HUNGER COUNT 2025

FOOD BANKS AS A LIFELINE: CANADA'S NEW NORMAL

Food Banks Canada
Banques alimentaires Canada

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

As an organization that supports a network of associations spanning coast-to-coast-to-coast, Food Banks Canada recognizes that our work takes place on the traditional territories of Indigenous Peoples who have cared for this land that we now call Canada since time immemorial.

We acknowledge that many of us are settlers and that these lands that we live, work, meet, and travel on are subject to First Nations self-government under modern treaty, unceded and un-surrendered territories, or traditional territories from which First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples have been displaced.

We are committed to decolonization and to dismantling the systems of oppression that have dispossessed Indigenous people of their lands, including the land on which we operate, and denied their rights to self-determination.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	4
TOP INSIGHTS	12
KEY HUNGERCOUNT FINDINGS	23
LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS	53
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS	80
OUR METHODOLOGY	88
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	93

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Every year, food banks across the country are setting new records. This year, they recorded 2.2 million visits in a single month. That's double the monthly usage recorded just six years ago. It took decades to reach one million visits in a month, and it has now taken half a decade to more than double that. This growth is making it difficult for food bankers to ensure that everyone has access to the daily food required to live, work, and reach their full potential.

Behind every food bank visit is a story. A parent skipping meals so their kids can eat. A senior choosing between medication and groceries. A worker juggling multiple jobs and still coming up short at the end of the month. These are not outliers.

This is Canada's new normal.

FOOD BANKS AS A LIFELINE: CANADA'S NEW NORMAL

FROM PANDEMIC TO PRECARITY: HOW WE GOT HERE

The seeds of this crisis were planted in the aftermath of the global pandemic, but they've been watered by inflation, housing costs, and an increasingly frayed social safety net. A cost-of-living crisis has gripped the country, and for many, food banks have become the solution.

Compounding this crisis are global and political shifts that are further straining an already brittle system. Food banks are facing not only record demand but also skyrocketing costs and donations that aren't keeping pace with the need. In 2021, **just over half of food banks** had to purchase food to meet their clients' needs. Today, that number is nearly 80%. And the price tag has ballooned — from **$209,000 to over $535,700 annually** on average in just three years. **For food banks in larger cities, the price tag is in the millions.**

The food bank system is no longer sustainable in the way it was meant to operate.

Food banks were never designed to be a backbone of the social safety net. They were meant to be a last resort, not a primary source of sustenance for millions.

While food banks are constantly innovating and strategizing to meet ever-growing demand, the system was not built to handle infinite growth.

Now, **many food banks are giving out less food to each person** than before, and **some fear having to turn people away.** Not because the need isn't there – but because demand is outpacing supply.

STRIVING FOR THE IMPOSSIBLE

A CHOICE BETWEEN RENT AND FOOD

Inflation may be cooling in the headlines, but for most, the pain persists. **Housing and food costs are up more than 25% since 2021**, while wages, especially for those in low-income work, have failed to keep pace. For the lowest-income workers, housing now eats up **two-thirds of their disposable income**, leaving less for food.

Even those who are employed are increasingly turning to food banks. In fact, food bank usage among working individuals has reached its highest level ever. Employment is no longer a reliable buffer against poverty.

Canada is not facing a food bank problem. **We are facing a food-insecurity crisis.** And we cannot volunteer or donate our way out of it.

This is the cost of inaction — a country where hunger is normalized, where need doubles in half a decade, and where systems meant to provide temporary relief are being asked to do the impossible under permanent demand.

A COUNTRY AT A CROSSROADS

IT'S TIME TO ASK: WHAT KIND OF COUNTRY DO WE WANT TO BE?

If we are to build a future that is strong, secure, and equitable, we must first acknowledge the silent emergency unfolding across our communities — and act now.

At Food Banks Canada, we are calling on the federal government to set a target to reduce food insecurity by 50% by 2030 while also acknowledging the government cannot achieve this ambitious target alone.

We do this by tackling the root causes of poverty – for instance, by improving our outdated EI system and repairing our social safety net. We work to make life more affordable by addressing our affordable housing shortage and providing targeted supports to help people better afford food. We address Northern food insecurity by reforming existing programs in partnership with Indigenous and Northern communities.

HARNESSING CANADA'S FULL POTENTIAL

Turning Canada's HungerCount around starts with feeding our collective potential.

When our neighbours go hungry, everyone's potential slips through the cracks. New ideas scatter, the energy needed to propel a country forward fades, and incredible talent sits on the sidelines as securing the next meal takes priority.

When people are worried about where their next meal is coming from, they cannot focus on being their best selves.

Food banks cannot solve this crisis on their own. But if everyone comes to the table, we can turn Canada's HungerCount around. Together, we can create a Canada where everyone has access to the food they need to thrive. A stronger Canada that will be ready to face the challenges of tomorrow.

Help us drive change. Let's Feed Greatness.

TOP INSIGHTS

FOOD BANK VISITS IN MARCH 2025	**2,165,766**
PERCENT CHANGE FROM 2024	**+5.2%**
PERCENT CHANGE FROM 2019	**+99.4%**

Food bank visits in March 2025 surpassed even last year's record-breaking number. This unprecedented level of usage is consistent with record-high rates of food insecurity.

IN MARCH 2025, THERE WERE NEARLY 2.2 MILLION VISITS TO FOOD BANKS IN CANADA — THE HIGHEST NUMBER IN HISTORY.

FOOD BANK USAGE HAS DOUBLED SINCE MARCH 2019, AND IS 5.2% HIGHER THAN IT WAS IN 2024.

The rate of growth in the last six years far surpasses anything ever experienced by the food bank network at a national level. Food bank usage rates have doubled nationally since 2019, including a 5.2% increase in the last year. This growth means food banks are finding it increasingly difficult to fully meet the demand.

TOP INSIGHTS

The proportion of food bank clients whose main source of income is employment continues to grow. This group now makes up 19.4% of food bank clients, compared to 18.1% last year. Until 2022, when the impacts of rapid inflation took effect, they generally made up between 10% and 12% of all clients. This year, the cumulative impact of inflation has further eroded the purchasing power of people who are employed, even those whose incomes are above the official poverty line.

19% OF FOOD BANK CLIENTS REPORT EMPLOYMENT AS THEIR MAIN SOURCE OF INCOME — COMPARED TO 12% IN 2019.

CUMULATIVE INCREASES IN THE COST OF ESSENTIALS ALIGN WITH GROWTH IN FOOD BANK USAGE.

The cumulative increases in the cost of basic necessities such as shelter and food have created a sustained affordability crisis for many people in Canada. Since 2021, the overall Consumer Price Index (CPI) has increased by over 18%. Shelter, food, and transportation have increased by 26%, 25%, and nearly 20%, respectively. These costs have far exceeded average wage growth and align with the increase in food bank usage during this period.

TOP INSIGHTS

Housing costs devour most of the disposable income of low-income households. People with the lowest incomes, which includes people receiving provincial social assistance, spend 66% of their disposable income on housing. In 2021, that figure was 49%. As non-negotiable housing costs take up a growing proportion of disposable income and savings decline, lower-income households face an increased risk of food insecurity and reliance on food banks.

RENT EATS FOOD FOR HOUSEHOLDS WITH THE LOWEST INCOMES.

ONE THIRD OF FOOD BANK CLIENTS ARE CHILDREN.

The proportion of children under 18 accessing food banks continues to hold at 33% of food bank clients; however, given the growth of food bank usage since the pre-pandemic period, that 33% now represents nearly 712,000 visits — an increase of nearly 340,000 monthly visits compared to six years ago. In addition, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of two-parent households with children under 18 among households accessing food banks — from 18.8% in 2019 to 23% in 2025.

TOP INSIGHTS

Market rentals are the most consistent housing type for households that access food banks, representing 70.4% of all housing tenure arrangements. Food bank clients who identify as belonging to a racialized group, or have been in Canada less than 10 years, or live in larger population centres of 100,000 people or more are more likely to be living in market rent housing.

70% OF FOOD BANK CLIENTS LIVE IN MARKET RENT HOUSING.

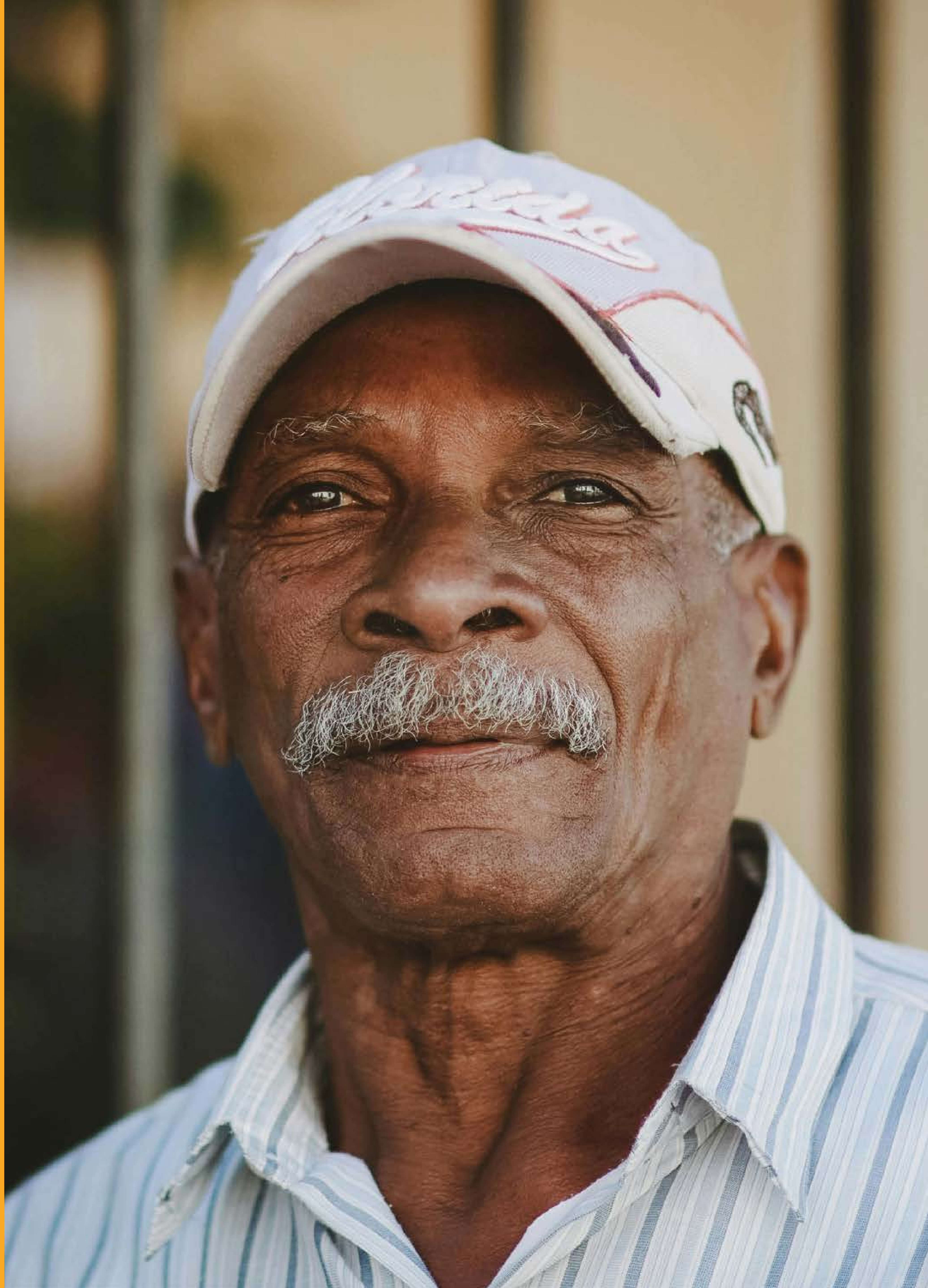
GROSSLY INADEQUATE PROVINCIAL SOCIAL ASSISTANCE REMAINS THE MOST COMMON SOURCE OF INCOME FOR FOOD BANK CLIENTS.

Provincial social assistance, which includes both the general welfare and provincial disability support income streams, is the primary source of income for 40% of food bank clients. Although some provinces have implemented initiatives to increase the incomes of people who receive social assistance, such as adding one-time cost-of-living payments and indexing rates to inflation, social assistance incomes are still so low that all household types on this form of income live below the poverty line in almost every province and territory.

People who are recent newcomers to Canada — that is, they have been in the country for 10 years or less — accounted for 34% of food bank clients, which is stable compared to last year but significantly higher compared to 2019. Recent newcomers who are currently employed generally have precarious work arrangements and receive lower wages. These two factors drive the greater levels of food insecurity among this group. This group is also less likely to access two income supports of last resort if they lose their job — employment insurance or provincial social insurance — because they don't meet eligibility requirements. The increase in need among recent newcomers makes the massive gaps in our safety net more visible and reinforces the urgent need for reform.

34% OF FOOD BANK CLIENTS ARE NEWCOMERS TO CANADA WHO HAVE BEEN IN THE COUNTRY FOR 10 YEARS OR LESS.

KEY HUNGERCOUNT FINDINGS



KEY HUNGERCOUNT FINDINGS

TOTAL VISITS

2,165,766

TOTAL VISITS (CHILDREN)

711,770

% CHANGE IN TOTAL VISITS, 2024–2025

+5.15

% CHANGE IN TOTAL VISITS, 2019–2025

+99.37

TOTAL MEALS AND SNACKS

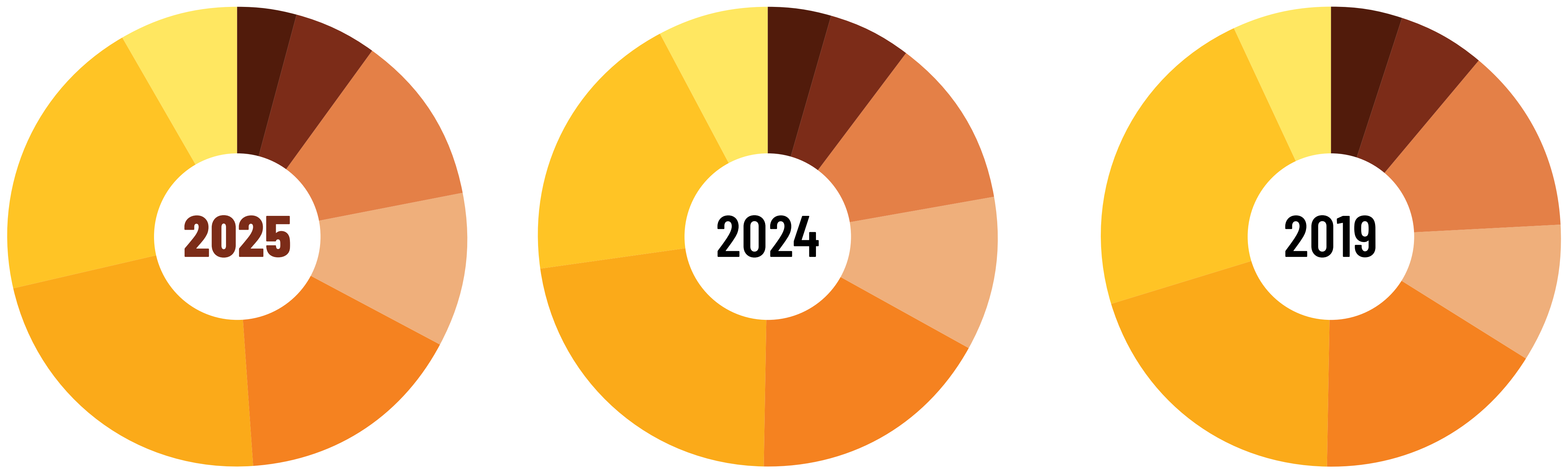
4,522,356

NUMBER OF FOOD BANKS REPORTING

2,725

KEY HUNGERCOUNT FINDINGS

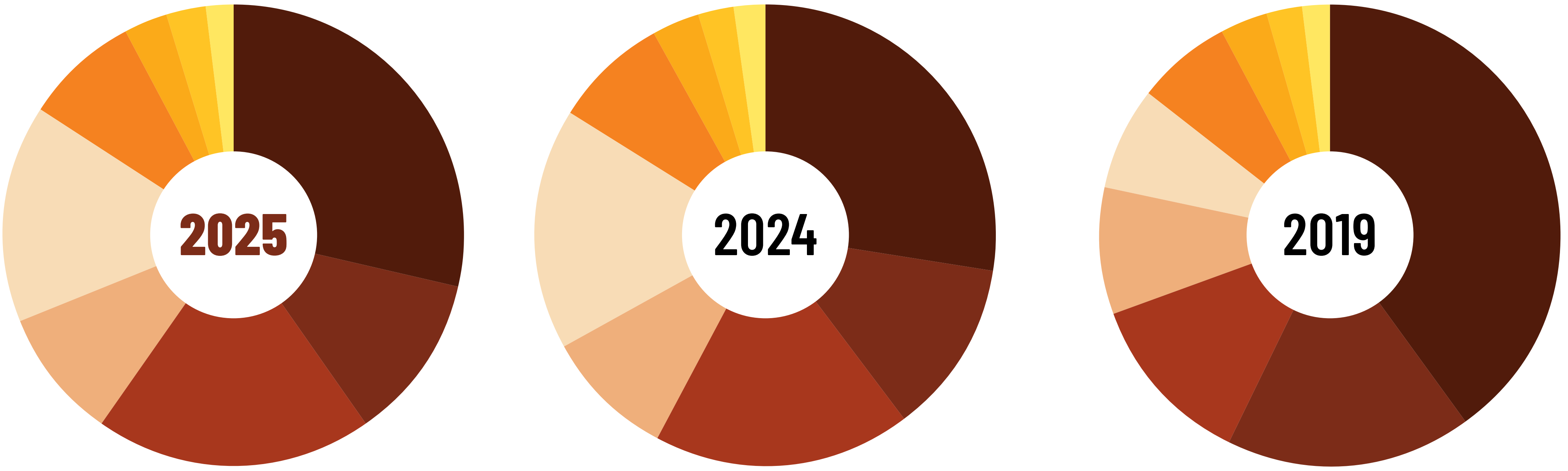
Age categories served as % of total, by age group



AGE	2025	2024	2019
% 0–2 years	**4.3**	4.5	5.2
% 3–5 years	**5.7**	6.0	6.1
% 6–11 years	**12.1**	12.0	12.9
% 12–17 years	**10.9**	10.7	9.9
% 18–30 years	**16.1**	17.2	16.3
% 31–44 years	**22.4**	22.4	20.0
% 45–64 years	**20.1**	19.6	22.8
% 65+ years	**8.3**	7.7	6.8

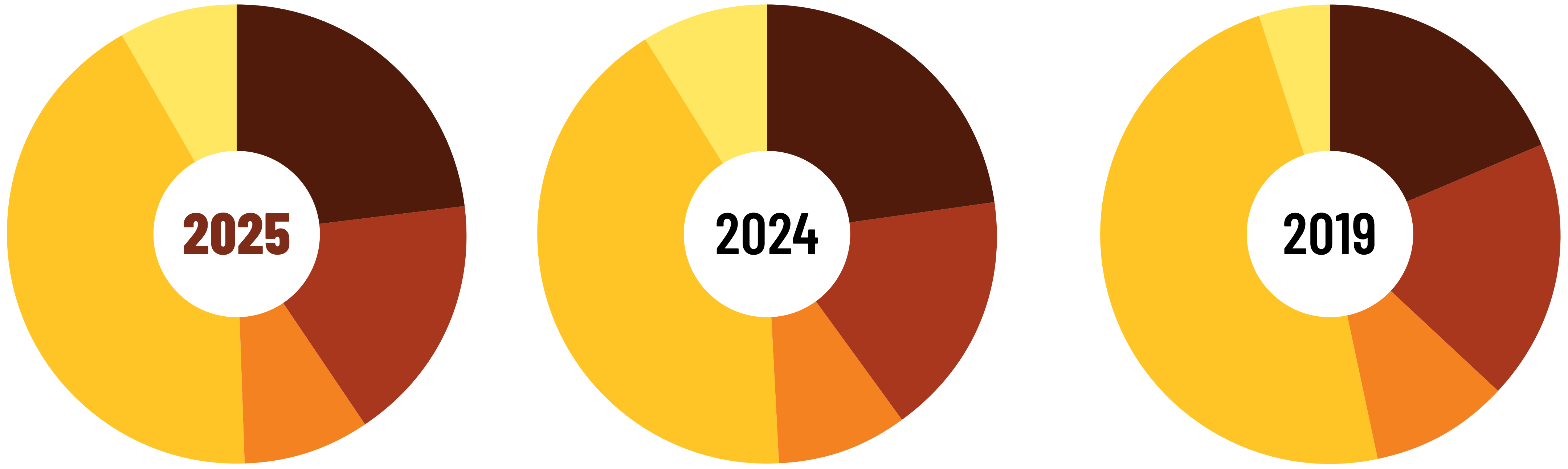
KEY HUNGERCOUNT FINDINGS

Primary source of income



	2025	2024	2019
% social assistance	**28.7**	27.7	40.1
% disability-related income support	**11.7**	12.2	17.3
% job income	**19.4**	18.1	12.1
% pension	**9.2**	9.2	9.0
% no income	**15.3**	16.9	7.0
% other income	**8.0**	7.9	6.7
% employment insurance	**3.2**	3.5	3.3
% CCB	**2.6**	2.3	2.5
% student loan	**1.9**	2.2	1.9

