

# POPULATION BASED SURVEY REPORT



Food Banks  
Canada

Banques  
alimentaires  
Canada

From Peer Insights to a Population-Based Survey: Challenges and opportunities faced by people who are employed and experiencing food insecurity

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# INTRODUCTION

In 2024, Food Banks Canada (FBC) conducted a community-based research (CBR) study to examine food insecurity among people who are employed. That study highlighted the growing number of individuals who, despite participating in the labour market, continue to struggle to afford adequate food due to rising living costs, low or unstable wages, and limited access to supports. Building on these findings, FBC subsequently undertook a population-based survey to assess the prevalence and distribution of experiences of food insecurity across a broader sample and to better understand how widespread the challenges are among working households. When read together, the two studies provide complementary insights, combining in-depth qualitative perspectives with population-level data to inform policy and program responses. Findings from our CBR project on the challenges faced by people who are both working and experiencing food insecurity sent a clear message: People are feeling trapped.

The affordability of basic goods and services emerged as a key reason for this feeling. Many people are feeling stuck in an endless cycle of trying to make ends meet in the face of a relentless affordability crisis. However, affordability is only one of several interrelated challenges within and outside of the labour market.

Those challenges include a growing gap between wages and the costs of living, prohibitive employment-related costs such as transportation (for commuting) and childcare, and a lack of benefits and job security. In addition, many of the project participants noted that they could not access government benefits because they were in a policy “no man’s land” rooted in outdated assumptions that a job guarantees financial stability, security, and an escape from poverty.



In order to explore the extent to which the themes, insights, and observations generated from the interviews in the CBR project applied to the general population of Canada, we used our findings to inform the development of a national, population-based survey with a sample of 10,000 people. With this large sample size, we could reliably segment the population to take a closer look at who is experiencing food insecurity, their employment status, and other demographic characteristics such as racial identity, length of time in Canada, income level, and job classification.

The results showed that a large portion of the population is likely experiencing the conditions that respondents in the CBR project said made them feel “trapped.” One in three respondents from the population-based survey reported experiencing financial hardship, and nearly 40% are likely to be food-insecure. The rates are higher among certain groups such as youth; Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) communities; newcomers to Canada; persons with disabilities; and blue-collar workers.

The majority of respondents in both the CBR and population-based studies are employed. Almost half of those who were identified as food-insecure are employed full-time. The key challenges highlighted in the CBR study as contributing to feeling trapped — rising living costs, low wages, and high commuting costs, for example — also emerged in the survey of the general population, and they were especially acute among those identified as food-insecure. Similar findings emerged in regard to barriers to accessing or maintaining quality employment, with limited job opportunities, disabilities or health issues, and lack of access to training or education showing high prevalence rates among people who are food-insecure. Additionally, transportation costs are cited as a major obstacle to employment nearly twice as often among people who are experiencing food insecurity compared to those who are not.

Regardless of the degree of financial hardship or food insecurity experienced, there is near universal public support for government policies aimed at reducing poverty and food insecurity. Sentiments expressed by participants in the CBR project were echoed loud and clear by the general population, especially those who were identified as food-insecure. Making housing more affordable, improving food access, expanding access to quality employment and training, and introducing innovative approaches to poverty reduction have solid support, especially among food-insecure respondents.

The study findings reinforce the urgency of the situation — the driving forces of food insecurity must be addressed sooner rather than later — and highlight key stressors and barriers faced by food-insecure populations, including those who are employed. In addition, the findings show how peer-based insights can complement national surveys and resonate on a national scale and remind us of the importance of grounding research in lived experience and in community.

# METHODOLOGY

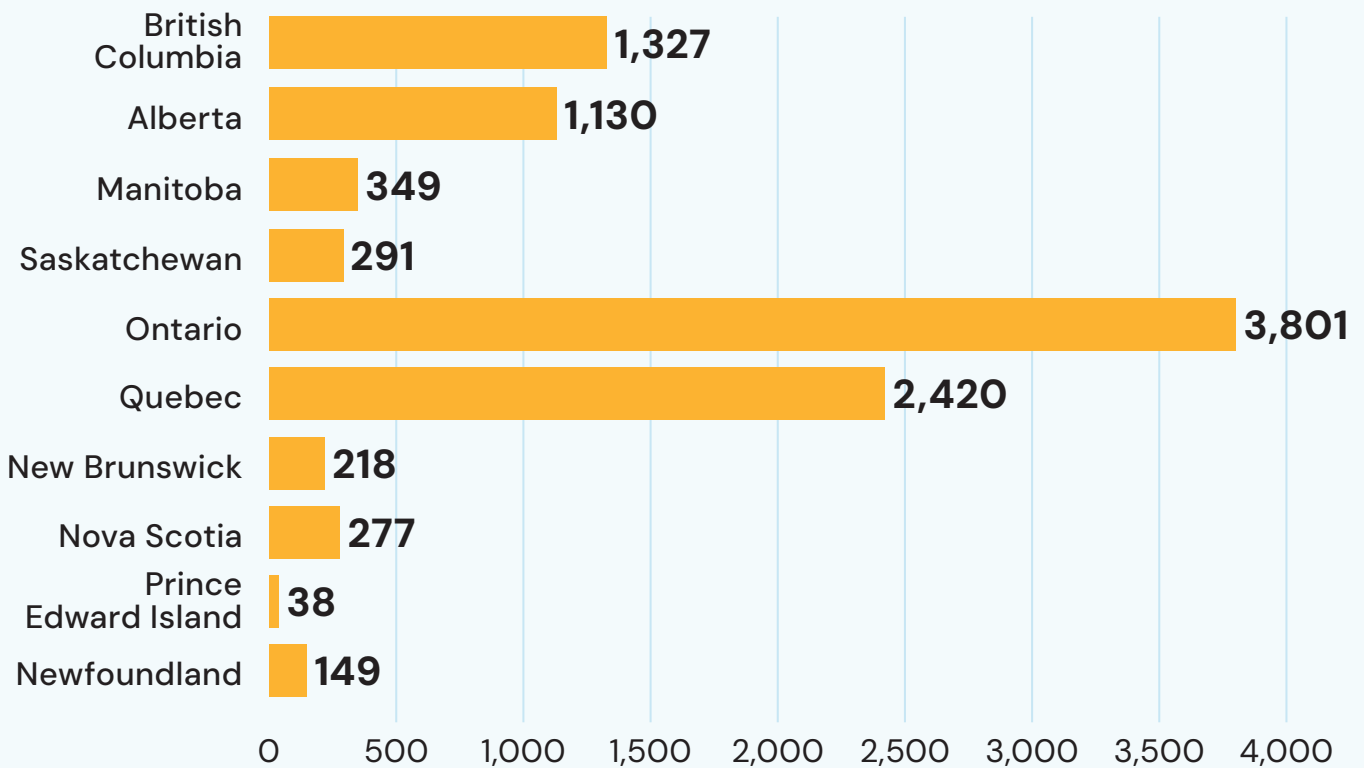
**Table 1** outlines the survey methodology, regional distribution of the responses, and number of people who responded to the survey. Poll conducted by Pollara Strategic Insights on behalf of Food Banks Canada.

**TABLE 1.** Study methodology and response distribution

<b>FIELD WINDOW</b>	February 24, 2025, to March 29, 2025.
<b>SAMPLING</b>	Bilingual online survey of randomly-selected sample of 10,004 adult (18+) Canadians.
<b>RELIABILITY</b>	As a guideline, a probability sample of this size carries a margin of error of $\pm 3.1\%$ , 19 times out of 20. The margin of error is larger for sub-segments.
<b>WEIGHTING</b>	Data has been weighted using the most current language, gender, age, and region Census data to ensure the sample reflects the actual population of adult Canadians.

## REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION

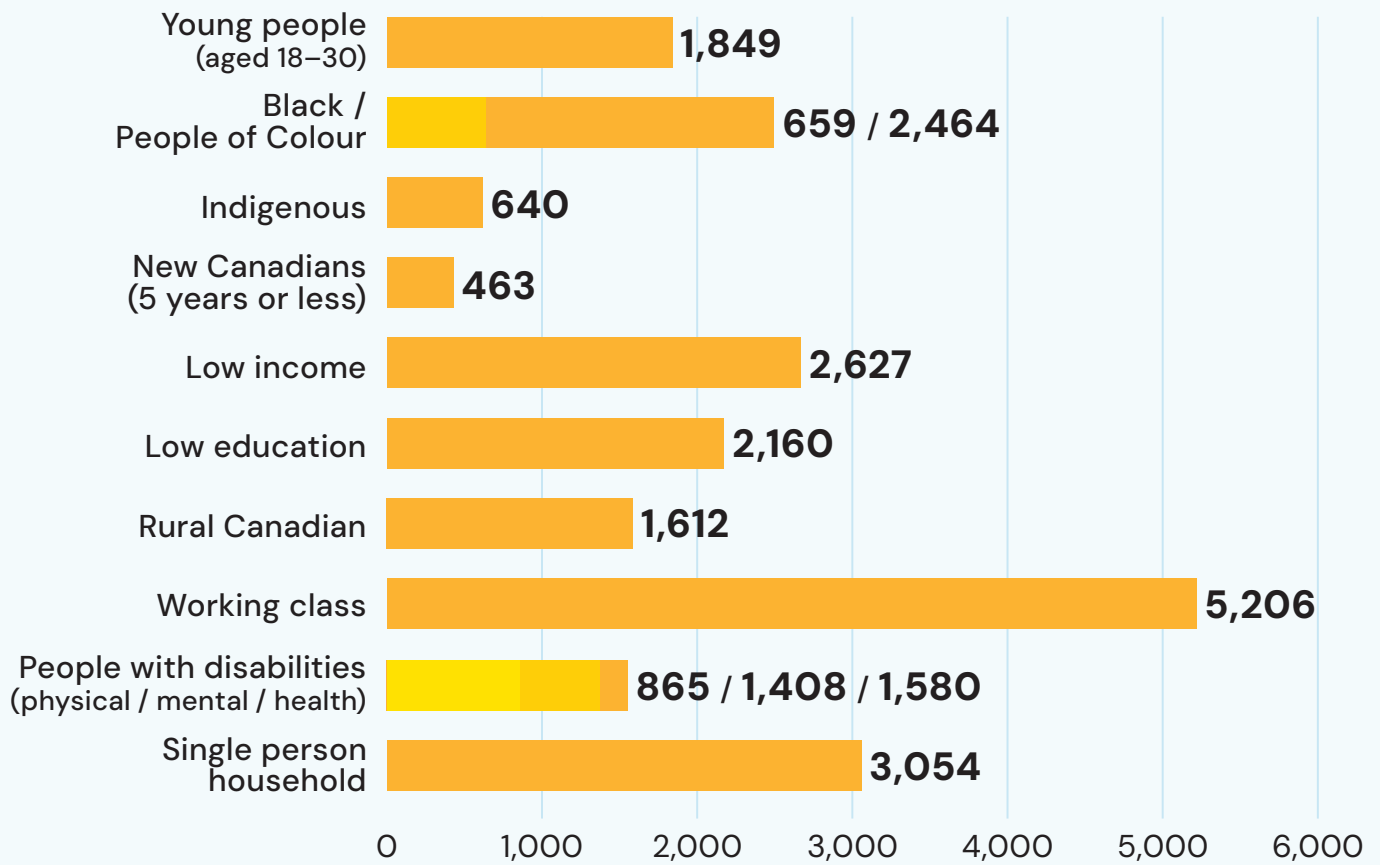
Region / Unweighted sample counts



**TABLE 1.** Study methodology and response distribution

## KEY TARGETED SAMPLE

Category / Unweighted sample counts



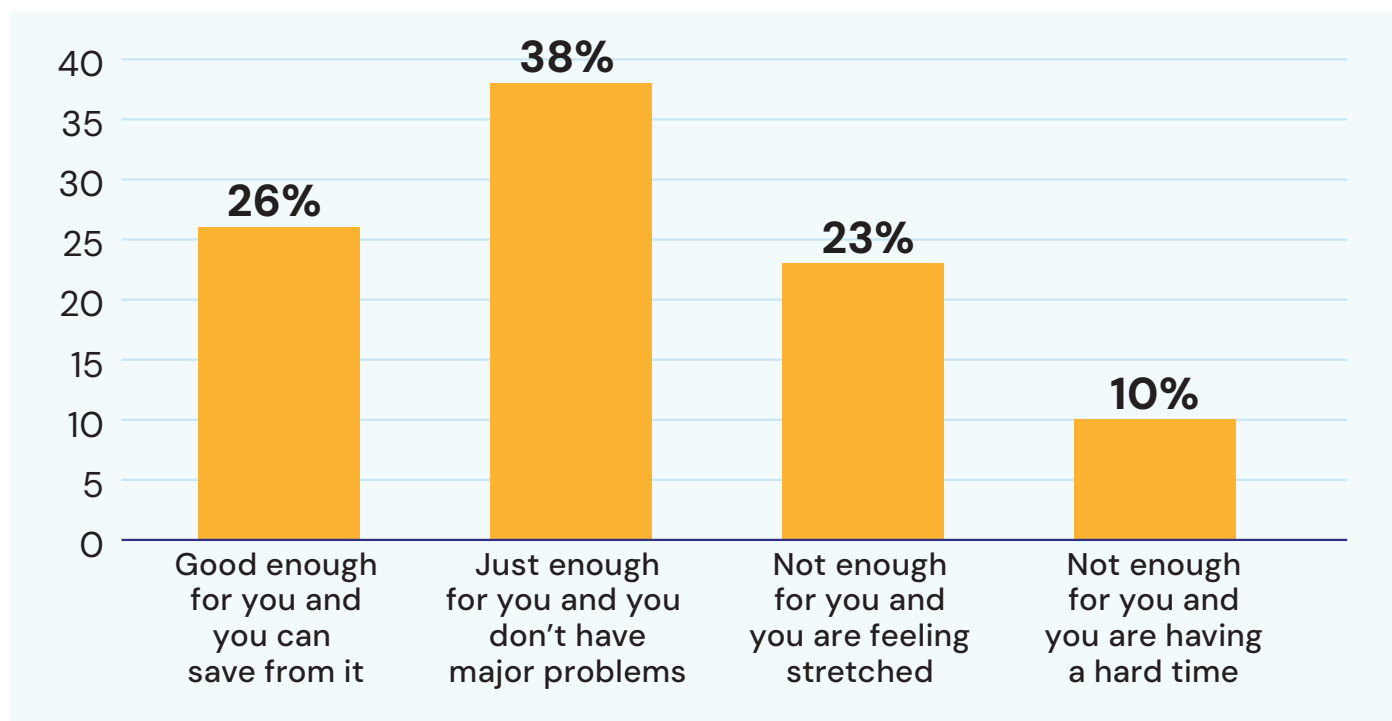
# FINANCIAL REALITY AND STRESS DRIVERS

A significant proportion of Canadians are struggling financially. One in three people report that their household income is not sufficient and that they either feel stretched or are experiencing hardship.

This points to a broad-based concern about financial security among a large segment of the population.

