



HUNGERCOUNT

2019 REPORT

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HUNGERCOUNT

2019



HUNGERCOUNT 2019— DESPITE A STRONG ECONOMY, VULNERABLE CANADIANS ARE BEING LEFT BEHIND

Food banks across Canada are leaders in providing support to people in need. They do so primarily by providing food, as well as other supports and resources, in thousands of communities across the country. They are grassroots, community led organizations that have emerged in response to the unique needs of their own communities. These needs could include the closing of a local factory, rapidly rising cost of rent in a particular region, or an environmental disaster such as a forest fire that suddenly leaves thousands of people homeless. While the specific needs of each community vary, the driving force behind that need is poverty and low incomes.

Throughout a life cycle, people can become vulnerable to poverty at different points - such as losing a job, losing a spouse or partner, or from the onset of a disability or illness. Our social safety net - the various income security programs and in-kind supports provided at federal, provincial and municipal levels - is what we, as a society, have developed to help our communities better manage these vulnerable periods, and the boom and bust periods inherent in our economic system. This system was developed to help prevent such life cycle events from condemning people to deep poverty and long-term destitution.

Since the aftermath of the Great Depression in the 1930s, Canada developed a strong safety net that included unemployment insurance, various tax benefits for families and seniors, and public health coverage. Where gaps in support existed, provincial social assistance - commonly known as welfare - was intended to be a last resort so people could, at the very least, both feed themselves and keep a roof over the head.

However, in the last few decades, the gaps in our social safety net have grown much wider. Federal Employment Insurance has become less of a support for the unemployed than it was previously, and provincial social assistance rates remained stagnant, falling rapidly in value compared with rising costs of living. The labour market has also been changing, moving from full-time employment with health benefits to more precarious or self-employment without benefits. Because of these growing gaps, people across Canada have to choose between shelter, utilities, and feeding their family.

Food banks are there to help manage these growing gaps. Every day, food banks work with their communities to acquire the food needed to support those in need through donations and purchases. Some food bank—"hubs"—distribute food to community agencies like food pantries, shelters, and after school programs that rely on food to deliver their support. Other food banks serve people directly with a selection of food to help people stretch their dollars... and some food banks do both.

In addition to distributing food, food banks are also a "thermometer" that gauges the health of their communities. Through delivering an essential service to those in need and tracking those visits, food banks can provide up to date information on those experiencing hunger and poverty during periods of rapid inflation or economic recessions. Through trend analysis, they can show us which groups are particularly vulnerable to these changes, as well as who is more likely to be left behind during periods of economic recovery.

DID YOU KNOW? FOOD BANKS ACROSS CANADA OFFER MORE THAN FOOD.

Over 50% provide information and referral services for their clients, connecting them to other resources they may need;

One in three offer or refer clients to free income tax support, enabling them to access money that they may be entitled to but not receiving;

One in five offer training, education, and/or help with finding employment.

Importantly, they help point us to solutions. When it comes to our social safety net, food banks can show what's working, where there are gaps, and what parts of the system need a complete overhaul. Ultimately they show that a strong economy on its own does not sufficiently reduce poverty. Changes in government policy that strengthen our social safety net and support people out of poverty are also needed for this to happen, and enable sustained progress in reducing food insecurity and the need for food banks.

The HungerCount is an annual reading of the temperature of thousands of communities across Canada. Conducted in March, the HungerCount provides a snapshot of food bank use in Canada. It provides *insights* into what is happening on the ground, with the data and information that is available. It is also action oriented, providing information to the public in order to help support progressive policy change.

Throughout this report, you will find numbers that demonstrate that while we are making progress in reducing hunger and poverty, there are still far too many people being left behind. Single person households are being forgotten, especially those who have disabilities and are not able to work. The number of seniors struggling with rising costs of living and accessing food banks is rapidly increasing. Children are still over represented in the food bank population. The high cost of housing is no longer just an urban issue, and is affecting those in smaller towns and rural areas and their ability to feed themselves.

We are at a crossroads where we have to make a decision: whether to stick with the status quo, and continue on the path that leads many to deepening levels of poverty and hunger; or to significantly revamp our income security system, and close the gaps in our safety net. We believe that together we can help to inform a better system, and achieve our vision of a Canada where no one goes hungry.

OVERALL FINDINGS

Despite a bleak situation, there is some good news

FOOD BANK USE HAS STABILIZED, WITH THE NUMBER OF VISITS IN 2019 APPROXIMATELY THE SAME AS THEY WERE IN 2018.

This year, total food bank visits reported across the food bank network in Canada in March 2019 was 1,084,386. While still a shockingly high number of food bank visits for one month, it is 1 per cent lower than it was last year. This corresponds to strong economic indicators such as low unemployment rates. When unemployment rates are low, the working age population is generally able to access more employment income, which makes needing a food bank less likely.

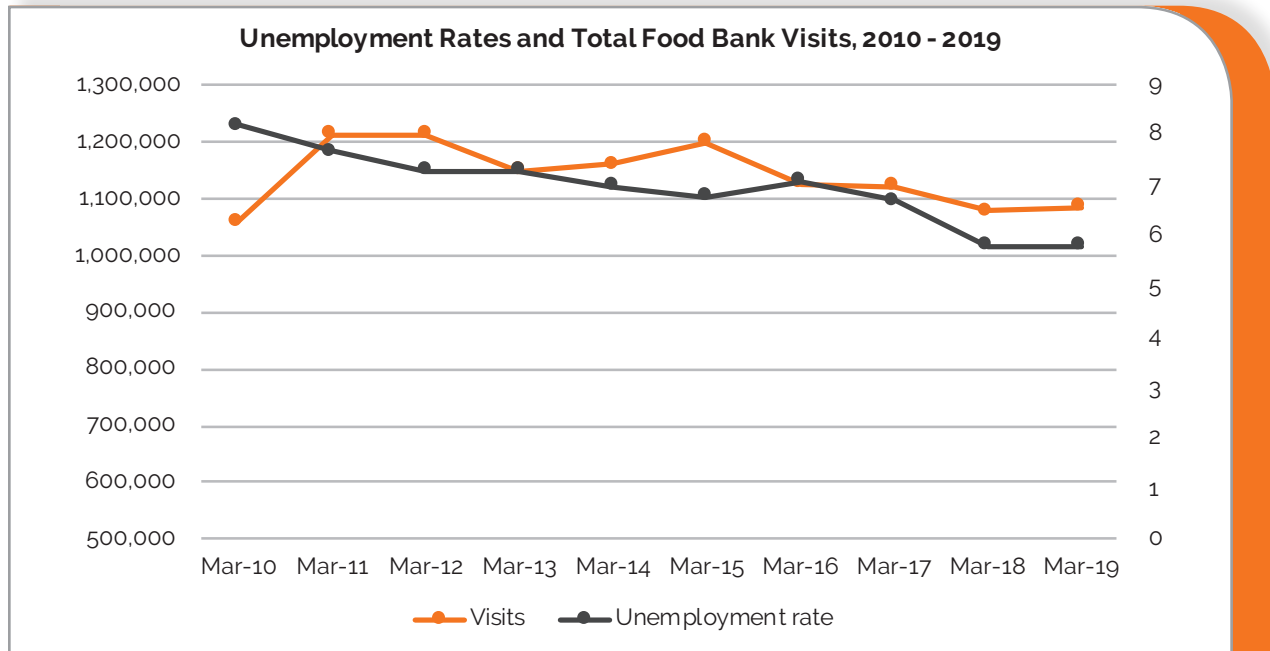
Food bank visits for March 2019 are now approximately the same level as they were in 2010. In the aftermath of the recession, unemployment rates were at their peak throughout 2009 and early 2010.¹ For many individuals, accessing food banks were a last resort after severance, E.I. and savings had run out. Food bank visits saw the full effect of this in March of 2011 when there were over 1.2 million visits that month, a 14 per cent jump over the prior year. Visits remained high and then saw a gradual decrease from 2015 onward, with numbers stabilizing over the last year. This decline has corresponded to a decline in unemployment rates over the same period.²

¹ Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0287-03 Labour force characteristics by province, monthly, seasonally adjusted.

² Table 14-10-0327-01

FOOD BANK VISITS ARE APPROXIMATELY AT THE SAME LEVEL THEY WERE IN 2010, WHEN FOOD BANKS NATIONWIDE WERE STARTING TO FEEL THE FULL IMPACTS OF THE 2008 RECESSION.

Source: Statistics Canada. Table 14-10-0287-03 Labour force characteristics by province, monthly, seasonally adjusted, and food bank visit numbers from Food Banks Canada HungerCount.



The number of children accessing food banks has been slowly declining since 2010.

The percentage of children accessing food banks has been slowly declining, and now represents 34.1 per cent of all food bank clients, whereas in 2010 they were 37.2%. An improving economy, combined with federal and provincial tax benefits for families with children, have been helping to slowly increase incomes of these households and may be having an impact on these results. During this period, Food Banks Canada, along with others, had advocated for an improved child benefit system at the federal level. The creation of the Canada Child Benefit in 2016 was the outcome of this work, and helped to further the progress in refining and improving our system of child benefits in Canada.

Unfortunately, there is still some bad news:

WHILE THE PERCENTAGE OF CHILDREN ACCESSING FOOD BANKS IS DECLINING, THEY ARE STILL FAR OVERREPRESENTED COMPARED TO THE GENERAL POPULATION.

Even though children under 18 now represent 34.1% of the food bank population, they are still far overrepresented compared to the general population, where they sit at 19.4 per cent. Costs associated with raising children, including child care costs, combined with rising costs of basics like food and rent, put immense pressure on households with children, leaving them vulnerable to poverty and hunger.

% of those accessing food banks who are children under 18, compared to the general population - selected years

% of children accessing food banks in Canada

MARCH
2010

MARCH
2013

MARCH
2015

MARCH
2019

37.2%

36.4%

35.6%

34.1%

% of children in general population

20.4%

19.8%

19.6%

19.4%

Source: Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0005-01 Population estimates on July 1st, by age and sex, and HungerCount 2010, 2013, 2016 and 2019

While overall visits are back to where they were in 2010, there has been a dramatic shift in the composition of those visits, indicating certain groups are being left out of the economic recovery and have become more vulnerable to poverty and hunger. They include single person households, and those receiving provincial disability support or pensions as their main source of income. These groups are not mutually exclusive, and often overlap.

Single person households versus single parent households

Despite a steady economic recovery, single person households without children have increased from 38 per cent of all food bank households to 48 per cent. Conversely, single parent households have decreased from 27.5 per cent of households to just over 18 per cent. While there are numerous tax benefits that can increase incomes for households with children, single person households do not have the same range of benefits, and often have to rely solely on the extremely low levels of provincial social assistance income if they are not able to access employment.

Household Type

MARCH
2010

MARCH
2019

Single person households

37.8%

48.1%

Single parent households

27.5%

18.3%

Those accessing food banks who are receiving the provincial disability support or pensions as their main source of income, versus the general welfare component of provincial social assistance and employment income

Those who are less likely to be able to work due to disability or retirement age – those who receive provincial disability support or

| Main Source of Income | MARCH 2010 | MARCH 2019 |
|----------------------------------------------------|------------|------------|
| Provincial disability support | 14.4% | 17.3% |
| Pension | 6.6% | 9.0% |
| Provincial disability support and pension combined | 21.0% | 26.3% |
| Employment | 11.4% | 12.1% |



pension as their main source of income – have increased from 21 per cent in 2010 to over 26 per cent in 2019. Both groups are struggling with rapidly rising costs of living, along with the increased costs that accompany greater health care needs. Seniors 65 and over have been the fastest rising age group accessing food banks. Those receiving disability support as their main source of income are contending with incomes that haven't grown with inflation and often don't cover basic household expenses.

The increasing cost of housing nationwide, and the lack of rent geared to income units, have been other factors that has been driving the demand for food banks. Those living in market rent housing have increased as a proportion of visits versus those in social (rent-geared to income) housing.

