



Canadian Association for
Conservation of Cultural Property
Association canadienne pour la
conservation et la restauration
des biens culturels



December 14, 2022

The Honourable Pablo Rodriguez,
Minister of Canadian Heritage

House of Commons
Ottawa, ON
K1A 0A6

Dear Minister,

The Board members of the Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property (CAC) and the Canadian Association of Professional Conservators (CAPC), are writing to you to express our deep concern for the safety of Canada's heritage collections. We have observed a worrying trend in which heritage institutions are eliminating conservation and collections positions without consideration to the impact on the care of collections. It is the responsibility of the Ministry of Heritage to ensure the conservation of Canada's cultural heritage and your intervention is needed in support of collections care.

Loss of Conservation Positions

The termination of the Director of Conservation and Technical Research at the National Gallery of Canada (NGC) adds to a growing list of recent conservation layoffs across Canada in federal, provincial, and municipal organizations, as well as the elimination of positions upon the retirement of current staff. The following institutions have seen conservation positions eliminated in the past three years:

- National Gallery of Canada: apparent elimination of the position of Director of Conservation and Technical Research (effective 2022), and Chief of Restoration-Conservation Labs (effective 2021);
- Manitoba Museum: eliminated the position of Manager of Collections and Conservation (effective 2022), and Collections Registrar (effective 2020);
- Royal British-Columbia Museum: eliminated the position of Head of Collections Care and Conservation (effective 2021), and no rehire after departure of Senior Conservator (effective 2020);
- City of Ottawa Archives: eliminated the sole position of Conservator (effective 2021);
- Royal Ontario Museum: no rehire after the retirement of Metals Conservator (effective 2021);

- Glenbow Museum: Conservator positions were included in large-scale layoffs (effective 2020).

Outside of these position losses, the closure of Parks Canada Regional Labs, executed in an effort to centralize all storage and conservation services in the National Capital Region, has left many Canadian regions and national heritage sites outside of major metropolitan areas with limited access to their collections and conservation services.

In addition, we are also witnessing the opening of new institutions with no conservation staff at all, such as the Remai Modern (Saskatoon, SK), and the Museum of Contemporary Art (Toronto, ON).

Risks to Collections

The recent trend in loss of conservation positions across Canada raises issues about the current state of Canadian cultural heritage preservation, a responsibility shared by all Canadian citizens. The *Canadian Collections Care Survey (CCCS)*¹, conducted by CAC and CAPC in 2018, found that numerous collections across Canada are currently in need of conservation services; 53% of institutions surveyed indicated that 10% or more of their collections would require significant conservation intervention to be accessible for use. Three in four institutions (76%) do not yet have a functional emergency plan for their collection. These represent only a fraction of ongoing threats to Canadian collections (see Appendix I). Conservators not only provide interventive conservation treatment to stabilize damaged artworks, but also identify and mitigate risks to collections, thereby preventing damage from occurring, and slowing deterioration of collections. Furthermore, it is the role of senior conservation staff to represent the interests and wellbeing of collections to museum leadership. The elimination of these positions results in a lack of knowledge and understanding of conservation needs at the upper management level.

Support for Conservation

It is clear that both the field of conservation and the cultural heritage sector in Canada are at a critical crossroads. In 2018, 74% of institutions surveyed indicated that they do not have any conservators on staff and 72% of institutions stated that they cannot afford to hire conservators on temporary contract when needed. Institutions need support from the Ministry of Canadian Heritage to safeguard their collections and make them accessible to current and future generations of Canadians. As the *Museums Act* is currently under review by the Ministry, it is time to update it with more specific language regarding the protection of collections by recognizing the important role of conservation professionals in institutions. Consistent funding specifically allocated for conservation

¹ <https://capc-acrp.ca/files/Canadian-Collections-Care-Survey-Summary-of-Results.pdf>