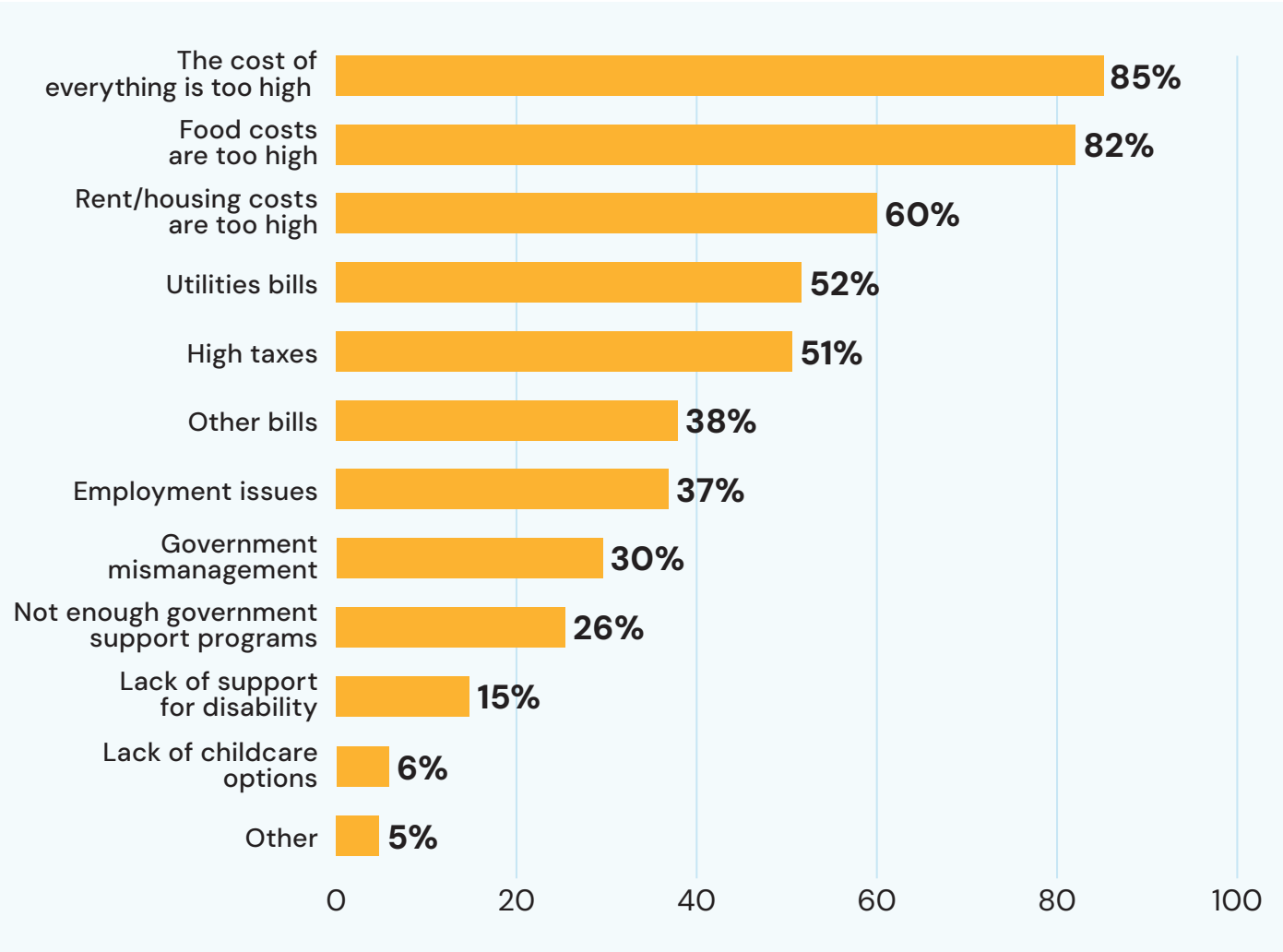
**Figure 1** outlines the degree of financial hardship among survey respondents, and **Figure 2** shows the main causes of that hardship among those who said they feel financially stretched.

**FIGURE 1.** Which of the following best describes your household income at the present time? (N = 10,004)



When the general population survey participants were asked to identify the primary sources of their financial stress, the high cost of living overall, followed by the cost of food and housing (particularly rent) emerged as their top concerns. (See Figure 2)

**FIGURE 2.** What do you believe are the main reasons that you are financially stressed? (N = 3,366)



# FOOD INSECURITY

## DEFINING FOOD INSECURITY

As in the CBR portion of the study, participants who responded affirmatively to two or more questions on an abbreviated six-item food-insecurity scale (see Table 2) were identified as food-insecure. This assessment tool was based on the methodology developed by the Economic Research Service of the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) (Economic Research Service, 2012) when using the six-item short form of the Household Food Security Survey Module.<sup>1</sup>

The six-item module is a shortened version of the original 18-item measure and has been widely used in both U.S. and Canadian research. In Canada, the full 18-item module has been adapted and implemented by Health Canada and Statistics Canada for national surveys, with similar wording and conceptual framing. (Note that our food-insecurity estimates are not fully comparable to those in the Canadian Income Survey (CIS) or the Canadian Community Health Survey [CCHS]).<sup>2</sup>

**TABLE 2.** Six-item food-insecurity scale

<b>FOOD-INSECURITY INDEX QUESTIONS</b>	<b>AFFIRMATIVE RESPONSES INDICATING HARDSHIP</b>
The food that I/we bought just didn't last, and I/we didn't have money to get more. <i>Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you/your household in the last 12 months?</i>	<b>"Sometimes" or "Often"</b>
I/we couldn't afford to eat balanced meals <i>Was that often, sometimes, or never true for you/your household in the last 12 months?</i>	<b>"Sometimes" or "Often"</b>
<i>In the last 12 months, since last April, did you/you or other adults in your household ever cut the size of your meals or skip meals because there wasn't enough food?</i>	<b>"Yes"</b>

<sup>1</sup> For information about the original development and validation of the six-item short-form food-insecurity scale, see Blumberg, S. J., Bialostosky, K., Hamilton, W. L., & Briefel, R. R. (1999). The effectiveness of a short form of the Household Food Security Scale. *American Journal of Public Health*, 89(8), 1231-34. <https://doi.org/10.2105/ajph.89.8.1231>

<sup>2</sup> Notten, G., Seer, S., Mendelson, M., Matern, R., & Parkin, A. (2024). Measuring poverty with a material deprivation index (MDI): An updated index for Canada. Food Banks Canada. [https://fbcblobstorage.blob.core.windows.net/wordpress/2024/06/FBC\\_2024\\_Measuring-PovertywithMDI\\_v20240327\\_FINAL-June-17-002.pdf](https://fbcblobstorage.blob.core.windows.net/wordpress/2024/06/FBC_2024_Measuring-PovertywithMDI_v20240327_FINAL-June-17-002.pdf)

**TABLE 2.** Six-item food-insecurity scale

<b>FOOD-INSECURITY INDEX QUESTIONS</b>	<b>AFFIRMATIVE RESPONSES INDICATING HARDSHIP</b>
<p>How often did this happen? <i>Almost every month, some months but not every month, or in only 1 or 2 months?</i></p>	<p><b>“Almost every month” or “Some months but not every month”</b></p>
<p><i>In the last 12 months, did you ever eat less than you felt you should because there wasn’t enough food?</i></p>	<p><b>“Yes”</b></p>
<p><i>In the last 12 months, were you ever hungry but didn’t eat because there wasn’t enough money for food?</i></p>	<p><b>“Yes”</b></p>

# RATES OF FOOD INSECURITY ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL, POPULATION-BASED SURVEY

The findings of the national, population-based study paint a stark picture of food insecurity across Canada — they indicate that nearly 40% of Canadians are food-insecure. These numbers underscore that affordability issues are widespread and affect many Canadians’ ability to meet even their basic nutrition needs.

They also highlight an urgent national issue. Food insecurity is not limited to people who are unemployed or unhoused. It affects a broad cross-section of Canadians, particularly youth, BIPOC communities, newcomers to Canada, persons with disabilities, and people in blue-collar jobs.

## WHO IS EXPERIENCING FOOD INSECURITY?

**Table 3** provides an overview of the proportion of respondents who are experiencing food insecurity, broken down by employment status.

Almost half of the survey respondents were in full-time work — as were almost half of the food-insecure population. This pattern is repeated across most employment categories, with the notable exceptions of people who are unemployed and seeking work — this group accounts for a significantly greater percentage of those experiencing food insecurity — and people who are retired — this group accounts for a significantly smaller percentage of those experiencing food insecurity. (Respondents could check more than one category.)

**TABLE 3.** Employment status of total respondents and respondents categorized as food-insecure (six-item module) (%)

<b>EMPLOYMENT STATUS</b>	<b>% OF ALL RESPONDENTS (N = 10,004)</b>	<b>% OF RESPONDENTS CLASSIFIED AS FOOD-INSECURE (N = 3,944)</b>
Full-time	46	48
Part-time	11	14
Self-employed	7	7
Unemployed and seeking work	5	8
Unemployed and not seeking work	4	5
Casual/On-call/Day labour	1	1
Full-time student	6	8
Part-time student	1	2
Retired	24	13
Parental leave	1	2

## PREVALENCE OF FOOD INSECURITY AND FOOD BANK USE WITHIN SUBGROUPS

Tables 4–7 break down food-insecurity rates and use of food banks by a range of employment, demographic, and income categories.

**Table 4** shows that food-insecurity rates are high across all groups in the labour market, but they are particularly high among people who work part-time, have less stable work arrangements, are on parental leave, are part-time students, or are unemployed. People who have more precarious working arrangements or are unemployed are more likely than other groups to have accessed a food bank in the last 12 months.

