

HUNGER COUNT 2022

From a Storm
to a Hurricane



“The rapid rate of inflation, coupled with rising rental costs, is driving people who were already living precariously close to the edge, off that edge.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ONTARIO

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NUMBER OF VISITS IN MARCH 2022

In March 2022, there were nearly 1.5 million visits to food banks in Canada, the highest March usage on record even though unemployment rates were at their lowest on record in the same month.

This year, we are seeing a trend that we have not previously observed. Despite the unemployment rate being at 5.3 per cent, “the lowest on record” since 1976,¹ food bank visits are the highest they have ever been. For now, the state of the economy as measured through standard indicators such as unemployment rates has become much less associated with food bank demand on a national scale.

1.46M

¹Statistics Canada. (2022, April 08). *Labour force survey, March 2022*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220408/dq220408a-eng.htm>

PER CENT CHANGE INCREASE FROM 2021

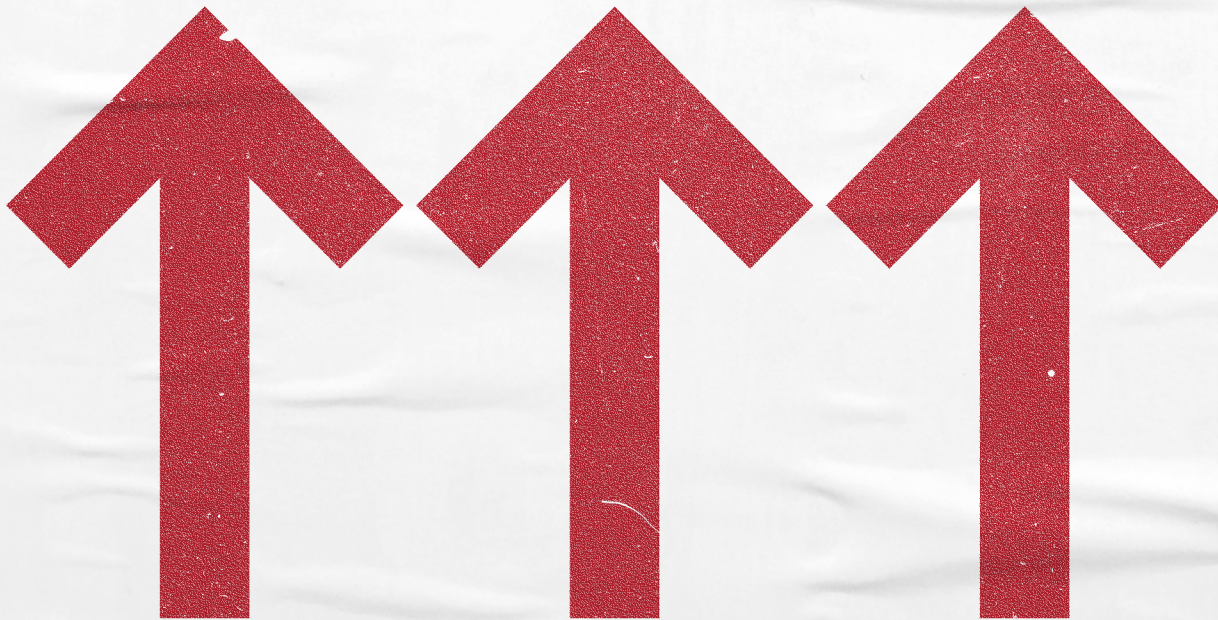
This year's food bank usage represents a **15 per cent increase compared to March 2021**, and a **35 per cent increase compared to March 2019**. Overall, food bank visits have skyrocketed since 2019, with the highest year-over-year increase in usage since the aftermath of the 2008 recession. Stagnant provincial social assistance rates, the end of pandemic-related benefits, and soaring inflation have all affected the ability of individuals in Canada to feed themselves and their families.

15%

SIGNIFICANT INCREASES IN THE COST OF LIVING

According to the survey respondents, the top three reasons people accessed a food bank this year were food costs, low provincial social assistance rates, and housing costs.

With the end of pandemic benefits in late 2021 occurring almost in lockstep with significant increases in the cost of living in early 2022, our findings illustrate that the past year has been particularly disastrous for low-income households. According to Statistics Canada, the lowest income quintile saw their disposable incomes decline by 7.5 per cent in the first quarter of 2022 compared to the previous year. Before the pandemic, the majority of households nationwide whose incomes were within this quintile were already spending more than 50 per cent of their income on rent and utilities. The 69 per cent of food bank clients who live in market rental housing were particularly affected. Massive increases in the costs of core items like food, rent, and fuel mean a proportionately much larger share of this reduced income would go to paying for these essential items.



