



OPINION & ANALYSIS

To spur productivity and economic growth, philanthropists must step up

**BERNARD MILLER
PETER FARDY**

OPINION

Bernard Miller, KC, is the managing trustee of the Killam Trusts.

Peter Fardy is principal adviser at Northport Philanthropic.

Some say we live in an era of polycrisis, a state of risk where multiple crises intersect to amplify their collective impact. In such a world, if we are committed to the well-being of Canadians and the country is to flourish, we need a broadly shared effort. Building Canada's future needs political, social and economic forces aligned to a shared commitment to enhancing the well-being of Canadians.

Philanthropy has a role to play. For example, the Bank of Canada recently issued a stark warning

about the country's productivity, saying the situation is an emergency that could erode living standards if left unaddressed.

To understand what this has to do with philanthropy, we must consider how productivity growth comes about. Research and innovation are key components. Research funding in Canada, whether viewed historically or benchmarked against other developed countries, portrays a story of relative mediocrity with muted business investment in research and federal funding increasing a modest 4 per cent between 2012 and 2022. On a broader but related scale, federal spending on all science and technology as a share of total government spending has been declining in recent years.

This is the gap that philanthropy has to fill. While it's natural to try to park this problem at the doorsteps of government, corporations and industry, we should

not overlook the contribution that the wealthiest Canadians – those who have benefited in prevailing economic systems – can make to building Canada's future.

In 1965, Mrs. Dorothy Killam left more than \$110-million to support advanced study in Canada. Over 59 years, the Killam endowments have disbursed more than \$1-billion to top scholars through the National Killam Program.

Killam awardees have global impact. Consider Geoffrey Hinton: Awarded a Killam prize in 2012, he went on to win the 2024 Nobel Prize in Physics for his groundbreaking work in artificial intelligence.

There are other philanthropists who have done the same.

The McCall MacBain Scholarships at McGill University are for master's and professional degree studies. The scholarships were announced in February, 2019, by John and Marcy McCall MacBain,

through a gift to McGill of \$200-million. They recognize the value of investing in brains with this donation. They show the value of investing in a master's-level scholarship that builds on excellence as a stepping stone to further accomplishment.

Also, consider other gifts for research in Canada made recently: \$250-million by the Temerty family to the University of Toronto's medical school; the Rogers Foundation's \$130-million for heart research in Toronto; and a \$100-million gift from Geoffrey Cumming for medical research at the University of Calgary. Scratch the surface, and you will see these donors believe education, research and innovation will improve society, humanity and Canada's place in the world.

But these efforts are not enough.

Research is conducted by those with advanced degrees. There has been a steadily widening gap be-

tween the percentage of the Canadian population with master's or doctoral degrees compared to numbers for the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development. Roughly 16 per cent of the population of OECD countries hold advanced degrees, while only 12 per cent in Canada do.

Canada needs another 800,000 people with advanced degrees to close the gap.

This can't be left to any one sector. There are roles for government, industry and wealthy individuals – especially those seeking to use their wealth to improve the lives of other Canadians.

More visionary philanthropists are needed.

Although relatively few as a percentage of the entire population, there are thousands of Canadian families that have capacity to step up. Let's hope their stories help inspire them.

Canada needs this torch passed. Who will accept it?