**TABLE 4.** Rates of food insecurity (six-item module) and food bank use, by employment status

<b>EMPLOYMENT STATUS</b>	<b>RATE OF FOOD INSECURITY (%) WITHIN THIS GROUP</b>	<b>% ACCESSED FOOD BANK IN LAST 12 MONTHS</b>
All respondents	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
Full-time student	48	15
Part-time student	52	18
Retired	21	5
Parental leave	52	21



**Table 5** outlines the rates of food insecurity and food bank use among people who are currently employed, broken down by various demographic and income characteristics.

Food insecurity and food bank use is more prevalent among certain groups:

- Younger adults
- People with lower incomes
- Newcomers to Canada
- Persons with disabilities
- People with lower levels of education
- Single persons with dependents
- Blue collar/working class
- People who are Indigenous, Black, or People of Colour

It is important to note that many of these groups intersect.

**TABLE 5.** Incidence of food insecurity (six-item module) among select groups, overall and currently employed

<b>RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>TOTAL (%)</b>	<b>CURRENTLY EMPLOYED (%)</b>	<b>% ACCESSED FOOD BANK IN LAST 12 MONTHS</b>
All respondents	39	42	10
<b>AGE GROUP</b>			
18–24	52	53	16
25–29	56	54	15
30–44	48	46	14
45–54	41	38	11
55–64	31	31	7
65+	19	20	3
<b>GENDER</b>			
Male	39	42	11
Female	39	42	10

<b>RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>TOTAL (%)</b>	<b>CURRENTLY EMPLOYED (%)</b>	<b>% ACCESSED FOOD BANK IN LAST 12 MONTHS</b>
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## **EDUCATION LEVEL**

High school or less	48	52	16
Trades/college/vocational /technical diploma	43	48	10
University degree or higher	31	34	8

## **INCOME LEVEL**

<\$50K	61	68	24
\$50K–<\$100K	41	49	9
\$100K–<\$150K	29	33	4
>\$150K	18	20	2

## **AREA LIVED IN**

Urban	42	45	13
Suburban	35	38	8
Rural	38	42	9

## **RACIAL IDENTITY**

Indigenous	52	52	21
Black	59	58	23
People of Colour	53	52	16
Caucasian/non-racialized	33	37	8

## **MARITAL STATUS**

Married	32	38	7
Single	50	49	15
Single with dependent <18	63	64	25
Single with dependent 18+	57	58	20

<b>RESPONDENTS</b>	<b>TOTAL (%)</b>	<b>CURRENTLY EMPLOYED (%)</b>	<b>% ACCESSED FOOD BANK IN LAST 12 MONTHS</b>
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## **LENGTH OF TIME IN CANADA**

<b>Born in Canada</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Less than 2 years</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>2–5 years</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>6–9 years</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>10+ years</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>8</b>

## **DISABILITY/HEALTH CONDITION**

<b>Does not have a disability/ long-term health condition</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>Has a physical disability</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>61</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Has a mental health condition</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Has a cognitive or learning disability</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Has a chronic health condition</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Has another type of disability/ health condition</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>20</b>

**Table 6** shows the prevalence of food insecurity among various segments of the job market. No segment is untouched by food insecurity, but food-insecurity rates are higher among people in blue-collar jobs (such as labour, manual work, construction, service, or retail).

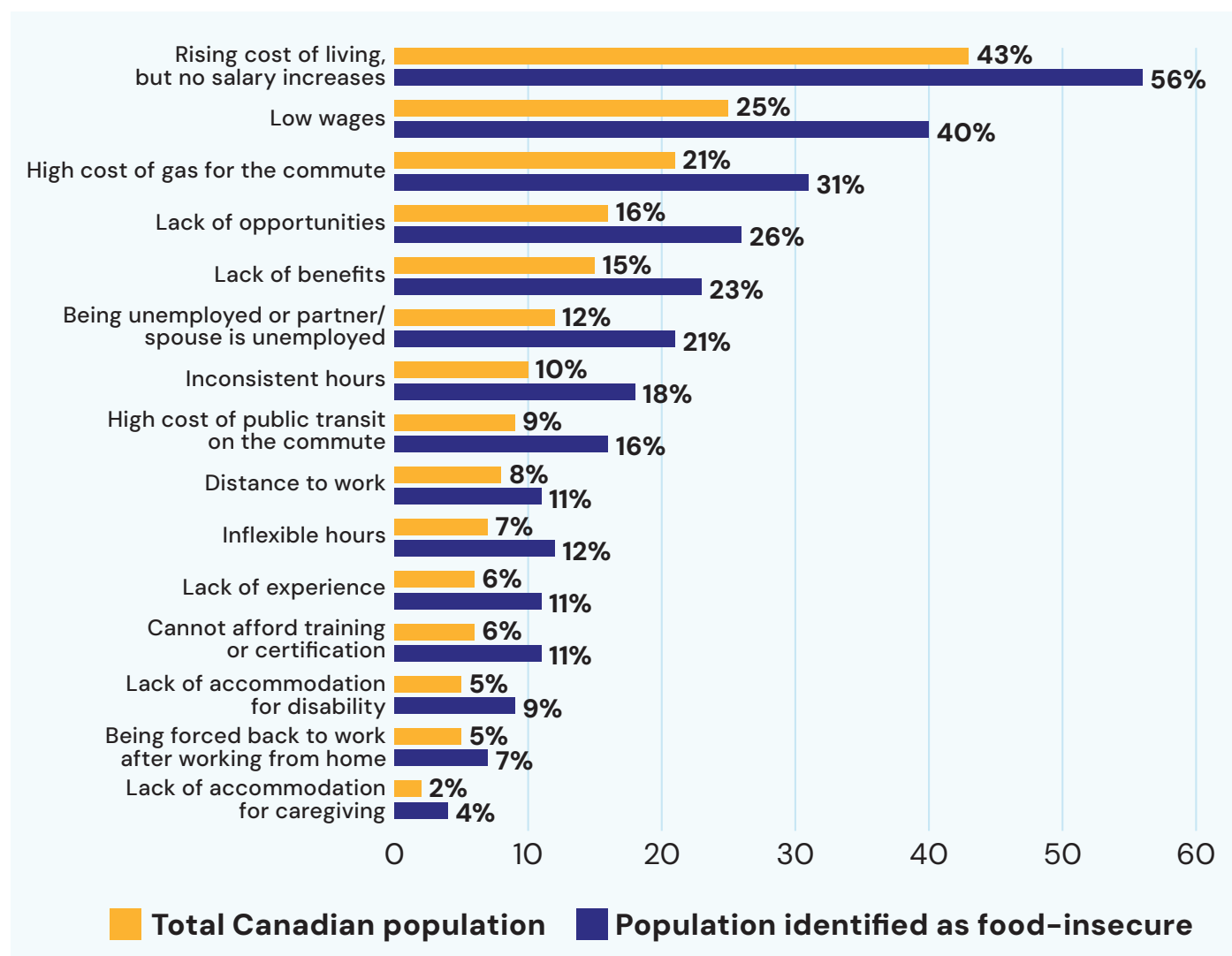
**TABLE 6.** Incidence of food insecurity (six-item module), by employment type and employment classification, total and currently employed

<b>EMPLOYMENT TYPE/ CLASSIFICATION</b>	<b>TOTAL BY EMPLOYMENT TYPE/ CLASSIFICATION (%)</b>	<b>CURRENTLY EMPLOYED (%)</b>	<b>% ACCESSED FOOD BANK IN LAST 12 MONTHS</b>
<b>EMPLOYMENT TYPE</b>			
All respondents	39	42	10
Receptionist	50	52	11
Labour/manual work	55	53	18
Construction	58	57	24
Server/bartender	63	66	24
Frontline service worker	41	42	11
Retail	53	55	16
Manufacturing assembly	41	46	13
Childcare	51	51	15
Administrative support	40	43	7
Skilled trades	44	48	10
Health care worker (e.g., nurses, medical assistants, personal support)	46	49	12
Other working-class job	43	44	14
Teacher	23	30	5
Entry-level professional	41	38	9
Middle-management	25	29	4
Upper-management	26	32	7
CFO, COO, CEO, CTO	29	34	7
Professional designation (e.g., lawyer, engineer, etc.)	25	27	6
Other professional class	36	39	10
<b>JOB CLASSIFICATION</b>			
Blue collar/working class	47	49	13
Professional/white collar	31	33	7

# EMPLOYMENT-RELATED FINANCIAL STRESS AND BARRIERS TO QUALITY EMPLOYMENT

Canadians cite a range of employment-related challenges that directly contribute to financial stress and difficulty achieving a stable livelihood. Among the most commonly reported causes of financial strain are the rising costs of living, persistently low earnings with no increases in wages, and the high costs of commuting. (See Figure 3) These factors disproportionately affect people who are already struggling with food insecurity and compound their day-to-day financial pressures.