FOOD BANK CLIENTS FROM SINGLE-PERSON HOUSEHOLDS

Provincial social assistance is the main source of income for nearly 50 per cent of food bank clients. Provincial social assistance benefits, which includes both the general welfare and provincial disability support income streams, have rapidly eroded compared to general inflation. People whose main source of income is provincial social assistance fall far below the official poverty line, with single-person households accounting for 45.4 per cent of food bank clients.

45.4%

ONE THIRD OF FOOD BANK CLIENTS ARE CHILDREN

While the percentage of children accessing food bank services continues to slowly decline, children, who represent approximately 20 per cent of the general population, are still greatly overrepresented at food banks. Income supports such as the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) have been crucial in buffering some of the economic impacts of the pandemic and rising costs of living; however, higher costs related to raising a family in this era of rapid inflation are making households with children vulnerable to poverty and hunger.

1 in 3

MORE SENIORS ACCESSING FOOD BANKS

The percentage of seniors accessing food banks has increased from 6.8 per cent in 2019 to 8.9 per cent in 2022. While seniors make up a relatively small portion of the food bank population, there has been a statistically significant increase in the number of seniors accessing food banks in the last three years. This increase corresponds to the increase in the number of people whose main source of income is a pension, from 9 per cent in 2019 to 11.3 per cent in 2022. Generally speaking, seniors have a better model of income support than the working-age population, which has led to reduced rates of food insecurity among this group. However, low-income seniors are vulnerable to the effects of high inflation because they are on fixed incomes and generally have greater health care needs.

8.9%

A large, bold, teal-colored percentage '14.1%' is displayed on the left side of the page. The background is a white, crumpled paper texture.

CLIENTS REPORTING EMPLOYMENT AS THEIR MAIN SOURCE OF INCOME

For the first time, there was a significant increase in the number of food bank clients who reported employment as their main source of income. The percentage of clients who reported employment as their main source of income increased from 12.5 per cent in 2021 to 14.1 per cent in 2022. Food bankers were less likely to cite unemployment as the main reason clients were accessing a food bank compared to last year (from 10.3 per cent to 7 per cent), but just as likely to cite “low wages or not enough hours” as a reason for accessing a food bank (12 per cent to 11.8 per cent). According to a national poll of the general population, people who were working at some point during the pandemic and also accessing a food program were more likely to belong to a racialized group or to be working in temporary, casual, or variable employment arrangements.

RISE IN INDIGENOUS PEOPLE ACCESSING A FOOD BANK IN 2022

The percentage of Indigenous people accessing a food bank rose from 8 per cent in 2021 to 15.3 per cent in 2022. Indigenous households were having to contend with already extremely high rates of food insecurity, and the combination of a reduction in income benefits and skyrocketing living costs in 2022 had devastating consequences for them. Climate change is also impacting food security for Indigenous people by limiting access to traditional foods and reducing the availability of ice roads that can be used to deliver food to remote and northern communities.

15.3%

MORE MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT NEEDED

Sixty-three per cent of food bankers saw increasing mental health support as one of the top policy priorities to reduce hunger in their communities – compared to 50 per cent in 2019. When asked about the leading causes of food insecurity in their community, food bankers were far more likely to identify mental health and related issues. Whether these observations were corroborated directly through the increased client demand, or indirectly through seeing the associated challenges their clients faced, food bankers on the front lines articulated the myriad ways in which the events of the last two years have affected their clients.

63%

HUNGERCOUNT 2022

FROM A STORM TO A HURRICANE

It has been a tumultuous three years for people on low incomes and the food banks that serve them.

In our *HungerCount 2021* report, we observed how the volatile combination of rising food and housing prices, along with low incomes, created “the perfect storm” when it came to demand for food bank services. We saw two waves of need: a new wave of clients, many impacted by pandemic-related unemployment, at food banks in larger urban centres; and a strong undercurrent of need at food banks in smaller urban centres and rural areas, which people with disabilities and seniors on fixed incomes who are struggling to cope with the steadily rising cost of living were more likely to rely on.

