Specifically, Red Cross is encouraging its water safety training partners to transition to the swim and lifeguarding programs of the Lifesaving Society Canada through the course of this year. The exception will be in First Nations communities where the training will continue as part of the Red Cross Indigenous Peoples Framework.

For Red Cross, the move ends an era that began in 1946 – when drowning rates in Canada were considerably higher than those we see today. Since then, Red Cross has provided swim training and lifesaving skills to more than 40 million Canadians.

Canadian Red Cross CEO Conrad Sauvé says the decision was driven by regular assessments the organization conducts of all its services that consider evolving humanitarian needs, the evolution of the marketplace, and alignment with its strategic direction.

“We are enormously proud of what we have accomplished in providing water safety training and we are truly grateful to entire generations of staff and volunteers who dedicated themselves to creating a program of the highest standard,” he said. “We continue to believe in the importance of water safety training, but no longer saw that we offered unique expertise in that area. We also believe the relative humanitarian need for water safety training has been surpassed by demands in other areas in which we are well positioned to make a difference.”

In recent years, a surge in disasters, emergencies and community health crises have prompted unprecedented levels of Red Cross engagement. COVID-19 alone has generated more than 100 activations in support of initiatives by the Government of Canada, provinces and territories. During the past year, the Society has also responded to three large-scale disasters and launched a significant initiative funded by Health Canada to reduce opioid-related deaths.

Sauvé says the arrangement with the Lifesaving Society Canada was the best path toward ensuring Red Cross’ departure from water safety programming would not disrupt Canadians’ access to critical training. “The Lifesaving Society is a respected, accomplished organization that has long shared our passion to reduce drownings and aquatic-related injuries. We have every confidence that the water safety training needs of Canadians will continue to be well-served in their care.”

The agreement will see Red Cross support its current training partners in making the transition to offering Lifesaving Society programming for swimming and lifeguarding. Red Cross will continue to support their training partners with expanding Community and First Aid programming, including opioid harm reduction and psychological first aid.

Red Cross will be making every effort to redeploy employees affected by today’s announcement to address other organizational needs.

For the Lifesaving Society, the arrangement is expected to double participation in their swimming, lifesaving, lifeguard, and leadership training programs that already see over a million participants each year.

Lifesaving Society CEO Bobby White says the arrangement with Red Cross is indicative of the commitment of both charitable organizations to service rather than profit.

“Humanitarian values drive both organizations,” says White. “Collaboration isn’t difficult when the interest of all is to simply keep Canadians safe.”

White says the Lifesaving Society appreciates the confidence in it expressed by Red Cross. He pointed to the Lifesaving Society’s experience of more than 100 years delivering nationally-recognized learn-to-swim, lifeguard and leadership training. He also noted that steps are being taken to ease the transition of current and aspiring Red Cross instructors, instructor trainers and lifeguards to the Lifesaving Society.

“We hope one benefit of a single national water safety training entity will be an easier entry for young Canadians to seize the great leadership and development opportunity in becoming an aquatic instructor, trainer or lifeguard.”

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ABOUT THE CANADIAN RED CROSS

Here in Canada and overseas, the Red Cross stands ready to help people before, during and after a disaster. As a member of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement – which is made up of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, the International Committee of the Red Cross and 192 national Red Cross and Red Crescent societies – the Canadian Red Cross is dedicated to helping people and communities in Canada and around the world in times of need and supporting them in strengthening their resilience.

ABOUT LIFESAVING SOCIETY CANADA

The Lifesaving Society is a national, independent, charitable organization that works to prevent drowning and water-related injury through its training programs, Water Smart® public education, aquatic safety management services, drowning research and lifesaving sport.

The Society represents Canada internationally in the Commonwealth Royal Life Saving Society and we are Canada’s Full Member in the International Life Saving Federation. We are the governing body for lifesaving sport – a sport recognized by the International Olympic Committee and the Commonwealth Games Federation.

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