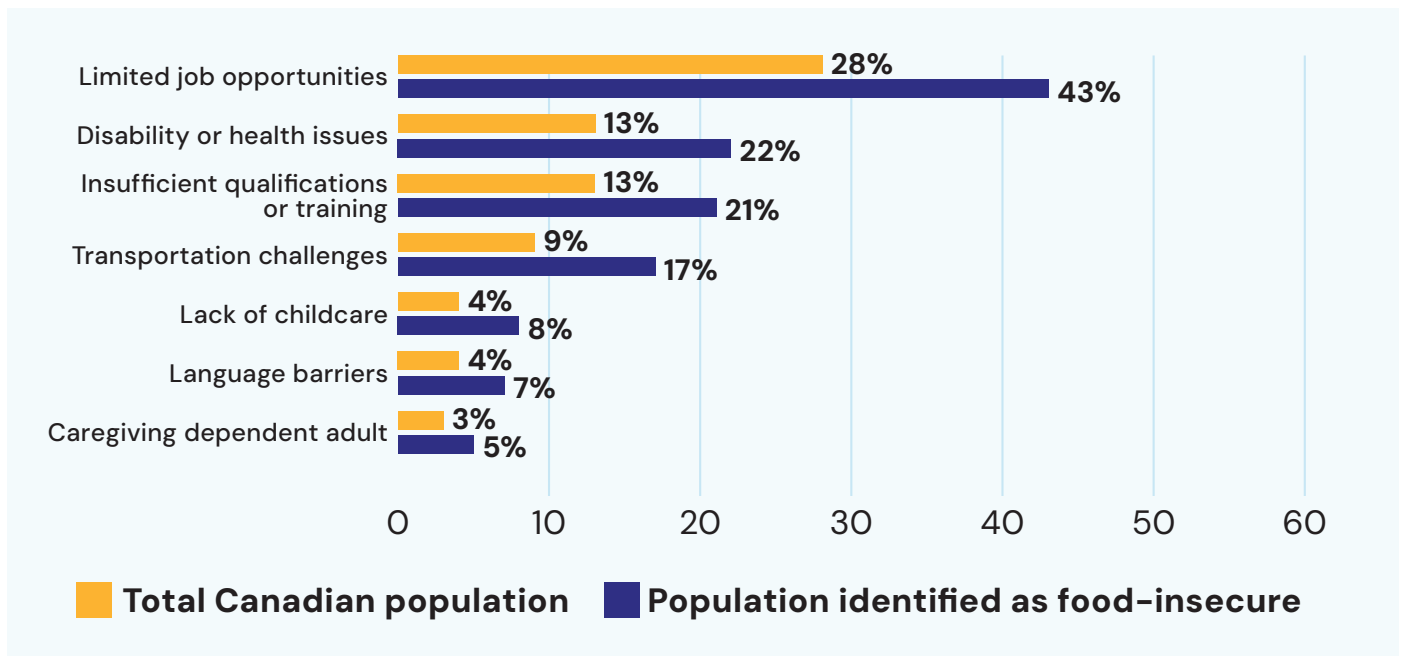
**FIGURE 3.** What, if any, aspects of your employment situation contribute to your being financially stressed? (Canada: N = 10,004; Food-insecure: N = 3,921)



In terms of barriers to accessing or maintaining quality employment, respondents pointed to limited job opportunities, disabilities or health issues, and lack of access to adequate training or education. These obstacles suggest that many Canadians are not only under strain because of their current employment conditions but also facing systemic barriers to improving their economic situation through better employment.

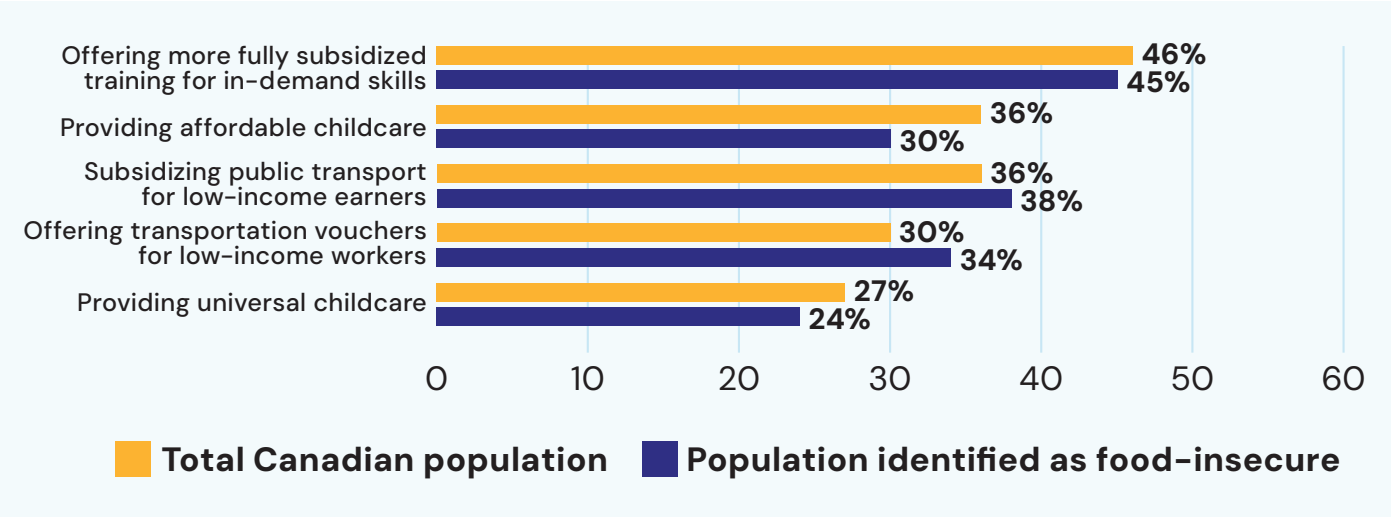
Among those who are experiencing food insecurity — a group particularly vulnerable to unstable or low-paying work — the issues are more acute, with many identifying structural and logistical barriers to participating in the workforce (see Figure 4).

**FIGURE 4.** What are the main barriers preventing you from finding or maintaining quality employment? (Canada: N = 10,004; Food-insecure: N = 3,921)



Respondents also identified policy interventions that could help support their efforts to secure or maintain quality employment. (See Figure 5.) Chief among them were more subsidized training for in-demand skills, affordable childcare, and help with transportation costs (e.g., subsidies for public transportation or transportation vouchers). It is notable that people experiencing food insecurity were more likely to prioritize help with transportation costs. Both childcare and transportation supports are key methods to reduce indirect costs associated with employment and make it more viable for those with limited resources to remain in or enter the workforce.

**FIGURE 5.** What policies do you think would be most helpful to maintain quality employment? (Canada: N = 10,004; Food-insecure: N = 3,921)



# NATIONAL PRIORITIES FOR GOVERNMENT POLICY

The national survey participants expressed overwhelming support for a range of government policies aimed at tackling poverty and food insecurity. Across the country, there is consistently high support — over 80% across all proposed areas — for government action, which highlights the urgency to address these issues and the level of public concern about them.