70 per cent of clients live in market rent housing, up from 60 per cent in 2010. Those living in social housing have decreased from 25.6% to 14.4%. The effects of skyrocketing rental markets have been spilling over from outside urban areas and into smaller towns, and recent investments in affordable housing units have not yet been able to address the massive demand.

| | 2010 | 2019 |
|----------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Market rent housing | 59.8% | 70.4% |
| Social (rent-geared to income) housing | 25.6% | 14.4% |

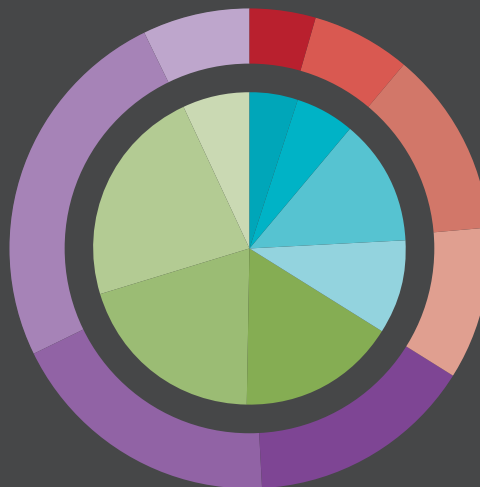
CANADA – KEY HUNGERCOUNT FINDINGS

Canada

| | ALL | RURAL |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Total Visits | 1,084,386 | 150,732 |
| Total Visits (Child) | 374,474 | 49,620 |
| % Change in Total Visits 2018-2019 | -1.1% | -1.0% |
| Total meals and snacks | 5,570,329 | 332,131 |
| Food Banks Reporting | 2,326 | 672 |
| % of food banks reporting an increase, 2018-2019 | 47.0 | 45.3 |

Age categories served as % of total, by age group

| | ALL | RURAL |
|-----------------|------|-------|
| % 0 - 2 years | 5.2 | 4.6 |
| % 3 - 5 years | 6.1 | 6.7 |
| % 6 - 11 years | 12.9 | 12.3 |
| % 12 - 17 years | 9.9 | 10.4 |
| % 18 - 30 years | 16.3 | 15.1 |
| % 31 - 44 years | 20.0 | 18.6 |
| % 45 - 64 years | 22.8 | 25.0 |
| % 65 + years | 6.8 | 7.0 |



% children

| ALL | RURAL |
|------|-------|
| 34.1 | 34.0 |

% seniors

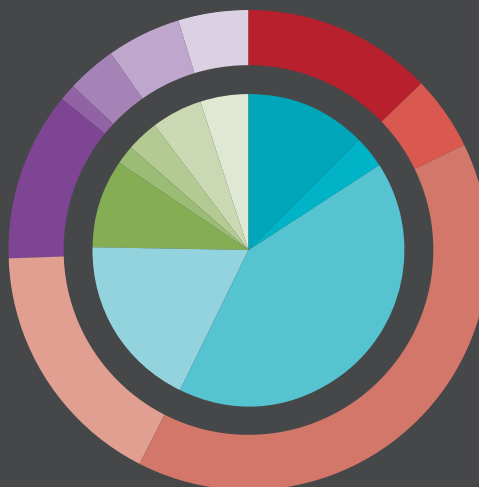
| ALL | RURAL |
|-----|-------|
| 6.8 | 7.0 |

Food Banks Reporting

| ALL | RURAL |
|-------|-------|
| 1,513 | 517 |

Primary source of income

| | ALL | RURAL |
|-------------------------------------|------|-------|
| % Job Income | 12.1 | 13.0 |
| % Employment Insurance | 3.3 | 5.0 |
| % Social Assistance | 40.1 | 39.7 |
| % Disability-Related Income Support | 17.3 | 17.0 |
| % Pension | 9.0 | 11.4 |
| % Student Loan | 1.9 | 1.0 |
| % Canada Child Benefit | 2.5 | 3.2 |
| % No Income | 7.0 | 5.1 |
| % Other Income | 6.7 | 4.6 |



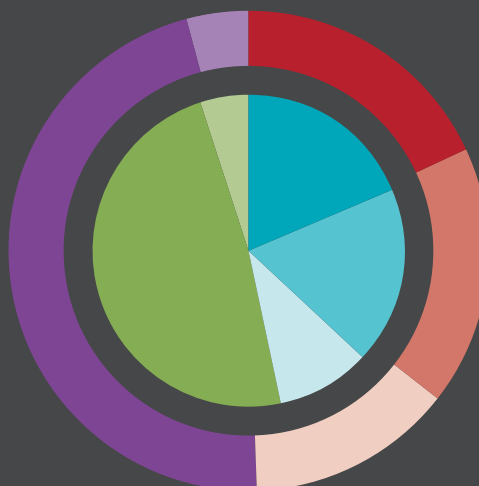
Food Banks Reporting

ALL RURAL

1,368 **463**

Household type

| | ALL | RURAL |
|----------------------------|------|-------|
| % Two-Parent Families | 18.8 | 18.1 |
| % Single Parent Families | 18.3 | 17.6 |
| % Couples With No Children | 9.8 | 13.9 |
| % Single People | 48.1 | 46.5 |
| % Other | 5.0 | 4.0 |



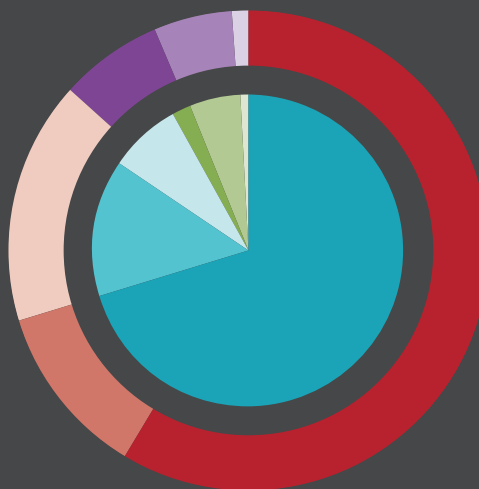
Food Banks Reporting

ALL RURAL

1,477 **496**

Housing type

| | ALL | RURAL |
|----------------------|------|-------|
| % Market Rental | 70.4 | 58.8 |
| % Social Housing | 14.4 | 11.6 |
| % Homeowners | 7.4 | 16.4 |
| % Band-Owned Housing | 2.0 | 7.0 |
| % Homeless | 5.3 | 5.3 |
| % Other | 0.6 | 0.9 |



Food Banks Reporting

ALL RURAL

1,230 **442**

Key HungerCount Findings

| | Total Visits | Total Visits (Child) | % Change in Total Visits 2018-2019 | Food Banks Reporting | Total Meals and Snacks | % of food banks reporting an increase, 2018-2019 |
|--------|--------------|----------------------|------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|
| BC | 124,713 | 38,074 | -1.6 | 113 | 455,901 | 48.5 |
| AB | 89,821 | 35,282 | -7.9 | 171 | 1,092,416 | 45.1 |
| SK | 37,216 | 15,778 | -3.6 | 36 | 14,280 | 42.4 |
| MB* | 82,067 | 33,280 | * | 52 | 419,970 | 39.6 |
| ON | 339,613 | 111,051 | 4.8 | 577 | 1,770,357 | 48.2 |
| QC*** | 345,184 | 120,025 | -5.5 | 1,150 | 1,595,120 | 45.7 |
| NB | 22,625 | 7,123 | 7.9 | 58 | 118,929 | 48.1 |
| NS | 25,629 | 7,463 | -0.6 | 123 | 103,357 | 53.9 |
| PE | 2,959 | 1,137 | -6.1 | 6 | 4,078 | 16.7 |
| NL | 10,704 | 3,149 | 5.8 | 45 | 3,402 | 59.0 |
| TERR** | 6,110 | 2,112 | -8.3 | 13 | 7,011 | 50.0 |

Age Categories

| | % 0 - 2 years | % 3 - 5 years | % 6 - 11 years | % 12 - 17 years | % 18 - 30 years | % 31 - 44 years | % 45 - 64 years | % 65 + years | % children | % seniors | Food Banks Reporting |
|--------|---------------|---------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|--------------|------------|-----------|----------------------|
| BC | 4.5 | 5.4 | 10.7 | 8.9 | 15.4 | 20.2 | 24.9 | 9.9 | 29.5 | 9.9 | 91 |
| AB | 6.5 | 6.9 | 13.7 | 11.3 | 16.9 | 20.4 | 19.9 | 4.4 | 38.4 | 4.4 | 89 |
| SK | 6.7 | 7.9 | 15.5 | 12.3 | 17.4 | 18.0 | 18.4 | 3.8 | 42.4 | 3.8 | 30 |
| MB | 4.9 | 8.2 | 17.4 | 12.9 | 13.0 | 21.5 | 18.1 | 4.1 | 43.4 | 4.1 | 38 |
| ON | 5.0 | 5.4 | 12.3 | 10.1 | 17.9 | 19.0 | 23.2 | 7.0 | 32.8 | 7.0 | 413 |
| QC | 5.0 | 6.8 | 13.8 | 9.3 | 14.1 | 22.0 | 22.3 | 6.6 | 34.9 | 6.6 | 684 |
| NB | 4.3 | 6.5 | 12.4 | 9.3 | 14.8 | 19.2 | 28.3 | 5.1 | 32.5 | 5.1 | 43 |
| NS | 4.6 | 5.1 | 11.1 | 8.6 | 20.0 | 17.3 | 26.8 | 6.4 | 29.4 | 6.4 | 78 |
| PE | 6.4 | 7.0 | 14.7 | 10.4 | 16.7 | 17.5 | 21.3 | 6.1 | 38.5 | 6.1 | 6 |
| NL | 3.3 | 6.1 | 11.3 | 9.9 | 16.4 | 20.9 | 26.6 | 5.6 | 30.6 | 5.6 | 36 |
| TERR** | 3.8 | 4.9 | 10.9 | 8.6 | 19.2 | 19.3 | 27.5 | 5.7 | 28.2 | 5.7 | 5 |

Household Type

| | % Two-Parent Families | % Single Parent Families | % Couples With No Children | % Single People | % Other | Food Banks Reporting |
|--------|-----------------------|--------------------------|----------------------------|-----------------|---------|----------------------|
| BC | 15.4 | 15.7 | 12.8 | 51.5 | 4.5 | 92 |
| AB | 21.1 | 23.2 | 6.3 | 42.7 | 6.7 | 86 |
| SK | 17.9 | 26.8 | 7.7 | 45.1 | 2.4 | 34 |
| MB | 30.9 | 19.9 | 1.4 | 47.3 | 0.5 | 9 |
| ON | 17.3 | 17.7 | 8.2 | 48.2 | 8.6 | 425 |
| QC | 20.4 | 18.2 | 10.4 | 49.0 | 2.0 | 639 |
| NB | 18.2 | 14.9 | 15.3 | 47.9 | 3.6 | 47 |
| NS | 19.9 | 12.1 | 25.0 | 42.8 | 0.1 | 78 |
| PE | 26.4 | 19.2 | 11.1 | 39.3 | 3.9 | 6 |
| NL | 11.8 | 23.7 | 9.2 | 53.0 | 2.3 | 32 |
| TERR** | 15.1 | 14.7 | 5.6 | 52.3 | 12.2 | 5 |

Housing Type

| | % Market Rental | % Social Housing | % Homeowners | % Band-Owned Housing | % Homeless | % Other | Food Banks Reporting |
|--------|-----------------|------------------|--------------|----------------------|------------|---------|----------------------|
| BC | 72.5 | 8.9 | 7.3 | 3.3 | 6.5 | 1.4 | 80 |
| AB | 70.8 | 8.4 | 9.0 | 5.8 | 5.4 | 0.6 | 72 |
| SK | 64.1 | 16.3 | 6.1 | 6.4 | 6.3 | 0.7 | 30 |
| MB** | 52.5 | 22.8 | 7.1 | 8.4 | 7.3 | 1.9 | 6 |
| ON | 69.9 | 18.4 | 5.3 | 0.4 | 5.8 | 0.3 | 372 |
| QC | 73.9 | 11.5 | 7.8 | 1.6 | 4.6 | 0.6 | 545 |
| NB | 66.7 | 11.8 | 17.6 | 0.7 | 3.0 | 0.3 | 41 |
| NS | 69.2 | 11.9 | 13.4 | 1.9 | 3.4 | 0.1 | 76 |
| PE | 67.5 | 13.4 | 13.0 | 2.5 | 3.0 | 0.6 | 6 |
| NL | 45.1 | 41.1 | 10.9 | 0.4 | 2.0 | 0.5 | 27 |
| TERR** | 40.8 | 30.3 | 5.4 | 8.5 | 14.6 | 0.4 | 6 |

Source of Income

| | % Job Income | % Employment Insurance | % Social Assistance | % Disability-Related Income Support | % Pension | % Student Loan | % Canada Child Benefit | % No Income | % Other Income | Food Banks Reporting |
|--------|--------------|------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------------------|-----------|----------------|------------------------|-------------|----------------|----------------------|
| BC | 14.0 | 3.0 | 24.2 | 28.6 | 11.4 | 0.3 | 1.4 | 8.1 | 9.1 | 84 |
| AB | 19.5 | 4.0 | 33.8 | 15.4 | 8.2 | 1.5 | 6.0 | 7.6 | 4.1 | 79 |
| SK | 12.4 | 2.6 | 52.6 | 9.1 | 7.4 | 1.4 | 2.4 | 6.3 | 5.8 | 30 |
| MB** | 13.2 | 6.1 | 43.3 | 2.5 | 7.9 | 4.5 | 0.0 | 14.2 | 8.3 | 9 |
| ON | 8.9 | 1.6 | 29.4 | 32.4 | 8.7 | 0.6 | 0.5 | 7.3 | 10.5 | 364 |
| QC | 12.6 | 4.1 | 53.3 | 3.9 | 9.3 | 3.7 | 5.3 | 4.8 | 3.1 | 623 |
| NB | 11.5 | 3.9 | 58.3 | 8.6 | 8.7 | 0.6 | 2.8 | 2.8 | 2.8 | 41 |
| NS | 13.5 | 4.5 | 45.5 | 11.7 | 10.3 | 2.6 | 0.0 | 7.1 | 4.8 | 78 |
| PE | 19.1 | 14.1 | 42.0 | 9.6 | 9.9 | 0.5 | 2.0 | 2.2 | 0.6 | 6 |
| NL | 7.4 | 3.1 | 71.7 | 3.0 | 8.1 | 1.0 | 1.3 | 2.5 | 1.7 | 29 |
| TERR** | 12.1 | 3.5 | 38.3 | 4.4 | 5.7 | 2.2 | 0.2 | 30.7 | 2.8 | 5 |

* Comparison not available to previous year due to change in methods of data collection.

