Fisheries and Oceans Canada | Pêches et Océans Canada

Canadian Coast Guard | Garde côtière canadienne

Evaluation of the Search and Rescue Program
Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary

ABOUT THE PROGRAM

The Canadian search and rescue (SAR) system is a cooperative effort between federal, provincial, municipal and territorial governments, as well as volunteer organizations. It involves searching for and assisting people, ships, aircraft and other craft that are, or are believed to be, in imminent danger.

The Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary (CCGA) is a network of volunteer organizations dedicated to SAR and safe boating activities. The CCGA is comprised of six regional organizations and one national organization, which are separate legal entities from the Government of Canada and work in close partnership with the Canadian Coast Guard (CCG). Most CCGA members are commercial fishers, pleasure boaters and members of the local communities, who volunteer their time and sometimes their vessel.

4,139 Volunteer members

964 Vessels

ABOUT THE EVALUATION

The evaluation was conducted by the Evaluation Division at Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO) and the Canadian Coast Guard (CCG) from March to November 2021. The program was last evaluated in 2016-17 as part of the Evaluation of the Search and Rescue Services Program. The evaluation included an assessment of the CCGA's relevance, use of resources, and effectiveness, as related to the CCGA activities funded through contribution agreements, from 2016-17 to 2020-21.

KEY FINDINGS

The CCGA plays an important and appropriate role within the Canadian search and rescue system.

The Auxiliary fills a need for maritime SAR by providing additional capacity on the water and by helping to improve service coverage, especially in high-traffic areas and remote coastal locations.

Most of the CCGA's activities are related to SAR maritime incidents, however, some undertake other activities, such as public education. There is agreement that the role of the CCGA could be expanded in some regions, particularly for environmental response. This would, however, require changes to the framework within which the CCGA currently operates.

Between 2015-16 and 2019-20, the CCGA responded to **8,027** maritime SAR incidents and delivered **17,000** hours of SAR operations.

The CCG and the CCGA follow guidelines and standards to deliver the program.

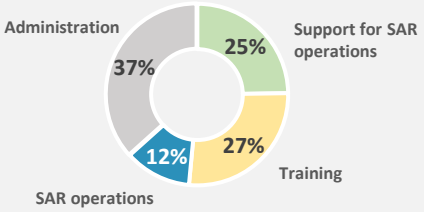
Guidelines and standards support the administration and the delivery of the auxiliary program and improve national consistency. Internal guidance, management practices and controls vary across regions. Since 2016-17, there have been efforts to improve reporting tools and business practices and these tools were found to be effective. The CCGA would like to see further improvements on aspects related to coordination and standardization.

Since 2016-17, core CCGA funding has remained at approximately the same levels as 10-15 years ago. However, some supplementary funding was provided to some regions for activities through the Oceans Protection Plan.

The core funding provided by CCG is the main source of funds for the operation of the Auxiliary, although some regions receive some funding from other sources. Supplementary funding was provided to some CCGA regions to expand the auxiliary network [(e.g., create the Coastal Nations Coast Guard Auxiliary, establish an Arctic Chapter, support the Indigenous Community Boat Volunteer (ICBV) Program].

Overall, the Auxiliary uses more than 50% of the total CCG funding for preparedness and capacity building (e.g., for activities in support of SAR operations and for training). While the CCG obtains sufficient information for accountability and oversight of the contribution funding, there are data limitations to assessing the full costs for the Auxiliary to participate in the national SAR system.

Between 2016-17 and 2020-21, the CCG provided **$32.2M** total funding to the CCGA.



Evaluation

Canada

CCGA members were positive about their experience in the Auxiliary.

Overall, members felt well-prepared to respond to maritime SAR incidents as measured by the availability of members, vessels and equipment. There are existing challenges, such as declining membership and vessels and ensuring equipment meets standards.

90% of members and **88%** of directors who responded to the survey *agreed* or *strongly agreed* that **they or their units are well-prepared to respond to maritime SAR incidents**.