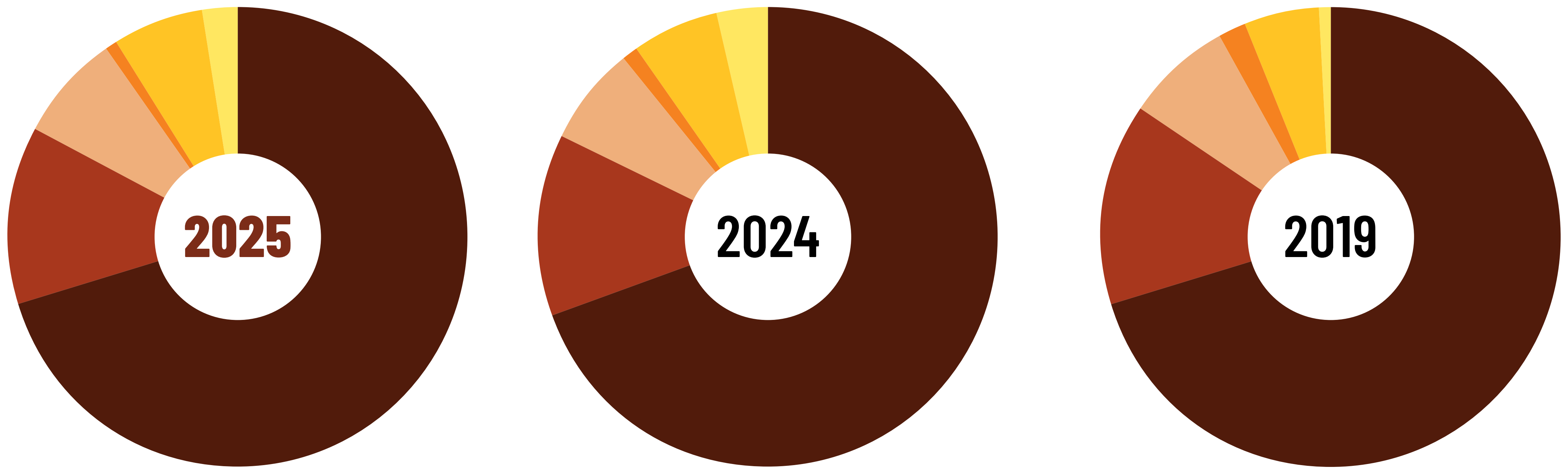
Household type



	2025	2024	2019
% two-parent families	**23.1**	22.8	18.8
% single-parent families	**17.5**	17.3	18.3
% couples with no children	**8.8**	9.3	9.8
% single people	**42.2**	41.9	48.1
% other	**8.3**	8.8	5.0

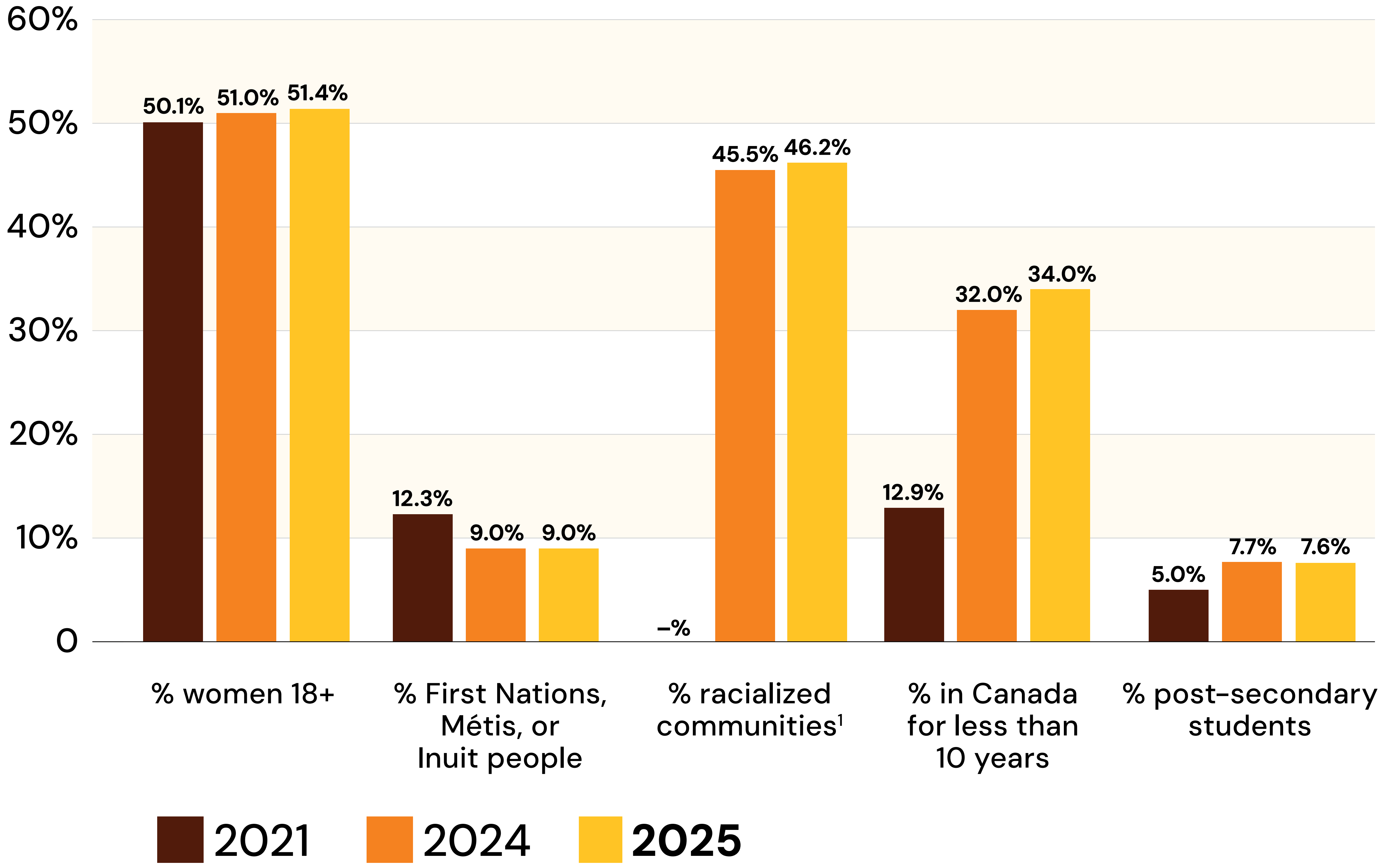
KEY HUNGERCOUNT FINDINGS

Housing type



	2025	2024	2019
% market rental	70.4	69.5	70.4
% social housing	12.6	12.8	14.4
% homeowners	7.5	7.1	7.4
% Band-owned housing	0.9	1.1	2.0
% unhoused/ temporary shelter	6.3	6.1	5.3
% other	2.4	3.4	0.6

Other demographic information



[1] "Racialized communities" refers to whether survey respondents indicated that they belong to a visible minority group as defined by the *Employment Equity Act*. This question was first included in the 2021 HungerCount survey.

KEY HUNGERCOUNT FINDINGS
PROVINCIAL RESULTS

	TOTAL VISITS	TOTAL VISITS (CHILDREN)	% CHANGE IN TOTAL VISITS (2024-2025)	% CHANGE IN TOTAL VISITS (2019-2025)	# OF FOOD BANKS REPORTING	TOTAL MEALS AND SNACKS PROVIDED
BC	223,340	68,053	-1.0	79.1	131	106,914
AB	210,541	75,968	21.8	134.4	127	602,859
SK	55,310	20,906	4.6	48.6	41	11,880
MB[1]	64,975	25,047	17.1	—	115	173,092
ON	763,756	228,689	3.7	124.9	619	1,097,330
QC	746,411	260,419	3.5	116.2	1395	2,352,639
NB	32,343	10,781	0.5	45.3	68	68,830
NS	43,421	14,023	10.3	69.4	144	87,191
PEI	5,350	1,757	-1.6	80.8	8	4,301
NL	15,422	4,700	8.3	44.1	64	17,320
TERR[2]	4,897	1,428	22.9	—	13	—

[1] Comparison to 2019 not available due to change in provincial network structure and change in data collection methods. Compared to 2021, Manitoba saw a 97% increase.
[2] Comparison to prior years not possible for all territories, except Yukon, due to changes in data estimation method. Yukon saw a 3.5% increase compared to last year, and a 79.9% increase compared to 2019.

KEY HUNGERCOUNT FINDINGS
AGE CATEGORIES

AGE CATEGORIES SERVED AS % OF TOTAL, BY AGE GROUP

	% 0-2 YEARS	% 3-5 YEARS	% 6-11 YEARS	% 12-17 YEARS	% 18-30 YEARS	% 31-44 YEARS	% 45-64 YEARS	% 65+ YEARS	% CHILDREN	# OF FOOD BANKS REPORTING
BC	4.1	4.5	11.2	10.8	13.7	23.1	21.3	11.3	30.6	108
AB	4.4	5.9	13.5	12.4	16.9	24.7	17.5	4.7	36.2	90
SK	4.4	6.3	14.2	12.9	15.5	23.3	18.4	5.0	37.8	31
MB	5.0	5.3	12.7	10.0	12.5	20.4	16.7	17.4	33.0	112
ON	4.0	5.0	11.6	11.0	17.3	21.6	20.8	8.8	31.5	499
QC	5.1	7.3	12.2	10.0	15.2	22.6	19.7	7.9	34.6	776
NB	4.0	5.6	12.7	10.9	15.4	23.2	22.3	5.8	33.3	52
NS	3.8	5.2	12.7	11.5	17.0	23.0	20.2	6.7	33.2	90
PEI	4.4	5.3	13.0	10.3	16.8	28.0	16.6	5.6	32.9	8
NL	3.0	4.4	11.2	11.4	12.9	22.9	27.6	6.5	30.1	33
TERR[1]	2.3	4.0	9.0	13.0	14.9	22.8	25.9	8.0	28.4	3

[1] Not enough data received for these variables. Results may not represent the entire territories this year.

KEY HUNGERCOUNT FINDINGS
HOUSEHOLD TYPE

	% SINGLE-PARENT FAMILIES	% TWO-PARENT FAMILIES	% COUPLES WITH NO CHILDREN	% SINGLE PEOPLE	% “OTHER” HOUSEHOLDS	# OF FOOD BANKS REPORTING
BC	14.1	20.0	11.5	48.7	5.7	117
AB	19.2	31.7	5.5	37.6	6.0	109
SK	20.7	22.1	6.6	40.5	10.1	35
MB	15.7	15.1	13.2	50.4	5.6	115
ON	15.8	21.2	7.3	44.2	11.6	518
QC	20.9	27.1	10.6	35.8	5.6	756
NB	17.2	19.7	8.0	47.2	7.9	55
NS	16.4	18.2	7.4	47.4	10.6	97
PEI	13.1	27.9	8.4	41.8	8.8	8
NL	16.6	13.2	11.4	54.2	4.6	45
TERR[1]	18.3	11.4	7.1	49.1	14.1	5

[1] Not enough data received for these variables. Results may not represent the entire territories this year.

KEY HUNGERCOUNT FINDINGS
SOURCE OF INCOME

	% JOB INCOME	% FEDERAL EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE	% SOCIAL ASSISTANCE	% PROVINCIAL DISABILITY SUPPORT	% PENSION INCOME	% STUDENT LOANS/ SCHOLARSHIP	% CCB	% NO INCOME	% OTHER INCOME	# OF FOOD BANKS REPORTING
BC	23.3	2.9	18.0	19.0	12.7	0.2	1.5	14.6	7.9	112
AB	30.8	2.0	17.2	6.4	6.2	1.0	7.6	21.6	7.4	101
SK	20.1	2.2	39.0	5.9	7.0	1.3	2.3	9.8	12.4	33
MB	17.2	3.9	25.4	11.3	6.6	7.3	1.9	16.1	10.4	113
ON	14.2	1.9	20.4	19.9	8.5	1.1	0.5	20.9	12.6	502
QC	20.6	5.4	43.3	3.2	10.5	3.4	3.6	7.8	2.3	827
NB	19.8	3.9	41.6	5.2	9.2	0.5	3.8	10.5	5.6	54
NS	23.7	4.3	29.3	10.3	9.4	1.7	0.3	14.7	6.3	93
PEI	34.4	4.0	17.4	4.6	3.1	0.3	0.8	27.8	7.7	7
NL	8.8	4.5	56.1	3.4	9.3	0.6	7.2	5.4	4.6	40
TERR[1]	13.4	2.7	31.8	3.1	4.6	0.9	2.3	26.8	14.4	3

[1] Not enough data received for these variables. Results may not represent the entire territories this year.

KEY HUNGERCOUNT FINDINGS
HOUSING TYPE

	% HOMEOWNERS	% RENTAL MARKET TENANTS	% SOCIAL HOUSING TENANTS	% BAND-OWNED HOUSING	% UNHOUSED/ TEMPORARY SHELTERS	% OTHER HOUSING	# OF FOOD BANKS REPORTING
BC	8.7	75.2	7.4	0.6	5.2	2.8	118
AB	9.9	70.5	5.4	6.4	5.6	2.2	112
SK	6.6	73.7	9.7	1.8	6.0	2.3	34
MB	11.2	60.0	23.5	0.5	3.8	0.9	113
ON	5.3	73.2	12.4	0.0	6.4	2.7	510
QC	7.8	67.0	14.8	1.0	7.1	2.1	824
NB	14.6	66.5	13.2	0.2	4.3	1.1	55
NS	12.0	71.0	7.8	0.3	6.8	2.1	99
PEI	8.0	65.8	19.4	0.0	4.5	2.3	8
NL	10.9	61.4	20.3	0.0	5.6	1.9	46
TERR[1]	6.9	55.7	20.1	0.0	14.9	2.4	5

[1] Not enough data received for these variables. Results may not represent the entire territories this year.

THE POST-PANDEMIC AFFORDABILITY CRISIS HITS THOSE WITH LOW INCOMES HARDEST

“THE MAIN REASON [FOR THE INCREASE THIS YEAR] IS THE COST OF HOUSING, HEATING AND GROCERIES. ALL HAVE INCREASED AND IMPACT OUR CLIENTS – MANY OF WHOM ARE EMPLOYED.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, NOVA SCOTIA

Despite a recent cooling of inflation and modest increases in wage growth, the cumulative increases in the prices of basic necessities such as shelter and food have created a sustained affordability crisis for many people living in Canada. Since 2021, the overall CPI has increased by over 18%, and shelter, food, and transportation have increased by 26%, 25%, and nearly 20%, respectively.[1]

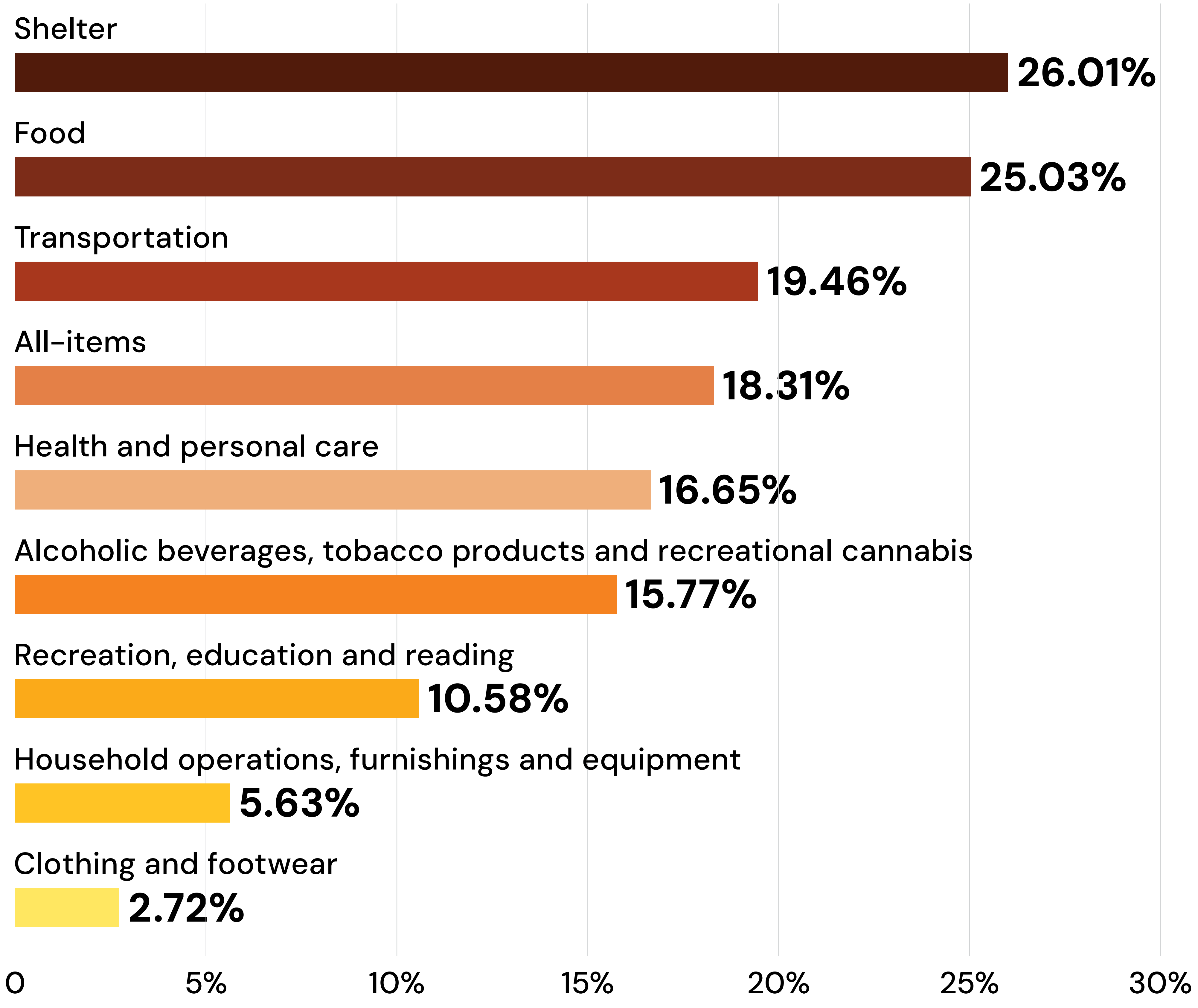
[1] Statistics Canada. (2024, August 19). *Table 18-10-0004-01 Consumer Price Index, monthly, not seasonally adjusted* [Data table]. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1810000401

THE POST-PANDEMIC AFFORDABILITY CRISIS HITS THOSE WITH LOW INCOMES HARDEST

> "[THE REASON FOR INCREASES THIS YEAR IS] RISING INFLATION WITHOUT WAGE/ BENEFITS INCREASES . . . INCREASED COST OF ALL ITEMS, INCLUDING FOOD, HOUSING, AND UTILITIES."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ALBERTA

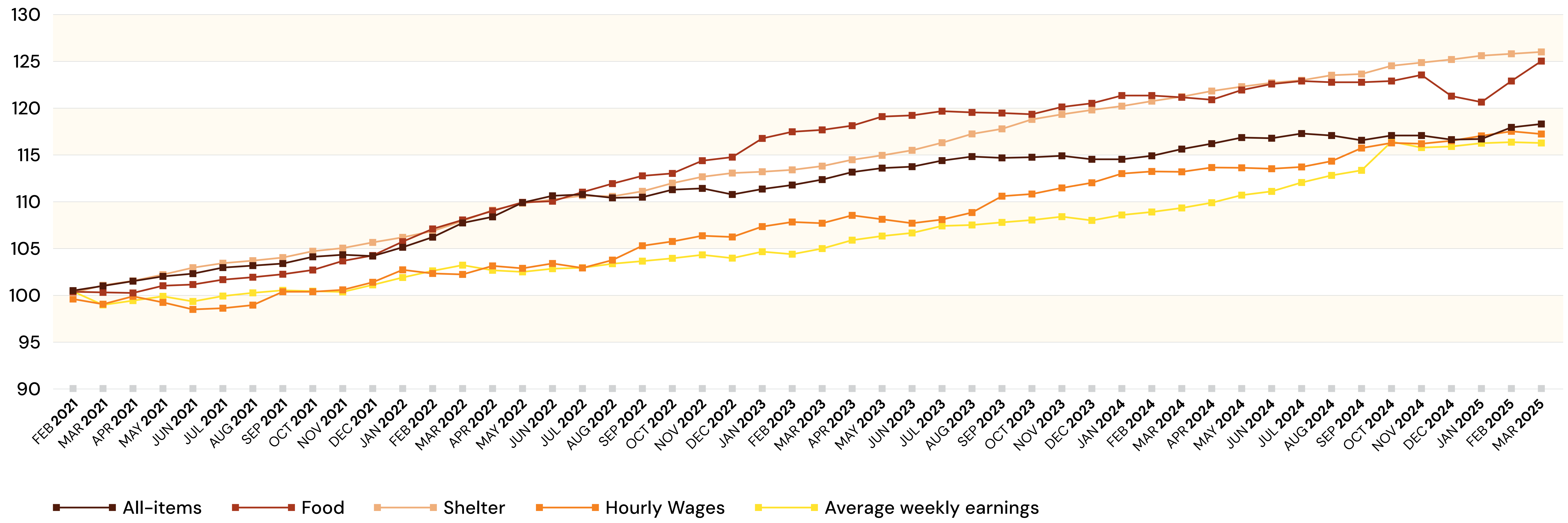
Figure 1: Cumulative increase in the Consumer Price Index by major component, January 2021 to March 2025



SOURCE OF DATA: Statistics Canada. (2025, April 15). *Table 18-10-0004-01 Consumer Price Index, monthly, not seasonally adjusted.* https://doi.org/10.25318/1810000401-eng. Chart adapted from Statistics Canada, Chart 1: Cumulative increase in the Consumer Price Index by major component, January 2021 to October 2024. *Research to Insights: Perspectives on Affordability and Inequality*, released January 22, 2025, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2025001-eng.htm.

THE POST-PANDEMIC AFFORDABILITY CRISIS HITS THOSE WITH LOW INCOMES HARDEST

Figure 2: Consumer Price Index components, hourly wages, and average weekly earnings (January 2021 = 100)



SOURCE OF DATA: Statistics Canada. (2025, April 15). *Tables 18-10-0004-01, 14-10-0065-01* and *14-10-0223-01*. Chart adapted from Statistics Canada, Chart 2: Index for Consumer Price Index components, hourly wages and average weekly earnings. *Research to Insights: Perspectives on Affordability and Inequality*, released January 22, 2025. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2025001-eng.htm.

"REASONS FOR THE INCREASE AT OUR LOCATION THIS YEAR INCLUDE THE COSTS OF HOUSING, FOOD, AND HEATING HOMES, AS WELL AS A LACK OF RELIABLE TRANSPORTATION FOR THOSE WILLING TO WORK."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, NOVA SCOTIA

THE POST-PANDEMIC AFFORDABILITY CRISIS HITS THOSE WITH LOW INCOMES HARDEST

“HOUSING AND FOOD COSTS ARE THE GREATEST CONTRIBUTORS TO THE INCREASE IN OUR SERVICES. COSTS FOR BASIC LIVING CONTINUE TO RISE, WHILE THE MONEY COMING IN DOES NOT RISE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THIS CHANGE SO PEOPLE MUST TAKE THE SAME AMOUNT OF MONEY AND STRETCH IT FURTHER. THIS IS CAUSING AN INCREASE IN STRESS AND ANXIETY IN THE COMMUNITY, AND DECISIONS MADE THAT PUT OFF HEALTH ISSUES, AS PEOPLE CANNOT AFFORD TO DEAL WITH ANYTHING ELSE. AND THEN HEALTH IS COMPROMISED.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Wages have increased for the general population by between 16% and 17%, but any gains were by far cancelled out by the rate of increase in the cost of food and housing during this same period.