** Not enough data received for these items. Results may not represent the entire province/territories this year.

*** Minor adjustments were made to Québec numbers at time of print but not included in overall analysis.

FOOD INSECURITY AND HUNGER IN CANADA

According to the Canadian Community Health Survey, the survey instrument that monitors food insecurity in Canada, definitions of food insecurity include everything from worrying about running out of food, to reducing food intake and going days without food due to lack of money.³

When we speak food insecurity, it includes the experience of an older, single woman living on disability income support who can only purchase the few fruits and vegetables she can afford at the beginning of the month when the cheque comes, but towards the end of the month has to subsist on crackers and noodles. It includes the single parent who makes sure her child has food on the table when they get home from school, but she will skip eating that day in order for that to happen. It includes the single man who, in between seasonal or casual work arrangements, will regularly go without eating for an entire day due to lack of money, far more frequently than the official Statistics Canada definition of severe food insecurity can track and record.

Food insecurity and income

Most recent results from the Canadian Community Health Survey show 12 per cent, or about 1 in 8, households in Canada experienced food insecurity the previous 12 months.⁴ Food insecurity can be experienced by anyone, regardless if income comes from pensions, employment, or social assistance. The common factor that drives food insecurity in Canada is low income. Regardless of income source, those experiencing food insecurity in Canada do not have enough money to put food on the table while trying to manage other basic necessities. While prevalence of food insecurity was highest among those receiving provincial social assistance (61%), over 10 per cent of those earning employment income experienced food insecurity, and constitute 60 per cent of all food insecure households in Canada when absolute numbers are considered.⁵ While the proportion of those accessing food banks in Canada with employment income has stayed relatively constant at about 12 per cent, this number, along with the number of wage earners who are food insecure, demonstrates that there are far too many people in Canada going hungry despite having a job.

**12 PER CENT, OR ABOUT
1 IN 8, HOUSEHOLDS IN
CANADA EXPERIENCED
FOOD INSECURITY
THE PREVIOUS
12 MONTHS.⁴**

Average incomes and food prices

A look at inflation rates for various food items over time, compared to the median income for all households in Canada, helps to explain why more Canadians, regardless of income source, are becoming more sensitive to food prices. Prices of significant food items – whether plant or animal based – has substantially outpaced the growth of median incomes.

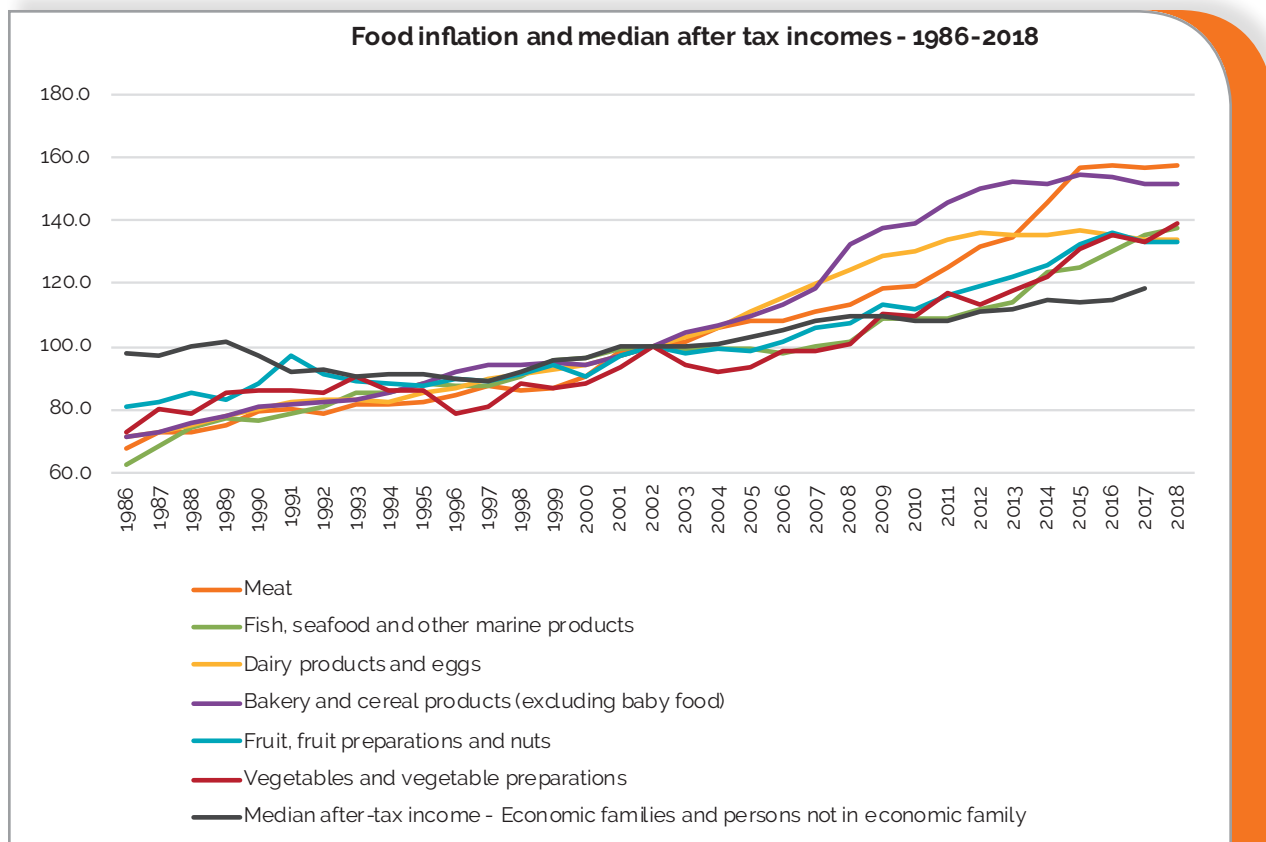
Food costs that are far outpacing core inflation are having a greater impact on low income households, and those with fixed incomes such as provincial social assistance or pensions are particularly vulnerable. Policy interventions that help mitigate the impact of food prices by increasing people's incomes are not just necessary to reduce overall food bank usage but also to support all food insecure households in Canada.

3 Tarasuk, V, Mitchell, A, Dachner, N. (2014). Household food insecurity in Canada, 2012. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). Retrieved from <https://proof.utoronto.ca/>

4 Tarasuk, V, Mitchell, A, Dachner, N. (2014).

5 Tarasuk, V, Mitchell, A, Dachner, N. (2014).





Source: Based on chart of pg. 14 from Charlebois et. AL (2019) Canada's Food Price Report, 2019. Dalhousie University and University of Guelph. Source data on food prices from Table: 18-10-0004-01 (formerly CANSIM 326-0020), Consumer Price Index, Monthly, not seasonally adjusted. Income data added from Statistics Canada, Table 11-10-0191-01, Income statistics by economic family type and income source. DOI <https://doi.org/10.25318/1110019101-eng>.

PROVINCIAL SOCIAL ASSISTANCE: WHEN A SAFETY NET HAS LARGE GAPS IN IT

Ever since Food Banks Canada began collecting data, provincial social assistance has consistently been the main source of income support for the majority of food bank clients across the country. While this form of income support falls under provincial jurisdiction, its impact on the demand for food banks nationally makes it an important focus of attention and consideration when advocating for policy change.

There are currently 2 million Canadians receiving provincial social assistance as their main source of income.⁶ While social assistance programs are different in each province in regards to rules, eligibility and other provisions, most social assistance programs in Canada can be divided into two general categories: general welfare – which is commonly intended as short-term assistance for those out of work and have no other means of financial support; and the disability portion of social assistance – which is for individuals who have disabilities or other medical conditions which make regular employment less likely. Regardless of the stream of social assistance that is being accessed, the program is intended as an income program of last resort, and as such provides the bare minimum of financial support.

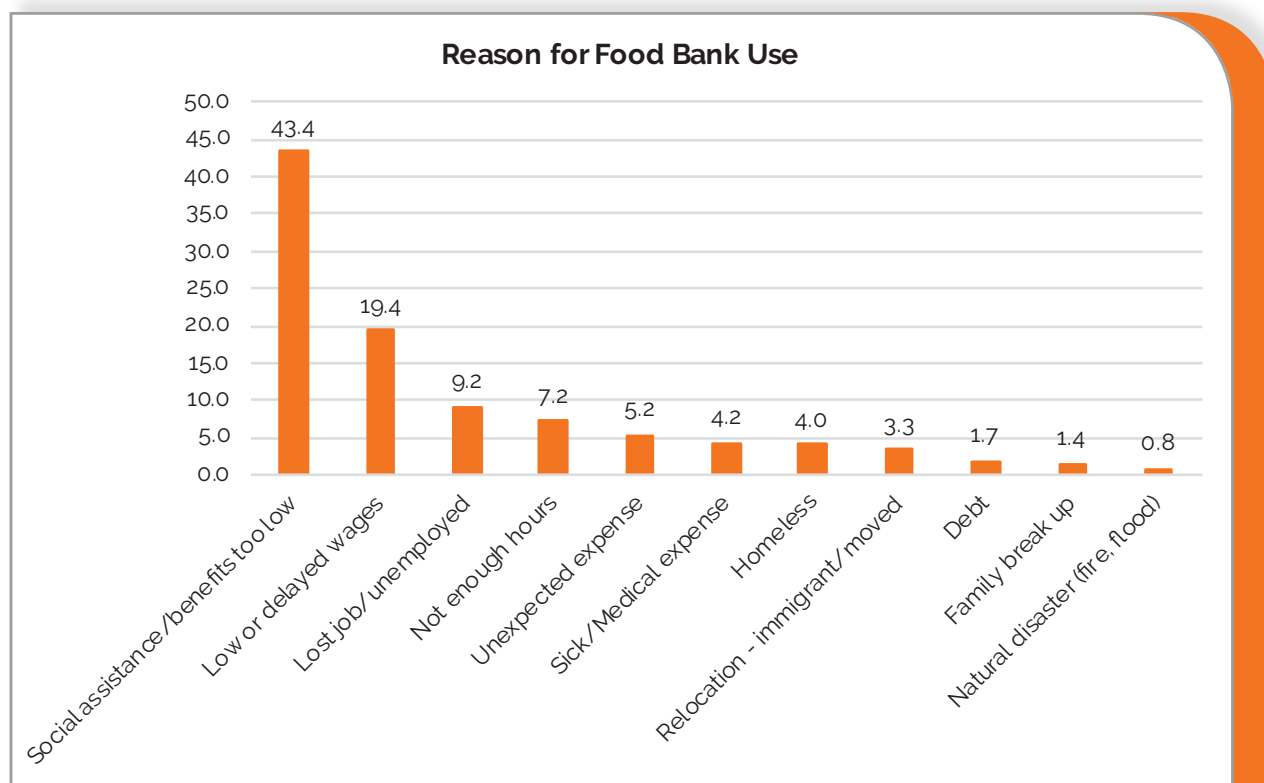
**PERCENTAGE OF
CLIENTS RECEIVING PROVINCIAL
SOCIAL ASSISTANCE AS THEIR
MAIN SOURCE OF INCOME
SUPPORT: 57.4%**

⁶ Welfare in Canada – Canada - Maytree. (2019). Retrieved from <https://maytree.com/welfare-in-canada/canada/>

And by bare minimum, this means that provincial social assistance rates across the country fall far under Canada's official poverty line, the market basket measure (MBM). This is most significantly the case for single adults receiving general welfare, whose real incomes are half of the official poverty line.⁷ For example, the total annual welfare income for a single person in Halifax, Nova Scotia is \$7,433, which is \$11,915 less than, or 38% of, the official poverty threshold for a single person in that region.⁸

Provincial social assistance and food bank use

Given the extremely low levels of income provided by social assistance, food banks are a necessity. When agencies participating in the HungerCount were asked what clients' main reasons were for accessing a food bank, the most common response by far was "Social assistance/benefits are too low".



Those receiving social assistance as their main source of income are 11 times more likely to experience severe food insecurity than the general population.⁹ While many who are food insecure do not access a food bank, trends that are seen in social assistance caseloads can greatly impact food bank demand. As one study demonstrates, there is a strong relationship between social assistance caseloads and food bank use. In the Calgary region, every increase of 100 social assistance caseloads led to an increase of 57 clients at Calgary Food Bank.¹⁰ Given that the majority of food bank clients nationwide receive their main source of income from provincial social assistance, there is a strong possibility this correlation would be seen in jurisdictions across the country.

⁷ Welfare in Canada – Canada – Maytree. (2019).

⁸ Tweddle, A. and Aldridge, H. (2018). Welfare in Canada, 2017. Maytree Foundation. Retrieved from https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/Welfare_in_Canada_2017.pdf

⁹ Tarasuk, V, Mitchell, A, Dachner, N. (2014).