The top policy priorities identified by Canadians include:

- Making housing more affordable
- Improving access to food to directly address food insecurity
- Expanding access to quality employment and training opportunities
- Implementing new and innovative approaches to poverty reduction

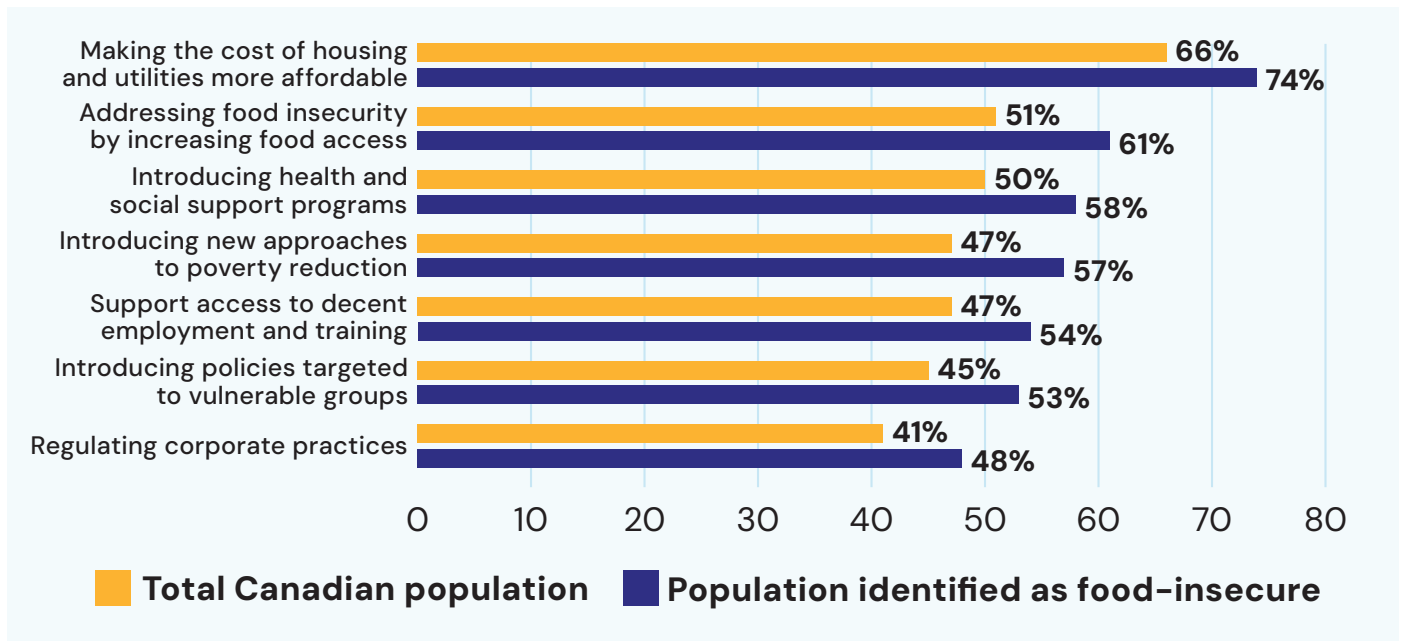
These actions are viewed as critical for reducing systemic hardship and ensuring more equitable economic outcomes for all Canadians.

Canadians who are experiencing food insecurity show consistently higher support for all measures compared to the general population. They place particular emphasis on housing affordability, food access, employment training, and free education.

The top findings from this area of the survey are summarized below (**see also Figure 6**):

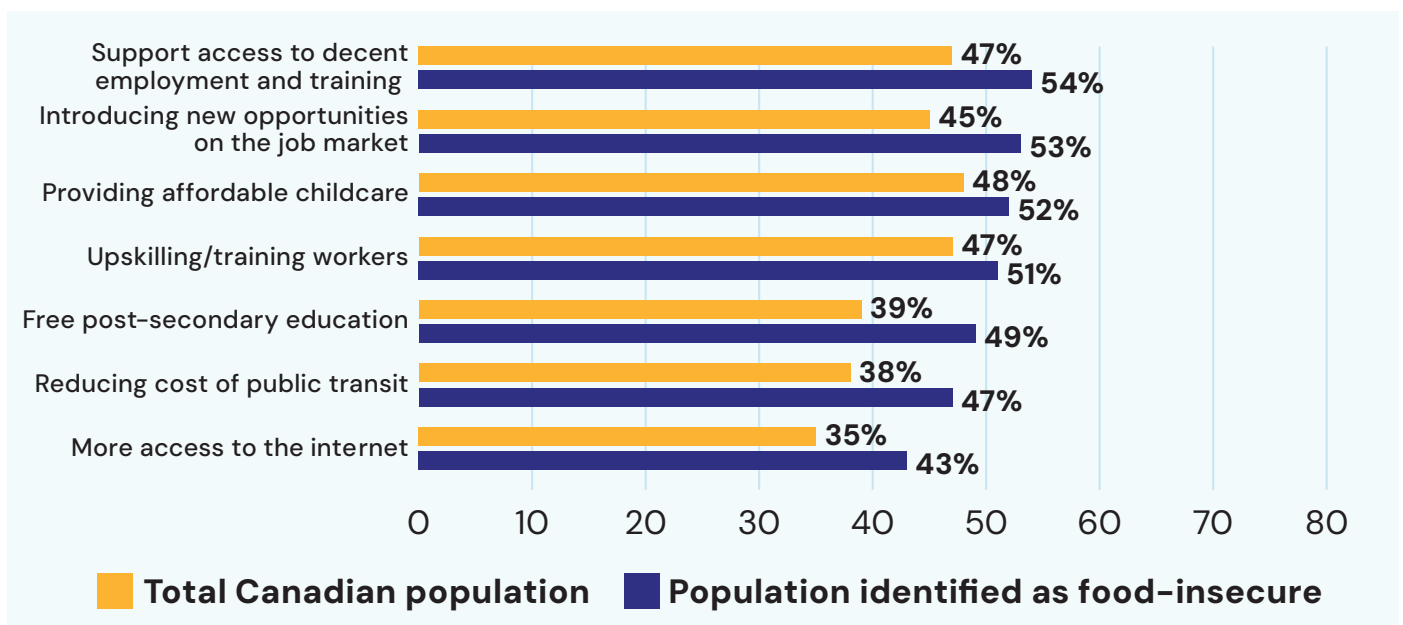
- Making housing and utilities more affordable is the highest-rated concern nationally (rated “very important” at 66% nationally and 74% among food-insecure respondents).
- Addressing food insecurity by improving food access is another core demand (51% nationally; 61% among food-insecure respondents).
- Strengthening health and social support systems, such as universal dental care, mental health services, and streamlined government assistance, has strong support, with half of the general population and 58% of food-insecure respondents supporting the strengthening of health and social support systems.
- Food-insecure respondents strongly support (57% compared to 47% nationally) introducing new approaches to poverty reduction, including changes to tax policy, monetary policy, and minimum income initiatives.
- Expanding access to employment and training opportunities, including affordable childcare, post-secondary education, and job market initiatives, is widely favoured, especially among food-insecure populations — with 54% of food-insecure respondents supporting these initiatives.

**FIGURE 6.** How important are each of the following areas when thinking about how the Canadian Government can address poverty and food insecurity? (% very important N=3,921)



When looking specifically at initiatives aimed at supporting those in the labour market, there is strong support among respondents identified as food-insecure for initiatives that support access to decent employment and training, new job opportunities, affordable childcare, and upskilling workers. There is also a notable 10 percentage point difference in support for free post-secondary education and reducing the cost of public transit when comparing food-insecure respondents to the general population.

**FIGURE 7.** Do you favour or oppose the following employment and training opportunities? (% strongly favour N=3,921)



# PREVALENCE OF FOOD INSECURITY, BARRIERS TO EMPLOYMENT, AND POLICY PREFERENCES AMONG SUBGROUPS

The large sample size of this study allows us to take a closer look at the key challenges, barriers, and opportunities experienced by specific segments of the population who experience higher rates of food insecurity. These groups include young adults (ages 25–29), individuals with annual incomes below \$50,000, newcomers to Canada (within the past five years), people living with disabilities, people with lower levels of education, single people with dependents, blue-collar and working-class workers, Indigenous populations, Black Canadians, and other People of Colour. These groups are often not mutually exclusive and often intersect, reinforcing the importance of having a range of policy and program solutions to help address these barriers and opportunities.

## YOUNG PEOPLE (25–29 YEARS OLD)

- 56% of all 25–29-year-olds, and 54% of people in this age group who are currently employed, are experiencing food insecurity.
- People in this group:
  - Are more likely to mention low wages, lack of benefits, lack of opportunities, inconsistent and/or inflexible hours, and the high cost of commuting by public transit as aspects of their employment situation that contribute to their financial stress.
  - Are more likely to mention transportation challenges, limited job opportunities, and lack of childcare as barriers to finding or maintaining quality employment.
  - Strongly support policies such as free post-secondary education, reduced public transit costs, and new employment opportunities.