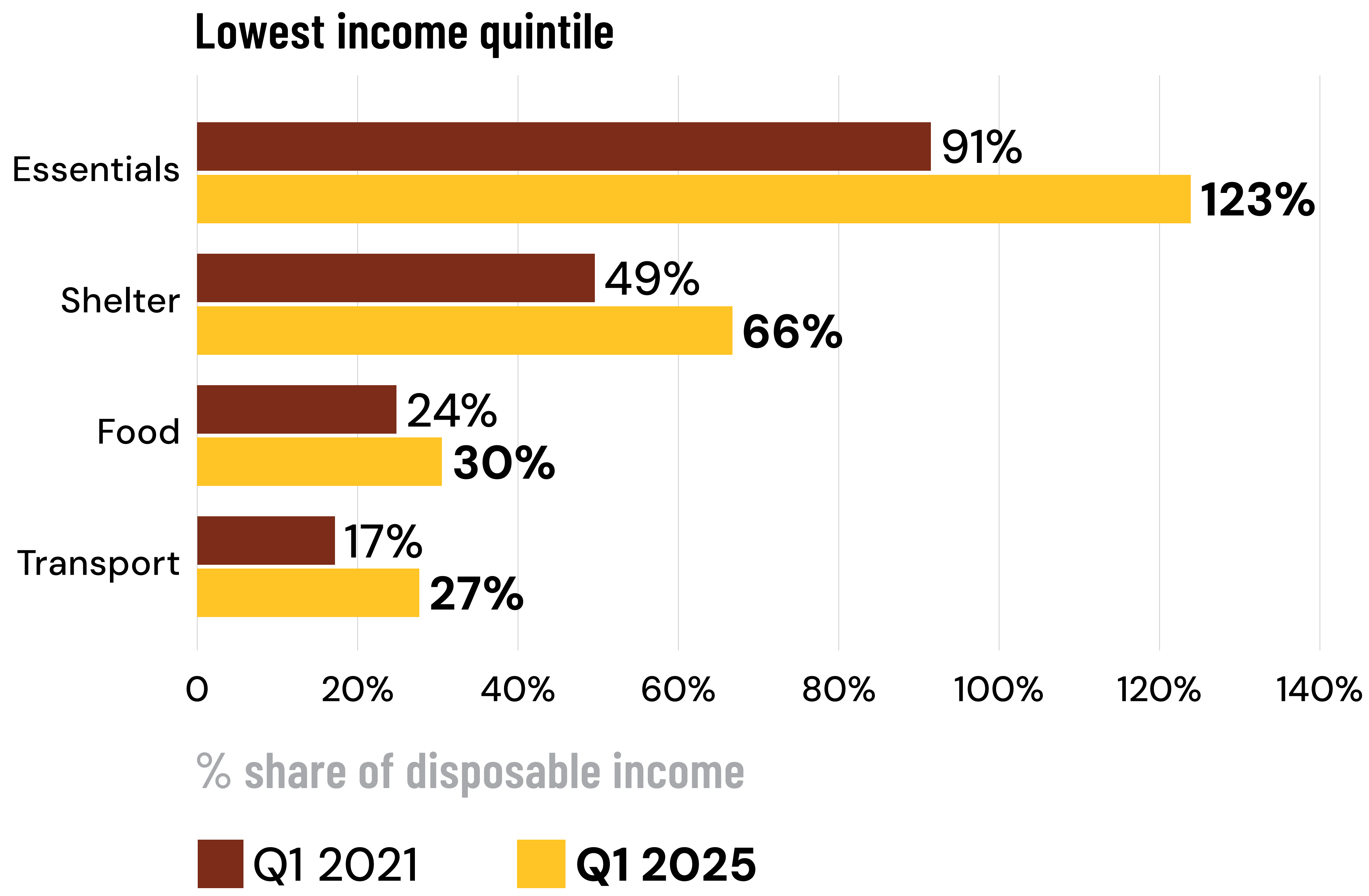
Although lower-income households have experienced a modest increase (9.4%) in their disposable income in the last few years,[2] they spend a larger share of their income on housing and food. Consequently, they feel the impact of inflation in these areas more significantly than people on higher incomes do. For example, those in the lowest income quintile saw their shelter costs rise from 49% of their disposable income in 2021 to 66% in 2025. When other essential items such as food and transportation are included, those in the lowest income quintile saw the combined cost of these items grow from 91% to over 120% of their disposable income over the past four years.[3]

[2] Statistics Canada. (2025, January 22). Chart 4: Average household net saving by income quintile. *Research to Insights: Perspectives on Affordability and Inequality*. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2025001-eng.htm

[3] Figure based on data from Statistics Canada. (2025, July 16). *Table 36-10-0662-01, Distributions of household economic accounts, income, consumption and saving, by characteristic, quarterly (x 1,000,000)* [Data table]. https://doi.org/10.25318/3610066201-eng

THE POST-PANDEMIC AFFORDABILITY CRISIS HITS THOSE WITH LOW INCOMES HARDEST

Figure 3: Percentage share of disposable income for essential items for lowest income quintile, Q1 2021 vs. Q1 2025



SOURCE OF DATA: Adapted from Affordability Action Council. (2023, December 12). *Groceries and essentials benefit: Helping people with low incomes afford everyday necessities.* Figure 1. IRPP. https://irpp.org/research-studies/groceries-and-essentials-benefit/. Updated figures calculated from Statistics Canada. (2025, July 16). *Table 36-10-0662-01, Distributions of household economic accounts, income, consumption and saving, by characteristic, quarterly (x 1,000,000).* https://doi.org/10.25318/3610066201-eng

THE POST-PANDEMIC AFFORDABILITY CRISIS HITS THOSE WITH LOW INCOMES HARDEST

"THE RISE IN HOUSING AND FOOD COSTS HAS FORCED CLIENTS TO USE FOOD BANKS FREQUENTLY. THERE IS ALSO AN INCREASE IN FEAR OF WHAT WILL OCCUR IN THE FUTURE REGARDING HOUSING AND FOOD COSTS, SO CLIENTS WHO HAVE SAVINGS ALSO USE THE FOOD BANK TO SAVE MORE FOR THE FUTURE. THERE HAS BEEN A SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE DEPENDENT ON OUR FOOD BANK."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ONTARIO

To make up for the growing discrepancy between rising costs of living and wage growth, one third of people living in Canada who were experiencing financial difficulty — their expenses were higher than their income — drew on their savings, borrowed from friends or family, took on additional debt, or used credit — actions also known as dissaving.[4] Over the past five years, the lowest income quintile averaged the greatest net dissaving annually — nearly -$9,000 in each of the last two years. The second- and third-lowest income quintiles also saw their average net dissaving increase. For example, the third income quintile moved from an average net saving of $2,646 in the second quarter of 2020 to a net dissaving of -$2,476 in the second quarter of 2024.[5]

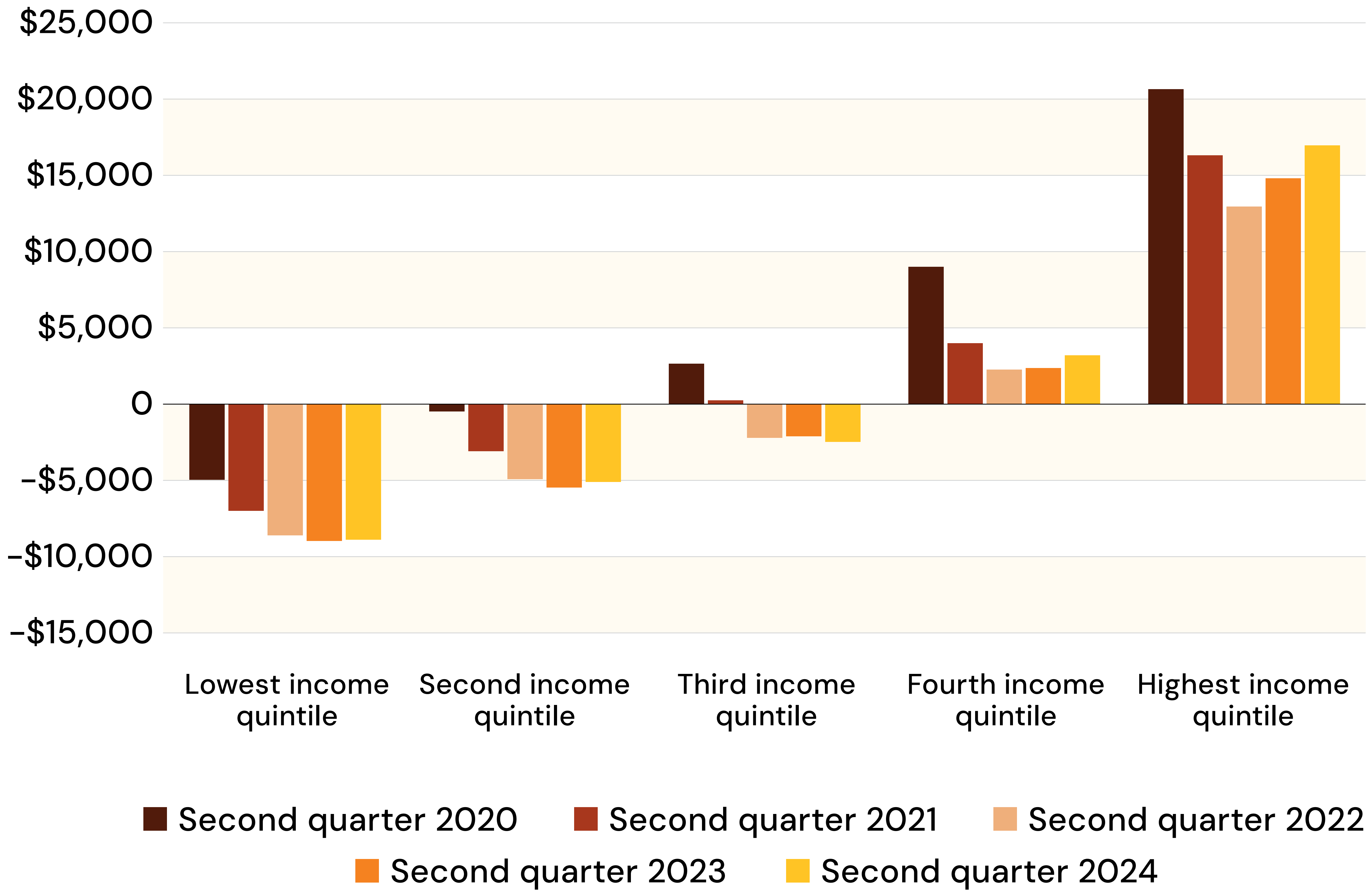
[4] Gellatly, G., Foran, H., & Pinault, L. (2024, December 19). Barriers to moving: Potential implications for the life satisfaction of young families. *Economic and Social Reports*. Statistics Canada. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/36-28-0001/2024012/article/00001-eng.htm

[5] Statistics Canada. Chart 4: Average household net saving by income quintile.

"INCREASED USE IS DIRECTLY TIED TO HIGHER RATES OF INFLATION AND MIDDLE-INCOME EARNERS NOT HAVING THE MEANS TO MAKE ENDS MEET. FAMILIES WITH A NUMBER OF DEPENDANTS ARE ALSO STRUGGLING TO PAY BILLS AND ENSURE SUFFICIENT FOOD IS AVAILABLE."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ALBERTA

Figure 4: Average household net saving by income quintile



SOURCE OF DATA: Chart reproduced from Statistics Canada, *Research to Insights: Perspectives on Affordability and Inequality.* https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-631-x/11-631-x2025001-eng.htm.

FOOD HAS BECOME A "CRUMPLE ZONE" FOR A RECORD NUMBER OF CANADIAN HOUSEHOLDS

A recent Maple Leaf Centre for Food Security study found that rising inflation is making it harder for households to cope with financial pressures and prepare for future shocks to household income, such as job loss or a health crisis.[6] A growing number of households in the last several years have relied on credit or emergency savings to cover essentials such as rent and food.

The study compared food to a car's "crumple zone," noting that it absorbs financial shocks for households with limited options. Food expenses are seen as flexible, unlike fixed costs like rent.

According to the latest data available from Statistics Canada, the number of households in which food has become the crumple zone is at a record high. In 2024, approximately 10 million people — 25.5% of the population of Canada — lived in households that were experiencing some level of food insecurity,[7] defined as inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints. This is an increase of nearly 1.3 million people compared to 2023, and nearly 4 million compared to 2019.[8] The number of people experiencing severe food insecurity — which includes missing meals, reducing food intake, and going without food for an entire day or days due to lack of money — has doubled from 1,314,000 in 2019 to 2,629,000 in 2024.[9]

"LIFE IN GENERAL HAS BECOME MORE DIFFICULT TO AFFORD, AND SO THE BASIC NEED OF FOOD BECOMES THE THING THAT PEOPLE ARE MOST LIKELY TO CUT OFF THEIR BUDGET, AS THEY CAN EAT NON-NUTRITIONAL FOOD AT A LOWER COST THAN THEIR HEALTHIER ALTERNATIVES."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ONTARIO

[6] Maple Leaf Centre for Food Security. (2024). *Urban archetypes: Exploring experiences with food insecurity in major Canadian cities* [Unpublished PowerPoint slides].

[7] Statistics Canada. (2025, May 01). Canadian Income Survey, 2023. *The Daily*. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/250501/dq250501b-eng.htm

The latest data release from Statistics Canada's 2023 Canadian Income Survey (CIS) uses 2023 tax filer data to provide poverty rates based on the Market Basket Measure (MBM), Canada's official measure of poverty. However, data collection for the food-insecurity scale took place from January to June 2024, referencing the respondents' experiences for the previous 12 months. Therefore, we are using the more recent year as the reference year when referring to food-insecurity data collected by the CIS.

[8] Statistics Canada. (2025, May 01). *Table 13-10-0834-01 Food insecurity by economic family type* [Data table]. https://doi.org/10.25318/1310083401-eng

[9] Statistics Canada. *Table 13-10-0834-01.*

SPOTLIGHT: THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETAL COSTS OF FOOD INSECURITY

SPOTLIGHT: THE INDIVIDUAL AND SOCIETAL COSTS OF FOOD INSECURITY

The skyrocketing growth in the rate of food insecurity over the last six years, and the associated twofold increase in food bank usage over that time, has profound economic implications at both the individual and societal levels.

The large body of evidence on the impact of food insecurity at the individual level points to strong relationships between food insecurity and a range of physical and mental health conditions, many of which can lead to premature mortality.[10]

The societal impacts include increased health care costs, such as costs related to hospital admissions for both physical and mental health concerns.[11] Overall, the health care costs for people who are experiencing food insecurity are more than double those for people who are not food-insecure.[12]

A direct connection exists between health care–related costs and reduced productivity, through either increased absenteeism due to illness or diseases that are exacerbated by food insecurity, or employees not being able to function fully at work because of lack of adequate nutrition.[13] Adults whose cognitive functioning was impaired as a result of childhood food insecurity may also find it difficult to find or keep a job or to meet performance-related expectations.[14] Subsequently, they become trapped in a self-sustaining poverty cycle.

It is more difficult to quantify how food insecurity affects the social bonds and institutional trust that are critical to a well-functioning society. Food insecurity is now linked to lower levels of trust in a range of areas, from close personal relationships to national institutions.[15] This finding aligns with the findings of our research paper on the Material Deprivation Index (MDI), a measure of poverty that strongly correlates to food insecurity — which found those who experience higher levels of deprivation exhibit less trust in their political leaders.[16]

Addressing food insecurity goes beyond meeting basic needs. It's also about protecting the trust that makes public institutions effective and successful.

[10] PROOF. (n.d.). *What are the implications of food insecurity for health and health care?* https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/what-are-the-implications-of-food-insecurity-for-health-and-health-care/

[11] PROOF. What are the implications.

[12] Tarasuk, V., Cheng, J., de Oliveira, C., Dachner, N., Gundersen, C., & Kurdyak, P. (2015). Association between household food insecurity and annual health care costs. *CMAJ, 187*(14), E429-E36. https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.150234

[13] The HSM Group. (2017). *An invisible problem: Food insecurity*. https://healthforward.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Food_Insecurity_White_Paper_2017.pdf
Hamelin, A.-M., Habicht, J.-P., & Beaudry, M. (1999). Food insecurity: Consequences for the household and broader social implications. The Journal of Nutrition, 129(2), 525S-528S. https://doi.org/10.1093/jn/129.2.525S

[14] Brown, J. L., Shepard, D., Martin, T., & Orwat, J. (2007, June 5). *The economic cost of domestic hunger: Estimated annual burden to the United States*. Report commissioned by The Sodexho Foundation, in partnership with The Public Welfare Foundation and Spunk Fund, Inc.

[15] Smith, M. D., Kassa, W., & Wesselbaum, D. (2024). Food insecurity erodes trust. *Global Food Security, 40*, 100742. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gfs.2024.100742

[16] Notten, G., Seer, S., Mendelson, M., Matern, R., & Parkin, A. (2024). *Material deprivation: An updated index for Canada*. Food Banks Canada. https://fbcblobstorage.blob.core.windows.net/wordpress/2024/06/FBC_2024_MeasuringPovertywithMDI_v20240327_FINAL-June-17-002.pdf

FOOD HAS BECOME A "CRUMPLE ZONE" FOR A RECORD NUMBER OF CANADIAN HOUSEHOLDS

Rent Eats Food

As non-negotiable housing costs take up a growing proportion of disposable income and savings decline, lower-income households become more likely to experience food insecurity and rely on food banks as an ongoing resource rather than a temporary solution. Food and housing together now represent 96% of disposable income in households in the lowest income quintile, and in effect, rent eats food.

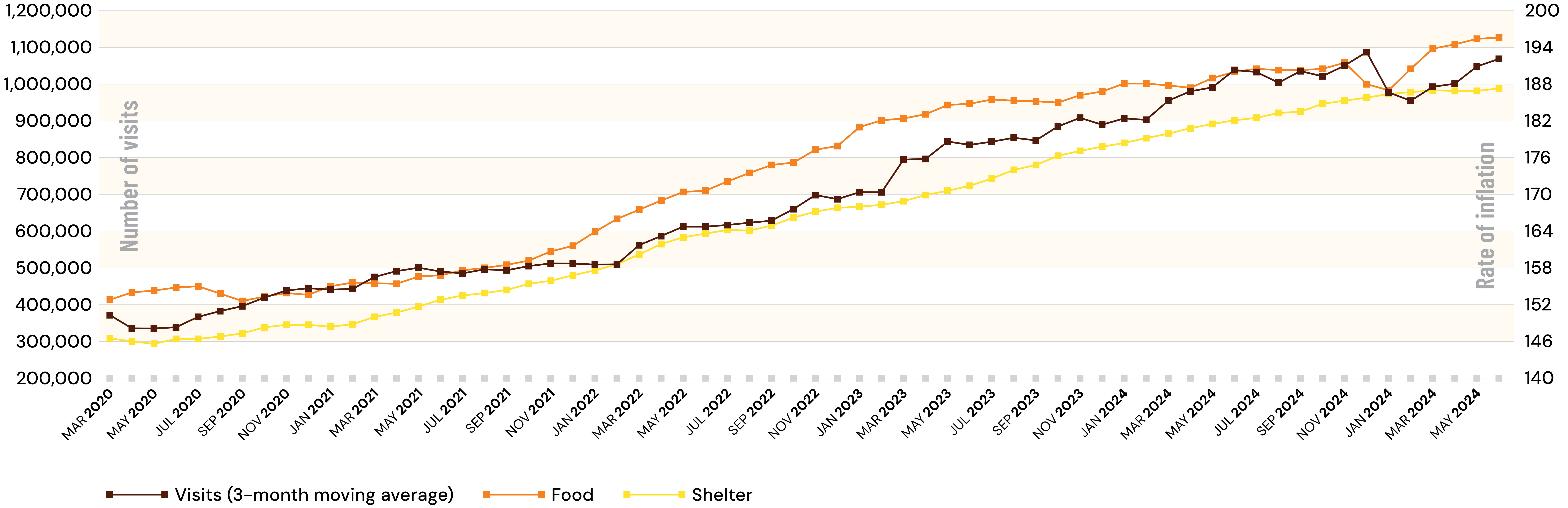
An examination of food bank usage data (collected from the food bank network) against the backdrop of Statistics Canada data points to the correlation between food bank usage and the rate of inflation for food and housing for the past five years. If we look at monthly food bank visits from a sample of food banks between March 2020 and June 2025, along with monthly food and housing prices during the same period (see next page), we can see the impacts of rising inflation that became more pronounced from February 2022 onward.

"LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING IS ONE OF THE MAIN DRIVERS OF INCREASED FOOD BANK USAGE. HOUSEHOLD INCOMES ARE NOT KEEPING UP WITH THE INCREASED RENTS AND PEOPLE ARE HAVING TO PAY MORE THAN 50% OF THEIR INCOMES ON RENT, WHICH DOESN'T LEAVE MUCH FOR OTHER NECESSITIES."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, BRITISH COLUMBIA

FOOD HAS BECOME A "CRUMPLE ZONE" FOR A RECORD NUMBER OF CANADIAN HOUSEHOLDS

Figure 5: Monthly food bank usage and food and housing inflation, March 2020–June 2025



SOURCE OF DATA: Monthly food bank visits from Food Banks Canada. Food and housing inflation from Statistics Canada (2024, August 19). *Table 18-10-0004-01 Consumer Price Index, monthly, not seasonally adjusted.* https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1810000401

NOTE: Trends come from a sample of food banks on the Link2Feed system that were able to provide food bank usage data throughout this period, representing approximately 50% of the network and 48% of total visits.