While the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic added even more uncertainty to people’s lives, there were glimmers of hope. With the introduction of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), along with increases to other income supports such as the Canada Child Benefit (CCB), we saw that some individuals who had been struggling with low incomes were able to get ahead. Some food banks in our network were even reporting that certain clients were no longer returning to access their services, possibly because they were receiving these enhanced income benefits. There was potential for the storm to lose strength, and for all of us to build on what we learned from pandemic relief measures: When people have enough money to pay their rent and put food on the table, they are less likely to rely on food banks.

Instead of subsiding, the storm builds strength.

Facing strong headwinds, such as rising food and housing costs that kept inflation high throughout 2021, people on low incomes were spending significantly more of their budgets on their basic needs, often sacrificing food in order to pay their rent. In addition, pandemic-related income benefits such as the Canada Recovery Benefit (CRB) – the successor to the CERB – ended in late October 2021. People living on the lowest incomes – whether that income came primarily from employment, social assistance (including disability supports), or pensions – were the hardest hit. With the end of pandemic benefits, the storm intensified and developed into a hurricane.

The findings from our latest HungerCount survey confirm what Food Banks Canada has been hearing anecdotally from food banks across the network all year: Demand is higher than ever, with nearly 1.5 million visits made to food banks across Canada in March 2022 alone.

Tracking the hurricane.

Our research shows that for food banks, the current situation differs from that of previous years. While record numbers of people are using food bank services, unemployment rates are simultaneously at historic lows, which is a drastic departure from previous patterns. Food banks are now in uncharted territory, and with food bank usage increasing at rates not observed since the aftermath of the 2008 recession, as well as a possible recession looming on the horizon, we must batten down the hatches and look after our most vulnerable neighbours.



HUNGERCOUNT 2022

FROM A STORM TO A HURRICANE

Fighting hunger on two fronts.

As we enter this uncharted territory of food banks across the country showing record-high numbers and unemployment rates sitting at historic lows, work must be done on two fronts to end hunger once and for all. First, we need to ensure that people who are experiencing food insecurity are given access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food as soon as possible. Second, we must work toward an improved social safety net that includes better income supports to prevent more people from falling into poverty in the first place.

Food banks provide an essential service. Every day, they work with their networks and communities to acquire food through donations and purchases to help the people who need it most. Food banks across our network use Food Banks Canada's Link2Feed client intake software to track usage and provide frontline data to help us understand the real reasons behind food bank use and, through trend analysis, show us which groups are especially vulnerable during periods of rising food insecurity.

Importantly, food banks also point us to solutions. When it comes to our social safety net, food banks can show what is working, where there are gaps, and what parts of the system need a complete overhaul. The findings in this HungerCount 2022 report confirm that people who receive provincial social assistance, for example, including people with disabilities, are falling even further behind. Racialized groups are overrepresented in the working poor population, and people who are working are accessing food banks more than ever before. Indigenous people are facing astronomically high rates of food insecurity, which is being amplified even further by inflation and climate change. There are still far too many children accessing food banks, and the number of older adults requiring support continues to rise.

This year in particular, our findings demonstrate that a strong economy cannot sufficiently reduce poverty on its own. Now more than ever, we need significant policy change to reduce the systemic inequities that have been amplified by the devastating effects of the pandemic and rapid inflation, combined with decades of social policy neglect.

We respectfully acknowledge that the land on which we developed this report is in traditional First Nation, Inuit, and Métis territory, and we acknowledge their diverse histories and cultures. We strive for respectful partnerships with Indigenous peoples as we search for collective healing and true reconciliation. Specifically, this report was developed in Ottawa, on the traditional unceded territory of the Algonquin people, and in Toronto, on the traditional territory of the Wendat, the Anishnaabeg, Haudenosaunee, Métis, and the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation.

Working together, we can achieve our vision of a Canada where no one goes hungry.

KEY HUNGERCOUNT FINDINGS

CANADA 2022 KEY HUNGERCOUNT FINDINGS

Total visits, March 2022

1,462,795

% change in total visits, 2021–2022

15%

Total # of meals and snacks provided

4,045,013

Total visits (children), March 2022

485,041

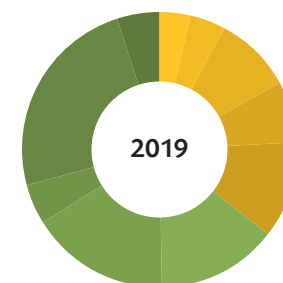
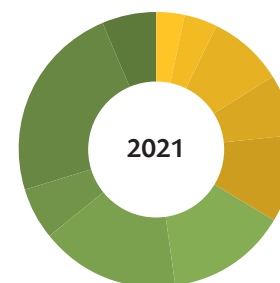
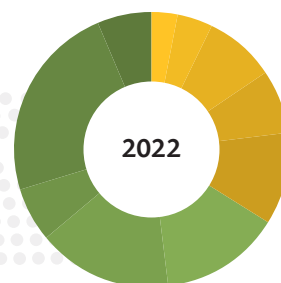
% change in total visits, 2019–2022

