

[CBC ran an interesting story of Aspirin's potential medical benefits](#) in treating cancer and the lack of funding for a medical trial costing \$10 million. Since Aspirin is off-patent, removing the potential for profits, big pharmaceutical companies are not funding this medical trial.

This news story raises critical questions that shine the spotlight on cancer research charities.

Firstly, work where there is no profit but public benefit is the *raison d'être* of the charity sector. That's why it's called the non-profit sector. So before berating big pharma, remember it's not their job to save the world. This important distinction is key in medical research. Perhaps it works best with big pharma underwriting cutting-edge medical research with high profit potential and charities paying for medical research where there is no profit. There are obviously opportunities in both approaches that offer huge payoffs in advancing medical care.

Funding medical research is one of the most popular causes we support, particularly when it comes to cancer. In 2010, we estimate that Canadians donated \$614 million to charities working in the cancer sector.

In Charity Intelligence's analysis, Canada's largest cancer research charities hold \$1,049 million in funding reserves. A \$10 million medical trial is less than 1% of these funding reserves. If every Canadian cancer research charity chipped in 1% of their funding reserves, this medical trial could get underway today.

Funding Reserves of Canadian Cancer Research Charities	\$ million
Alberta Cancer Foundation	80.6
BC Cancer Foundation	101.9
Breast Cancer Society of Canada	0.8
Canadian breast Cancer Foundation	63.3
Canadian Cancer Society	150.4
Cancer Research Society	23.4
CancerCare Manitoba	40.7
Dalhousie Medical Research	4.4
Dr. Michael Bliss Cancer Care Foundation	1.8
Fondation Quebécoise du Cancer	2.1
Movember	39.2
Ottawa Regional Cancer Foundation	5.9
Ovarian Cancer Canada	1.7
Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation	306.3
Prostate Cancer Canada	29.2
Sunnybrook Foundation	109.1
Terry Fox Foundation	87.7
Total	1,048.6
Source: Audited financial statements for each charity Funding reserves are all liquid assets (cash and investments less interest bearing liabilities) excluding donor-endowed funds when disclosed.	

The Harvard research estimates that this 5-year trial could save 75,000 lives a year. That would include approximately 1,100 Canadian lives a year. Waiting until the UK trial concludes in 2025 will sacrifice too many lives.

Charity Intelligence appreciates that charities need to hold back cash reserves to have stability in their operations and to fulfil granting commitments. But holding funds has opportunity costs. Here the cost is measured in human lives.

The other opportunity cost in funding this medical research is which research loses out? Apparently, the cancer research charities are backing research projects with higher potential impact than saving 75,000 lives per year for a \$10 million investment. In charities we trust.