RISING UNEMPLOYMENT BECOMING A STRONGER DRIVER OF NEED

“THE HIGH COST OF LIVING – SPECIFICALLY HIGH RENTS – HAVE DECREASED THE AMOUNT OF INCOME CLIENTS HAVE TO SPEND ON FOOD. HIGHER UNEMPLOYMENT AND LAYOFFS FOR PEOPLE IN MINIMUM WAGE JOBS IS ALSO A CONTRIBUTING FACTOR TO INCREASED RELIANCE ON THE FOOD BANK.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, BRITISH COLUMBIA

“OUR AREA PULP & PAPER MILL CLOSED LAST YEAR AND HAS LEFT MANY IN OUR DISTRICT UNEMPLOYED. THESE PERSONS QUALIFIED FOR EI BUT THEIR BENEFITS HAVE RECENTLY RUN OUT.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ONTARIO

“THE LACK OF TRANSIT AND DEPENDENCY ON VEHICLES TO LIVE HERE, THE COST OF PURCHASING AND MAINTAINING A VEHICLE IS EXTREMELY HIGH IN OUR AREA, AND WE HAVE SOME OF THE HIGHEST GAS PRICES IN THE COUNTRY. MANY CLIENTS EXPRESS TROUBLE IN FINDING WORK, OR HAVING BEEN LAID OFF RECENTLY.”

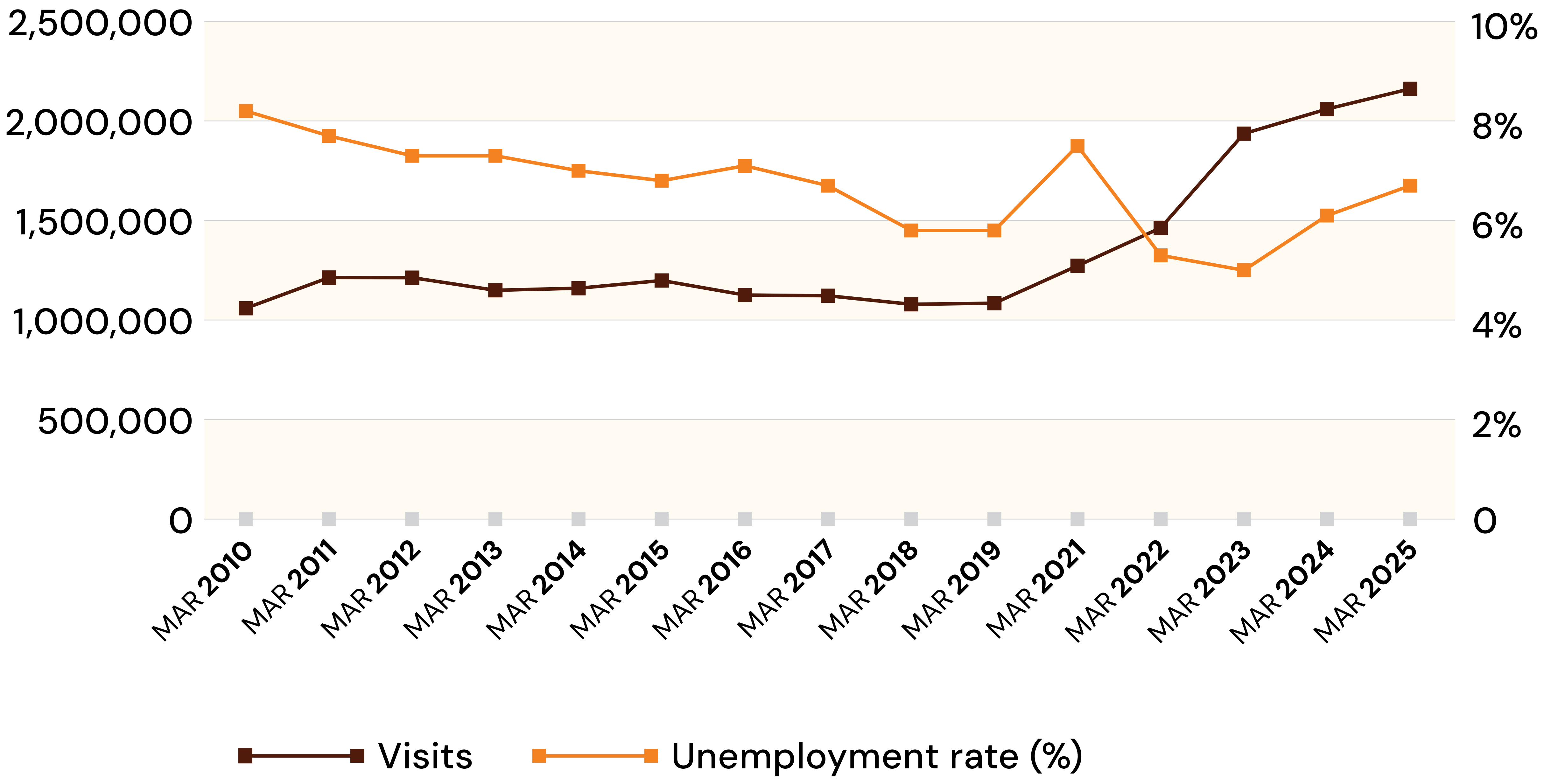
SURVEY RESPONDENT, BRITISH COLUMBIA

RISING UNEMPLOYMENT BECOMING A STRONGER DRIVER OF NEED

As Canada navigates a period of economic uncertainty, unemployment is re-emerging as a significant contributor to heightened need.

Trends in food bank usage closely mirrored trends in unemployment rates until 2022, when there was a period of diversion that coincided with that year's rapid inflation. Although inflation has recently cooled, rising unemployment threatens to re-emerge as a driver of increased food bank use nationwide. At the time of the HungerCount survey in March 2025, the unemployment rate was 6.7%, compared to 6.1% in March 2024, when employment fell for the first time since January 2022.[17] In May 2025, unemployment increased to 7%, marking the third consecutive monthly increase and the highest rate since 2016, excluding the pandemic period;[18] that same month, job vacancies were at their lowest level since October 2017.[19]

Figure 6: Unemployment rates and total food bank visits, March of each year, 2010–2025



SOURCE OF DATA: Food bank visit numbers from Food Banks Canada 2025 HungerCount. Unemployment rates from Statistics Canada. (2025, September 05). *Table 14-10-0287-01: Labour force characteristics, monthly, seasonally adjusted and trend-cycle, last 5 months*. https://doi.org/10.25318/1410028701-eng.

[17] Statistics Canada. (2025, April 04). Labour force survey, March 2025. *The Daily*. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/250404/dq250404a-eng.htm

[18] Statistics Canada. (2025, June 06). Labour force survey, May 2025. *The Daily*. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/250606/dq250606a-eng.htm

[19] Rabinovitch, A. (2025, July 31). *Canadian job vacancies fell to a near 8-year low amid hiring freezes*. Global News. https://globalnews.ca/news/11313465/canadian-job-vacancies-may-2025/

STRUGGLING ON TWO FRONTS: STRUGGLES OF A SYSTEM OPERATING AT MAXIMUM CAPACITY

"[WE ARE] DOING THIS ALL RUNNING ON DONATIONS WHICH HAVE DECLINED DUE TO A VARIETY OF REASONS. IT FEELS IMPOSSIBLE MOST DAYS, LIKE WE ARE RUNNING ON HOPES AND DREAMS. IT IS VERY SCARY SOME DAYS, NOT KNOWING IF WE WILL HAVE ENOUGH FROM ONE DAY TO THE NEXT."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, NEW BRUNSWICK

Key drivers of demand, such as economic downturns or rapid inflation, can also impact the food bank system in terms of supply. For example, increases in unemployment and rapid inflation can affect donors' and corporations' capacity to contribute at the same time as the demand for services increases because individuals are facing greater financial hardship.

The Canadian food bank system has had to adapt how it manages supplies in the face of skyrocketing need in the past four years. For example, nearly 80% of the network has had to purchase food to make up for insufficient food donations in 2025, compared to 55% in 2021. When the increased costs of the food they must purchase are factored in, food banks are spending an average of more than 2.5 times the amount on food every year than they did three years before — for example, they spent an average of $209,700 in 2021 and $535,700 in 2024.

AVERAGE ANNUAL $ AMOUNT SPENT ON FOOD IN 2021: **$209,700**

AVERAGE ANNUAL $ AMOUNT SPENT ON FOOD IN 2024: **$535,700**

"OUR EMERGENCY FOOD PANTRY COSTS HAVE SKYROCKETED FOR THE SAME AMOUNT OF FOOD. WHEN I STARTED 3 YEARS AGO, WE HAD DOUBLE THE AMOUNT OF FOOD FOR THE SAME PRICE WE PAY NOW."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ONTARIO

STRUGGLING ON TWO FRONTS: STRUGGLES OF A SYSTEM OPERATING AT MAXIMUM CAPACITY

"OUR SUPPORT FOR AGENCY PARTNERS HAS GROWN BY 65% THIS YEAR. HOWEVER, WE'VE FACED TIMES WHERE WE'VE HAD TO SCALE BACK DONATIONS TO AGENCIES DUE TO A DECLINE IN OVERALL DONATIONS."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Reduced budgets and limited food supplies mean many food banks have had to cut back distribution or have run out of food more often than they did in 2021, despite strong support from their networks and communities. In 2025, 52% of food banks had to give out less food than usual, and 23% ran out of food before demand was met — compared to 20% and 10%, respectively, in 2021.

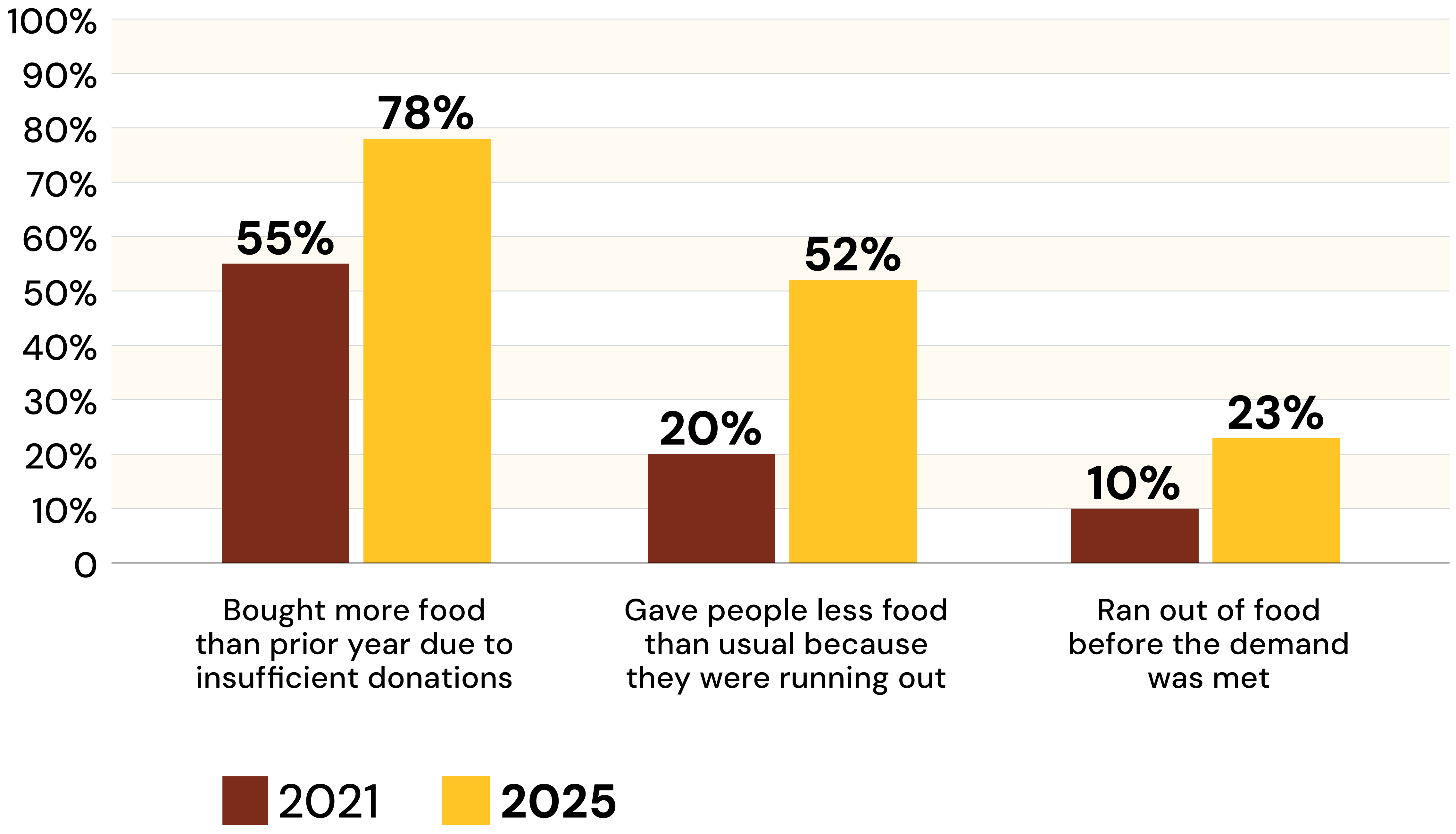
In some cases, limited operational capacity is due not to lack of food but to lack of physical space to store the food or lack of volunteers and/or employees to coordinate the distribution of the food.

STRUGGLING ON TWO FRONTS: STRUGGLES OF A SYSTEM OPERATING AT MAXIMUM CAPACITY

"OUR PROGRAM HAS A FIXED CAPACITY IN TERMS OF RESIDENTIAL LIVE-IN CLIENTS THAT WE PROVIDE FOOD FOR. BUT WE HAVE HAD TO BUY SUBSTANTIALLY MORE FOOD DUE TO LACK OF DONATIONS AND THE COST OF DOING SO HAS RISEN EXPONENTIALLY TO AN UNSUSTAINABLE LEVEL FOR OUR ORGANIZATION."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Figure 7: Food banks' experiences of food shortages



SOURCE OF DATA: Food Banks Canada network survey (*N* = 373).

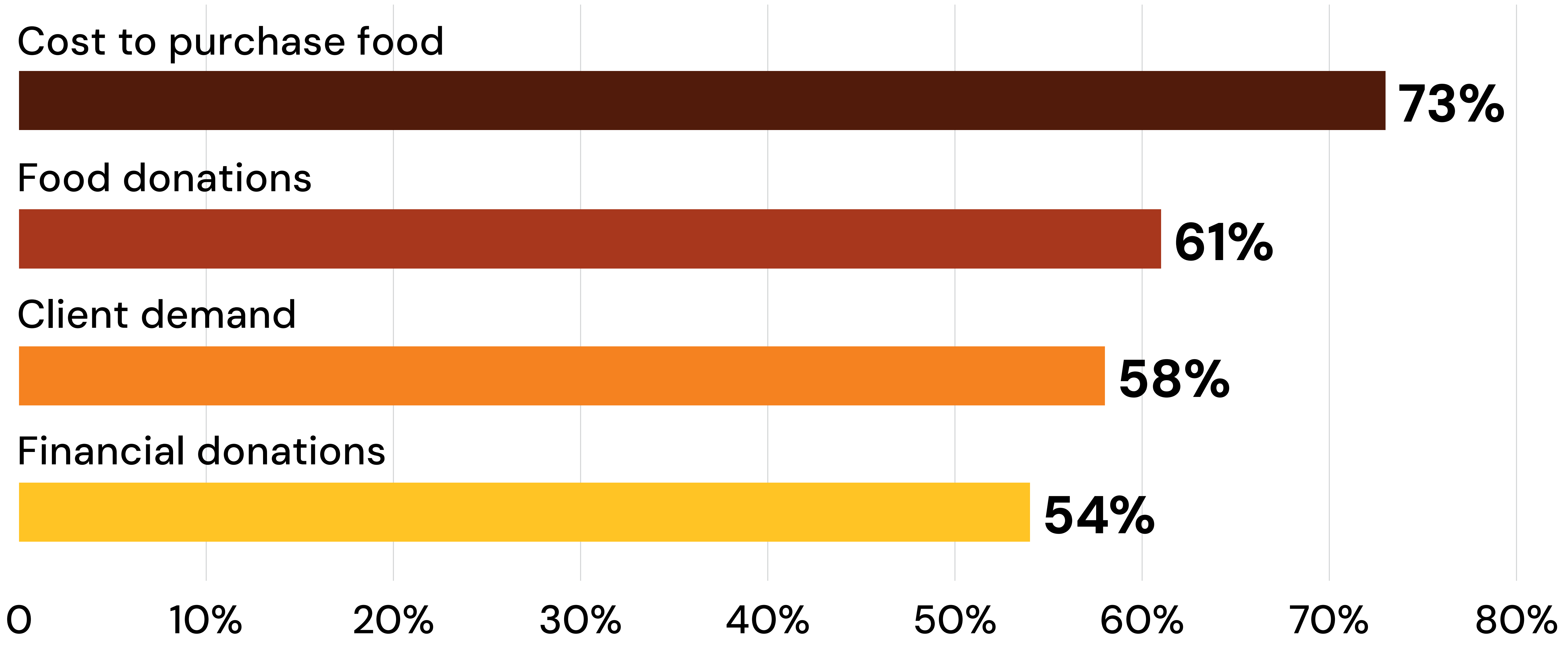
CONCERNS ABOUT THE THREAT OF U.S. TARIFFS ON A SYSTEM ALREADY AT ITS BREAKING POINT

The ongoing threat of tariffs from the U.S. adds another dimension of uncertainty to a system that has already reached a breaking point. Notably, 73% of network respondents indicated that U.S. tariffs could have either a very negative or somewhat negative effect on the costs of purchasing food to supplement their inventory; 61% foresee a negative impact on food donations, and 58% expect to see a negative impact on the demand side through increased client demand.

"WE ARE CURRENTLY [ANTICIPATING] A METEORIC INCREASE IN REQUESTS FOR HELP. (EQUIVALENT TO WHAT WE SAW DURING COVID, BUT WITHOUT ANY EMERGENCY AID . . .). WE NO LONGER HAVE ANY RESERVES OR MONEY TO BUY ADDITIONAL FOOD. IN A CONTEXT OF THE TRADE WAR WITH THE UNITED STATES, WE ARE VERY WORRIED.

SURVEY RESPONDENT, QUEBEC

Figure 8: Potential impact of U.S. tariffs (very or somewhat negative impact)



SOURCE OF DATA: Food Banks Canada network survey. *N* = 373. Q: If the U.S. places tariffs on a wide range of products from Canada as currently planned, what do you think the impact would be at your food bank, based on the following, if any?

TOP CITED REASONS FOR ACCESSING A FOOD BANK THIS YEAR

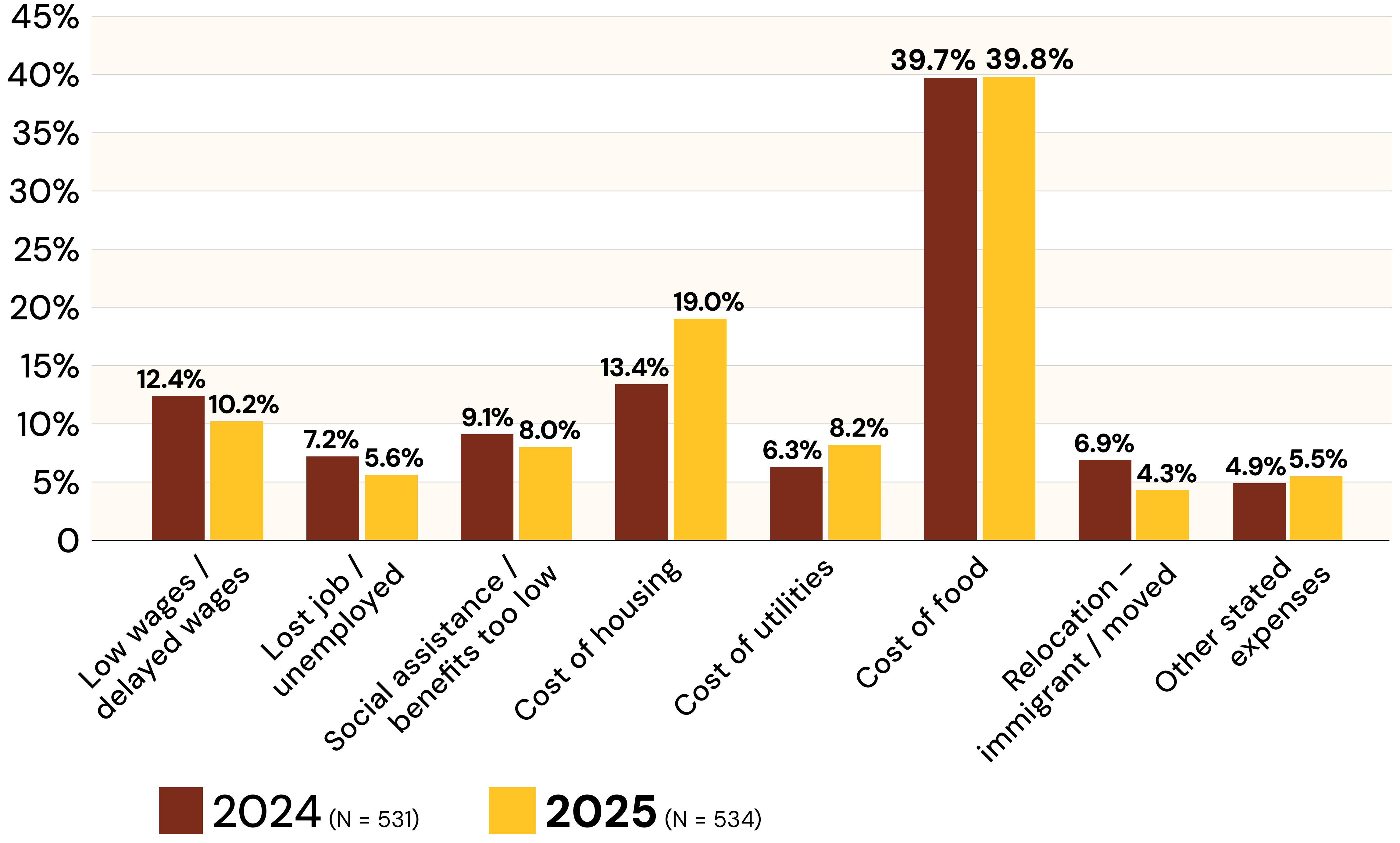
"HOUSING AND FOOD COSTS ARE A MAIN FACTOR CAUSING INCREASE IN USAGE."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ALBERTA

While housing-related costs take up the largest chunk of the budgets of people living on low incomes, food costs are felt most frequently, during the weekly trips to the grocery store. Similar to last year, food and housing remain the top reasons clients cite for accessing a food bank, followed by low/delayed wages and low provincial social assistance benefits. These results are consistent with the experience of the general population, who cite the rising cost of food as the main reason for their worsening financial situation, followed by housing costs and employment-related issues.[20]

Key drivers of need differ somewhat between urban and rural areas. Low social assistance rates, cost of food, and cost of utilities were mentioned more frequently by clients in smaller communities of 10,000 people or fewer.