35%

of food banks reporting

2,381

Age categories served as % of total, by age group



AGE

% 0–2 years

2022

4.5

2021

4.8

2019

5.2

% 3–5 years

5.8

5.8

6.1

% 6–11 years

12.1

12.3

12.9

% 12–17 years

10.7

10.4

9.9

% 18–30 years

15.2

14.7

16.3

% 31–44 years

20.0

20.0

20.0

% 45–64 years

22.8

23.2

22.8

% 65+ years

8.9

8.7

6.8

% Children

33.1

33.3

34.1

% Seniors

8.9

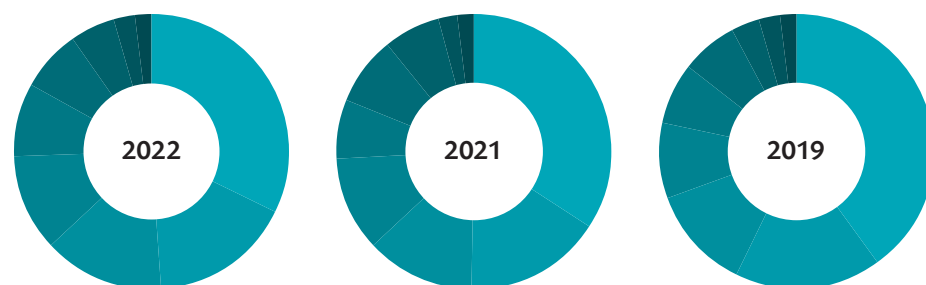
8.7

6.8

CANADA 2022

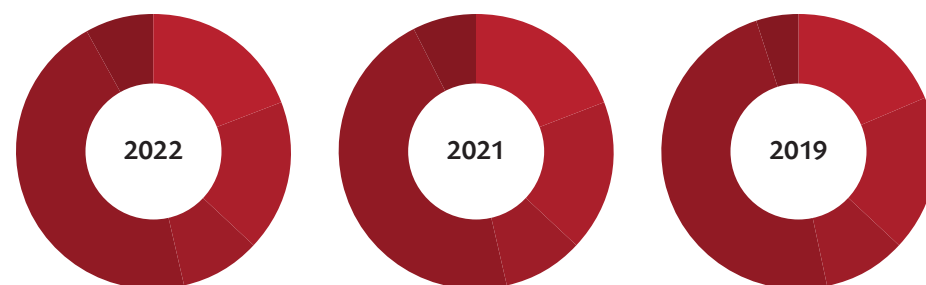
KEY HUNGERCOUNT FINDINGS

Primary source of income



	2022	2021	2019
% Social assistance	32.3	34.3	40.1
% Disability-related income support	16.7	16.2	17.3
% Job income	14.1	12.5	12.1
% Pension	11.3	11.1	9.0
% No income	8.7	7.0	7.0
% Other income	7.2	8.1	6.7
% Employment insurance, CWLB, CRSB, CRCB ²	5.4	6.7	3.3
% CCB	2.5	2.3	2.5
% Student loan	1.7	1.7	1.9

Household type



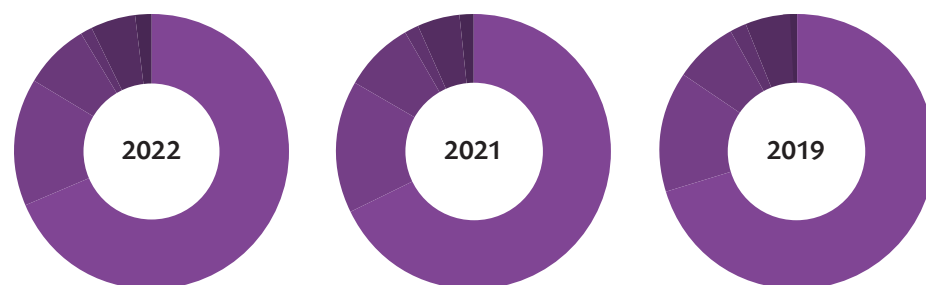
	2022	2021	2019
% Two-parent families	19.3	19.4	18.8
% Single-parent families	17.9	17.8	18.3
% Couples with no children	9.4	9.4	9.8
% Single people	45.4	46.1	48.1
% Other	8.0	7.4	5.0

² Canada Worker Lockdown Benefit (previously CRB), Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit, Canada Recovery Caregiver Benefit.

