

## Phoenixed: Inside Canada's payroll disaster

Global Payroll Association

CONTENT PRODUCTION

### WHAT'S THE BACKGROUND?

Payroll professionals take a lot of pride in their work and are a vital part of every organisation, but they often feel like they aren't included or heard in critical business decisions. The Global Payroll Association (GPA) is a worldwide network for global and in-country payroll professionals to connect with their peers and internationally known payroll experts.

GPA was already producing two interview-style podcasts featuring payroll experts but their reach wasn't beyond their own membership. Storythings approached GPA with an idea for an investigative podcast about the Canadian government's problem-riddled payroll transformation project. GPA was keen to invest in a narrative podcast series with the potential to reach a much wider audience and raise public awareness of the importance of payroll.

### WHAT WAS THE SOLUTION?

In 2023, GPA commissioned Storythings to develop and produce a six-part investigative podcast series called "Phoenixed: Inside Canada's payroll disaster." The series explains what went wrong when Canada set out to modernise its government payroll system in 2011, a \$310 million project that would save \$70 million a year via automation and consolidation. When the Phoenix pay system was rushed to launch in 2016, tens of thousands of Canadian civil servants were paid incorrectly — or not at all. Eight years later, the costs have surpassed \$3 billion, and the system still isn't fixed. Because it was a government project, much information about Phoenix pay is in the public domain, offering a rare look inside a big payroll transformation project.

GPA's goal was to highlight payroll as an essential element of any business strategy and create better understanding of its complexities, as well as increase awareness of the organisation outside of the payroll industry. The podcast had to serve disparate audiences: payroll professionals and global business leaders, as well as Canadians affected by Phoenix pay. Over eight months, Storythings worked closely with the GPA and a team of experienced journalists in Ottawa to create "Phoenixed." Hosted by long-time political reporter Glen McGregor, the

six-episode narrative podcast transports listeners to Ottawa and small-town New Brunswick to find out how the payroll project went so wrong for so long.

### **WHAT WAS THE IMPACT?**

The podcast was released weekly in April and May 2024, with total downloads reaching 5,000 by the end of the series and 10,000 after three months. The podcast was selected to be featured on Apple Podcasts in Canada, and GPA continues to promote the podcast in its social channels, newsletter and magazine. Feedback from listeners has been overwhelmingly positive.

Members of the payroll community around the world can share countless examples of how payroll transformation projects went wrong or just barely avoided disaster. In the end, the Phoenix pay story underscores the importance of taking payroll seriously and making sure that payroll leaders are at the table when making big decisions.

<https://www.phoenixedglobalpayrollassociation.com/>

*For contest entries if needed:*

### **SHORTER DESCRIPTION (140 words)**

In 2023, GPA commissioned Storythings to produce a six-part investigative podcast series called “Phoenixed: Inside Canada’s payroll disaster.” When Canada set out to modernise its government payroll, the Phoenix pay system was rushed to launch in 2016 and tens of thousands of Canadian civil servants were paid incorrectly — or not at all. Eight years later, the costs have surpassed \$3 billion, and the system still isn’t fixed.

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## **Credits**

CEO, GPA: Melanie Pizzey

Reported and hosted by: Glen McGregor

Produced and edited by: Kevin Sexton

Research and fact-checking by: Tobin Ng

Sound design by: Xavier Paradis

Executive Producer, Storythings: Grace Dobush

Director, Storythings: Hugh Garry

Project management by Lyndsay Borgonon

Legal review by Ryan Keller

Art direction by Darren Garrett