Figure 9: Main reasons for accessing a food bank, 2024 versus 2025



SOURCE OF DATA: Food Banks Canada 2025 HungerCount.

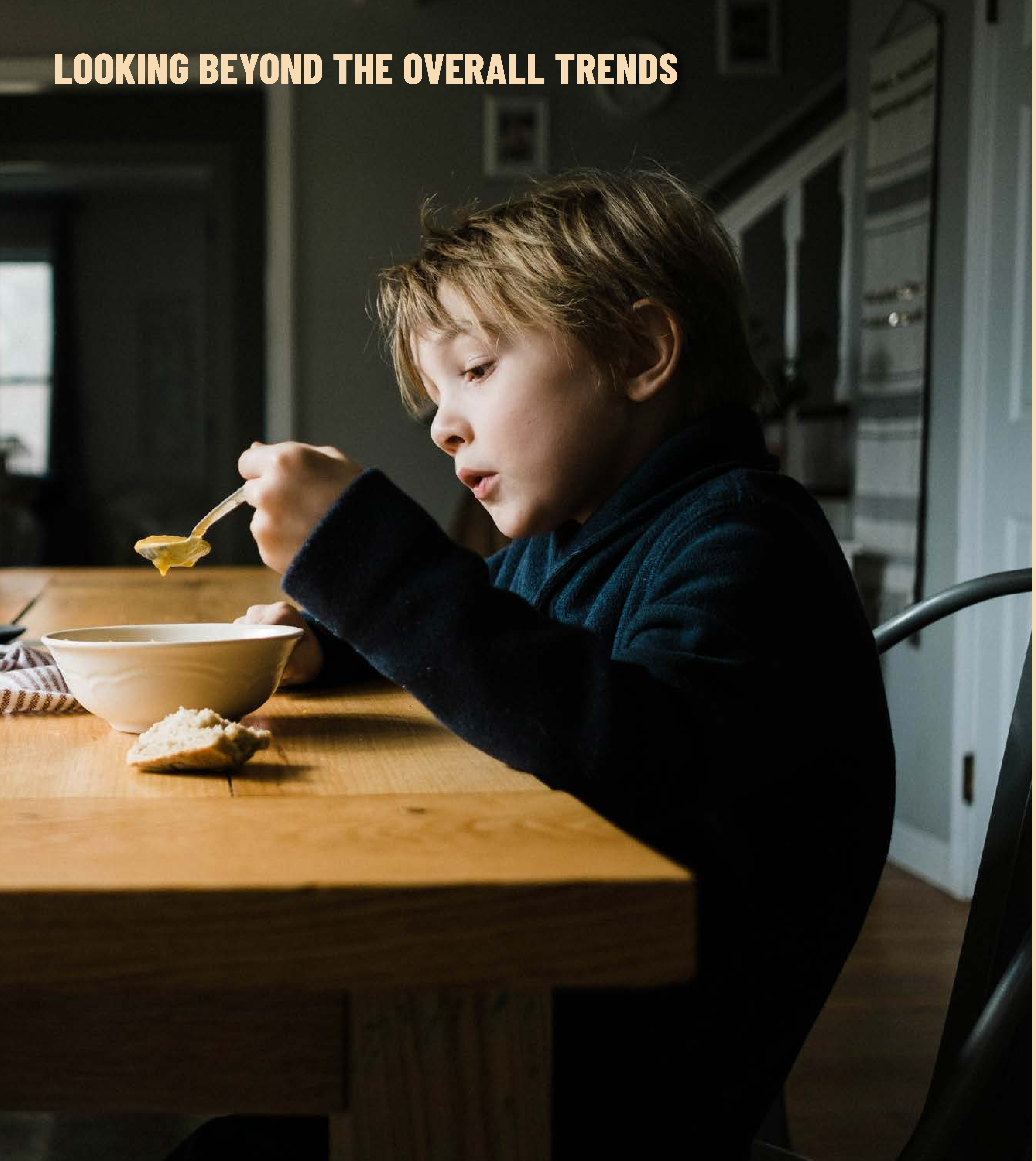
[20]Based on quarterly surveys commissioned by Food Banks Canada and conducted by Pollara Strategic Insights via online survey, from national sample of 1,500 Canadians, from April 2024 to July 2025.

LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS

“IN 2025, FOOD INSECURITY IN OUR COMMUNITIES CONTINUED TO CLIMB, IN LINE WITH NATIONAL TRENDS. WE HAVE SEEN A SHARP INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF NEWCOMERS, REFUGEES, AND ASYLUM SEEKERS, MANY ARRIVING WITH LIMITED SUPPORT AND FACING SIGNIFICANT BARRIERS TO SECURING EMPLOYMENT AND HOUSING. THE SOARING COST OF RENT AND LACK OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING HAVE LEFT MANY HOUSEHOLDS FINANCIALLY OVERBURDENED, WITH INSUFFICIENT INCOME REMAINING FOR FOOD AND BASIC NEEDS. SENIORS ON FIXED INCOMES, PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, AND SINGLE-PARENT HOUSEHOLDS ARE ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE, WHILE EVEN MIDDLE-INCOME EARNERS ARE INCREASINGLY TURNING TO OUR FOOD BANK AS INFLATION AND STAGNANT WAGES ERODE PURCHASING POWER. THE RELIANCE ON FOOD BANKS IS NO LONGER SHORT-TERM OR CRISIS-BASED FOR MANY — IT HAS BECOME AN ONGOING NECESSITY TO SURVIVE. WITHOUT SYSTEMIC CHANGES AND INCREASED INVESTMENT IN POVERTY REDUCTION AND AFFORDABLE HOUSING, WE ANTICIPATE THIS DEMAND WILL CONTINUE TO GROW.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, BRITISH COLUMBIA

LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS



This report is a snapshot in time, but it can be analyzed year-over-year with annual data to illustrate concerning trends among specific demographic groups. Those trends include increased food bank usage among people with jobs, households with children and two parents, racialized communities, and recent newcomers. They also include persistently high numbers of visits from children, people who rent, single people, and people who are accessing provincial social assistance programs.

LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS
AGE GROUPS

Children

The proportion of children under 18 accessing food banks continues to hold at 33% of food bank clients; however, given the recent growth in food bank use, that 33% now represents nearly 712,000 visits — an increase of nearly 340,000 visits in one month compared to six years ago. The proportion of children living in households that are accessing a food bank is the same as the proportion of children living in households that are food-insecure — one third (32.9%) of children under 18 in the 10 provinces lived in a food-insecure household in 2024.[21] These similar proportions reinforce how trends seen among people accessing food banks are similar to those among people experiencing food insecurity. As children under 18 represent approximately 20% of the general population,[22] they remain greatly overrepresented at food banks.

Working-age adults

Although the proportion of adults in the 18–30 age range accessing food banks has not increased significantly since the pre-pandemic period, the proportion of adults in the 31–44 age range increased from 20% in 2019 to 22.4% this year. During the same period, the percentage of adults in the 45–64 age range accessing food banks declined from 22.8% to 20.1%.

According to data from a sample of food banks in our network, adults aged 44 and under appear to represent the newer wave of clients, are more likely to be employed, and are struggling with high rents and other rapidly rising living costs. Those aged 45–64 are more likely to rely on provincial social assistance, living on incomes that are well below the official poverty line and requiring longer-term and more frequent visits to a food bank.

Those aged 45–64 are also more likely to rely on the disability support portion of provincial social assistance. This is part of a larger systemic trend of provincial social assistance being 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.[24] This trend, along with systemic barriers to accessing the labour market, means people with disabilities are more likely than people without disabilities to experience food insecurity, including severe food insecurity.[25]

Seniors

Clients aged 65 and over represent a relatively small segment of the food bank population. However, their share has grown compared to pre-pandemic levels and last year. In 2019, this group accounted for 6.8% of clients; that figure grew to 7.7% in 2024 and 8.3% in 2025. Senior food bank clients are part of a more recent increase in users who primarily rely on government pensions that have not kept pace with expenses and are affected by rising food and housing costs.

This trend of more seniors accessing food banks aligns more closely with food-insecurity rates for this population than with the official poverty rate. While the official poverty rate for seniors 65 and older declined from 5.7% in 2019 to 5% in 2023[26], the food-insecurity rate increased from 8% to 12.6% during the same period.[27] The reason for this discrepancy is that the official poverty rate looks primarily at income, whereas the food-insecurity rate assesses the extent to which other factors — for example, high housing and utility costs, higher than average health care needs, or rapid inflation — may impact a household's ability to afford food.

Therefore, there have been calls to consider a range of approaches to measuring poverty to better capture the lived realities and range of circumstances impacting older adults.[28] One such approach is the MDI, as used by the National Institute on Aging in its 2024 annual survey. The MDI indicated that 14% of seniors lived in poverty.[29] Indicators of well-being such as the MDI and food-insecurity rates inherently take into account the varying circumstances that can impact a senior's ability to afford food and reflect trends in the increasing number of seniors accessing food banks over the past six years.

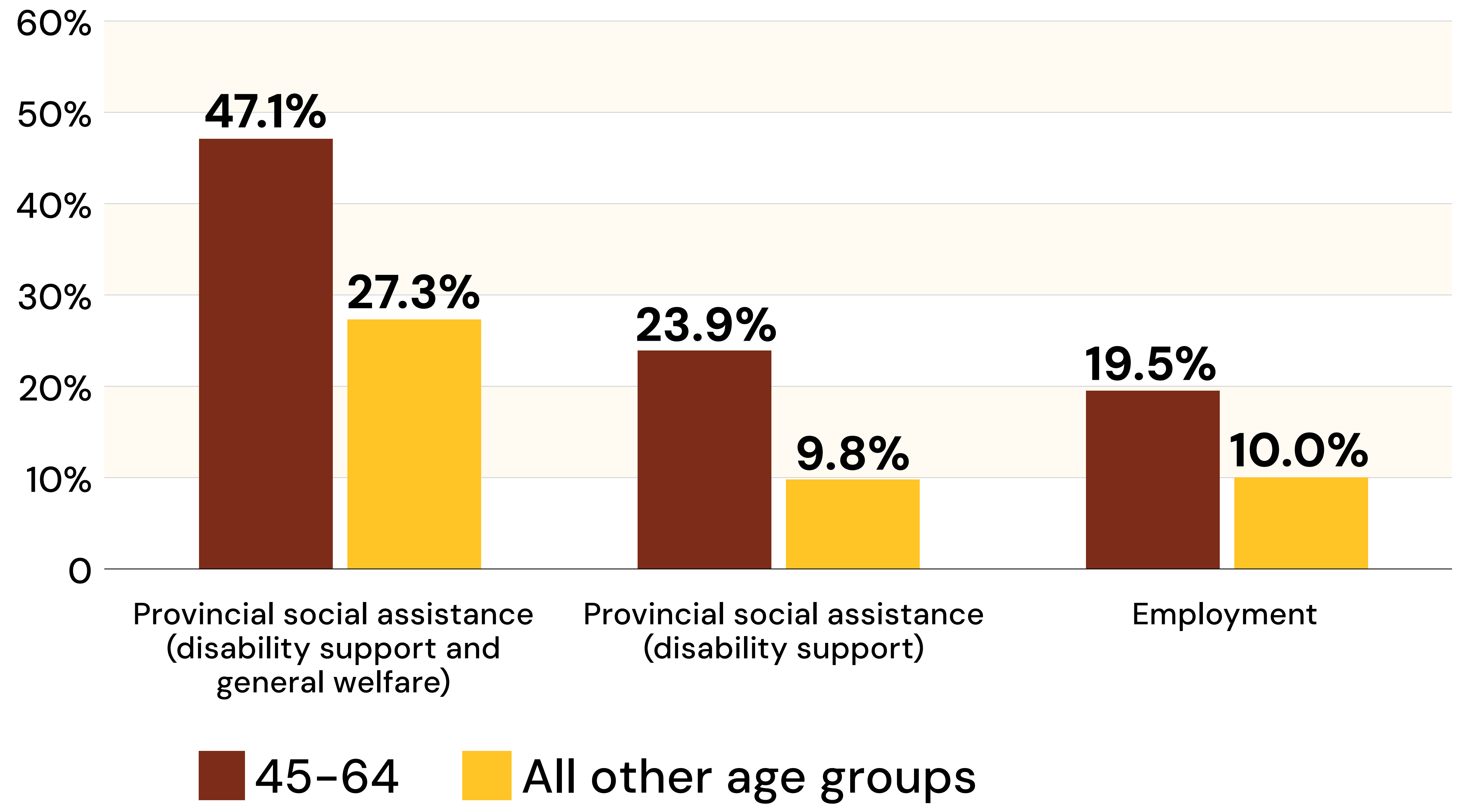
"[F]OR MANY CANADIANS WITH DISABILITIES, PROVINCIAL SOCIAL ASSISTANCE IS EFFECTIVELY A FIRST-RESORT PROGRAM RATHER THAN A SAFETY NET."[23]

DR. MICHAEL J. PRINCE,
LANSDOWNE PROFESSOR OF SOCIAL POLICY

[21] Statistics Canada. (2025, May 01). *Table 13-10-0835-01 Food insecurity by selected demographic characteristics* [Data table]. https://doi.org/10.25318/1310083501-eng
[22] Statistics Canada. (2024, September 25). *Table 17-10-0005-01 Population estimates on July 1, by age and gender* [Data table]. https://doi.org/10.25318/1710000501-eng
[23] 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). University of Toronto Press.
[24] Stapleton, J., Tweedle, A., & Gibson, K. (February, 2013). *What is happening to disability income systems in Canada?* Council of Canadians with Disabilities. Retrieved from http://www.ccdonline.ca/en/socialpolicy/poverty-citizenship/income-security-reform/disability-income-systems#sec-trend
[25] Gupta, S., Fernandes, D., Aitken, N., & Greenberg, L. (2024, August 21). Household food insecurity among persons with disabilities in Canada: Findings from the 2021 Canadian Income Survey. *Health Reports*. Statistics Canada. https://www.doi.org/10.25318/82-003-x202400800002-eng
[26] Statistics Canada. (2025, May 01). *Table 11-10-0135-01 Low income statistics by age, sex and economic family type* [Data table]. https://doi.org/10.25318/1110013501-eng
[27] Statistics Canada. Table 13-10-0835-01.
[28] Griffin, P., & Tabbara, M.-D. (2023, October 25). *A fine line: Finding the right seniors' poverty measure in Canada*. Maytree. https://maytree.com/publications/a-fine-line-finding-the-right-seniors-poverty-measure-in-canada/
Policy Options. (2025, July 14). *Reducing poverty means looking at all its complexities*. https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/july-2025/poverty-measures/
Policy Options. (2025, June 09). *The case for using several ways to measure the economic reality of older adults*. https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/june-2025/older-adult-poverty/
[29] Iciaszczyk, N., Gallant, G., Bronstein, T., Brierley, A., & Sinha, S. K. (2024). *Perspectives on growing older in Canada: The 2024 NIA Ageing in Canada Survey*. National Institute on Ageing, Toronto Metropolitan University. https://www.environicsinstitute.org/docs/default-source/default-document-library/final-report9843e654-8e24-448e-8bd9-4e0a5d2f991c.pdf?sfvrsn=e214f9b3_1

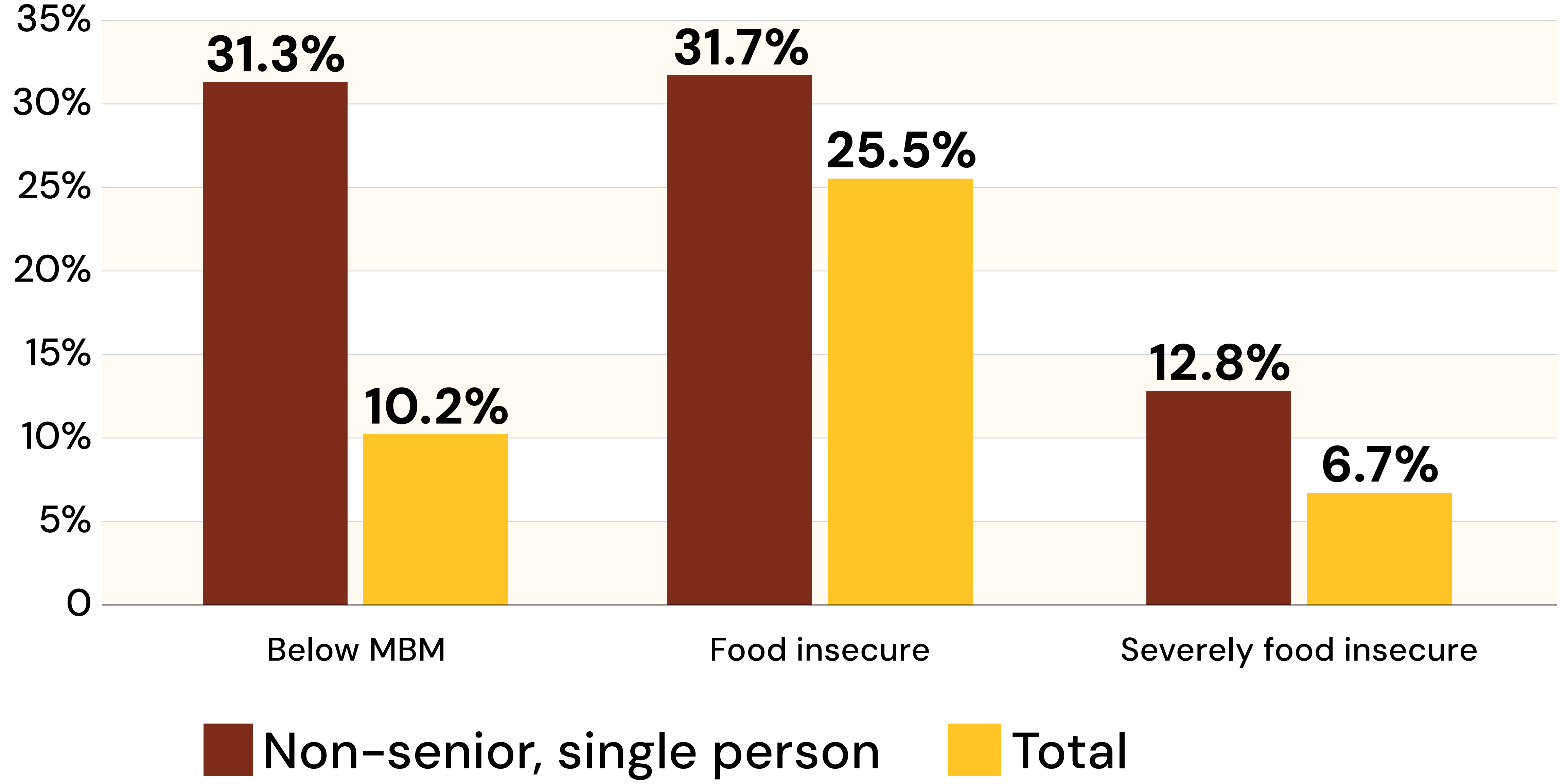
LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS
AGE GROUPS

Figure 10: Main source of income and select age groups of those accessing food banks, March 2025



SOURCE OF DATA: Food Banks Canada intake database. (*N* = >200,000).

Figure 11: Rate of poverty according to the MBM (Market Basket Measure), food insecurity and severe food insecurity, single, non-senior household vs. total



SOURCE OF DATA: Statistics Canada. (2025, May 01). *Table 11-10-0135-01 Low income statistics by age, sex and economic family type.* https://doi.org/10.25318/1110013501-eng. Statistics Canada. (2025, May 01). *Table 13-10-0834-01 Food insecurity by economic family type.* https://doi.org/10.25318/1310083401-eng.

LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS
HOUSEHOLD TYPE

Single-person households

Single-person households remain the most common household type accessing food banks in Canada. While there has been a consistent decline in the proportion of single-person households compared to before the pandemic (48% in 2019 versus 42% in 2025), this is due to increased need among other household types (such as two-parent families with children), rather than reduced need among single people.

The over-representation of single-person households in the food bank population is largely because they represent most provincial social assistance cases in every province and territory[30] and rely on incomes that fall far below the official poverty line in most provinces.[31] With fewer income support options aside from provincial social assistance and time-limited EI support, working-age single adults who are out of work often have little choice but to rely on food banks because their income levels are so low. In 2024, this policy gap meant that nearly one third of non-senior, single individuals in the general population lived below the official poverty line and experienced food insecurity, and nearly 13% of single-person households experienced severe food insecurity, nearly double the rate of the overall population.[32] (See Figure 11 on page 57).

[30] Oliveira, T. (2024). *Social assistance summaries, 2024*. Maytree. https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/Social_Assistance_Summaries_2024.pdf
[31] Laidley, J., & Oliveira, T. (2025). *Welfare in Canada, 2024*. Maytree. https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/Welfare_in_Canada_2024.pdf
[32] Statistics Canada, Canadian income survey, 2023.

"WE ARE ALSO SEEING SINGLE PEOPLE OF ALL AGES ATTEND OUR FOOD BANK (30% OF CLIENTS IN MARCH WERE 1-PERSON HOUSEHOLDS), AND THEY ARE ALL TELLING US THAT THEY ARE BARELY GETTING BY BECAUSE RENT IS HIGH AND THEY ARE USUALLY RENTING A BEDROOM IN A SHARED HOUSE FOR OVER $1000/MONTH."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ONTARIO

HOUSEHOLD TYPE

Households with children

Compared to before the pandemic, there has been a significant increase in the proportion of two-parent households with children under 18 accessing food banks — from 18.8% in 2019 to 23% in 2025. Two-parent families who access food banks are more likely to live in larger urban areas of 100,000 or more and more likely to access food banks where the majority of clients are from racialized or Indigenous households.

This trend is consistent with other research findings that show households with children have been especially hard hit by rapidly rising costs of living.[33] That same survey also found that over one quarter (28%) of households with children expected to access food from a community organization in the next six months compared to about one in five among other household types.[34]

[33] Statistics Canada. (2024, August 15). Nearly half of all Canadians report that rising prices are greatly impacting their ability to meet day-to-day expenses. *The Daily*. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/240815/dq240815b-eng.htm

[34] Statistics Canada. Nearly half of all Canadians.