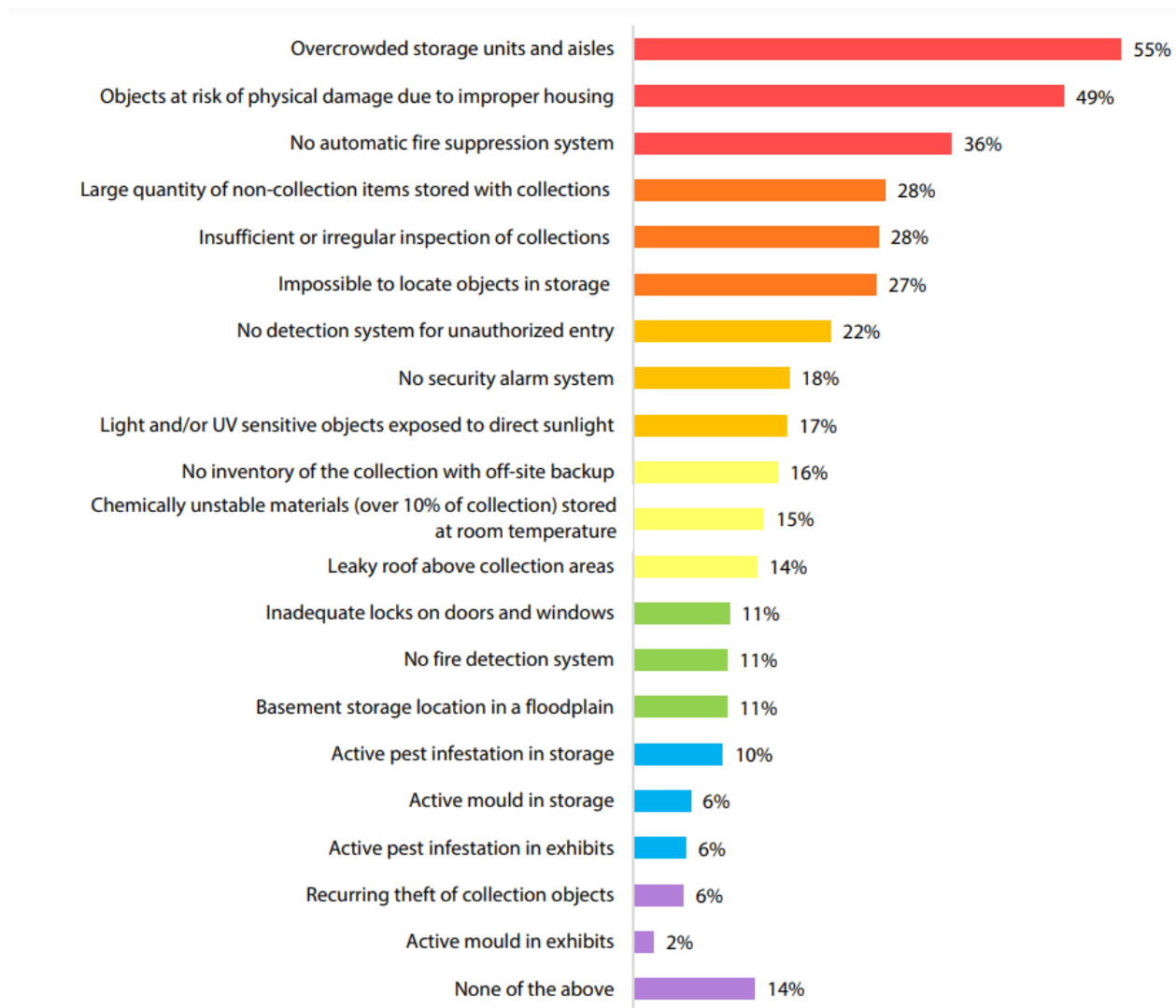
of collections needs to be made available by the Ministry of Canadian Heritage to institutions of all sizes across Canada.

We look forward to working with you in the implementation of our recommendations. We are available for consultation at your convenience.

Respectfully Yours,

Board of Directors of the Canadian Association for Conservation of Cultural Property, and the
Board of Directors of the Canadian Association of Professional Conservators,
on behalf of the community of conservation professionals in Canada.

Appendix I: Threats affecting any main cultural heritage facility where collections are present



Source: *Canadian Collections Care Survey, 2018, p.8.*