# PEOPLE ON LOW INCOMES (EARNING <\$50K/YEAR)

- 61% of people who earn <\$50K per year, and 68% of people who earn <\$50K per year and are currently employed, are experiencing food insecurity.
- People in this group:
  - Are more likely to mention low wages, lack of benefits, lack of opportunities, and inconsistent hours as aspects of their employment situation that contribute to their financial stress.
  - Are more likely to mention transportation challenges, limited job opportunities, and disability or health issues as barriers to finding or maintaining quality employment.
  - Strongly support upskilling/training workers, affordable childcare, free post-secondary education, cheaper public transit, and new employment opportunities.

# NEW CANADIANS (5 YEARS OR LESS)

- 60% of people who have been in Canada for 5 years or less and 68% of those who have been in Canada for 2 years or less are considered to be food-insecure. This is much higher than the national average of 39%.
- People in this group:
  - Face higher barriers to employment, including non-recognition of their credentials and restricted access to training.
  - Are more likely to mention low wages, lack of benefits, lack of opportunities, inconsistent and/or inflexible hours, and the high cost of public transit for commuting as aspects of their employment situation that contribute to their financial stress.
  - Are more likely to mention transportation challenges, limited job opportunities, and language barriers as challenges to finding or maintaining quality employment.
  - Strongly support subsidized training for in-demand skills, subsidized transit, and transportation vouchers as policies that would help maintain quality employment.

# PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

- Just over half of people with a disability or disabilities are categorized as food-insecure. The prevalence ranges from 43% for those with a chronic health condition to 62% for those with a cognitive or learning disability.
- People in this group who have a mental health or cognitive disability are more likely to mention low wages, lack of benefits, and inconsistent hours as aspects of their employment situation that contribute to their financial stress.

- People in this group who have a physical or cognitive disability are more likely to mention lack of accommodation for disability as contributing to their financial stress, and those with cognitive disabilities are more likely to mention lack of opportunities.
- People in this group who have mental health issues or cognitive disabilities are more likely to mention transportation challenges, insufficient qualifications or training, and limited job opportunities as barriers to finding or maintaining employment.
- Overall, people in this group strongly support subsidized training opportunities and subsidized transit.

## PEOPLE WITH LOWER LEVELS OF EDUCATION

- 48% of people with a high school education or less, and 52% of this group who are currently employed, are considered food-insecure.
- A lower level of education correlates strongly with food insecurity and housing challenges.
- Canadians with only a high school education or less report greater financial stress compared to Canadians with higher levels of education.
- People with lower levels of education are also more likely to rely on government support.
- People in this group expressed strong support for policies that address job training, access to education, and transit affordability.

## SINGLE PEOPLE WITH DEPENDENTS

- 63% of people in this group are categorized as food-insecure, and 25% have accessed a food bank in the last year.
- People in this group:
  - Are more likely to mention low wages, lack of benefits, lack of opportunities, inconsistent and/or inflexible hours, and the high cost of gas for commuting as aspects of their employment situation that contribute to their financial stress.
  - Are more likely to mention transportation challenges, limited job opportunities, insufficient qualifications or training, and lack of childcare as contributing to challenges finding or maintaining quality employment.
  - Express strong support for subsidized training and universal childcare.

# BLUE-COLLAR/WORKING CLASS

- 47% of people who would be considered blue collar/working class, and 49% of this group who are currently employed, are categorized as food-insecure.
- People in this group:
  - Are more likely to mention low wages, inconsistent hours, the high cost of gas (for commuting), and the rising cost of living but no salary increases as aspects of their employment situation that contribute to their financial stress.
  - Are more likely to mention transportation challenges, limited job opportunities, and insufficient qualifications or training as challenges to finding or maintaining quality employment.
  - Express strong support for upskilling/training workers and introducing new opportunities in the job market.
  - Often fall through gaps in support systems designed for people who are unemployed or on extremely low incomes.

# INDIGENOUS POPULATIONS

- 52% of people in this group are categorized as food-insecure, and 21% have accessed a food bank in the last 12 months.
- People in this group:
  - Are more likely to mention the rising cost of gas for commuting, the rising costs of living but no salary increases, and lack of accommodation for disabilities as aspects of their employment situation that contribute to their financial stress.
  - Are more likely to mention transportation challenges, insufficient qualifications or training, and disability or health issues as contributing to challenges finding or maintaining quality employment.
  - Express strong support for fully subsidized training for in-demand skills.



# BLACK CANADIANS

- 59% of people in this group are categorized as food-insecure, and 23% have accessed a food bank in the last 12 months.
- People in this group:
  - Are more likely to mention low wages, the high cost of public transit for commuting, the rising cost of living but no salary increases, and lack of opportunities as aspects of their employment situation that contribute to their financial stress.
  - Are more likely to mention insufficient qualifications or training, limited job opportunities, transportation challenges, and lack of childcare as challenges to finding or maintaining quality employment.
  - Express strong support for fully subsidized training for in-demand skills and subsidized public transport for people earning low incomes.

# PEOPLE OF COLOUR

- 53% of people in this group are food-insecure, and 16% have accessed a food bank in the last 12 months.
- People in this group:
  - Are more likely to mention low wages, lack of benefits, high cost of public transit for commuting, the rising cost of living but no salary increases, and lack of opportunities as aspects of their employment situation that contribute to their financial stress.
  - Are more likely to mention insufficient qualifications or training, limited job opportunities, language barriers, transportation challenges, and lack of childcare as challenges to finding or maintaining quality employment.
  - Express strong support for introducing new opportunities to the job market.