Social assistance (general welfare) and provincial disability support

Provincial social assistance, which includes both the general welfare and provincial disability support income streams, is the primary source of income for 40% of food bank clients. General welfare is commonly intended as short-term assistance for people who are out of work and have no other means of financial support, and provincial disability support is for people who have disabilities or other medical conditions that present barriers to employment and are unable to find and/or hold a job.

Compared to 2019, there was a significant drop in the proportion of food bank clients receiving the general welfare portion of social assistance — from 40.1% in 2019 to 28.7% in 2025. Taking the total growth in food bank usage into consideration, although the actual number of households that were receiving provincial social assistance and accessing food banks has increased, that increase is not as pronounced as the growth in households receiving income from other sources (such as employment).

The share of food bank clients whose main income was the disability portion of social assistance dropped from 17.3% of total households in 2019 to 11.7% this year. When the overall increase in food bank usage is considered, the number of households that were receiving disability support and accessing food banks has increased since 2019, but not at the same rate of increase experienced by clients receiving other sources of income.

Nationwide, both the general welfare and disability portions of provincial social assistance have strict eligibility requirements. To qualify (and continue to be eligible), a household must have very limited assets and income. Often, there is no earnings exemption for a household applying for social assistance and limits on earned income for recipients before full clawbacks of that income take effect.[35] Unlike recipients in income support programs that assess eligibility annually, those receiving provincial social assistance undergo monthly eligibility checks and can be cut off from assistance entirely — including health-related benefits — if their income from the previous month exceeded the eligible amount. In many ways this undermines efforts to achieve financial independence, discourages people from seeking employment, and perpetuates a cycle of poverty.

Some provinces are introducing important initiatives to increase the incomes of people receiving social assistance by indexing benefits to inflation, adding tax credits, or creating new income streams within social assistance. For example, the welfare income of a single person on general welfare in New Brunswick increased by 27% in 2024 over the previous year, the highest increase in the country.[36] Despite these recent initiatives, though, social assistance incomes are still so low that all household types on this form of income live below the poverty line in almost every province and territory.[37]

As a consequence of both the extremely low income levels and the punitive design of social assistance programs, the prevalence of food insecurity among people receiving provincial social assistance is almost four times that of the total population, and half of those individuals live in households experiencing severe food insecurity.[38]

"MORE EXPENSIVE HOUSING (INCREASED RENTS) AND FOOD COSTS SEEM TO BE THE MAIN REASONS FOR INCREASED USAGE, BUT WE ALSO SEE MORE CLIENTS WHO HAVE LOST JOBS AND PEOPLE RELYING ON SOCIAL ASSISTANCE THAT ARE NOT RECEIVING ENOUGH MONEY TO MEET THEIR BASIC NEEDS."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ALBERTA

[35] Laidley & Oliveira. *Welfare in Canada*, 2024, pp. 209-215.
[36] Laidley & Oliveira. *Welfare in Canada*, 2024.
[37] Laidley & Oliveira. *Welfare in Canada*, 2024.
[38] Li, T., Fafard St-Germain, A. A., & Tarasuk V. (2023). *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2022*. Research to Identify Policy Options to Reduce Food Insecurity (PROOF). Retrieved from https://proof.utoronto.ca/

"WE HAVE DOUBLED THE NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS SERVED IN THE PAST 2 YEARS AND OUR NUMBERS FOR 2025 ARE CONTINUING TO INCREASE. HOUSING AND FOOD COST INCREASES, COUPLED WITH INSUFFICIENT SOCIAL ASSISTANCE (OW AND ODSP) ARE THE PRIMARY REASONS FOR THIS INCREASE."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ONTARIO

"MANY OF OUR CLIENTS WITH DISABILITIES EXPRESS THAT THEY DO NOT GET ENOUGH FINANCIAL SUPPORT TO LIVE OFF, SAME WITH MANY RETIRED CLIENTS."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, BRITISH COLUMBIA

LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS
EMPLOYMENT

"WE ARE HEARING PEOPLE SAY THAT THEY NEED HELP WITH FOOD BECAUSE EVEN THOUGH THEY ARE EMPLOYED, THEY CANNOT MEET THEIR RENT/ MORTGAGE PAYMENTS."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ONTARIO

The majority of adults experiencing food insecurity in Canada are currently employed.[39] This finding is not new. It is reflective of the fact that most people living in Canada receive their income by working. What is new is the steady growth in employed people coming to food banks. That signals that fewer people are coping with the ongoing affordability crisis.

The proportion of food bank clients whose main source of income is employment is at its highest ever —19.4% in 2025 compared to 12.1% in 2019. It hovered between 10% and 12% of all clients until 2022, when the impacts of rapid inflation took effect. The cumulative impact of inflation has continued to erode the purchasing power of those who are employed, even if their incomes are above the official poverty line.

This year, 10.2% of respondents stated that low/delayed wages or not enough hours were their primary reason for accessing a food bank in March 2025. Alongside reduced purchasing power among individuals in full-time and stable employment, food bankers reported that factors such as seasonal or casual work arrangements, insufficient working hours, closed work permits for temporary foreign workers, and restrictions on allowable work hours for international students all contributed to overall usage.

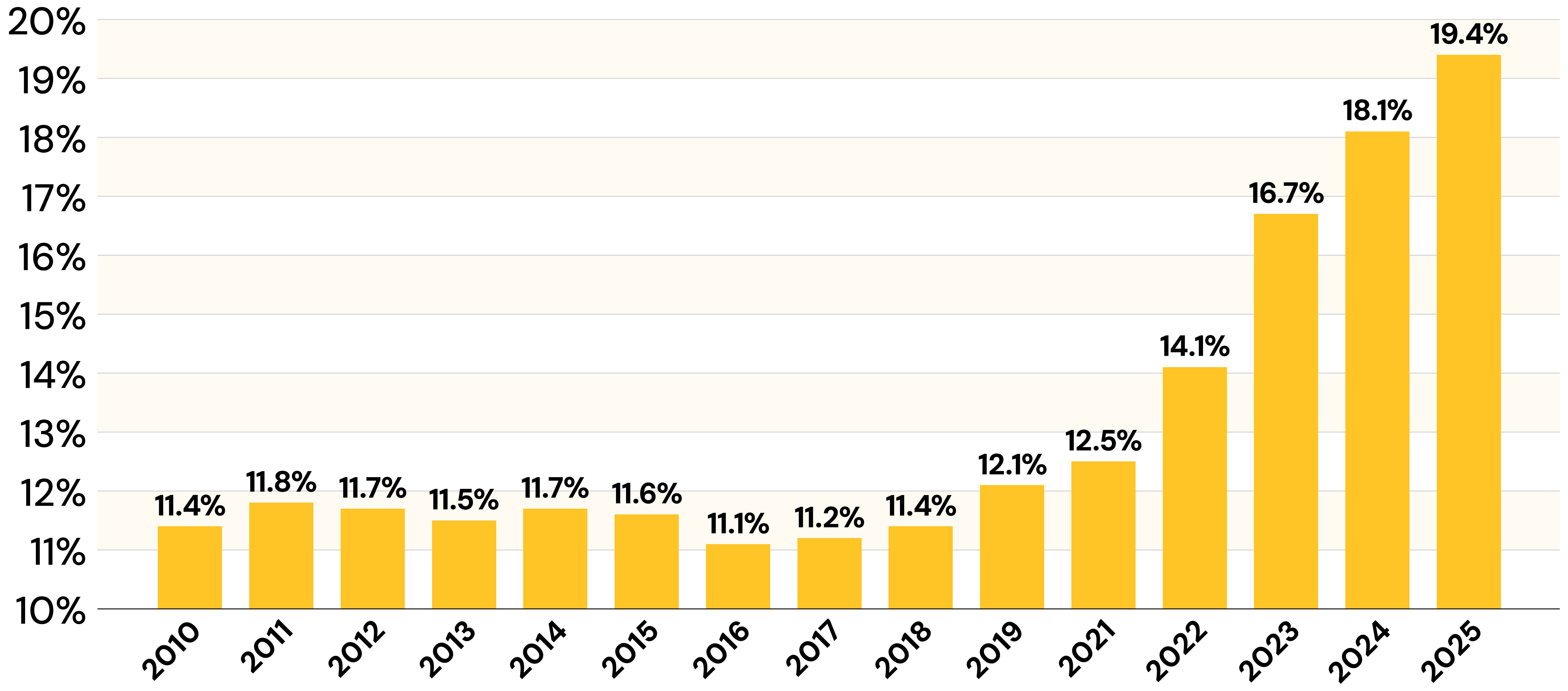
"THE AFFORDABILITY CRISIS HAS DRIVEN THE SIGNIFICANT INCREASE IN USAGE. 95% OF CLIENTS RECEIVING FOOD SUPPORTS ARE NOW PAYING MORE THAN 50% OF THEIR INCOME ON RENT AND 44% OF THEM ARE EMPLOYED SO THE WAGES ARE NOT KEEPING UP WITH THE INCREASES IN RENT, FOOD AND POWER."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ALBERTA

[39] Li et al. Household food insecurity in Canada, 2022.

LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS
EMPLOYMENT

Figure 12: Percentage of food bank clients whose main source of income is employment, 2010–2025



SOURCE OF DATA: Food Banks Canada 2025 HungerCount.

"NOT ENOUGH SUBSIDIZED CHILD CARE SO PEOPLE ARE PAYING HIGH AMOUNTS TO BE ABLE TO WORK MINIMUM WAGE JOBS."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, NEW BRUNSWICK

"MOST OF OUR CLIENTS WORK SEASONALLY OR AT SERVICE JOBS WHICH AREN'T ENOUGH TO COVER THE ESCALATING HOUSING COSTS. WHEN FOOD AND GAS PRICES JUMPED LAST YEAR IT PUSHED MANY OF THEM INTO NEEDING MUCH MORE HELP."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, BRITISH COLUMBIA

"MANY WORKERS ARE ALSO SEASONAL/ CONTRACTUAL WORKERS MAKING IT CHALLENGING TO BE CONSISTENTLY SELF-SUFFICIENT."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ALBERTA

SPOTLIGHT: EXPLORING THE EXTENT OF FOOD INSECURITY AND FOOD BANK USAGE AMONG THOSE EMPLOYED IN THE GENERAL POPULATION

SPOTLIGHT: EXPLORING THE EXTENT OF FOOD INSECURITY AND FOOD BANK USAGE AMONG THOSE EMPLOYED IN THE GENERAL POPULATION

In order to better understand the characteristics and employment circumstances of people who are both employed and experiencing food insecurity, Food Banks Canada commissioned a national survey of the general population.[40]

To assess the likelihood that the survey respondents lived in a food-insecure household, we used the six-item module developed by the Economic Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) (Economic Research Service, 2012).[41] This is a short form of the 18-item module typically used in Canada, with similar wording (Office of Nutrition Policy and Promotion, 2007).[42] Survey respondents who responded affirmatively to two or more questions on the abbreviated six-item food insecurity scale were identified as food-insecure. **It is important to note that methodological differences mean our food-insecurity estimates in this section are not fully comparable to those in the Canadian Income Survey (CIS), used elsewhere in this report, or in the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS).[43]**

Regardless, the results of this survey provide important insights into food insecurity among various segments of the labour market. They also show the prevalence of food bank access within the last 12 months.

"WE'RE SEEING A SIGNIFICANT SHIFT IN THE HOUSEHOLDS WE SERVE. 27% ARE NOW WORKING HOUSEHOLDS, WHICH UNDERSCORES THE NEED FOR EXPANDED HOURS, INCLUDING EVENINGS AND WEEKENDS. WE ARE COMMITTED TO MEETING THIS GROWING NEED, BUT WITH JUST TWO STAFF MEMBERS AND A DEDICATED VOLUNTEER TEAM ALREADY STRETCHED THIN, EXPANDING OUR OPERATIONS IS A LOGISTICAL CHALLENGE. STILL, IT'S A CHALLENGE WE RECOGNIZE AS ESSENTIAL TO ADDRESS. AS WE LOOK TOWARD INCREASING OUR HOURS AND DISTRIBUTION DAYS, WE'RE ALSO MINDFUL OF A CRITICAL CONCERN: ENSURING WE HAVE ENOUGH FOOD TO MEET THE NEEDS OF EVERY CLIENT WHO WALKS THROUGH OUR DOORS."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, BRITISH COLUMBIA

[40] The survey conducted by Pollara Strategic Insights, from February 24, 2025, to March 29, 2025, was a bilingual online survey of 10,004 randomly selected adult (18+) Canadians. The probability sample of this size carries a margin of error of ± 3.1%, 19 times out of 20. The margin of error is larger for sub-segments. The data was weighted using the most current language, gender, age, and region census data to ensure the sample reflects the actual population of adult Canadians.

[41] Statistics Canada used the six-item module to measure food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic. See *Food insecurity during the COVID-19 pandemic, May 2020* [Archived content]. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00039-eng.htm

[42] Health Canada. (2007). *Canadian Community Health Survey, Cycle 2.2, Nutrition (2004): Income-related household food security in Canada*. Ottawa, ON: Office of Nutrition Policy and Promotion, Health Canada. Retrieved from https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/food-nutrition-surveillance/health-nutrition-surveys/canadian-community-health-survey-cchs/canadian-community-health-survey-cycle-2-2-nutrition-2004-income-related-household-food-security-canada-health-canada-2007.html

[43] A key difference is that the questions in the six-item module focus on adults in the household, whereas eight questions in the 18-item module are child-focused. Another important difference is that the six-item module has one less question relating to marginal food insecurity (worrying about running out of food before getting money to buy more) and excludes the two adult-oriented questions that determine the severest food insecurity (losing weight and not eating for a whole day).

SPOTLIGHT: EXPLORING THE EXTENT OF FOOD INSECURITY AND FOOD BANK USAGE AMONG THOSE EMPLOYED IN THE GENERAL POPULATION

Key findings from the survey of the general population

1. FOOD-INSECURITY RATES ARE HIGH ACROSS THE BOARD, BUT THEY ARE PARTICULARLY HIGH AMONG PEOPLE WHO ARE WORKING PART-TIME OR HAVE LESS STABLE WORK ARRANGEMENTS, AND AMONG THOSE WHO ARE UNEMPLOYED AND SEEKING WORK. PEOPLE WHO ARE IN MORE PRECARIOUS WORKING ARRANGEMENTS OR ARE UNEMPLOYED ARE MORE LIKELY THAN OTHER GROUPS TO HAVE ACCESSED A FOOD BANK.

The results of this survey indicate that 39% of the population experienced food insecurity in the last 12 months according to the six-item module, and 10% accessed a food bank in that same period. Those currently employed full-time show similar rates of food insecurity and food bank usage to the overall total population (taking a 3% margin of error into account). Those employed part-time or as casual/on-call or day labour show rates of food insecurity at about 50%, and food bank usage between 16% and 18%. Those on parental leave also show high rates of food insecurity at 52%, and nearly one in five workers on parental leave access a food bank. Those who are unemployed and seeking work see the highest rates of food insecurity and food bank usage, with 64% experiencing food insecurity and over one in four accessing a food bank.

Table 1: Incidence of food insecurity (six-item module) and food bank usage by employment status (n = 10,004)

	RATE OF FOOD INSECURITY	% ACCESSED FOOD BANK IN LAST 12 MONTHS
Total	39	10
Full-time	41	8
Part-time	50	16
Self-employed	39	11
Unemployed and seeking work	64	27
Unemployed and not seeking work	58	23
Casual/On-call/Day labour	49	18
Retired	21	5
Parental leave	52	21

For source of data, see footnote 40.

SPOTLIGHT: EXPLORING THE EXTENT OF FOOD INSECURITY AND FOOD BANK USAGE AMONG THOSE EMPLOYED IN THE GENERAL POPULATION

2. NO SEGMENT OF THE JOB MARKET IS UNTOUCHED BY FOOD INSECURITY, BUT FOOD-INSECURITY RATES ARE HIGHER AMONG THOSE IN BLUE COLLAR JOBS (SUCH AS LABOUR, MANUAL WORK, CONSTRUCTION, SERVICE, OR RETAIL).

The overall rate of food insecurity among people who are employed is 42%. People who work in jobs traditionally categorized as blue collar experience higher rates of food insecurity (49%) than people in jobs traditionally categorized as professional or white collar (33 %); 13% of blue collar workers accessed a food bank in the last year.

Workers in labour market sectors that are more likely to have precarious and part-time hours experience among the highest rates of food insecurity, with servers/bartenders showing the highest prevalence (66%), followed by workers in construction (57%) and retail (55%). One quarter of those who work in construction or are servers/bartenders have accessed a food bank in the last 12 months, and nearly one in five who do labour or other manual work have accessed a food bank.

Receptionists, health care workers and people in manufacturing assembly, childcare, and skilled trades also see higher than average rates of food bank usage.

Table 2: Incidence of food insecurity (six-item module) and food bank usage, by employment type and employment classification, among those currently employed

	% of those living in a food-insecure household (currently employed) (*n* = 6369)	% accessed food bank in last 12 months (*n* = 10,004)
	EMPLOYMENT TYPE	
Total	42	10
Receptionist	52	11
Labour/Manual work	53	18
Construction	57	24
Server/Bartender	66	24
Frontline service worker	42	11
Retail	55	16
Manufacturing assembly	46	13
Childcare	51	15
Administrative support	43	7
Skilled trades	48	10
Health care worker (nurses, medical assistants, personal support)	49	12
Other blue collar jobs	44	14
Teacher	30	5
Entry-level professional	38	9
Middle management	29	4
Upper management	32	7
CFO, COO, CEO, CTO	34	7
Professional designation (e.g., lawyer, engineer, etc.)	27	6
Other white collar jobs	39	10
	JOB CLASSIFICATION	
Working class/Blue collar	49	13
Professional/White collar	33	7

SPOTLIGHT: EXPLORING THE EXTENT OF FOOD INSECURITY AND FOOD BANK USAGE AMONG THOSE EMPLOYED IN THE GENERAL POPULATION

3. GIVEN THE NOTABLE INCREASE IN THE PROPORTION OF RACIALIZED PEOPLE AND RECENT NEWCOMERS AMONG PEOPLE WHO ARE EMPLOYED AND ACCESSING FOOD BANKS IN THE PAST SEVERAL YEARS, WE TOOK A CLOSER LOOK AT THOSE SEGMENTS OF THE POPULATION. THE RESULTS SHOW THAT EMPLOYED RACIALIZED AND INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS EXPERIENCE A HIGHER PREVALENCE OF FOOD INSECURITY AND FOOD BANK USE THAN THOSE WHO ARE NON-INDIGENOUS AND NON-RACIALIZED, AND THAT THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN LIVING IN CANADA FOR LESS THAN 10 YEARS AND ARE EMPLOYED ALSO EXPERIENCE A HIGHER PREVALENCE OF FOOD INSECURITY AND FOOD BANK USE COMPARED TO THOSE WHO WERE BORN IN CANADA OR HAVE LIVED HERE FOR 10 YEARS OR MORE. IT IS IMPORTANT TO NOTE THAT THESE GROUPS ARE NOT MUTUALLY EXCLUSIVE AND OFTEN INTERSECT.

Table 3: Incidence of food insecurity (six-item module) and food bank usage, by racial identity among those currently employed

	% of those living in a food-insecure household (currently employed) (*n* = 6369)	% accessed food bank in last 12 months (*n* = 10,004)
Indigenous	52	21
Black	58	23
People of colour	52	16
Caucasian/non-racialized	37	8

Table 4: Incidence of food insecurity (six-item module) and food bank usage, by length of time in Canada

	% of those living in a food-insecure household (currently employed) (*n* = 6369)	% accessed food bank in last 12 months (*n* = 10,004)
Born in Canada	39	9
Less than 2 years	67	28
2–5 years	58	25
6–9 years	57	19
10+ years	41	8

LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS
HOUSING TYPE

"HOUSING IS A HUGE ISSUE IN OUR AREA. SEVERAL GENERATIONS AND FRIENDS ARE LIVING TOGETHER TO BE ABLE TO AFFORD RENT."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Market rental

Market rentals remain the most consistent housing type for households that are accessing food banks. They represent 70.3% of all housing tenure arrangements. This finding is consistent with other research findings that show increased rates of food insecurity among market renters compared to homeowners. In addition, the MDI shows that nearly 42% of renters live in poverty.[44]

Some key characteristics of people who are accessing food banks and live in market rent housing are consistent with characteristics of people considered "recent" renters (those who have been living in their residence for less than a year) as identified by Statistics Canada.

Recent renters pay up to 20% more in shelter costs than non-recent renters[45] and are more likely to be in at least one of the following categories: recent newcomers; Latin American, Arab, or Black; living under the official poverty line; or living in downtown cores.[46] Similarly, food bank clients, including those who have been living in Canada for less than 10 years, or those who live in larger population centres of 100,000 people or more, are more likely to be living in market rent housing.[47]

Unhoused or other

The number of food bank clients who are unhoused or have other living arrangements — including temporary or makeshift accommodations such as vehicles, hotels, and couch surfing — has increased significantly from 2019 — from 6% to 8.7%. This housing category is now the third most common one among food bank clients, with market rentals and subsidized housing being the most common. This reflects the ongoing impacts of housing inflation and the affordability crisis in both urban and rural areas.

"MANY OF OUR PARTNER AGENCIES SERVE UNHOUSED INDIVIDUALS WHO RELY ON SPECIALTY FOOD ITEMS, AND THE DEMAND CONTINUES TO OUTPACE OUR AVAILABLE RESOURCES."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, BRITISH COLUMBIA

[44] Uppal, S. (2023, November 14). Food insecurity among Canadian families. *Insights on Canadian Society*. Statistics Canada. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2023001/article/00013-eng.htm|
Mendelson, M., Notten, G., Matern, R., & Seer, S. (2024). *Poverty in Canada through a deprivation lens*. Food Banks Canada. https://fbcblobstorage.blob.core.windows.net/wordpress/2024/06/FBC_2024PovertyInCanada_ENG_v6.pdf

[45] MacIsaac, S., & Wavrock, D. (2025, August 27). Renters' shelter costs by duration of tenancy. *Economic and Social Reports*. Statistics Canada. https://doi.org/10.25318/36280001202500800003-eng

[46] Statistics Canada. (2023, October 04). *A tale of two renters: Housing affordability among recent and existing renters in Canada*. https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/98-200-X/2021016/98-200-X2021016-eng.cfm

[47] Food Banks Canada. (2024). *HungerCount 2024*. https://foodbankscanada.ca/hunger-in-canada/hungercount/

GENDER

"HIGH COST OF HOUSING, LOW WAGES, CONTINUING UNEXPECTED EXPENSES WHILE WORKING WITH A VERY LIMITED BUDGET AND WE ARE SEEING AN INCREASE IN DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WHICH LEADS TO FAMILY SEPARATION AND GREAT FINANCIAL HARDSHIP TO THE PARTNER EXPERIENCING THE VIOLENCE."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ALBERTA

Women comprise 51% of food bank clients. However, the gender gap widens significantly when we look at the intersection of food insecurity and other variables such as household composition and health status. For example, the results from the most recent Canadian Income Survey make clear that individuals in single-parent families, especially those with a female head of household, are more likely to experience food insecurity (52.1%) than couples with children (28.6%) or single-parent families with a male head of household (30.3%).[48]

Additionally, families with a female major income earner are more likely to report food insecurity than those with a male major income earner,[49] and women in food-insecure households are also more likely to experience negative mental and physical health effects compared to men.[50] Food programs and organizations that deal specifically with women's issues, such as women's shelters, have referred to how many women living in difficult or dangerous situations are forced into staying because the eroded social safety net has limited their options for relocating. This is a particular challenge for women with uncertain immigration statuses and women experiencing intimate partner violence.