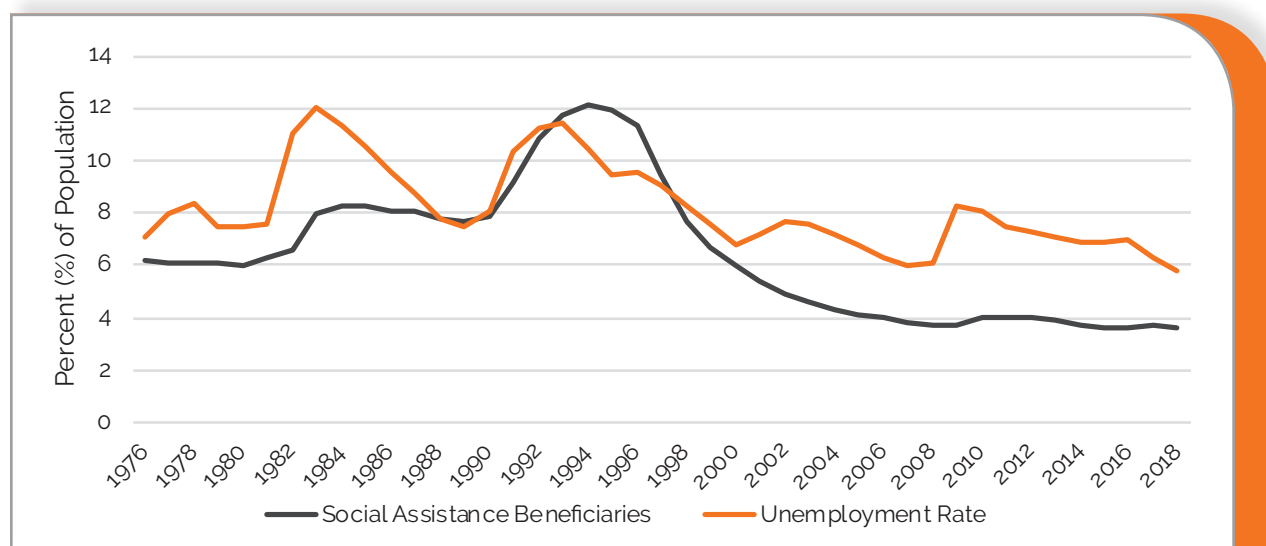
¹⁰ The School of Public Policy, University of Calgary. Social Policy Trends: Calgary Food Bank Clients and Social Assistance caseloads (December 2017) Retrieved from <https://www.policyschool.ca/publications/social-policy-trends-calgary-food-bank-clients-social-assistance-caseloads/>

Over the last 40 years, the gaps in our social safety net have become much wider

Trends over the last 40 years demonstrate the impact that economic cycles have on numbers of people needing social assistance in Canada. In the previous recessions of the early eighties and nineties, a greater percentage of the population was accessing social assistance in their provinces. The recession of the early nineties saw an especially high spike in the number of people on social assistance, which occurred during the same time period that a revamped, and more restrictive, Employment Insurance (E.I.) system, was introduced.

In the latter part of the nineties, policy changes were enacted within provincial social assistance programs across Canada that reduced the income levels and tightened the eligibility for the program. By the time the 2008 recession hit, Canadians were faced with two restrictive sources of income support, and fewer people accessed social assistance than they did during the previous two recessions. However, people were still struggling in great numbers during that period, as food bank visits reached their highest peak in 2011 and 2012. Currently, while unemployment rates are at the lowest they have been in recent times, there is still a persistent rate of the population on social assistance. This could be an indication that people are still struggling to re enter the labour market, and living on extremely low levels of income not intended to be a source of long-term support. There are also growing numbers receiving the disability component of provincial social assistance. As a result, the number of people accessing food banks remains far too high, and there is a deepening poverty for those relying on provincial social assistance.

Rates of unemployment and social assistance in Canada, 1976-2018



Source: Adapted from John Stapleton, The 'Ball' or the 'Bridge', Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, May 2009. National social assistance beneficiaries from Kneebone, R., & White, K. (2014). THE RISE AND FALL OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE USE IN CANADA, 1969–2012. The School of Public Policy SPP Research Papers, University of Calgary, 7(5). Retrieved from <https://journalhosting.ucalgary.ca/index.php/sppp/article/download/42457/30349/>. Thanks to Ronald Kneebone for providing updated numbers of social assistance caseloads to 2018. Social assistance beneficiaries do not include those receiving the disability component. Unemployment rates from Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0327-01, Labour force characteristics by sex and detailed age group, annual.

When the income support program of "last resort" becomes the only option

Currently, there are over 1.1 million people receiving the general welfare portion of provincial social assistance in Canada, nearly 2 million if we include those receiving the disability support portion. Food bank managers across Canada are speaking about increasing layoffs, seasonal unemployment and precarious work. Our current social safety net, and social assistance in particular, was designed during a period when full time work was the norm. In the post-recession economy, increases in part time, contract and seasonal work are now becoming more the norm.

"I had a friend from my past reach out to me today. She was a part of the approximate 2,000 people that lost their jobs 10 years ago, when the forest industry crashed. Paula was a little older and had fewer marketable job skills, and didn't compete very well....she, like many others, has exhausted her savings, and sold all her tangible assets. Paula now relies on food banks, as she cannot make her rent and eat all month, solely on her pension. I think she is part of the growing numbers, quietly existing in the shadows, trying to make ends meet."*

Food bank manager, Ontario

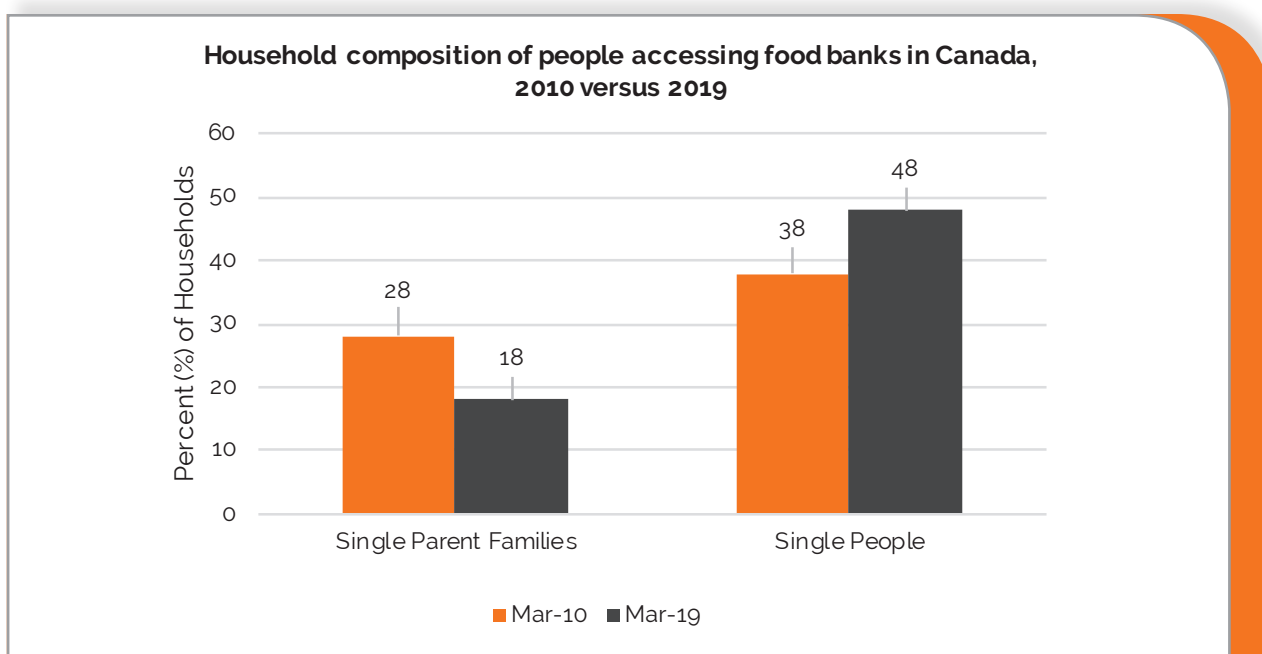
*Name changed to protect identity

This safety net is outdated, and is not equipped to adequately support people during economic downturns, or fill in the gaps to even out the piecemeal nature of today's labour market. As these trends in the labour market continue, and the present danger of another recession looms, our income support system including our provincial social assistance system will need a major overhaul. Otherwise, an increasing number of Canadians will be facing longer periods of destitution, poverty, and being forced to rely on food banks to make ends meet.

THE GROWTH OF SINGLE-PERSON HOUSEHOLDS ACCESSING FOOD BANKS

"Our demand seems to be increasing 5-10% annually. The main demographics are single person households that saw a large increase over last year...we also see a lot of pensioners who don't receive enough money to live."

Desirée Erdmann, Coordinator, Crowsnest Pass Food Bank.



HungerCount 2019 shows single person households are increasingly the most common type of household accessing food banks across Canada. Single-person households accounted for 38 per cent of all food bank users in 2010 but now account for close to half (48 per cent). Food bank coordinators seeing the increase amongst singles identified low social assistance and disability payments, unaffordable housing and other rising costs as contributing factors.

Social assistance rates for singles nationwide are so low, many have no choice but to rely on food banks

While families have the added advantage of being able to pool resources by sharing incomes and expenses, singles living alone do not have this opportunity, and are often not eligible for many of the benefits and tax credits that parents with children can make use of. In addition to lack of access of benefits outside social assistance, social assistance payments for single person households are extremely low. The gap between market basket measure (MBM) thresholds and total social assistance payments that a household can be eligible for is far greater for a single person in every province.¹¹ This could be one of the contributing factors why single-person households account for 28.2 per cent of the population but represent about 40 per cent of those experiencing severe food insecurity and 48 per cent of those accessing food banks.¹²

The number of singles on social assistance continues to grow

"Over the last year, we've seen at least a dozen major employers, whether season or year round, close up. In some cases, it happened unexpectedly with no notice to the workers and families."

Food bank coordinator, Newfoundland

As single person households have fewer income support options than other household types during periods of unemployment or sporadic employment, they are more likely to need to access provincial social assistance during these periods. From 2000 to 2011, single-person households on Ontario Works went up by 65 per cent in Ontario and single parents went down by 20 per cent. This trend can be seen in every province for which data on social assistance caseloads is available.¹³

Over time these income disparities can make it significantly more likely for households with two people or more people to have accumulated non-financial assets. On average, families and households with more than two incomes have 200,000 more dollars in non-financial assets compared to single person households.¹⁴ This limited level of assets, combined with limited access to benefits, make it more unlikely for single-person households to adjust to shocks in their budget.¹⁵ As a result, the post-recession work environment in Canada that includes periods of unemployment as well as minimum wage and contract work could be far more damaging to single-person households.¹⁶ We fear that without a strategy to address this, we will have a looming crisis that will leave more single person households vulnerable to extreme poverty.

11 MBM figures (2015) representing different areas in every province were compiled to create a provincial average for single person households and for 2 person households to compare with the two household types (2019, April); Social Assistance payments encompass total 2017 income including basic social assistance, additional SA benefits, federal child benefits, provincial child benefits, GST credit and provincial tax credits/benefits; and Social Assistance Summaries. Retrieved from <https://maytree.com/social-assistance-summaries/>

12 Galbraith, N., Truong, J., & Tang, J. (2019, March 6). Living alone in Canada. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2019001/article/00003-eng.htm>, and Tarasuk, V., Mitchell, A., Dachner, N. (2014). Household food insecurity in Canada, 2012. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). Retrieved from <http://nutritionalsciences.lamp.utoronto.ca/>

13 Stapleton, J., & Bednar, V. (2011). Trading Places: Single Adults Replace Lone Parents as the New Face of Social Assistance. Mowat Centre for Policy Innovation. Retrieved from https://munkschool.utoronto.ca/mowatcentre/wp-content/uploads/publications/40_trading_places.pdf

14 Statistics Canada (2017). CANSIM Table 205-0002. Ottawa: Government of Canada

15 (2018). Hunger Report 2018. Retrieved from <https://oafb.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/Hunger-Report-2018-Digital.pdf>

16 Stapleton, J., & Bednar, V. (2011).

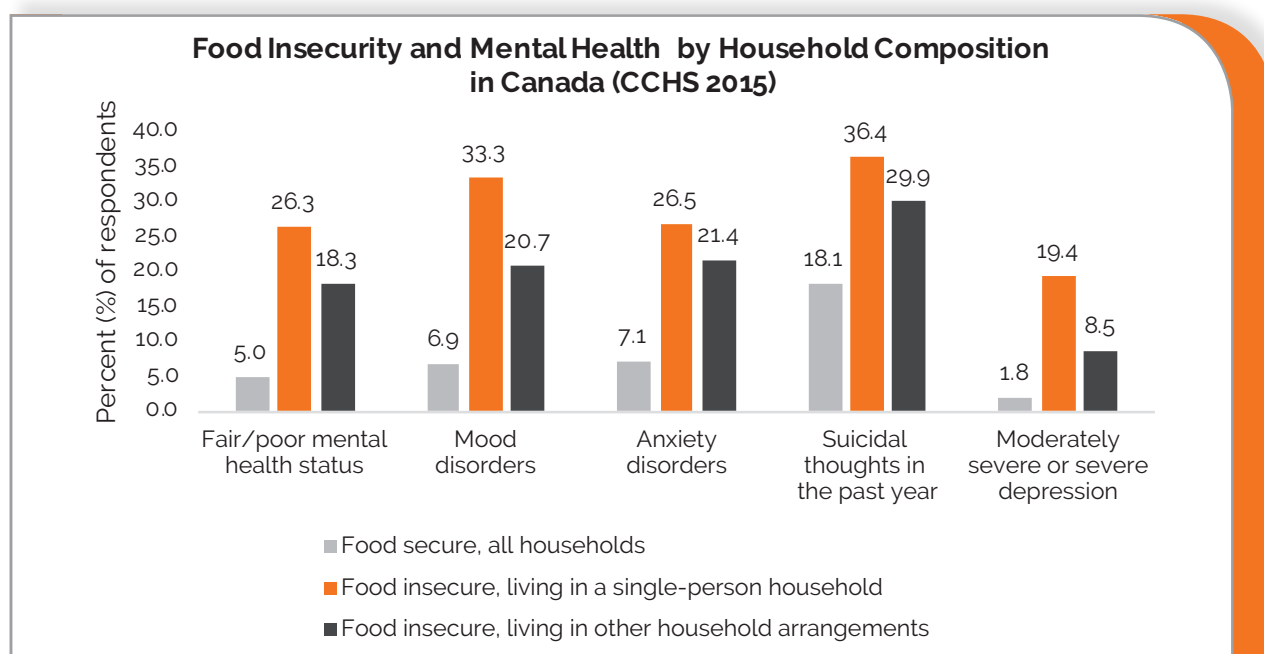
A disturbing intersection: single person households, food insecurity, and poor mental health

"It is convoluted and hard for people with mental health issues to ask for help or access it."

