

Viewpoint: How to uphold the solidarity created by COVID-19 even though WHO ended the international emergency

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

The World Health Organization (WHO) has declared the [end of the global emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic](#). Although [COVID-19 remains a danger for many](#), especially with the possibility of new variants, experts are urging that we move forward to prepare for the

next pandemic.

The [pandemic](#) caused significant suffering. The WHO estimates that around [6.9 million people died](#), although the true death toll is [likely much higher](#). Added to that is the loss and pain experienced by many around the world.

But the pandemic also created the circumstances for a type of global, national and local solidarity that has rarely been seen before. In Canada, we saw this unique solidarity in the homegrown "caremongering" movement, where volunteers organized online to offer a helping hand to neighbors and strangers.

During the height of the pandemic, there were at least [191 caremongering groups in Canada](#). The movement showcased the goodwill of "[kind Canadians](#)" and was praised worldwide.

Caremongering

[A study led by researchers at McMaster University](#) on caremongering Facebook groups found that the majority of posts were to request or offer materials like [personal protective equipment](#), food and clothes or services like picking up groceries and prescriptions.

There was also a lot of information-sharing about COVID-19, community updates, inspiration and advice. News reports covered these heartwarming stories from coast to coast. From [Halifax](#) to [Hamilton](#) and [Kamloops](#), many caremongers called this help "[lifesaving](#)."

This was especially the case for vulnerable populations such as the elderly, people with disabilities and immunocompromized individuals.

Pandemic unveiled systemic issues

It seems that during those early days, people forgot about their differences and banded together in unity [to feel stronger](#) against the common enemy of COVID-19.

But crises and disasters can also "[lift veils](#)." They can be transformative or confirmatory, generate new ways of thinking or reinforce prevailing structures of power.

Disasters like the pandemic provide an opportunity to [examine the exception in order to understand the rule](#) and to expose the unequal social structures that are often hidden in everyday life.

A [University of Guelph study](#) found that in 2020, as the reality of the pandemic set in, discussions in caremonger groups turned towards difficult topics of social justice, inequality and colonization.

One group organizer who took part in the study shared that she felt COVID-19 unveiled the challenges faced by marginalized people.

"[It] pulled a mask off of this but once COVID goes away, these problems do not go away ... so right now is the time that we have to keep that mask off so that we make sure that whatever it looks like on the other side of COVID, there is more equity, there's more justice, there's more support and nurturing and recognition that we have been hiding people away and ignoring problems for far too long."

For example, the inequitable rollout of vaccines unveiled how governments have historically overlooked [lower-income](#) and racialized communities. It galvanized doctors, public health experts and community advocates to [demand better from the government](#).

Many people saw the injustice in how the most affected neighborhoods, [where people were doing essential work in grocery stores, factories, delivery trucks and hospitals](#), had the lowest vaccination rates while high-income neighborhoods filled with white collar and remote workers had the [highest vaccination rates](#).

A more equitable post-pandemic world

As the global emergency ends, we need to ask ourselves how a post-pandemic world could be more equitable, just and nurturing.

To begin, we can bring the energy of caring for others to our politics. The pandemic allowed people to connect with strangers in their neighborhoods and country through the development of community good will across different geographies. This is what political scientist [Benedict Anderson](#) called socially-constructed "imagined communities."

During the pandemic, a light was shone on the needs of those rarely prioritized in politics such as seniors in long-term care, children, low-income households and immunocompromised individuals.

[Politics is about who gets what, where and how](#) and we saw that in action throughout the pandemic.

We can apply our newly gained political awareness in the upcoming elections [in Toronto and Alberta](#) and aim to achieve a politics that strives for a more equitable, just and nurturing approach to the distribution of resources through [evidence-based policies](#).

Second, the pandemic provided citizens with the time and motivation to think intentionally about life. Some have argued that the pandemic is an opportunity to "[rethink humanity's future](#)" with a focus on reimagining the way we want to live going forward. Indeed, many people have

adapted [healthier behaviors](#) and more sustainable lifestyles.

In the U.K., [85 percent of consumers reported adopting at least one sustainable lifestyle change](#) during the pandemic.

Pandemic travel restrictions also produced some [positive environmental effects](#) around the world. [Air travel decreased significantly](#) and raised people's thresholds for what justifies their carbon emissions.

Others have become more [ethical consumers](#) as part of the [shop local movement](#). More than [80 percent of Canadians](#) reported a desire to support local small businesses during the 2021 holiday season.

All this symbolizes a shift in thinking. As we reflect on the last three years, let us seize the opportunity to use the experience to create a more equitable, just and nurturing post-pandemic world.

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