CANADA 2022

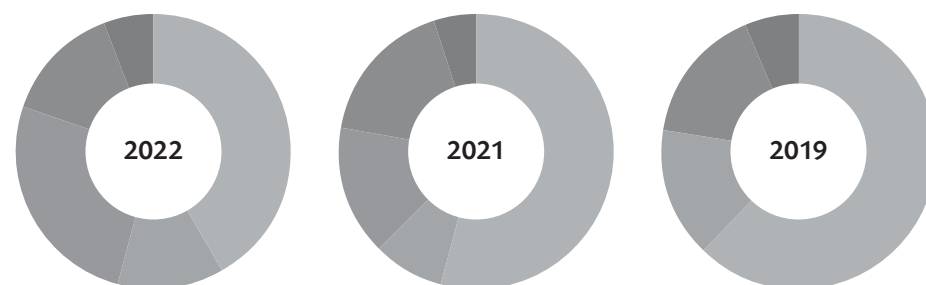
KEY HUNGERCOUNT FINDINGS

Housing type



	2022	2021	2019
% Market rental	68.8	67.9	70.4
% Social housing	15.0	15.7	14.4
% Homeowners	7.8	8.3	7.4
% Band-owned housing	1.5	1.7	2.0
% Unhoused/ temporary shelter	5.1	5.0	5.3
% Other	1.9	1.4	0.6

Other demographic information



	2022	2021	2019
% Women 18+	51.9	51.2	50.1
% First Nations, Métis, or Inuit people	15.3	8.0	12.3
% Racialized communities ³	32.5	14.4	—
% In Canada for less than 10 years	17.2	16.1	12.9
% Post-secondary students	7.1	4.7	5.0

³"Racialized communities" refers to whether survey respondents indicated that they belong to a visible minority group as defined by the *Employment Equity Act*. Responses to this question, and other demographic questions, are voluntary in the HungerCount survey. As this question was first included in the 2021 HungerCount, response rates may have been lower than for other questions. Therefore, the actual number of respondents who identify as belonging to a racialized community accessing food banks may be higher than the results indicate and comparisons between the two years may not be accurate.

PROVINCIAL RESULTS

KEY HUNGERCOUNT FINDINGS

Provincial results

	Total visits, March 2022	Total visits (children), March 2022	% change in total visits (2021–2022)	% change in total visits (2019–2022)	# of food banks reporting	Total # meals and snacks provided
BC	163,231	52,312	25%	31%	126	248,202
AB	155,722	57,750	34%	73%	142	643,742
SK	44,851	17,747	37%	21%	43	11,955
MB ⁴	43,987	16,858	32%	—	13	270,744
ON	486,299	147,816	16%	43%	480	920,964
QC	493,972	169,679	4%	43%	803	1,779,599
NB	23,931	7,363	17%	7%	60	63,849
NS	29,857*	8,733	14%	17%	106	96,277
PEI	3,320	1,148	2%	12%	6	3,666
NL	13,726	4,225	27%	28%	57	1,785
TERR ⁵	6,230	2,092	36%	2%	17	4,230

*Adjustments were made to Nova Scotia numbers at the time of print not included in overall analysis.

⁴Comparison to 2019 not available due to change in provincial network structure and change in data collection methods. Figure for 2021 has been recalculated due to error.

⁵Not enough data received for these variables. Results may not represent the entire territories this year.

PROVINCIAL RESULTS

KEY HUNGERCOUNT FINDINGS

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	4.8	10.9	10.2	14.1	20.0	24.3	11.6	30.0	106
AB	5.1	6.6	13.1	12.2	15.9	21.5	19.9	5.7	37.1	76
SK	5.5	6.8	14.8	13.1	17.0	19.6	18.4	4.8	40.1	33
MB	5.6	6.6	17.1	13.8	11.9	17.8	21.1	6.1	43.1	9
ON	4.1	5.1	11.4	10.7	16.4	19.1	23.5	9.7	31.3	414
QC	4.7	6.6	13.1	9.5	13.8	20.8	22.4	9.2	33.8	738
NB	4.1	5.1	12.5	9.6	13.8	19.9	28.0	7.2	31.2	47
NS	3.6	5.3	11.2	10.1	17.9	19.1	24.6	8.1	30.2	89
PEI	3.9	5.9	13.9	10.7	16.1	22.2	20.3	7.0	34.3	5
NL	3.4	5.2	10.9	10.7	13.7	20.5	29.0	6.7	30.2	37
TERR ⁶	3.9	5.2	6.5	13.1	18.0	25.2	24.8	3.3	28.8	1

⁶Not enough data received for these variables. Results may not represent the entire territories this year.