[48] Statistics Canada. (2025, May 01). Table 4: Persons living in a household that experienced food insecurity by selected family type, Canada, 2019 to 2023. *The Daily*. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/250501/t004b-eng.htm
[49] Uppal. Food insecurity among Canadian families.
[50] Canadian Community Health Survey: Public Use Microdata File, 2019/2020. Calculations made by authors.

LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS
INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

In 2025, 8.8% of food bank users identified as Indigenous, despite Indigenous Peoples representing only about 5% of the Canadian population. While this figure has declined slightly in recent years, it does not necessarily indicate a reduction in food insecurity among Indigenous households. Instead, the decline is more reflective of shifting demographics in the overall food bank population and the fluctuating proportion of Indigenous clients accessing services at a given time. Rates of Indigenous food bank use are particularly sensitive to the timing of government transfers, such as band distributions or federal benefits, which can temporarily reduce demand during data collection periods.

Findings from the most recent Canadian Income Survey show that disparities in food insecurity persist — 39.9% of individuals who are Inuit, Métis, or First Nations experience food insecurity, compared to 25.5% of the total population.[51] This disparity arises from the structural and systemic barriers that place Indigenous communities at heightened risk. In remote and northern regions, the high cost of living further compounds Indigenous food insecurity. Elevated energy prices drive up the cost of food, transportation, fuel, and utilities, placing additional strain on households already facing limited economic opportunities.

Client data from March 2025 revealed that Indigenous food bank clients were far more likely to rely on fixed incomes — for example, social assistance, disability benefits, or the Canada Child Benefit — than the overall food bank population (69% versus 44%). Households that rely on fixed payments have little flexibility to absorb inflationary pressures, making them particularly vulnerable to spikes in food and energy costs. Food banks whose clientele is primarily Indigenous reported a greater proportion of single-parent households (21% versus 18% across all food banks) and single-person households (48% versus 42% across all food banks). Both groups face elevated risks of poverty and food insecurity because of reduced economies of scale and the challenges of managing household expenses on limited incomes.

The consequences of food insecurity are not only material but also health-related. Indigenous adults who experience food insecurity face significantly higher odds of chronic physical and mental health conditions compared to food-secure non-Indigenous adults. They are also more likely to self-report poor health and diminished mental well-being, outcomes that reflect the cumulative effects of inadequate nutrition, chronic financial stress, and systemic inequities in access to health and social supports.[52]

[51] Statistics Canada. Table 13-10-0835-01.
[52] Willows, N. D., Loewen, O. K., Blanchet, R., Godrich, S. L., Veugelers, P. J., & Alexander Research Committee. (2024). Indigenous identity and household food insecurity are associated with poor health outcomes in Canada. *Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research*, 85(2), 76–82. https://doi.org/10.3148/cjdpr-2023-024

LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS
RACIALIZED GROUPS

"MANY MEMBERS OF THE AFRICAN, CARIBBEAN AND BLACK (ACB) COMMUNITY FACE BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT, AFFORDABLE HOUSING, AND EDUCATION DUE TO SYSTEMIC RACISM. THIS RESULTS IN LOWER INCOME LEVELS AND INCREASED FOOD INSECURITY."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ONTARIO

In 2025, 46.2% of people who accessed food banks in Canada identified as members of racialized groups, compared to 45.5% in 2024 and 39.3% in 2023. The results from the most recent Canadian Income Survey show that 32.2% of racialized individuals, and nearly 47% of those who are Black, are experiencing food insecurity, compared to 25.5% of the total population.[53]

The increase in the rates of employed people accessing food banks since 2022 coincides with the increase in the rates of racialized communities accessing food banks during this period.[54] When looking at food-insecurity rates among employed people in the general population, the prevalence of food insecurity among those who are Black is 58%; among other people of colour, 52%; and among the non-racialized, non-Indigenous population, 37%.[55]

These findings are consistent with findings from other studies that show a higher prevalence of "working poor" among racialized populations. For example, an August 2025 Statistics Canada report shows that people who belong to racialized groups are more likely to be earning below the low pay threshold (defined as hourly earnings that are less than two thirds of the median) compared to those who are non-racialized and non-Indigenous.[56]

[53] Statistics Canada. *Table 13-10-0835-01*.

[54] In 2022, racialized communities represented 32.5% of people accessing food banks.

[55] See Table 3 in this report.

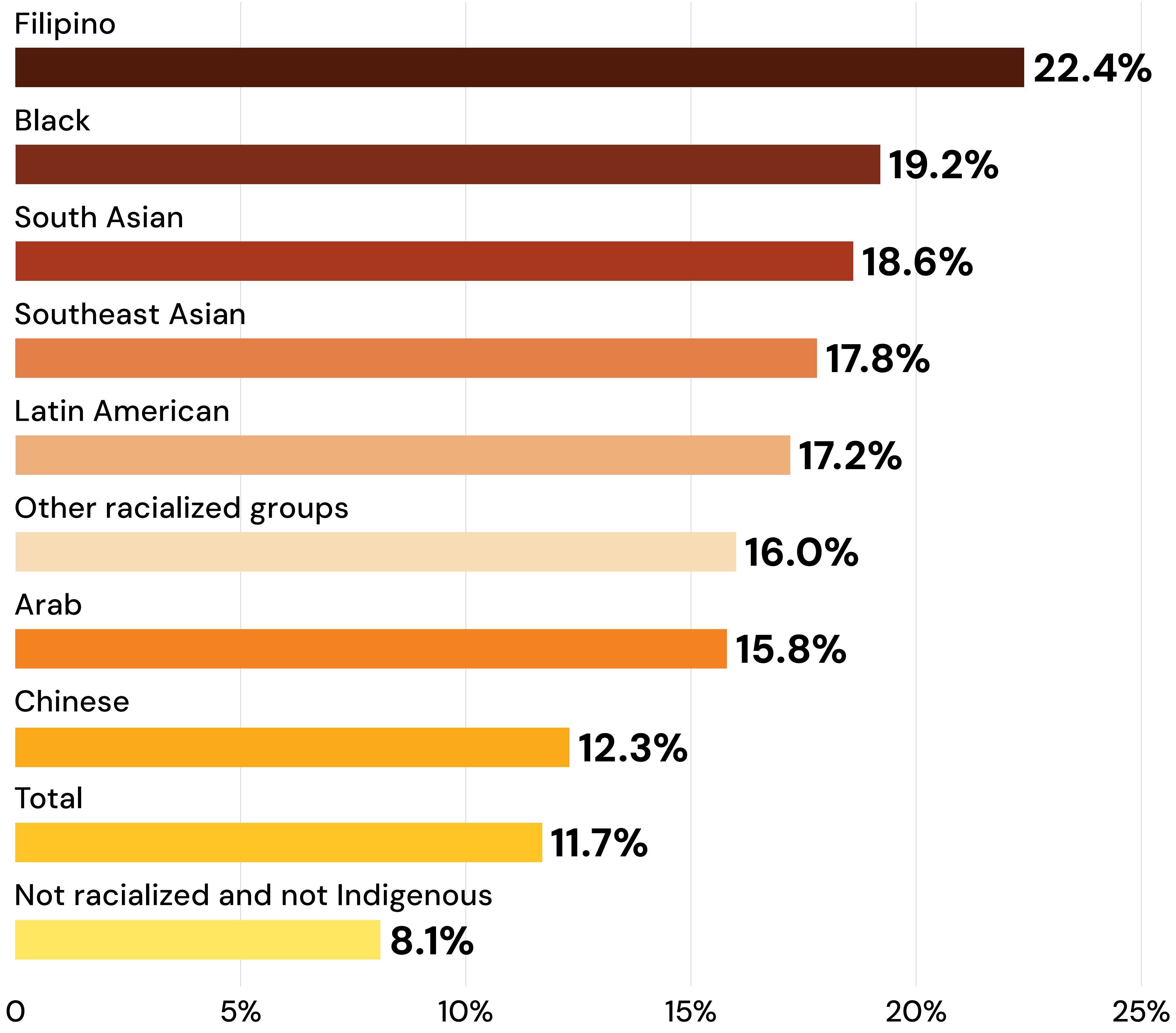
[56] Gill, J. (2025, August 18.) Employees with low pay, 2024. *Quality of Employment in Canada*. Statistics Canada. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/14-28-0001/2025001/article/00002-eng.htm?utm_source=mstatcan&utm_medium=eml&utm_campaign=statcan-statcan-mstatcan

LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS
RACIALIZED GROUPS

According to results based on information collected from a sample of food banks in Food Banks Canada's intake database, people from racialized groups who access food banks are more likely to have employment income as their main source of income (20%) compared to clients who identify as white (14%).

Compared to total clients, people from racialized groups who use food banks are more likely to live in market rental homes and face the compounding effects of having to rely on low-wage, part-time, or precarious employment, paying a high portion of their income on rent. It should be noted that there is a lack of government support programs that target benefits to those who are employed or live in market rental housing.

Figure 13: Percentage of employees earning below the low pay threshold, 25–54 year olds, by racialized group, Canada 2024



SOURCE OF DATA: Chart reproduced from Gill, J. (2025, August 18.) Employees with low pay, 2024. *Quality of Employment in Canada*. Statistics Canada. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/14-28-0001/2025001/article/00002-eng.htm?utm_source=mstatcan&utm_medium=eml&utm_campaign=statcan-statcan-mstatcan

"FACTORS IN OUR AREA [LEADING TO INCREASED USAGE] INCLUDE HOUSING AND FOOD COSTS, AS WELL AS INSUFFICIENT SUPPORTS FOR NEWCOMERS WHEN THEY ARRIVE. DIFFICULTY ACCESSING EMPLOYMENT WITH A LIVING WAGE ALSO APPEARS TO PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE FOR NEWCOMERS."

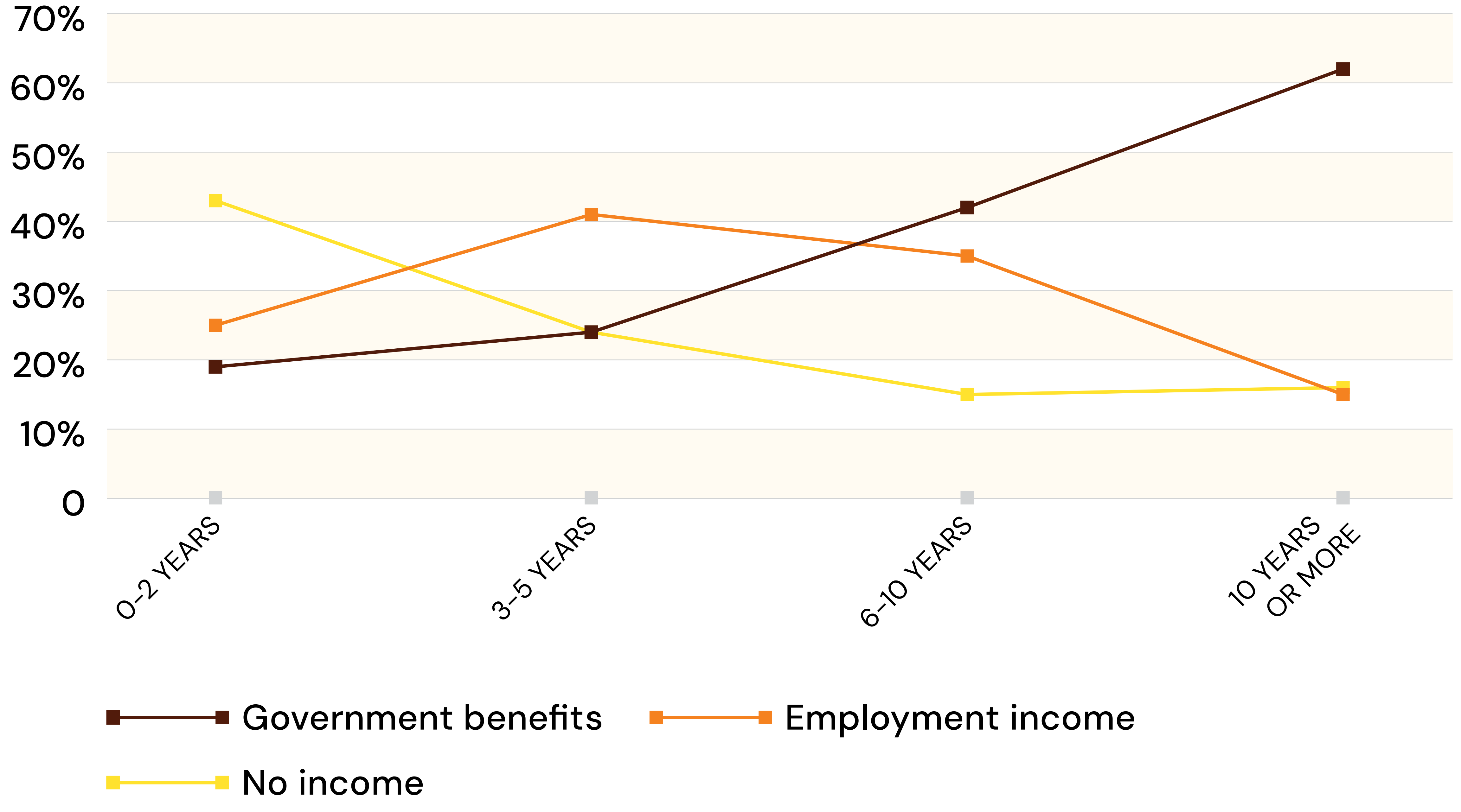
SURVEY RESPONDENT, ONTARIO

Newcomers to Canada who have been in the country for 10 years or less account for nearly 34% of food bank clients, which is stable compared to last year but a significant increase from 2019, when they represented 13% of clients.

Newcomers who are using food banks are more likely to be earning income from employment or not earning any income, compared to people who were born in Canada or have been living here for longer than 10 years. People in the latter groups are more likely to be receiving federal or provincial benefits.

Figure 14 shows the trajectory of the immigrant experience. In their early years, many new immigrants who use food banks are either not eligible for or unaware of various benefits, such as provincially regulated social assistance and disability support and federal benefits such as the Canada Child Benefit. Food bank users who were born in Canada or have lived here for more than 10 years are more likely to access government benefits.

Figure 14: Primary income source by length of time in Canada, percent of households using food banks



SOURCE OF DATA: Food Banks Canada intake database. Results may not be geographically representative. (*N*=>200,000).

LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS
LENGTH OF TIME IN CANADA

Compared to the general population in Canada, newcomers in general are more likely to be unemployed or working in lower-paid, insecure jobs, with nearly 3 in 10 recent newcomers earning below the low pay threshold.[57] Those who have temporary work permits are vulnerable to exploitation by their employers. Those who are skilled workers or professionals can face far more complex environments than their counterparts who were born in Canada, and may need to put in more time and effort to secure employment in their fields.[58] Despite these hurdles, and even though many are required to pay taxes, newcomers are the least able to access employment insurance benefits.[59]

With the additional pressure of high housing costs, recent newcomers who are employed face higher rates of food insecurity than newcomers who have lived in Canada for 10 years or more or people who were born in Canada. For example, 67% of recent newcomers who have lived in Canada for two years or less and are currently employed experience food insecurity, compared to 37% of people who were born in Canada and are currently employed.[60]

[57] Gill. Employees with low pay, 2024.
[58] Nohl, A.-M., Schittenhelm, K., & Schmidtke, O. (2014). *Work in transition: Cultural capital and highly skilled migrants' passages into the labour market*. University of Toronto Press. https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442668737
[59] Food Banks Canada. (2025, July 17). *Food Banks Canada challenges assumptions about newcomers' circumstances*. https://foodbankscanada.ca/food-banks-canada-data-challenges-assumptions-about-newcomers-circumstances/
[60] See Table 4 in this report.

FOOD INSECURITY, FOOD ACCESS, AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN CANADA'S NORTH

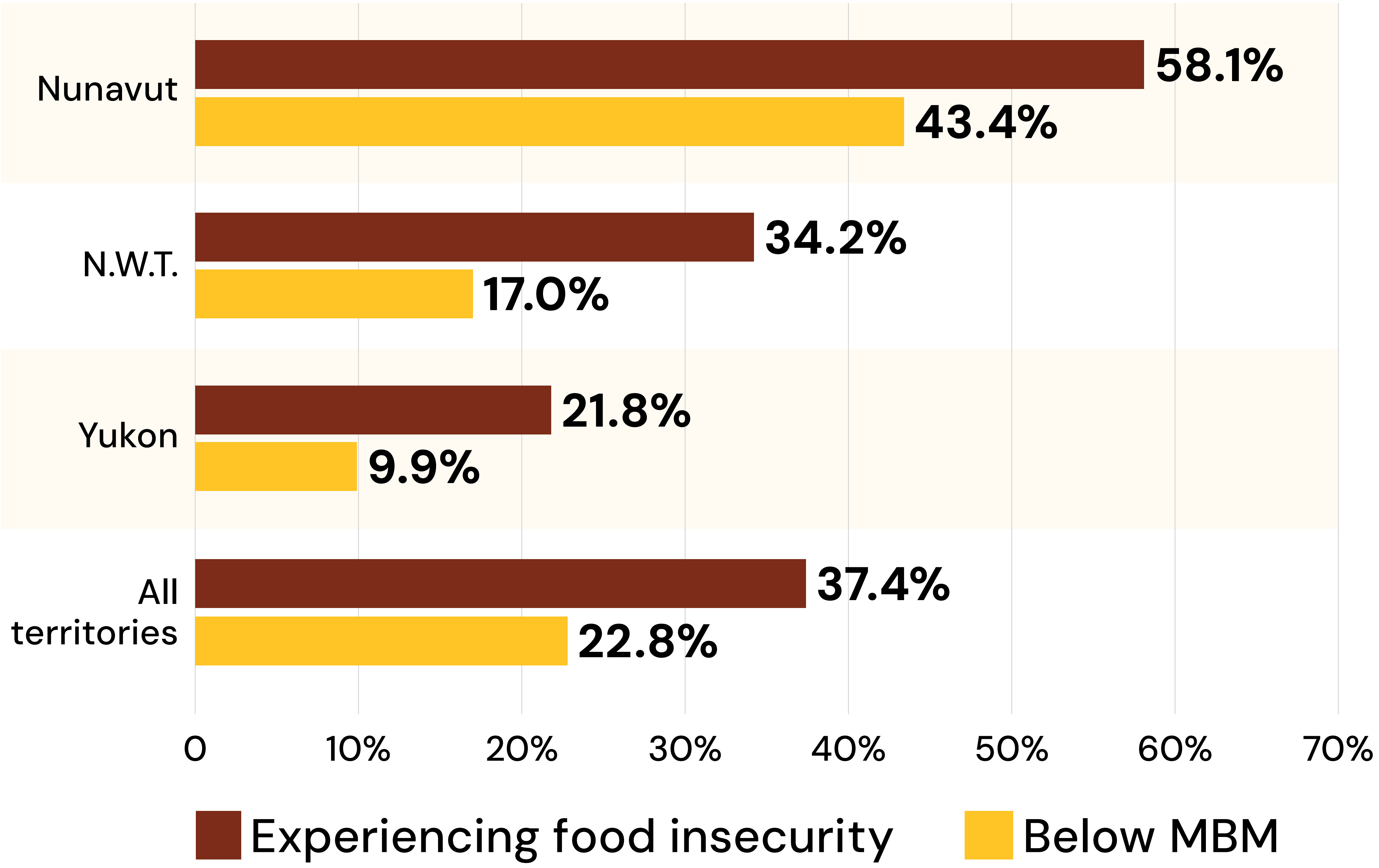
Poverty and food-insecurity rates are higher across the territories than they are in the provinces. In 2025, just over 22% of people in the territories lived under the official poverty line, compared to 10.2% in the provinces. The food-insecurity rate for the territories is 37.4%, compared to 25.5% for the provinces, and has increased by 11 percentage points since 2021.[61] Nunavut has the highest poverty (34%) and food-insecurity (58%) rates among all the territories.

People who live in the North contend with food costs that can be double or triple the costs in southern regions of the country. For example, the latest available figures (from 2022) indicate that the estimated average monthly cost of a nutritious food basket in Northern communities for a reference family of four was $1,805.44, over $700 more than the cost of a nutritious food basket in Ottawa in that year, even after subsidies are applied.[62]

More recent information, from between 2022 and 2024, shows that the cost of food in Qikiqtaaluk, Nunavut's largest region, increased at a much faster rate than in the rest of Canada. The price of a comprehensive basket of goods — or even a selection of the 23 most commonly purchased products — rose by more than 20% in Qikiqtaaluk, compared to an average of 12% nationally.[63]

Numerous factors contribute to greater food costs in the North, including higher costs to build and maintain a store (including high electricity costs), the need to pay adequate wages to workers to accommodate the higher cost of living, greater risk of spoilage due to shipment distances, and transportation costs.[64]

Figure 15: Rates of poverty and food insecurity by territory



SOURCE OF DATA: Statistics Canada. (2025). Canadian Income Survey, 2023. *The Daily.* https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/250501/dq250501b-eng.htm

[61] Statistics Canada. (2024, June 19). Canadian income survey: Territorial estimates, 2022. The *Daily*. https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/240619/dq240619d-eng.htm

[62] Government of Canada. (2022). *Cost of the revised Northern food basket in 2021-2022*. https://www.nutritionnorthcanada.gc.ca/eng/1745933919234/1745947912822
Ottawa Public Health. (2022). *2022 nutritious food basket and food insecurity in Ottawa: Monitoring food affordability in Ottawa*. https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/resources/Documents/NFB-2022-Report-EN.pdf
Weekly cost of Northern nutritious food basket multiplied by four for comparison purposes.