Food bank coordinator in Smith Falls, Ontario

While the extremely low incomes for single person households are one of the largest contributors to this type of household experiencing food insecurity and the need to access a food bank, poverty often intersects with, and likely exacerbates, other issues such as disabilities and mental health. Canada Community Health Survey results from four cycles show that food insecurity has a statistically significant relationship with mental health variables such as self-perceived mental health, having a doctor diagnosed mood or anxiety disorder, and having had suicidal thoughts or major depressive episodes in the past year in adults aged 18 to 64.¹⁷

The most recent data from the 2015/2016 CCHS follows a similar pattern. Higher levels of food insecurity are related to poorer self-perceptions of mental health, having been diagnosed with a mood or anxiety disorder, suffering from severe and moderately severe depression and having had suicidal thoughts in the past 12 months. These relationships are even stronger when data is disaggregated based on household composition.¹⁸ Single-person households with moderate to severe food insecurity are more likely to have experienced mental health issues.



Source: Statistics Canada. 2015/2016 Canada Community Health Survey PUMF.

Food banks in Canada are acutely aware of this intersection, with approximately 50 per cent of food bank coordinators across Canada having identified increasing mental health supports as one of the top policy priorities to reduce hunger in their community.

¹⁷ Four cycles: 2005, 2007/08, 2009/10, 2011/12; Jessiman-Perreault, G., & McIntyre, L. (2017). The household food insecurity gradient and potential reductions in adverse population mental health outcomes in Canadian adults. *SSM - Population Health*, 3, 464–472. doi: 10.1016/j.ssmph.2017.05.013

¹⁸ Statistics Canada. 2015/2016 Canada Community Health Survey PUMF.

With the reduction of full time jobs being replaced by precarious, part time and casual employment, Food Banks Canada fears the resulting stress on incomes and health will add to both food bank use and mental health challenges. Providing more supports to assist people navigate an increasingly precarious labour market, along with developing a better system of support for single person households than is being provided with our present income security system, are needed in order to reverse this present trend.

THE “WELFARIZATION OF DISABILITY” AND THE IMPACT ON FOOD BANKS NATIONWIDE

Changes in income sources of households accessing food banks in Canada



| Canada - All | 2010 | 2019 |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Provincial social assistance: Disability portion | 14.4% | 17.3% |
| Provincial social assistance: general welfare | 50.5% | 40.1% |

| Canada- Rural | 2010 | 2019 |
|--------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Provincial social assistance: Disability portion | 11.8% | 17.0% |
| Provincial social assistance: general welfare | 50.8% | 39.7% |

“...for many Canadians with disabilities, provincial social assistance is effectively a first-resort program rather than a safety net.”¹⁹

Dr. Michael J Prince, Lansdowne Professor of Social Policy

Provincial social assistance is increasingly becoming the main source of income support for people with disabilities in Canada – a trend that social policy experts refer to as the “welfarization of disability”.²⁰ The impact of this trend is being seen in food banks across the country, as clients who are receiving the disability portion of social assistance– despite receiving higher levels of income than general welfare - are increasingly accessing food banks for help.

The number of people accessing food banks who receive provincial disability support increased from 14.4 per cent in 2010 to 17.3 per cent in 2019. In rural Canada, the change is more pronounced, with an increase from 11.8 per cent to 17 per cent in the same time period. Conversely, those receiving the general welfare portion of social assistance has decreased from over 50 per cent to 40 per cent, both overall and in rural areas. Some food banks report that those receiving provincial disability support represent the bulk of their clients, as they simply cannot afford rising costs of living such as rent, food and utilities like heat and hydro.

¹⁹ Prince, M. J. (2015). Entrenched Residualism. In P.-M. Daigneault & D. Beland (Eds.), *Welfare Reform in Canada: Provincial Social Assistance in Comparative Perspective* (pp. 289–304). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto.

²⁰ Stapleton, J., Tweedle, A. & Gibson, K. (February, 2013) “What is Happening to Disability Income Systems in Canada? Katie Gibson Consulting”. Retrieved from <http://www.ccdonline.ca/en/socialpolicy/poverty-citizenship/income-security-reform/disability-income-systems#sec-trend>

Provincial disability assistance has become the fastest growing program of income support for people with disabilities

In Canada, there are a range of income support programs for people with disabilities, which include private disability insurance (for those covered by a workplace plan), federal benefits (such as Employment Insurance (E.I.) Sickness, Canada Pension Plan-Disability, Veterans Benefits and various tax credits), and provincial benefits (such as the disabled component of provincial social assistance and provincial workers compensation). Aside from the disability component of provincial social assistance and tax credits, most of these other programs are only available to those who had been regularly employed, in a job that provided a consistent salary or wage.

The disability component of provincial social assistance, originally intended as a program of last resort for those who cannot access workplace triggered benefits, has become the fastest growing income support program for people with disabilities in regards to public expenditure.²¹ The growth is so fast, that it has been observed that provincial social assistance is now a "first resort program rather than a safety net."²²

Why this matters

Each province varies in regards to the eligibility and levels of income support for people receiving provincial disability assistance. However, what all provinces and territories have in common is that income levels are generally low, with the income levels of a single person with a disability falling below the poverty line in every province and territory.²³ This is due in large part to the fact that the real dollar value of disability income rates have, with the exception of Manitoba and Quebec, fallen substantially from 30 years ago. As the chart below demonstrates, when averaging the maximum disability incomes of a single person on provincial social assistance for each province, **the real value of maximum annual disability social assistance benefits has declined by over 10 per cent compared to 30 years ago.**²⁴

Maximum Annual Provincial Disability Social Assistance Benefits (2017 Constant Dollars).

| | NL | PE | NS | NB | QC | ON | MB | SK | AB | BC | Canada (average) |
|--------------------------------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|------------------|
| 1989 | \$13,205 | \$14,204 | \$13,613 | \$12,964 | \$11,136 | \$15,941 | \$11,530 | \$13,927 | \$10,475 | \$13,149 | \$13,014 |
| 2003 | \$12,267 | \$10,204 | \$11,186 | \$10,040 | \$12,317 | \$14,917 | \$10,593 | \$11,298 | \$9,818 | \$12,441 | \$10,450 |
| 2017 | \$11,579 | \$10,229 | \$10,264 | \$9,837 | \$12,741 | \$14,682 | \$12,132 | \$11,276 | \$10,225 | \$13,096 | \$11,606 |
| Real % change 1989-2017 | -12.31% | -27.99% | -24.60% | -24.12% | 14.41% | -7.90% | 5.22% | -19.03% | -2.39% | -0.40% | -10.82% |

Source: adapted from Prince, 2015, table 16.3, with income data from Maytree, Welfare in Canada, 2017. Alberta's maximum does not include their Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (AISH) program, which differs from other programs because recipients are given a flat rate regardless of household size. In 2017 that rate was \$19,056.

As provincial disability income support caseloads continue to expand, many with disabilities will be increasingly vulnerable to poverty and hunger. Moving forward, changes both within income support programs as well as the labour market that better support and accommodate people with disabilities are needed, as well as movement towards a modernized income support system that provides adequate income support regardless if someone is working or not.²⁵

²¹ Stapleton, J. et al. (2013)

²² Prince, M. J. (2015)

²³ Statistics Canada. (2019, January 3). Table 4.5 Market Basket Measure (MBM) thresholds for economic families and persons not in economic families, 2015. Retrieved from https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/ref/dict/tab/t4_5-eng.cfm

²⁴ Maytree, Social Assistance Summaries. (2019, April). Retrieved from <https://maytree.com/social-assistance-summaries/>

²⁵ For further discussion of reform direction, see Prince, M.J. (2016). Inclusive Employment for Canadians with Disabilities: Toward a New Policy Framework and Agenda, Montreal: Institute for Research on Public Policy.

THE RAPID INCREASE OF SENIORS ACCESSING FOOD BANKS

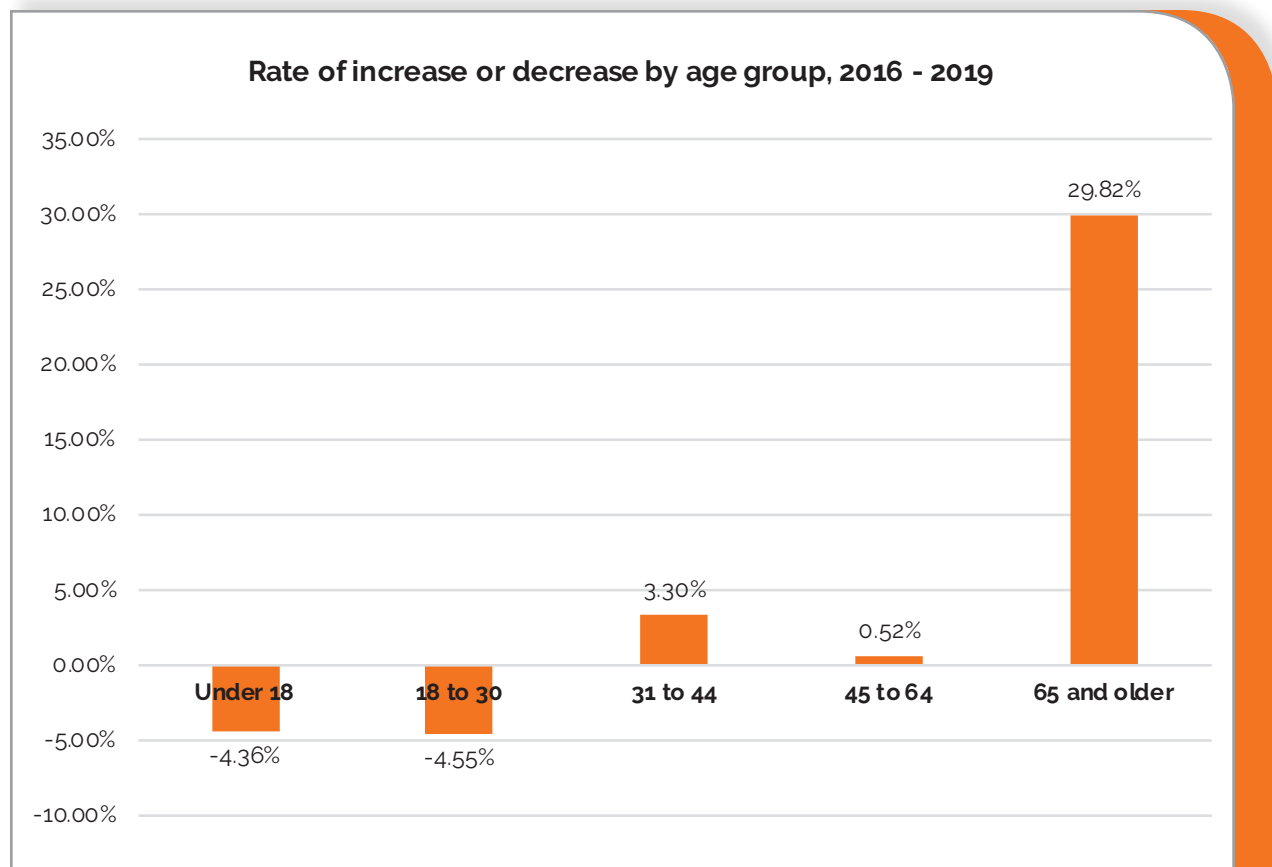
"We have a lot of seniors...one lady had to get her tooth fixed and had no coverage. Whether it's prescription, dental - they can't afford it. We have retirees, 69 - 70, coming in looking for a part time job because they can't make ends meet."

June Muir, Executive Director, Unemployed Help Centre, Windsor, Ontario

"Seniors I'm concerned about. We used to be concerned about formula and diapers, but now we have to stock Ensure, adult diapers - things we don't have a lot of on the shelves."

Volker Kromm, Executive Director, Regional Food Distribution Association

Seniors 65 and over don't represent a large proportion of people accessing food banks - they are just under 7 per cent. However, when looking at the rate of increase within each age group over the last three years, seniors are far outpacing the rest. While it's generally understood that seniors in Canada have a better model of income support and reduced food insecurity as a result²⁶, those that are accessing food banks demonstrate there are some gaps in support for some lower income seniors.