PROVINCIAL RESULTS

KEY HUNGERCOUNT FINDINGS

Household type

	% single-parent families	% two-parent families	% couples with no children	% single people	% “other” households	# of food banks reporting
BC	12.6	13.5	11.0	56.7	6.2	118
AB	21.4	23.5	7.9	41.4	5.8	109
SK	26.7	14.0	6.3	44.5	8.6	37
MB	15.5	25.6	15.0	37.0	6.9	12
ON	17.4	16.9	7.7	46.6	11.3	430
QC	18.7	23.8	10.9	40.9	5.7	682
NB	15.8	15.5	10.4	50.7	7.5	51
NS	17.4	13.9	9.1	47.9	11.7	93
PEI	15.5	24.1	10.1	41.1	9.2	5
NL	22.7	9.6	9.1	54.6	4.0	43
TERR ⁷	6.3	61.9	7.2	22.6	2.0	5

⁷Not enough data received for these variables. Results may not represent the entire territories this year.

PROVINCIAL RESULTS

KEY HUNGERCOUNT FINDINGS

Source of income

	% job income	% federal employment insurance (CRB, CRSB, CRCB)	% social assistance	% provincial disability support	% pension income	% student loans/scholarships	% CCB	% no income	% other income	# of food banks reporting
BC	18.5	4.0	18.3	24.1	13.4	0.9	1.5	11.4	7.9	110
AB	19.9	6.2	26.2	16.1	10.2	0.9	5.9	8.9	5.7	98
SK	12.2	3.5	44.4	8.9	8.6	1.1	2.7	8.8	9.8	35
MB	13.3	9.7	43.7	0.5	10.5	5.2	0.3	16.3	0.4	10
ON	10.3	3.0	22.7	30.3	10.3	0.8	0.8	10.4	11.4	424
QC	15.4	8.1	44.3	3.8	12.9	3.1	4.0	5.3	3.2	616
NB	11.7	6.4	46.0	6.6	11.4	1.1	3.9	5.0	7.9	51
NS	15.1	5.1	41.0	12.2	11.0	1.4	0.2	6.3	7.6	91
PEI	31.0	8.3	27.7	8.1	4.6	0.2	1.7	7.4	10.8	5
NL	7.2	4.6	61.5	3.5	10.3	0.2	3.9	2.3	6.5	36
TERR ⁸	17.7	1.4	16.3	3.3	8.6	0.0	5.3	42.6	4.8	2

⁸Not enough data received for these variables. Results may not represent the entire territories this year.

PROVINCIAL RESULTS

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	8.4	70.8	9.7	2.1	5.7	3.2	109
AB	11.0	66.7	7.9	7.0	6.4	0.9	99
SK	7.4	68.9	13.3	4.3	5.0	1.2	36
MB	10.6	61.3	19.1	3.9	3.5	1.5	9
ON	5.6	68.9	17.5	0.4	5.1	2.4	417
QC	7.9	70.0	15.4	0.7	4.8	1.2	589
NB	15.9	63.8	13.8	0.9	4.2	1.4	49
NS	13.6	68.4	10.7	1.2	4.4	1.6	91
PEI	9.4	48.6	36.5	0.2	1.3	4.0	5
NL	12.1	55.0	30.1	0.1	2.4	0.3	36
TERR ⁹	3.0	33.8	42.3	5.5	13.4	2.0	2

⁹Not enough data received for these variables. Results may not represent the entire territories this year.

UNCHARTED TERRITORY

THE UNCOUPLING OF FOOD BANK USAGE AND UNEMPLOYMENT RATES

Until this year, food bank usage closely mirrored unemployment rates. Generally speaking, when unemployment rates were low, the working-age population was more likely to be able to access employment income, which in turn reduced the likelihood of their needing a food bank.