Training and supporting members to meet and surpass standards and requirements is a priority for the CCGA.

The CCGA member survey showed that training is available, accessible and useful; however, there are challenges related to internal and external factors, which have an impact on the delivery of training (e.g., remoteness of some communities, availability of members).

76% of CCGA directors *somewhat* or *strongly agreed* that **members have the training they need.**

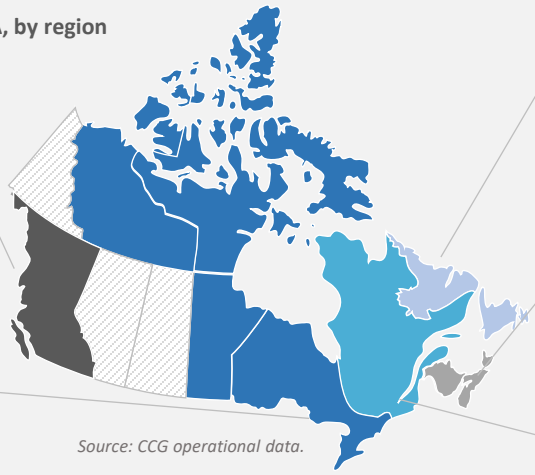
The ICBV program has increased the number of Indigenous communities participating in the CCGA.

The program has increased the capacity of some communities to participate in maritime search and rescue; and has had a positive impact on the relationship between the CCG and Indigenous communities.

The Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary is effective in responding to maritime SAR incidents.

The Canadian Coast Guard Auxiliary is involved in almost one-quarter of overall incidents and maintains levels of service comparable to those established for CCG primary SAR assets.

Key effectiveness indicators for the CCGA, by region (2015-16 to 2019-20)



West Coast
Average duration of mission: **1.8 h**
Average reaction time: **18 minutes**
% reaction time <30 min. **86%**
% of reported lives at risk saved: **98%**

Central & Arctic
Average duration of mission: **2.1 h**
Average reaction time: **17 minutes**
% reaction time <30 minutes **82%**
% of reported lives at risk saved: **94%**

Newfoundland and Labrador
Average duration of mission: **6.3 h**
Average reaction time: **22 minutes**
% reaction time <30 minutes: **79%**
% of reported lives at risk saved: **99%**

Maritimes
Average duration of mission: **2.5 h**
Average reaction time: **10 minutes**
% reaction time <30 min. **90%**
% of reported lives at risk saved: **97%**

Quebec
Average duration mission: **1.7 h**
Average reaction time: **11 minutes**
% reaction time <30 minutes **89%**
% of reported lives at risk saved: **94%**

Source: CCG operational data.

CONSIDERATIONS FOR FUTURE PROGRAMMING

While the findings from the evaluation did not result in any recommendations, the report includes considerations for future programming.

Core funding: The core funding currently does not cover all the costs incurred by the auxiliaries, which impacts the ability of the CCGA to maintain vessels, equipment, and training available and up to the Auxiliary's national standards.

Maintaining sustainability: There are challenges related to internal and external factors that can have an impact on the ability of the CCGA to sustain the capacity and preparedness of the units.

Data and information limitations: While the CCG obtains sufficient information on funding distribution for accountability and oversight, there are limitations to assessing the full costs for the Auxiliary to participate in the national SAR system. Without the full picture of funding sources and shortages, the CCG is limited in identifying gaps in service or capacity and in planning appropriate measures, including increased funding, to address them.

CCGA's future role: There may be opportunities to expand the role of the CCGA in some regions, particularly for environmental response. Changes would be required to the current policy and legal framework under which the auxiliary operates, as well as to the training and the funding provided.

CCG-CCGA partnership and communication: The CCG's support to auxiliaries is valued and appreciated, but there seems to be a desire for further improvements in the partnership by increasing two-way communication and having open discussions on aspects of coordination and standardization.