²⁶ Dutton, (2016). Food Insecurity in Poor Canadian Seniors is Greatly Reduced when Guaranteed Annual Income Kicks in. Canadian Public Policy, 42(3), September 2016, pp. 274-286. https://proof.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/CP423_PR.pdf

According to the result of the HungerCount, seniors 65 and over accessing food banks have increased by nearly 30 per cent since 2016, while other age groups under 30 have decreased, or minimally increased during the same time period.

Despite receiving higher incomes through federal pension supports than those receiving provincial social assistance, these numbers indicate that seniors on fixed incomes are particularly vulnerable to the rapidly rising costs of rent and food, vulnerabilities that are for many seniors compounded by greater health care needs such as prescription drugs.

While seniors generally receive coverage for their prescription drugs, the extent of coverage varies between provinces and territories, and seniors still pay between 11 to 13 per cent of the cost out of pocket.²⁷ For many seniors on low income, those out of pocket costs can be prohibitive, making some choose between their medication and food.²⁸

Generally, seniors have a better system of income support in Canada than the working age population. These trends indicate there are some gaps that need to be filled, and that for vulnerable populations such as seniors in-kind supports, such as extent of drug coverage, are equally important aspects of a social safety net for those in their retirement years.

THE INCREASING PRESSURE OF RENTAL COSTS – IT'S NOT JUST THE URBAN AREAS

"The cost of housing has gone up...our male clients cannot afford bachelor rental space, so they are rooming with others."

Food Bank Coordinator from Smith Falls, Ontario



| Canada – All | 2010 | 2019 |
|----------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Market rent housing | 59.8% | 70.4% |
| Social (rent-geared to income) housing | 25.6% | 14.4% |

| Canada - Rural | 2010 | 2019 |
|----------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Market rent housing | 51.5% | 58.8% |
| Social (rent-geared to income) housing | 15.5% | 11.6% |

²⁷ Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer (September, 2017) Federal cost of a national pharmacare program. Retrieved from <http://www.pbo-dpb.gc.ca/en/blog/news/Pharmacare>.

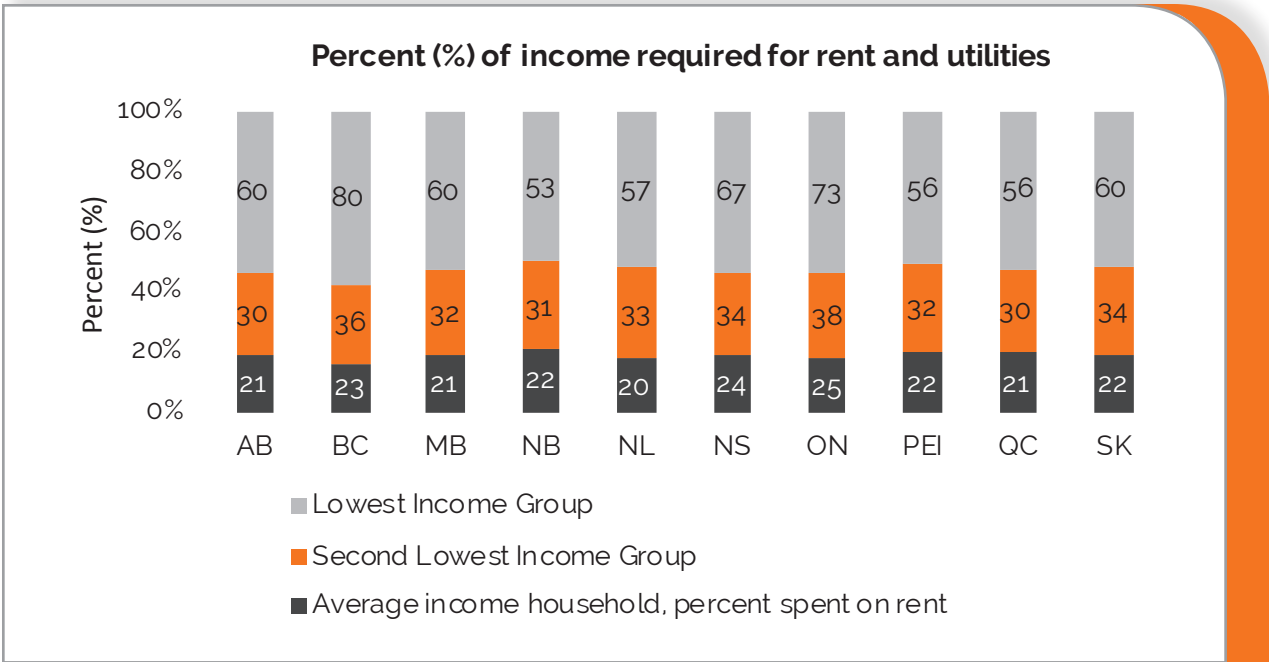
²⁸ Webster, P. (2019) Medication costs driving seniors to food banks. CMAJ News. Retrieved from <http://cmajnews.com/2017/11/21/medication-costs-driving-seniors-to-food-banks-cmaj-109-5521/>

Results from the 2019 survey indicate that food bank coordinators across Canada are feeling the pressure of the impact that the high cost of housing is having on demands for their services. 61 per cent of HungerCount respondents nationwide felt increasing the stock of affordable housing was the most important initiative that would reduce hunger in their community.

And it's no wonder. In 2019, respondents indicated that 70% of their clients lived in market rent housing, increasing from 60 per cent in 2010. This trend is not just the urban centres - food banks in rural areas saw an increase to 59 per cent from 52 per cent of clients of those who lived in market rent housing over the same time period. Whether it's people leaving the larger urban centres to find more affordable housing, a new business enterprise relocating to a remote Northern town, or a tourist site seeing an increasing demand for short term rentals, the affordable housing crisis has had a spillover effect from the larger urban areas, impacting food bank demand in more remote areas.

In addition to the high cost of rent, residents also have to spend on utilities such as electricity, heat and water. Food bank coordinators across Canada spoke about the difficulties of keeping up with high utility bills. Winter heating bills can be especially tough on residents and unexpected if winter extends for longer.

The combination of rent and utilities devours the majority of the budget for people living with the lowest incomes in Canada, especially those receiving provincial social assistance, government pension, or low wage work. While it is generally recommended that households pay no more than 30 per cent of their income on rent, in all of the provinces, the lowest income group is paying well over 50 per cent of their income for the cost of rent and utilities²⁹. Spending this portion of income on housing is considered a "crisis" level of spending on housing, leaving little left over for other basic needs such as food, as well as leaving them at risk of homelessness.³⁰



Source: Canadian Rental Housing Index - COST. Retrieved from http://rentalhousingindex.ca/en/#cost_prov. Across Canada, the top end of the lowest income threshold ranges from an annual income of approximately \$20,000 to \$33,000.

²⁹ <https://bcnpha.ca/news/news-release-families-feeling-the-impact-as-rental-housing-affordability-worsens-across-canada/>
³⁰ News Release: Families Feeling the Impact as Rental Housing Affordability Worsens Across Canada - BC Non-Profit Housing Association. (2019). Retrieved from <https://bcnpha.ca/news/news-release-families-feeling-the-impact-as-rental-housing-affordability-worsens-across-canada/>

Without significant investments in affordable private rentals or social housing, industry experts predict that average rental rates will increase by 6 per cent year over year on a national basis in 2019.³¹ Rising rents in large cities and the spillover effects into smaller towns is going to make shelter costs unaffordable for more low-income Canadians.

The cost of housing has a significant impact on food insecurity and the need for food banks. Rent is a non-negotiable expense, and other basic needs such as food are sacrificed. While the federal government has made some significant investments in the new National Housing Strategy, these trends indicate that the government immediately act with policies such as the Canada Housing Benefit, so that households with low incomes living in market rent housing do not have to sacrifice food in order to pay for their rent.

THE PERFECT STORM – FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO HUNGER IN NORTHERN COMMUNITIES

When Volker Kromm, the Executive Director of the Regional Food Distribution Association in Thunder Bay sends food to isolated, remote First Nations communities in Northern Ontario, he is not just providing food to individual households in need – but he's also an important ally in helping to open doors to communities that are in crisis. For instance, when one northern community saw three of its members die by suicide in one week, crisis workers noted that the food delivered helped them to better connect with the families there.

These challenges, faced by communities across the Canadian North, are a perfect storm - examples of major contributors to food insecurity in the rest of Canada. Lack of employment opportunities, limited sources of available income aside from social assistance, food costs that are not only sky high but extremely volatile. Additionally, Indigenous people face exceptionally high rates of severe food insecurity nationwide³², and in the North have been especially impacted by the effects of colonization that forced many from relying on hunting and harvesting traditional food to an increased reliance on store bought goods.³³ These factors may be why food insecurity in northern areas is extremely high – with Nunavut reporting food insecurity among 47% of its households, and Northwest Territories at 24%.³⁴

Compounding these external challenges are the limitations faced by food banks in the North, which are constrained from lack of resources, infrastructure and personnel. This limited capacity also means that food banks are unable to serve the growing need.

"Food prices are extremely volatile...an item could be five dollars one week and ten dollars another week making it very difficult for families to budget."

Food bank volunteer, northern Labrador

Even with the subsidies given to retailers through Nutrition North, the cost of food is still a key driver of food insecurity in that region. A participatory food costing study revealed that the average price of the Revised Northern Food Basket that feeds a family of four for one week was \$410 in a 14-month period from late 2014 to early 2016. If the same items were purchased in Ottawa the cost would be \$192. Differences in prices were even starker for foods that were richer in nutrients, like vegetables and meat.³⁵

31 Murchison, B. & Danison, P. & Myers, B. (2019). Rentals.ca 2019 Rental Market Predictions from Experts Across Canada. Rentals.ca. Retrieved from <<https://rentals.ca/blog/2019-rental-market-predictions-from-experts-across-canada#insights-for-2019>>

32 Tarasuk, V, Mitchell, A, Dachner, N. (2014).

33 Food Banks Canada, HungerCount 2015. Retrieved from https://www.foodbankscanada.ca/getmedia/01e662ba-f1d7-419d-b40c-bcc71a9f943c/HungerCount2015_singles.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf

34 Tarasuk, V, Mitchell, A, Dachner, N. (2014).

35 Kenny, T., Fillion, M., MacLean, J., Wesche, S. D., & Chan, H. M. (2018). Calories are cheap, nutrients are expensive – the challenge of healthy living in arctic communities. Food Policy, 80, 39–54. doi:10.1016/j.foodpol.2018.08.006

The cost of transportation makes food more expensive in remote communities. Transporting goods via cargo airplanes is several times more expensive than transportation through highway trucks. Ice trucks cost significantly less but ice roads are seasonal and unreliable. In addition to transportation difficulties and lack of infrastructure, retail market concentration also has an impact on food costs in the North. The cost of this transportation greatly impacts regional food distribution centres getting food to these areas, as charities are not eligible for transportation subsidies as retail outlets are.

Lack of employment opportunities and low incomes make it difficult to be able to afford food. The unemployment rate in northern areas can be far greater than the national average unemployment, especially in isolated communities. For instance, Nunavut has an unemployment rate of 16.3 percent compared to Canada's unemployment rate of 5.8 percent in 2019. In the Northwest Territories, unemployment was 8.3 percent.

Limited employment opportunities mean many people rely on social assistance. In the case of Nunavut, where their income assistance program had 14,488 beneficiaries, which represents more than one third of the population.³⁶ Moreover, while food prices have been moderated to a certain extent by Nutrition North, social assistance incomes still fall behind. For instance, while the price of a nutritious food basket in Iqaluit reported an increase of 0.3 per cent from 2011 to 2018, the income from social assistance for a single person declined by 7 per cent within that same time period when inflation is taken into account.³⁷

While food bank use has declined in the Territories over last year, we believe that is due to issues of food bank access, limited data collection, and other factors, not related to declining food insecurity or improving conditions. Further study is needed to elaborate why these numbers are in decline while food insecurity remains alarmingly high.

In our HungerCount 2019 survey, food bank coordinators across Canada referred to rising food prices, costs of shelter and utilities as well as declining social assistance and disability payments as contributors to food bank use. Many of these trends are felt more acutely in northern communities and require more tailored solutions to meet the unique needs in that region.

WHEN HUNGER CAN'T WAIT — MEETING THE IMMEDIATE NEED IN THE FACE OF DEEPENING POVERTY

"From a client perspective there have been huge changes. When people came to the food bank it was canned fruit, mac and cheese, a pre-assembled bag, and a litre of milk... now, in most cases they get their choices of unlimited produce and bread. Previously, they were able to access food from once every two weeks, now they can come up to six days per week."

Peter Sinclair, Executive Director, Loaves and Fishes Food Bank, Nanaimo, B.C.

³⁶ Maytree, Social Assistance Summaries. (2019, April). Retrieved from <https://maytree.com/social-assistance-summaries/nunavut> and Statistics Canada. Table 17-10-0005-01 Population estimates on July 1st, by age and sex

³⁷ Cost of the Revised Northern Food Basket in 2017-2018. (2019). Retrieved from <https://www.nutritionnorthcanada.gc.ca/eng/1548078467819/1548078497301> and Welfare in Canada – Nunavut – Maytree. (2019). Retrieved from <https://maytree.com/welfare-in-canada/nunavut/>

While the disturbing trends being seen in food bank demand show the need for significant policy intervention at both federal and provincial levels, these changes are often slow and incremental. The urgency of action requires a multipronged approach, one that better meets immediate needs while policy change moves at a different pace.