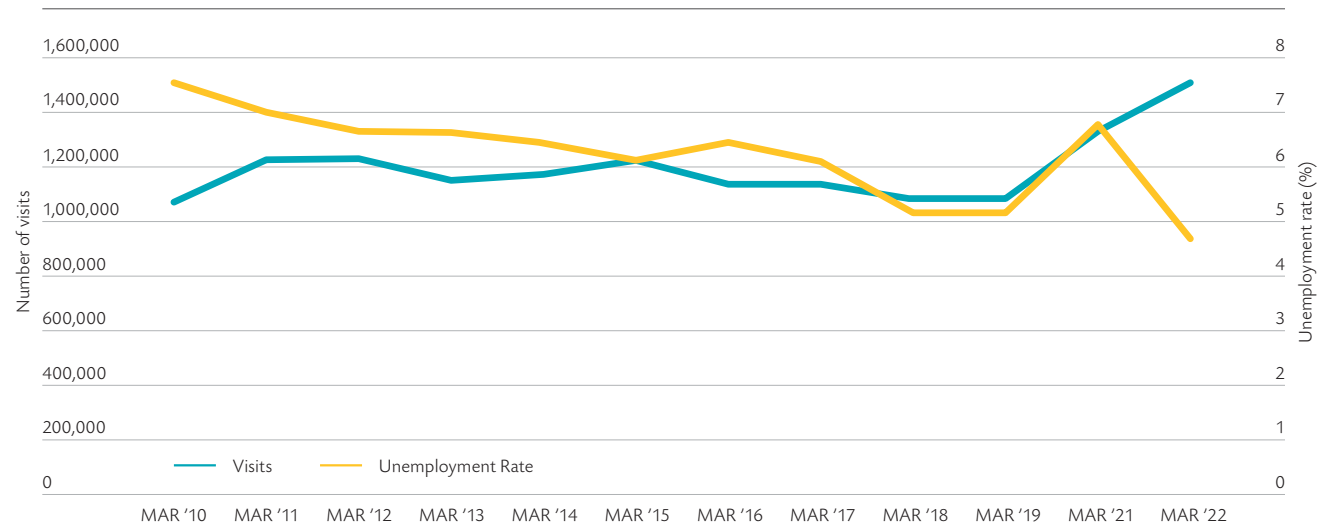
This pattern was initially observed after the 2008 recession, when unemployment rates peaked throughout 2009 and early 2010, and food bank visits dramatically increased in 2011. At that time, food bank visits were a last resort; people would turn to food banks only after their severance pay, EI, and savings had run out. As unemployment rates declined, food bank usage stabilized and then saw a slow decline until 2021.

Food bank usage declined in the second quarter of 2020, in large part due to the availability of government income benefits such as the CERB, then sharply increased in 2021 against a backdrop of pandemic-related lockdowns and increasing

unemployment rates. In last year's report, we referred to this as a "perfect storm," with the rare combination of large-scale unemployment occurring simultaneously with food and housing inflation. This year's findings indicate that last year's storm may have been just the beginning.

In 2022 we are seeing a trend that we have not previously observed. Despite the unemployment rate being at 5.3 per cent, "the lowest on record" since 1976,¹⁰ food bank visits are the highest they have ever been. For now, the state of the economy as measured through standard indicators such as the unemployment rate has become much less associated with food bank demand on a national scale.

Table 1: Unemployment rates and total food bank visits, March of each year, 2010–2022



Source: Statistics Canada. (2022). Table 14–10–0287–03 Labour force characteristics by province, monthly, seasonally adjusted. DOI: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410028703>. Food bank visit numbers from Food Banks Canada HungerCount.

¹⁰ Statistics Canada. Labour force survey, March 2022.

2019–2022: A PERIOD OF TUMULTUOUS CHANGE

The past three years have been tumultuous, with many events affecting the ability of people in Canada to feed themselves and their families: a global pandemic and the resulting unemployment rates, the introduction of new income benefits, and then the end of those benefits, not to mention skyrocketing inflation.



The “eye” of the storm: The impact of pandemic income benefits.

Following an initial surge in usage when full lockdown measures came into effect in March 2020, the majority of food banks reported a decrease in usage from March to May, with most attributing those decreases to government income support programs such as the CERB.¹¹

In addition to the anecdotal and intake data gathered from food banks during this time, reports from Statistics Canada illustrate the extent to which pandemic-related benefits contributed to the median after-tax income for those in the lowest income deciles. According to data from the 2021 Census of the Population, pandemic-related benefits contributed 58 per cent to the median after-tax income of the lowest income decile, and nearly 34 per cent to the second-lowest income decile.¹²

Given that the upper-income limit of the lowest and second-lowest deciles were approximately \$27,000 and \$34,000,¹³ respectively, those who benefited from the COVID-19 support measures may have included people who were accessing food banks prior to the introduction of those measures.