[63] Li, N. (2024). *Technical report on 2022–2023 food price increases in Qikiqtaaluk region, Nunavut*. ICFI Evaluation Team. Toronto Metropolitan University.

[64] Food Banks Canada. (2023). *The journey of food to remote Northern communities*. https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/e32626c229e945a0a5939fe37bb82a12

FOOD INSECURITY, FOOD ACCESS, AND CLIMATE CHANGE IN CANADA'S NORTH

FOOD ACCESS, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY

Food insecurity in the North is complex and extends beyond the high cost of food. It also involves limited choice, restricted access, poor quality and availability of foods, and broader challenges tied to cultural disruption and the impacts of climate change.[65]

In regard to traditional food access, climate change has been associated with a range of challenges, including reduced animal and plant populations, shorter harvesting seasons, dangerous hunting conditions, and increased financial costs for hunting-related expenses, such as higher fuel costs for unpredictable weather or longer hunting trips. Access to traditional food is a critical component of ensuring food security in Indigenous communities across the North and helping reduce the pressure of relying on expensive, market-based foods.

Colonial policies and market forces have been eroding Indigenous food security for decades,[66] but communities across the North are finding innovative ways to reclaim food sovereignty.[67] They include initiatives that support increased traditional food access — for example, community hunts — and local food production — for example, greenhouses, small-scale farming, and food hubs.[68]

[65] Guan, J., Wang, J. C.-H., & Beardy, B. (2023). Indigenous food insecurity is complex—why are the policy indicators simple? *Canadian Journal of Public Health* [Advance online publication: DOI:10.2139/ssrn.5188371].

[66] Burnett, K., & Hay, T. (2023). *Plundering the North: A history of settler colonialism, corporate welfare, and food insecurity*. University of Manitoba Press.

[67] In the North, food sovereignty incorporates "Inuit knowledge, language, culture continuity and community self-sufficiency" in regards to food management. See Qikiqtani Inuit Association. (2019). *Food sovereignty and harvesting*. https://www.qia.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Food-Sovereignty-and-Harvesting.pdf

[68] Zagar, A. (2023). *The impact of climate change on traditional food systems: Understanding the challenges and risks that climate change brings to traditional food systems in remote communities in Northern Canada.* Food Banks Canada https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/7292a3b644374d0281f2e7c2260f3327

JORDAN'S PRINCIPLE AND INUIT CHILD FIRST INITIATIVE

"WITH INCREASED FOOD AND FREIGHT COSTS, AND CUTS TO JORDAN'S PRINCIPLE FUNDING, FAMILIES ACROSS THE NORTH ARE STRUGGLING TO ACCESS HEALTHY FOODS. MANY INDIGENOUS FAMILIES ARE REACHING OUT ON A DAILY BASIS WITH FOOD REQUESTS, INCLUDING TRADITIONAL FOODS THAT CANNOT BE MET BY LOCAL FOOD PROGRAMS AND FOOD BANKS."

SURVEY RESPONDENT, YUKON

Insufficient government support became a bigger concern this year, as the federal government announced in February that it was going to find "new ways to process requests to expedite decision-making and address the increased demand." This would place limitations on the Jordan's Principle, a child-first principle in Canada that ensures First Nations children have access to the health, social, and educational services they need and that there will be no delays or denials because of jurisdictional disputes over funding.

Jordan's Principle was established in 2007 after the death of Jordan River Anderson, a First Nations child from Manitoba who spent his entire life in hospital because different levels of government could not agree on who should pay for his at-home care. It was created to prevent such jurisdictional disputes from ever again delaying or denying access to essential health, social, or educational services for First Nations children.

Jordan's Principle funding has expanded to address not only medical and educational needs but also the broader social determinants of health, including food security. Through Jordan's Principle, families and service providers have been able to request support for things such as healthy food programs, specialized diets for children with medical conditions, and transportation to access groceries and community meals. By recognizing food security as essential to children's well-being, Jordan's Principle became a tool that communities could use to create a more supportive environment in which children have consistent access to nutritious food. Changes to how it is administered would be destabilizing, creating uncertainty for families and service providers who rely on stable and predictable supports to meet children's basic needs.

The Hamlet Food Voucher Program, funded through the Inuit Child First Initiative (ICFI), has also provided important relief by supporting families in meeting the nutritional needs of Inuit children. Beginning in 2023, municipal governments in Nunavut successfully secured ICFI funding to extend nutrition supports to all Inuit children in their communities. By December 2024, nearly every community in the territory — except one — had implemented a voucher program, offering $500 per child for groceries, with an additional $250 for children under the age of four.[69]

The ICFI which funds health, education, and social programs for Inuit children, was set to expire March 31. It was granted a one-year extension, but the status of the funding remains unclear. New restrictions now require each child to be individually registered. This change has created major administrative burdens for communities such as Igloolik, and the future of impactful programs such as food vouchers is uncertain. Service providers fear that critical supports for Inuit families will be disrupted or even discontinued.[70]

[69] Sinha, V., Wheatley, D., Penney, J., & Li, N. (2025, February 27). Inuit children in Nunavut face a preventable food security crisis. *The Conversation*. https://theconversation.com/inuit-children-in-nunavut-face-a-preventable-food-security-crisis-250004
[70] Antunes, J. (2025, March 27). Inuit Child First Initiative extended, but nobody is sure when money will flow. *Nunatsiaq News*. https://nunatsiaq.com/stories/article/inuit-child-first-initiative-extended-but-nobody-is-sure-when-money-will-flow/

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
FOOD INSECURITY UNDERMINES A STRONG CANADA

Canada is at a crossroads. This past year brought significant political change, including a new federal Liberal mandate under Prime Minister Mark Carney. While the Prime Minister's early actions suggest a shift in federal priorities — with a focus on sustainable economic growth, affordability, nation-building projects, and public sector modernization — the commitment to reducing poverty and curbing food bank reliance remains uncertain.

This domestic shift is unfolding against a backdrop of rising geopolitical tensions, threats to the global trading system, and an increasingly divided world. The combination of domestic transition, policy uncertainty, and global instability makes it harder to assess whether political will to address poverty is gaining ground or losing momentum.

Meanwhile, the need for decisive action on poverty and food insecurity has never been more urgent.

Food bank usage in Canada has surged. There were 1 million more monthly visits in 2025 than in 2019. Statistics Canada has reported a record 10 million people living in food-insecure households — an increase of 4 million over the same period. Severe food insecurity has doubled, with 2.6 million people regularly skipping meals or going entire days without eating.

Canada's food bank system was never designed to manage this level of sustained demand. Operating costs have tripled over four years, and many food banks are struggling to keep their shelves stocked. Others have been forced to cut back on food distribution or, in some cases, shut down entirely. The system is buckling under pressure.

Beyond the immediate strain on the charitable sector, the long-term consequences of widespread food insecurity are deeply concerning. The health impacts — both physical and mental — drive up costs in our health care system and erode economic productivity. There is also mounting evidence that sustained deprivation undermines public trust, weakens democratic institutions, and threatens social cohesion.

As Canada seeks to navigate the current global uncertainty and economic disruption, the fact that a quarter of its population cannot afford enough food poses a serious threat to national resilience. A strong Canada depends on tackling affordability, poverty, and food insecurity — starting now.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
KEY FEDERAL ACTIONS ON POVERTY IN 2024–25

In 2024–25, the federal government took several steps that touch on the underlying conditions contributing to poverty in Canada. While they may not represent a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy, they shape the policy environment in important ways. Key developments included:

FINALIZING THE CANADA DISABILITY BENEFIT (CDB)

After years of development, the federal government finalized the design of the Canada Disability Benefit in advance of its scheduled rollout in July 2025. While its full impact remains to be seen, the CDB represents a long-overdue income support measure for people with disabilities, one of the groups most at risk of persistent poverty. However, the current amount continues to be inadequate for many people with disabilities.

ROLLING OUT THE CANADIAN DENTAL CARE PLAN (CDCP)

The Canadian Dental Care Plan was launched in 2023, and the initial rollout throughout 2024 included seniors over 65, children under 18, and individuals who qualified for a disability tax credit.[71] All remaining eligible adults have access to the program as of May 2025. Recent evidence shows the first phase of its rollout may have contributed to the major improvement in seniors' ability to afford regular dental care.[72]

LAUNCHING A NATIONAL SCHOOL FOOD PROGRAM

The government began rolling out a national school food program — another long-standing platform commitment of the previous government. Although the program does not directly address the structural causes of food insecurity, it provides moderate affordability relief for low-income families and supports better educational outcomes for children from food-insecure households.

UPDATING THE NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY

The federal government revised its housing plan to include billions in new financing for affordable and market rent housing. While the scale of need remains enormous — millions of units are required — this represents a key investment in efforts to close the housing supply gap and ease rental pressures.

It's important to note that these actions were taken under two different governments, although both were led by the same political party. The mandate and direction of the new Carney government have identified key areas for targeted action, including getting the federal government back into the business of building homes, accelerating affordable housing construction, improving the EI system, and investing in the North. Although these commitments could contribute to poverty reduction and improved affordability, if fully implemented, more direct and structural reforms are needed if poverty rates are to decline in a meaningful way.

[71] Health Canada. (2023, December 11). *The Canadian Dental Care Plan*. Government of Canada. https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/news/2023/12/the-canadian-dental-care-plan.html
[72] Matern, R., Notten, G., & Seer, S. (2025, July 31). Don't miss the good news on poverty reduction in 2025. *Policy Options*. phttps://policyoptions.irpp.org/2025/07/poverty-reduction/

AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH TO POLICY DEVELOPMENT

It is important to remember that the experience of poverty varies greatly among different demographic groups. Vulnerable populations — for example, Indigenous people, new Canadians, racialized Canadians, people who are unhoused, single-parent families, young Canadians, and people who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+ — not only experience higher rates of poverty than other populations but also are more likely to live in precarious housing and are often less able to access support or leave poverty. As governments rebuild the social safety net in Canada, they must keep in mind these differences in experience so that no one is left behind.

We can create a Canada where no one goes hungry. Through collective action and policy change, government can reduce food insecurity by 50% by 2030.

To end food insecurity and reverse the alarming trends seen by food banks across Canada, Food Banks Canada is calling for urgent action in three key areas:

01 TACKLE THE ROOT CAUSES OF POVERTY

02 MAKE LIFE MORE AFFORDABLE

03 ADDRESS NORTHERN FOOD INSECURITY

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
TACKLE THE ROOT CAUSES OF POVERTY

People are falling through the cracks. Canada's social safety net, once strong and enviable, has become dated and ineffective in the context of the current economic situation. More people are becoming food-insecure and trapped in poverty. Alarmingly, the data shows that employed people are using food banks at a staggering rate. Government must tackle systemic poverty head on to alleviate growing food bank usage by improving Canada's EI system and repairing the social safety net.

Improve EI

To address the rising rates of food insecurity among working individuals — currently the fastest-growing group of food bank users — the federal government must provide direct support for low-income and precariously employed workers.

To effectively support this growing demographic, the federal government must modernize the EI system to reflect today's labour market realities. Reforms should include:

- Expanding access to EI for precarious, gig, and self-employed workers and reducing the number of qualifying hours.
- Enhancing the Working-While-on-Claim program, extending benefit durations to up to 52 weeks.
- Creating a permanent income support stream for displaced older workers (aged 45–65) impacted by industrial or trade-related disruptions.

These evidence-based policy measures would provide more equitable and comprehensive protection for people who are struggling to stay afloat while working.

Repair the social safety net

Repairing Canada's social safety net requires a renewed commitment to ensuring no individual falls below a minimum income threshold. A strong safety net must guarantee a basic standard of living and provide reliable support to protect people from poverty, while addressing the mental health and addiction challenges many individuals face. The federal government has taken some promising steps, such as launching the Canada Disability Benefit (CDB) and Canadian Dental Care Plan (CDCP), but these initiatives remain too limited in scope to counter the growing depth and scale of poverty. The Government of Canada's D grade in the 2025 Poverty Report Card[73] reflects this disconnect.

The federal government must act now to prevent further hardship, starting with a firm commitment to strengthen the CDB. It must:

- Improve the benefit amount to lift people with disabilities out of poverty, as intended.
- Enhance the program's eligibility and accessibility so that more people can apply and benefit from it.

Without bold, immediate action to reinforce the social safety net, poverty and food insecurity will continue to rise, undermining the long-term health and stability of communities across the country.

[73] https://foodbankscanada.ca/poverty-report-card/

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
MAKE LIFE MORE AFFORDABLE

Life has become increasingly unaffordable for many people. The cost of rent has skyrocketed and has started to hinder people's ability to buy food. Action is needed to alleviate housing costs and allow people to buy nutritious food. The Government of Canada must move quickly to build affordable homes and enact a Groceries and Essentials Benefit.

Build affordable homes

Housing affordability remains one of the most urgent and widely cited solutions to hunger and poverty in Canada. In 2025, 83% of food banks identified the need for more affordable housing as the single most important policy intervention — up from 61% in 2019. This urgency is underscored by the dramatic rise in housing costs for low-income households, who now spend an average of 66% of their disposable income on shelter. Renters in market-rate housing, especially racialized individuals and recent newcomers living in large urban centres, are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity.

To improve housing affordability, the federal government must act swiftly and decisively on both the supply and demand sides. The Government must:

- Accelerate the operations of Build Canada Homes to deliver tens of thousands of non-market and affordable rental units annually by leveraging public land and working in partnership with organizations that recognize the value of building such units.
- Finalize a national housing accord with provinces and municipalities to align funding, reduce development charges, and streamline zoning reforms.
- Introduce a national rent assistance program — modelled on Manitoba's successful Rent Assist program — to immediately relieve pressure on renters who have low incomes.

Combining large-scale public building with targeted tenant support is the clearest path to repairing Canada's broken housing system.

Support food affordability

The rising cost of food is felt most acutely and frequently, literally week after week, at the grocery store. Food is now the top reason food bank clients cite for seeking support, mirroring broader public concern about the impact of food prices on household finances. The dramatic 25% rise in food prices over four years has not been matched by wage growth or adjustments to social assistance, leaving many Canadians increasingly unable to afford even basic necessities.

To provide immediate relief, the federal government must:

- Introduce a Groceries and Essentials Benefit targeted at Canadians who have low incomes.
- Model the benefit on the proven GST tax credit system, as recommended by the Affordability Action Council.
- Increase the CWB or GST credit top-ups during periods of food price shocks.

Implementing these measures would offer direct, timely assistance to households disproportionately affected by food inflation, while also reinforcing public trust in the government's ability to respond to a worsening affordability crisis.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
ADDRESS NORTHERN FOOD INSECURITY

Food insecurity in Northern Canada is both more severe and more complex than in the provinces, driven by a combination of extreme poverty rates, unaffordable food prices, and systemic barriers to access.

Over 22% of people in the territories live below the poverty line — more than double the national average — and 37.5% live in food-insecure households. The crisis is most acute in Nunavut, where nearly 60% of residents experience food insecurity. In addition to high prices, residents deal with poor-quality food, restricted choice, limited availability, and climate change–driven threats to traditional food sources, all of which contribute to a deeper and more entrenched crisis.

To meaningfully reduce food insecurity in the North, policy must shift toward long-term, systemic solutions rooted in equity and Indigenous partnerships.

- Nutrition North Canada must be redesigned in collaboration with Northern and Indigenous communities to ensure that food cost relief is both targeted and locally accountable.
- The Northern Residents Deduction should be transformed into a refundable, progressive benefit that provides greater support to low- and modest-income households, rather than disproportionately benefiting higher earners.

Although food subsidies and tax relief can help, they are only part of the solution. Addressing Northern food insecurity requires a coordinated federal strategy that tackles affordability, infrastructure gaps, climate resilience, and Indigenous food sovereignty head on.

OUR METHODOLOGY

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 improve it, we would like to hear from you. Please get in touch at info@foodbankscanada.ca and put HungerCount in the subject line of your message.

OUR METHODOLOGY

Food Bank Universe

Within the Food Banks Canada's network there are 10 provincial organizations; 1 territorial association; 814 affiliate food banks, with nearly 3,000 agencies included in them; and 3 direct affiliates in the 2 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. We use March as the study period because it is an unexceptional month, without predictable high- or low-use patterns. By using March consistently, we can track usage patterns across the years.

To maximize data integrity and minimize interpretation errors, the survey includes examples of how the data is collected and categorized. It also includes definitions of the categories.

The survey is sent to food banks and meal programs through the provincial organizations and directly to food banks not affiliated with Food Banks Canada. It is available through an online link and as a PDF and a Word document. In some cases, phone interviews are also necessary. The food bank network of Feed Ontario, Feed Nova Scotia, and approximately 180 food banks in other provinces, including non-affiliated Salvation Army food banks, use an online program called Link2Feed. These food banks were given the option to skip client usage questions in the online survey because their data could be obtained through Link2Feed.

A Note on Visits

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

A "visit" counts each person once for each time they receive 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 as four visits. A single parent with two children who accessed the food bank twice in March would count as a total of six visits.

Each food bank determines the number of times people in their community can access its services, driven by their mission, community need, and available resources. In some cases, people can visit a food bank multiple times per month; in other cases, people can visit less than once per month. Most food banks in Canada assist clients once per month.

The 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 week's 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 their hamper programs, enabling them to quickly distribute specific food items that may be in abundance at a given time, such as fruits, vegetables, and bread. Because these food banks must distribute a high volume of these foods very quickly due to their perishability, they offer 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, recovery program pick-ups have been excluded from the total number of visits.

Analyzing the Data

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

We recognize that errors may arise during data collection processes. Food Banks Canada undertakes extensive follow-up with food bank outliers (those that deviate +/-25% in any given year); however, the +25% range produced too many outliers this year because of the dramatic rise in the number of clients seen by food banks across the country, and so this range was altered on a province-by-province basis to target true outliers. The analysis was performed by Food Banks Canada staff using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). The overall usage number is based on primary data received directly from

OUR METHODOLOGY

organizations. We combine total visits from all responding valid surveys and calculate household results using only surveys with complete data in those categories.

The data was processed in SPSS and descriptive analysis was conducted. Proportions of categorical variables were calculated and compared with other categories of the variables and with the findings of the previous surveys. The outputs were also tabulated and plotted in an Excel spreadsheet.

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

To analyze responses to client demographics, a sample of food banks that responded to the relevant questions was used. Response rates for the demographic questions remain consistent year to year. Demographic data is analyzed at the national level to ensure a robust sample representation, with missing cases excluded from the analysis. Where comparisons of demographic items are presented, samples were tested for statistical significance using t-tests to look for differences between two independent samples.

An additional analysis of demographic data was conducted using client-level, disaggregated data from the Food Banks Canada intake database. The data was collected from a sample of food banks that use the system and consented to share their data with Food Banks Canada. While the sample is numerically robust, it may not be geographically representative.

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 if there was a reporting error in a previous year. In these instances, corrections can be made to data from past years. Discrepancies are often minor and do not impact the overall trends. Food Banks Canada makes every effort to ensure that the data presented is as accurate as possible.

Methodology Review

In the fall of 2018, the Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC) conducted a review of the HungerCount methodology and made several recommendations for the coming years. Overall, the SRDC found that HungerCount is a survey program that provides rich data about vulnerable, and typically under-represented, populations. HungerCount provides a robust snapshot in any given year of food bank use, 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.

OUR METHODOLOGY
FOOD PROGRAMS PARTICIPATING IN THE HUNGERCOUNT 2025 SURVEY

PROVINCE	# OF AFFILIATES	# OF ORGANIZATIONS PARTICIPATING	FOOD BANK ONLY	MEAL ONLY	BOTH	# OF AGENCIES AND COMMUNITY GROUPS SUPPORTED	TOTAL
AB	112	124	96	1	27	985	**1,109**
BC	111	133	92	1	40	831	**964**
MB	109	115	71	0	44	303	**418**
NB	64	67	49	9	9	90	**157**
NL	60	60	52	0	8	9	**69**
NS	139	141	84	34	23	75	**216**
NT	2	4	3	0	1	0	**4**
NU	1	3	1	1	1	0	**3**
ON	139	646	452	82	112	575	**1,221**
PE	8	8	4	0	4	10	**18**
QC	33	1,395	372	519	504	0	**1,395**
SK	35	39	28	1	10	77	**116**
YT	1	2	2	0	0	7	**9**
Total	814	**2,737**	1,306	648	783	**2,962**	**5,699**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Food Banks Canada would like to thank the hundreds of thousands of people who access food programs, and the thousands of staff and volunteers who contribute information to the HungerCount report every year. Without their efforts and participation this research would not be possible. Special thanks go to Martin Gooch, Chief Executive Officer of VCM International, and André Turcotte, Senior Advisor at Pollara Strategic Insights, for their assistance.

We would also like to thank the HungerCount 2025 Provincial Coordinators:

Dan Huang-Taylor
Food Banks BC (British Columbia)

Shawna Bissell
Food Banks Alberta (Alberta)

Dawn MacDougall
Food Banks Alberta (Alberta)

Michael Kincade
Food Banks of Saskatchewan (Saskatchewan)

Meaghan Erbus
Harvest Manitoba (Manitoba)

Amanda Colella-King
Feed Ontario (Ontario)

Erin Waddington
Feed Ontario (Ontario)

Noémie Robidoux
Food Banks of Quebec (Quebec)

Stéphane Sirois
Food Depot Alimentaire (New Brunswick)

Carrie Delaney
Food Depot Alimentaire (New Brunswick)

Epiphany Spielman
Feed Nova Scotia (Nova Scotia)

Nathan Corkum
Feed Nova Scotia (Nova Scotia)

Mike MacDonald
Upper Room Food Bank (Prince Edward Island)

Tina Bishop
Community Food Sharing Association
(Newfoundland and Labrador)

Heather Sealey
Food Bank Society of the Yukon (Yukon)

Design by
The Garden

Copy editing by
Lesley Cameron

Food Banks Canada Banques alimentaires Canada

HUNGERCOUNT WAS PREPARED BY

Richard Matern, Sofia Seer, Phil Ozga, Thomas Simpson, Dana Vreeswijk, Sarah Faubert, and Khoaja Khaled

Recommended citation: Food Banks Canada (2025). *HungerCount 2025*. Mississauga: Food Banks Canada.