The reality of seeing this level of hunger on a daily basis has pushed many food banks to find new ways to improve both the amount and quality of food they give to their clients, while managing limitations of costs and infrastructure on the ground. In recent years there has been more public and media attention given to food recovery. Food recovery is seen as part of a range of approaches to reduce the amount of food loss and waste that occurs at various stages of our food supply chain, contributing to greenhouse gas emissions.³⁸ Food recovery refers to rescuing healthy, surplus food that would otherwise go into landfill due to inefficiencies in our food supply chain, and redirecting it to people who are in need.

Food banks across Canada have been “rescuing” food from local retailers, farmers and manufacturers for decades, however often lacked the capacity, mostly through limitations in infrastructure, to accept large amounts of perishable food necessary to meet the demand. Now, through new partnerships that are leveraging resources and supports from government, corporate retailers, and the agricultural sector, food banks across the country have been able to vastly increase not just a larger amount of food, but a growing diversity of food that includes an abundance of fruits and vegetables, meat, and dairy products.

Historically, a key limitation for many food banks has been the ability to store large amounts of fresh or frozen perishable food. Many food banks are small, volunteer run organizations with limited space to run their programs, as well as limited hours of operation and capacity to safely store and distribute foods such as meats, dairy and vegetables. In cases where the volunteer capacity and space is available, there may not be the financial resources available to purchase the walk in coolers, freezers, or refrigerated transportation needed to maintain the safety of the product.

Recognizing these limitations, various partners in the public, private and non-profit sector have stepped up to the plate to invest in building the capacity of food banks to build this infrastructure and refrigeration capacity. A

recent example of this is the federal government announcing a Local Food Infrastructure Fund (LFIF), which is a \$50 million investment over five years for added support to this work.



³⁸ Canada, E. (2019). Taking stock: Reducing food loss and waste in Canada - Canada.ca. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/environment-climate-change/services/managing-reducing-waste/food-loss-waste/taking-stock.html>

"Because we have all these vegetables and fruits...these individuals would just go without...for them to come and have access to that each and every day they are so thankful. There's just so much."

June Muir, Executive Director, Unemployed Help Centre, Windsor, Ontario

"The quantity and variety of the food the [food banks] receive has improved. For some organizations this allows them to devote more money to individuals and help them."

Alexandra Dupré, Directrice, Développement du PRS

Ultimately, the main focus is the people who need help. While most food banks nationwide provide households with a week's worth of food once per month, some food banks participating in food recovery programs enable people to access certain kinds of perishable food, such as fruits and vegetables, on a daily basis. Additionally, money that would often be spent on purchasing food in order to provide balanced hampers for clients – which on average ranges from \$27,000 a year for medium size food banks to over \$1 million for some larger food banks – can be redirected into providing other programs or supports for clients.

Food recovery initiatives are not a long-term solution to hunger in Canada, and must not occur at the expense of continued investment in progressive social policy that increases people's incomes, which ultimately has the biggest impact in reducing food insecurity. However, they can decrease the burden and stress of hunger for people accessing them, while enabling more dignity and choice within this mode of support.

FOOD RECOVERY REFERS TO RESCUING HEALTHY, SURPLUS FOOD THAT WOULD OTHERWISE GO INTO LANDFILL DUE TO INEFFICIENCIES IN OUR FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN, AND REDIRECTING IT TO PEOPLE WHO ARE IN NEED.



POLICY

RECOMMENDATIONS



HUNGERCOUNT 2019 – POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The data is clear - food bank use in Canada remains at unacceptably high levels. While food banks are finding new and innovative ways to provide healthy, nutritious food and a wide variety of services to support those they serve, only long-term policy solutions can address the root causes of hunger in Canada.

This is because the root cause of food bank use is, and always has been, related to poverty and low income – and this core issue can only be addressed through government policies.

With a newly elected minority government in Ottawa, and with many new progressive voices representing communities across the country, there is an opportunity to build on the foundational pieces that were put into place over the last few years.

The introduction of the Canada Child Benefit, the poverty reduction strategy, the national housing strategy and the expansion of the Canada Workers Benefit (just to name a few) were all policy recommendations that we advocated for in previous HungerCount reports and we welcome them as key pillars to built upon moving forward.

These are positive and important steps, but it is clear that much more still needs to be done if we are to reach the intended goals of significantly reducing poverty, and food bank use, in Canada.

Good intentions and well laid out strategies alone will not be enough to meet Food Banks Canada's vision of a Canada where no one goes hungry.

To that end, implementing the following policy recommendations are essential if the federal government wants to meet the targets set forth in its poverty reduction strategy and ultimately reduce the need for food banks in the long term.





RECOMMENDATION 1

SUPPORT THE CREATION OF AFFORDABLE EARLY LEARNING AND CHILDCARE ACROSS THE COUNTRY

Year over year, one of the most shocking statistics to emerge from our HungerCount report is just how deeply children are affected by low incomes and poverty in a country as rich as ours.

In 2019, and over the last decade, children have made up just over 20 percent of the country's general population – yet they represent almost 35 percent of those seeking help from a food bank. This means that hundreds of thousands of children rely on food banks each month in Canada. These numbers are not only staggering – they are unacceptable.

Childcare has become so expensive across Canada that many families with moderate to low incomes are struggling. In Toronto in 2018, the average childcare costs per child was above \$20,000 per year and most cities across the country are similarly expensive, even in provinces with subsidized daycare plans.³⁹

The federal government has made some significant investments in supporting families with the Canada Child Benefit and we are encouraged to see a slight decrease in food bank use amongst children since its introduction. However, while some progress has been made – it is clear that drastically reducing the cost of childcare is a key piece needed to truly reduce the need for food banks for so many children.

In order to make a substantial impact for families living with low incomes, an increased and sustained federal investment in early learning and childcare is essential. The links between social and economic policy in this area are clear: every \$1 invested in early learning and care will boost the economy in the long run by \$6.⁴⁰

Early learning and childcare is an investment in the well-being of Canadians that has real benefits for the country as a whole. Funding and supporting the creation of affordable early learning and childcare has multiple benefits – it supports parents to enter or remain in the workforce and increase their incomes, or to upgrade their education and skills; and it decreases school drop-out rates among children and youth and improves post-secondary educational participation.⁴¹

While wide availability of affordable childcare is particularly beneficial for parents facing financial hardships, it is a boon to parents at all income levels. This is especially true for single-parent households who remain over-represented in food banks across the country. Single parent households face significantly higher levels of stress than other household types, and pressures of raising a child that include managing unaffordable childcare costs inevitably plays a role.⁴²

In an era when the majority of parents work, with a rapidly changing labour market and a shrinking labour force, it is simply good economics to invest in early learning and childcare.⁴³

We recommend:

To develop a National Strategy on Early Learning and Childcare with tangible targets and goals.

- The strategy should include a significant increase in current federal investment levels towards early learning and childcare, and set measurable targets and goals that increase the amount of accessible, affordable and publicly-funded quality childcare in every province and territory in Canada.
- A central focus of federal investment should be on building the necessary infrastructure needed to physically create more childcare spaces.
- The strategy should outline affordability benchmarks that each province must respect to qualify for federal support and funding to effectively create national standards of quality and affordability for early learning and childcare in every part of the country.

39 Macdonald, D. and Friendly, M. (2019). Developmental Milestones – Child care fees in Canada's big cities 2018. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA). Retrieved from <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/developmental-milestones>

40 Alexander, C., Beckman, K., Macdonald, A., Renner, C. and Stewart, M. (2017). Ready for Life: A Socio-Economic Analysis of Early Childhood Education and Care. Ottawa: The Conference Board of Canada. Retrieved from https://www.conferenceboard.ca/temp/5f0e9371-025a-4576-8f0c-24097dd688e1/9231_Ready-for-Life_RPT.pdf

41 Ibid.

42 Statistics Canada CCHS (2015). Public Use Microfile.

43 Fields, A., Uppal, S., & LaRochelle-Côté, S. (2017). The impact of aging on labour market participation rates. Retrieved 25 September 2019, from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2017001/article/14826-eng.htm>



RECOMMENDATION 2

INCREASE SUPPORTS FOR SINGLE ADULTS LIVING WITH LOW INCOMES

One of the most striking trends in food bank use in Canada is the growth of single unattached individuals walking through our doors across the country and asking for help. The percent of single people using food banks has increased significantly over the last decade, having grown from 38% of households in 2010 helped to almost half of all households (48%) in 2019.

Looking at the staggering economic statistics for this group, it doesn't take long to figure out why the food banks have seen this jump. Using the Market Basket Measure, the official poverty measure in Canada, the figure is just over 1 in 10. If we look only at unattached (i.e. single) working-age people, the figure jumps to 33%: one in every three single adults lives in poverty.⁴⁴

This group alone represents a low-income population of 1.3 million people. These are Canadians who live in deep poverty, with average incomes that are 50% below the poverty line. This means these individuals are often struggling to survive on about \$10,000 per year.

Given these statistics, it is hardly surprising that close to one in five single adults experiences food insecurity and that so many need support from a food bank to make ends meet.⁴⁵

This is a population that, from a government program perspective, has few places to turn and seems to have been largely forgotten by federal and provincial governments. Many within this group have mental health issues that are exacerbated by poverty and low income. As mentioned in the report, single person households that are food insecure experience higher levels of mental health issues than other households. Many have mental health issues that go untreated for lack of supports available to them, are stuck in a cycle of inadequate social assistance or disability-related supports, or have lost a job and have nowhere to turn for new training and education programs to re-enter the workforce.

For decades, governments have focused policies on specific subsets of the populations such as families and seniors, yet have routinely overlooked working-age single adults as a group that requires targeted action.

A large number are receiving social assistance but can't climb out of poverty due to the grossly inadequate supports and strict conditions that come with these programs. Overall, government supports for this group of vulnerable people have declined by half since the mid 1990s.⁴⁶

The federal government has recently increased their supports for low income Canadians who are working with the expansion of the Canada Workers Benefit. Food Banks Canada had called on the government to enact these changes and we applaud this step in the right direction - but more help is required for this segment of the population that has been ignored for far too long.

We recommend:

- **The creation of a new program to support ill and unemployed Canadians whose temporary Employment Insurance (EI) or disability benefits are about to run out.** This new program would close a major gap in our social safety net that leaves many people with no choice but to enter a cycle of poverty perpetuated by our broken social assistance systems across the country.
- **Develop new mental health measures as part of future health accords with the provinces and territories that include a specific focus on the needs of single, working-age adults.**
- **To make single, low-income adults a priority consideration in all future poverty reduction policy measures to ensure that this vulnerable population is no longer left behind.**
- **To implement our Basic Income recommendation (see recommendation 4) to address the high levels of poverty amongst singles with no attachment to the labour force.**

44 Food Banks Canada (2016). Nowhere to Turn, Toronto: Food Banks Canada. Retrieved from https://www.foodbanksCanada.ca/getmedia/a4298971-1a48-4bef-98ef-409c6773c7f0/Nowhere-to-Turn_FINAL_EN.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf

45 V. Tarasuk, A. Mitchell & N. Dachner (2014)

46 B. Murphy, X. Zhang & C. Dionne (2012). Low income in Canada: A multi-line and multi-index perspective. Statistics Canada. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2012001-eng.pdf?st=ISWkIN8s>



RECOMMENDATION 3

IMMEDIATELY IMPLEMENT THE CANADA HOUSING BENEFIT

Food banks across the country consistently report, year over year, that the high cost of housing is one of the main reasons why people seek their support.

As is described in this report, people across the country spend so much of their monthly incomes on their housing costs that very little, if anything, is left over for food.

In 2017, we were encouraged to see the federal government introduce a new National Housing Strategy, something that Food Banks Canada had advocated for over many years.

As part of the strategy, the federal government committed to spending around \$20 billion dollars (equally matched by the provinces and territories for a total of \$40 billion) over the next twelve years with the ultimate goal of removing 530,000 households from housing need and reducing the amount of chronically homeless people by half by 2030.⁴⁷

These are positive developments and sound government policy – yet very little, if anything, has been done since the strategy's announcement to help those who currently need the support of food banks due to their high housing costs.

It is understandable that significant investments in affordable housing infrastructure, such as the ones introduced in the new housing strategy, take years to develop. However, the Canada Housing Benefit (that was also promised in the strategy) should immediately be implemented and expanded to include all eligible households.

The Canada Housing Benefit is a program designed to directly support low-income Canadians who are paying a high percentage of their incomes towards housing costs. While the exact details of how the government plans to roll out the benefit have yet to be released, it is currently intended to provide 300,000 households with an average support of \$2,500 per year by 2030.⁴⁸

If we consider that 12.7% of Canadian households are in core housing need, meaning their housing cost exceeds 30% of income (which is the widely-accepted 'affordability' benchmark), in need of major repairs, or unsuitable to family size⁴⁹ – it is clear that the government's own targets for the Canada Housing Benefit over a twelve year span are grossly inadequate.