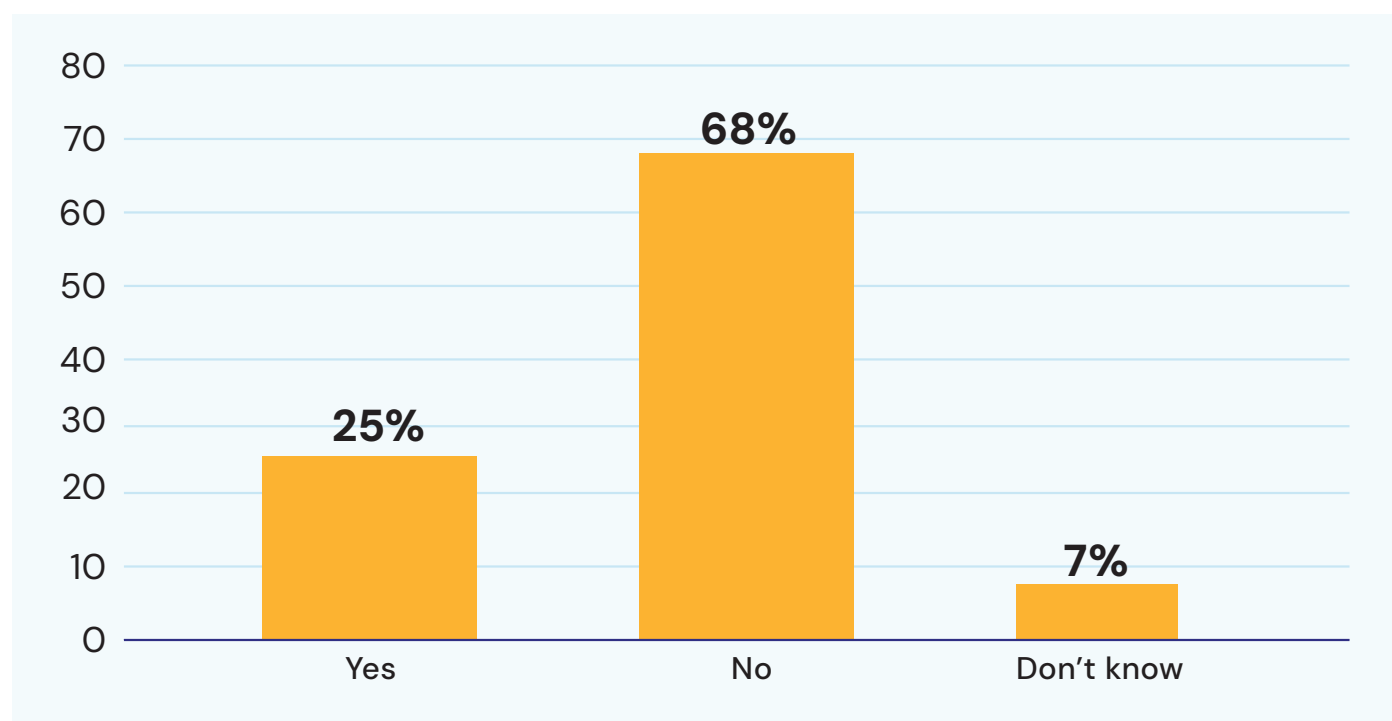


# ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

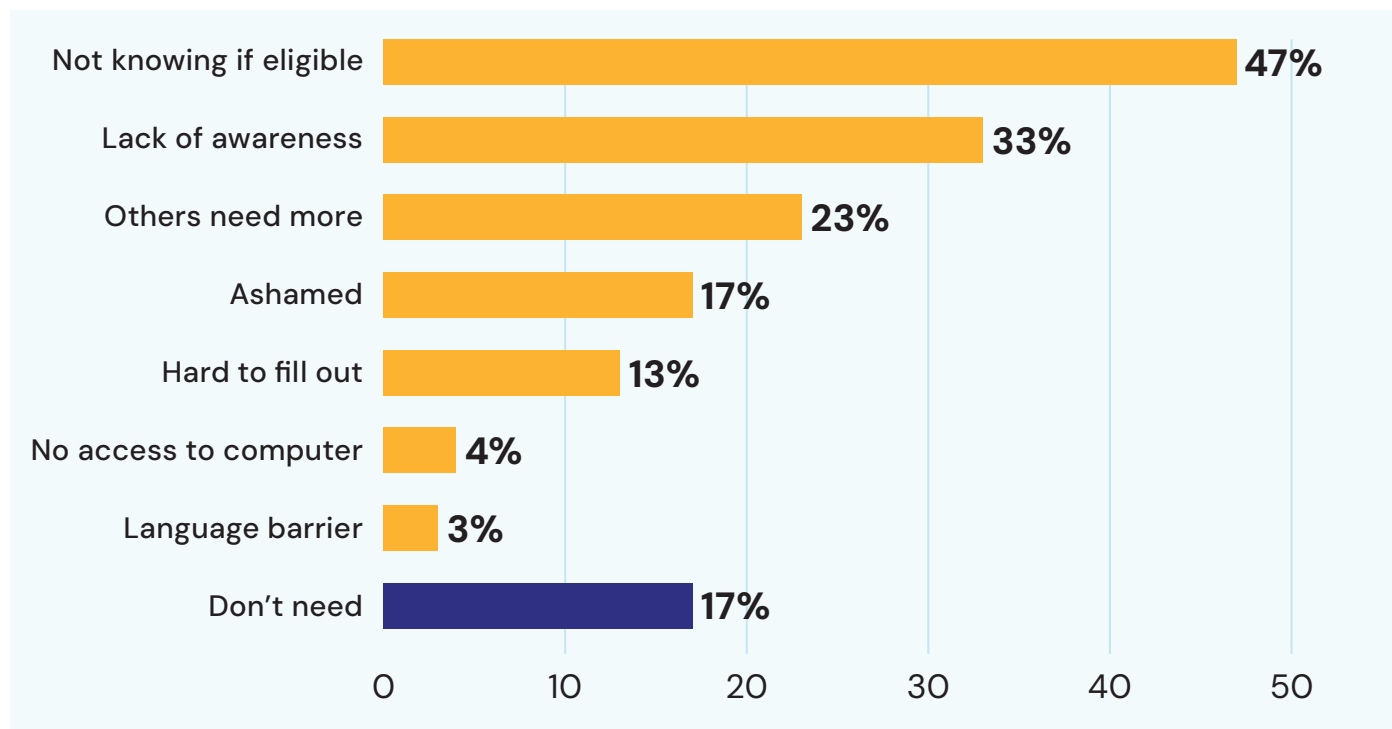
Peer researchers in the CBR study noted that many of the people they spoke with were not accessing government programs despite experiencing many challenges and high levels of food insecurity. Many were unaware of the support that is available to them or found it difficult to access.

The findings from the national survey were consistent with the peer observations — nearly 70% of respondents who were identified as food-insecure were not accessing any government support programs. Most of this group were not sure if they were eligible (47%) and/or were not aware of what support was available (33%). One in five mentioned administrative barriers such as difficulty filling out the forms, lack of access to a computer, or language barriers as reasons for not accessing government support.

**FIGURE 8.** Do you access any government programs for financial support? (N = 3,921)



**FIGURE 9.** What prevents you from accessing these programs? (N = 2,676)



These findings reinforce those of an independent report prepared by the Office of the Auditor General of Canada covering the period April 01, 2019–August 31, 2021. The report’s objective was to determine whether Employment and Social Development Canada and the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) ensure hard-to-reach populations are made aware of, and can access, the Canada Child Benefit, Canada Workers Benefit, Guaranteed Income Supplement, and Canada Learning Bond. A key finding was that there is no “integrated approach for people needing more personalized help.”<sup>3</sup>

Employment and Social Development Canada and the CRA identified several groups that face barriers to accessing benefits. They include Indigenous peoples, people with insecure housing, newcomers to Canada, people living with disabilities, seniors, and youth. The two organizations also identified barriers that make accessing benefits challenging, including literacy and language barriers, reluctance to disclose personal and financial information, not filing tax returns, complex application processes, limited access to financial services, and geographical location.

The report indicates that “the Canada Revenue Agency and Employment and Social Development Canada did not have an approach for ensuring a comprehensive and seamless service experience to assist those individuals requiring individualized support” and that “the department and agency do not currently have an approach for ensuring a seamless service experience for hard-to-reach clients accessing certain benefits.”

<sup>3</sup> Office of the Auditor General of Canada. (2022). Report 1: Access to benefits for hard-to-reach populations, “Awareness of and access to benefits.” [https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/oag-bvg/2021-2024-reports/documents/parl\\_oag\\_202205\\_01\\_e.pdf](https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/oag-bvg/2021-2024-reports/documents/parl_oag_202205_01_e.pdf)

It also noted that the take-up of benefits may be overestimated, as estimates do not always consider those who have not filed tax returns. The “department and agency had limited evidence that their increased outreach activities had resulted in increased take up of benefits by hard-to-reach people.”<sup>4</sup>

The report highlights that neither Employment and Social Development Canada nor the CRA have a clear and complete picture of the people who are not receiving benefits they are potentially eligible for and that they have not done enough to help hard-to-reach populations access the benefits that were put in place to support low-income earners in Canada.

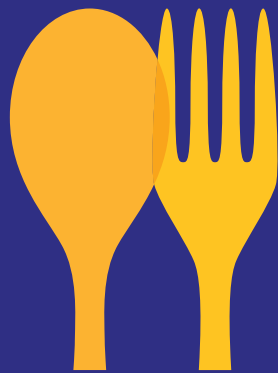
The commitment in the recent federal budget to implement an automatic tax filing system is a crucial step in helping people access benefits they do not realize they may be entitled to, such as the Canada Child Benefit or the Canada Workers Benefit. Those benefits could help to significantly increase incomes for people who are experiencing food insecurity. Support in navigating access to other programs — for example, apprenticeship programs — and widening eligibility for these programs could also help to reduce food insecurity in Canada.

## CONCLUSION: FROM RESEARCH TO ACTION

The findings of this report illustrate the key challenges faced by people who are experiencing food insecurity, particularly those who are employed. They also highlight that certain groups face disproportionately high rates of food insecurity — for example, people who are Black or Indigenous and other People of Colour, single parents, blue-collar workers, people who earn lower incomes, newcomers to Canada, and younger people. The evidence underscores the importance of targeted, inclusive policies and programs that address the intersecting factors shaping these groups’ experiences and reinforces that every level of government and sector of society has a crucial role to play in addressing these issues. By fostering equitable opportunities and ensuring accessible support, stakeholders can help bridge gaps, strengthen our workforce, and reduce food insecurity in Canada.

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<sup>4</sup> Office of the Auditor General of Canada, Report 1, “Findings.”



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