We recommend:

- Immediately implement the planned Canada Housing Benefit so that Canadians struggling to afford their rent can access this important rental support as the rest of the National Housing Strategy takes effect.
- Significantly increase the amount that the federal government plans to invest in the Canada Housing Benefit so that all low-income citizens become eligible for the benefit (remove any cap limit on how many eligible citizens can apply).
- Introduce new investments, and address an important omission of the National Housing Strategy, to build supportive housing for people with mental and physical health disabilities, particularly for low-income and marginalized populations.⁵⁰

47 Government of Canada (2017). A Place to Call Home – Canada's First National Housing Strategy. Retrieved from www.placetocallhome.ca.

48 Ferrer, M. (2018). New Canada Housing Benefit will Help (Some of) The Poorest (Maybe). The Public Policy and Governance Review. Retrieved from <https://ppgreview.ca/2018/01/22/new-canada-housing-benefit-will-help-some-of-the-poorest-maybe/>.

49 Statistics Canada. (2017). 2016 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-400-X2016228.

50 Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. (2018). No Time to Lose: Alternative Budget 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2018/09/AFB%202019.pdf>



RECOMMENDATION 4

DEVELOP PILOT PROJECTS TOWARDS A BASIC INCOME FOR ALL CANADIANS

For decades, consecutive federal governments have shrugged off the idea of moving forward on a Basic Income because it is considered a provincial matter. The fact that the Ontario government initiated a Basic Income pilot project in 2016 seemed to reinforce this notion that progress on this front could be achieved without the federal government's leadership or support.

Unfortunately, the Ontario situation showed just how fragile such a stance can be. With the Ontario government's cancellation of the Ontario basic income pilot projects that were in progress in 2018, crucial data and analyses will never be compiled. A significant opportunity to make progress towards the creation of a basic income for all Canadians was squandered and lost.

The fact that a change in a provincial government could so easily discard such an important pilot project is alarming. The Ontario pilot project would have provided valuable data for the development of a basic income across all provinces and territories in Canada, not only for Ontario.

Given the importance of the data and potential analysis that has been lost, and the fragility of counting on individual provinces to lead the way on this important issue, the federal government has a responsibility to show leadership in forging a new path forward for Canada's most vulnerable citizens, because it is clear that the current approach is broken.

Under our current system of social assistance, one must be virtually penniless before being able to apply for support.⁵¹ Once approved for the program, the average yearly welfare income for a single person in 2017 was only slightly over \$8,500, more than \$10,000 below the poverty line.⁵² And, if one tries to work their way out of welfare, their benefits (cash and non-cash) are clawed back with punitive rates that disincentivize work.

This is a system that has not evolved since the 1990s and one that keeps people mired in a cycle of poverty that is extremely difficult to escape – as is demonstrated by the fact that nearly 60% of those currently helped by food banks are either on social assistance or disability supports.

Waiting on the provinces themselves to forge a new path forward towards a Basic Income is no longer an option, as we have seen most recently in Ontario.

We are asking that the federal government show leadership on this front and work directly with all provinces and territories to help us move towards a Basic Income for all in Canada.

We recommend:

- Fund and develop, in coordination with the provinces and territories, multiple Basic Income pilot projects of various types across the country in every province and territory to help minimize the risk of fluctuating provincial governments shutting projects down.
- Accumulate and analyze the data from these pilot projects over multiple years to determine the type of Basic Income that is best suited for Canada.

In the short-term to immediately boost the incomes of those living in poverty:

- Implement a national prescription drug coverage plan (pharmacare) to cover the costs of prescription drugs so that all Canadians (especially vulnerable groups such as seniors and low-income families) have access to the medications they need.
- Allow all low-income households to have access to the non-cash benefits that are currently only available to those on social assistance (such as childcare subsidies, affordable housing supplements, drug and dental insurance).
- Convert all federal non-refundable tax credits into refundable tax credits, where appropriate. These include (but are not limited to) the Disability Tax Credit, credits for family caregivers, and the credit for public transit users.

51 Tweddle, A., Battle, K. and Torjman, S. (2015). Welfare in Canada 2014. Ottawa : Caledon Institute. Retrieved from https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/Welfare_in_Canada_2014.pdf.

52 Tweddle, A. and Aldridge, H. (2018). Welfare in Canada, 2017. Maytree Foundation. Retrieved from https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/Welfare_in_Canada_2017.pdf



RECOMMENDATION 5

REDUCE NORTHERN FOOD INSECURITY

Northern food insecurity remains a significant concern for Food Banks Canada. While consecutive federal governments have attempted to address this problem with various targeted programs and initiatives - it is clear that the current approach is failing.

Food Banks Canada has worked over the last few years to suggest ways to improve the Nutrition North program and northern food insecurity in general, and we remain concerned that food costs in the North remain largely unchanged since the beginning of the Nutrition North program in 2011.

Recent data released by Statistics Canada shows that the Nutrition North subsidy hasn't had the impact on food costs that many had hoped for when the program was first introduced almost a decade ago.

As shown in the most recent numbers released by Nutrition North Canada, the average cost of the Revised Northern Food Basket in March 2018 was actually higher by over 2% since March of the previous year, and only 1% lower than in March 2011, prior to the launch of the Nutrition North program.⁵³

Recent measures announced by the program, such as new supports for traditional hunting and gathering programs (a measure which Food Banks Canada has advocated for), as well as a new Inuit to Crown working group to address future challenges, are welcomed – yet are likely insufficient to address the multiple challenges facing the north, as described in this report.

With household food insecurity levels that remain unacceptably high in the territories, the cost of food barely changing since 2011, and social assistance income that is decreasing when inflation is taken into account, it is time for the government to review its food security strategy in the north.

Food banks with ties to northern communities across the country are doing what they can to send food to northern and remote areas but they must pay full shipping costs as they are currently not eligible for Nutrition North subsidies that would reduce these costs.

Organizations such as Winnipeg Harvest, the RFDA in Thunder Bay, Ottawa Food Bank and the Community Food Sharing Association in Newfoundland (just to name a few) are doing what they can to support their struggling northern communities, but it is very difficult to stretch scarce financial resources towards high shipping costs.

Ultimately, food prices and food-driven solutions can only do so much. The federal government must also review its entire approach towards the long-term root causes of food insecurity in the north if significant progress is to be achieved.

We recommend:

- That the Nutrition North Canada subsidy immediately be broadened and expanded to become accessible to charities such as food banks who send food and supplies to remote and isolated northern communities.
- That the federal government, in collaboration with the newly formed Inuit to Crown Working Group, initiate a comprehensive review of Nutrition North Canada to determine why the program is only minimally achieving its objectives of reducing the cost of food in the North.
- That the federal government immediately start working towards a basic income (see recommendation 4) and move away from a broken social assistance system that keeps far too many northern Canadians in a cycle of poverty and food insecurity.

53 Government of Canada (2019). Cost of the Revised Northern Food Basket in 2017-2018, Nutrition North Canada. Retrieved from <https://www.nutritionnorthcanada.gc.ca/eng/1548078467819/1548078497301>.

OUR METHODOLOGY



The annual HungerCount is Food Banks Canada's signature report documenting food bank use in Canada. It is a cross-sectional, census survey of most food bank agencies, organizations and programs, within and outside of the Food Banks Canada network. The HungerCount provides a point in time snapshot of food bank use in Canada.

Food Banks Canada is always looking for ways to improve the HungerCount report. If you have questions about the report, or ideas on how we could make this research better, we would like to hear from you. Please get in touch at info@foodbankscanada.ca and reference HungerCount.

Food Bank Universe

Within the food bank network there are 10 provincial organizations; 609 affiliate food banks; over 2,500 agencies included in these affiliates, 4 direct affiliates in the 3 territories. There are also independent food banks operating outside the network that are included in the survey.

Data Collection

The HungerCount survey is sent out to food banks in February of each year, and the data is collected for the month of March. The data continues to be collected for the month of March as the study period is an unexceptional month, without predictable high or low use patterns. Since March is used consistently, we are able to track usage patterns across time periods.

To maximize data integrity, and minimize interpretation errors, the survey includes examples of how the data is to be collected and categorized. Definitions of the categories are also included.

The survey is administered in four different ways:

- (1) through an online program called Link2Feed that is used by the food bank network of Feed Ontario, Feed Nova Scotia and approximately 20 food banks in other provinces.
- (2) emailed directly to food banks and meal programs through the provincial organizations in BC, AB, SK, MB, QC, NB, PE, NL and are not on the Link2Feed program.
- (3) via paper survey sent directly to food banks and meal programs that have limited technology and require physical surveys.
- (4) phone interviews were necessary in some cases. These are primarily non-affiliated food banks, or food banks in remote, northern locations.

A Note on Visits

Starting from the 2018 HungerCount, Food Banks Canada has reported the number of visits to food banks in the month of March to provide a better representation of the need for food banks across Canada.

A "visit" counts each person once for each time they received a hamper of food, as well as each person in their household. For example, a single person who accessed the food bank four times in March would count for four visits. A single parent with two children who accessed the food bank twice in March would count as a total of 6 visits.

Each food bank determines the number of times people in their community can access the services of their food bank, driven by their mission, community need, and available resources. In some cases, people can visit a food bank multiple times per month while in other cases people are able to visit fewer than once per month. The majority of food banks in Canada assist clients once per month.

Total number of visits incorporates visits to the food banks for a grocery basket or hamper that generally consists of a few days to a weeks worth of food, with a mixture of perishable and non-perishable items. Some individual food banks that have been recently engaging in larger scale food recovery initiatives run these as separate programs in addition to these hampers, enabling those food banks to be able to quickly distribute specific food items that may be in abundance at a given time, such as fruits, vegetables and bread. Due to the necessity of quickly distributing a high volume of these specific foods due to their perishability, these food banks enable more frequent "visits" to enable a quicker turnover of food. As these programs typically consist of specific food items only, they are counted as a different program than the traditional hamper programs. For the purposes of data consistency, these recovery program pick ups have been excluded from the total number of visits.

Analyzing the Data

Survey data are entered into a database, cleaned to ensure a robust analysis including filtering of results to include only food bank and meal programs, and verifying any outliers to ensure responses did not inappropriately alter the overall results.

We recognize that error exists in any data collection process. Food Banks Canada undertakes extensive follow up with food bank outliers (those who deviate +/-25% in any given year). The analysis performed by Food Banks Canada staff used Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). To arrive at the overall usage number, primary data is received directly from organizations. We cumulate total visits from all responding valid surveys and calculate household results using only surveys with complete data in those categories.

In cases where surveys were not completed by operating food banks, conservative estimates are produced by verifying that a food program still exists and using regional data to apply a percent increase or decrease to previously reported numbers. Outliers are removed from the regional data to ensure trends aren't over-reported.

Limitations

Food banks across the country operate with limited resources and capacity for documentation. In some cases, Food Banks Canada follows up with outliers to find out there was a reporting error in a previous year. In these instances, corrections can be made to data from past years. Most often these discrepancies are minor and do not impact the overall trends. Food Banks Canada makes every effort to ensure that data being presented is as accurate as possible.

Methodology Review

In the fall of 2018, the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) did a review of the HungerCount methodology and made several recommendations for the coming years. Overall, SRDC has found that HungerCount is a survey program providing rich data concerning vulnerable, and typically under-represented populations. HungerCount provides a robust snapshot in any given year of food bank utilization, as well as key demographics of the populations who use food banks across Canada. Several quality control checks are in place to minimize measurement and response errors in data collection phases.

FOOD PROGRAMS PARTICIPATING IN HUNGERCOUNT 2019 SURVEY

| Province | # of Affiliates | # of Organizations Participating | Food Bank Only | Meal Only | Both | # Agencies incl. in Affiliate Surveys | Total Org. Represented |
|--------------|-----------------|----------------------------------|----------------|------------|------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------|
| AB | 88 | 171 | 83 | 52 | 36 | 540 | 711 |
| BC | 103 | 113 | 64 | 7 | 42 | 579 | 692 |
| MB | 13 | 52 | 49 | 2 | 1 | 427 | 479 |
| NB | 60 | 58 | 37 | 2 | 19 | 63 | 121 |
| NL | 53 | 45 | 40 | 1 | 4 | 19 | 64 |
| NS | 89 | 123 | 75 | 40 | 8 | 28 | 151 |
| NT | 2 | 6 | 4 | - | 2 | 0 | 6 |
| NU | 1 | 6 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| ON | 131 | 577 | 411 | 85 | 81 | 849 | 1,426 |
| PEI | 6 | 6 | 3 | - | 3 | 5 | 11 |
| QC | 32 | 1,132 | 289 | 433 | 410 | - | 1,132 |
| SK | 30 | 36 | 30 | - | 6 | 97 | 133 |
| YK | 1 | 1 | - | - | 1 | 0 | 1 |
| Total | 609 | 2,326 | 1,089 | 623 | 614 | 2,608 | 4,934 |

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| ABOUT

US



OUR VISION IS A CANADA WHERE NO ONE GOES HUNGRY

Food Banks Canada is a national charitable organization dedicated to helping Canadians living with food insecurity. We support a network of Provincial Associations, affiliate food banks, and food agencies that work at the community level to relieve hunger. Our work is focused on maximizing collective impact, strengthening local capacity, and reducing the need for food banks.

OUR MANDATE

Food Banks Canada provides national leadership to relieve hunger today and prevent hunger tomorrow in collaboration with the food bank network in Canada. We do this by maximizing the collective impact of the network, strengthening the local capacity of food banks, and advocating to reduce the need for food banks.







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