While food bank visits started trending back upward in June 2020, the impacts of the CERB and its successors — the CRB, the Canada Recovery Sickness Benefit (CRSB), and the Canada Recovery Caregiving Benefit (CRCB) — were still notable, with 47 per cent of food banks reporting a decrease compared to two years earlier.

The changes to income policy were only one aspect of pandemic-related supports; other aspects included freezes on rent increases and eviction moratoriums. As CRB benefits wound to a close in late October, policy analysts John Stapleton and Yvonne Yuan noted that in the area of housing affordability, these rental protections offered a temporary oasis in the eye of the pandemic storm, and forecast strong headwinds once these initiatives ended.¹⁴

Regarding food insecurity and food bank use, the introduction of pandemic-related income measures had a similar impact. However, for many people who were accessing food banks during this time, the eye of the storm was brief; for others, it was non-existent. For example, many large urban centres — that is, with over 100,000 people — faced unrelenting need throughout the pandemic, with a quarter of survey respondents seeing usage more than double during this time. Clients in these areas were more likely to access food banks because of job loss and reduced hours of work, and more likely to be from racialized communities than those in smaller urban centres.

Smaller urban centres, on the other hand, saw a simmering undercurrent of need among people who relied primarily on disability income and pensions. Others saw the value of their incomes deteriorate in the face of the rising costs of living. In both situations, food bankers observed that while a portion of their clients had not needed to come back since before the pandemic, new clients were coming in their place. In addition, those who did need help required more frequent assistance throughout the month than in previous years.

These trends were a glimpse of what was to come.

¹¹ Food Banks Canada. (2020). *A snapshot of food banks in Canada and the COVID-19 crisis*, p. 22.
https://fbcblobstorage.blob.core.windows.net/wordpress/2022/03/A-Snapshot-of-Food-Banks-in-Canada-and-the-COVID-19-Crisis_EN.pdf

¹² Statistics Canada. (2022). *The contribution of pandemic relief benefits to the incomes of Canadians in 2020*.
<https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/98-200-X/2021005/98-200-X2021005-eng.cfm>

¹³ Statistics Canada. (2022). *Upper income limit, income share and average of adjusted market, total and after-tax income by income decile*.
<https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1110019301>

¹⁴ See <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2021/10/27/renters-face-headwinds-moving-out-of-the-eye-of-the-pandemic-storm.html?rf>

2022: INFLATIONARY PRESSURES, AND THE SHIFT FROM A STORM TO A HURRICANE

“We saw a decrease in visits per month while people were collecting CERB. Since January 2022 and the phasing out of CERB, we have seen a dramatic increase in uses per month, which we believe to mostly be attributed to the cost of housing, inflation, cost of food, access to transportation, ... lasting effects of COVID-19, and income/government benefits not increasing to match inflation.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ONTARIO

“The end of COVID relief funds and now the clawback of those ‘over-payments’ are now affecting people’s income dramatically. Pair that now with inflation, rising food costs, and the cost of fuel, and it is creating an even bleaker situation for those who were struggling financially.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, MANITOBA

As the CRB came to an end in late October 2021, income support programs mostly returned to the status quo, which was already the norm for the nearly 50 per cent of food bank clients receiving one of two forms of provincial social assistance. The incomes of people who receive provincial social assistance, either general welfare or the disability component, are already well below the poverty line. In many cases, the real dollar value of that income has barely risen compared to its value 30 years ago,¹⁵ let alone in periods of more “standard” inflationary increases of 1 or 2 per cent a year.

Unrelenting inflation saw even more people in Canada in the grip of hunger. After a period of relatively stable overall inflationary increases in 2020, supply chain issues, climate challenges, and an unyielding housing market led to sustained inflationary increases in 2021. By January 2022, inflation had increased 5.1 per cent on an annual basis for the first time since 1991, and shelter costs increased by 6.2 per cent, the biggest increase since 1990.¹⁶

By the time the HungerCount survey was conducted in March 2022, geopolitical conflict, including Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, was adding fuel to the inflationary storm. General inflation went up by 6.7 per cent compared to the previous year, with the cost of gasoline increasing by nearly 40 per cent, other fuels by 61 per cent, and food by 8.7 per cent.¹⁷

¹⁵ Food Banks Canada. (2021). *HungerCount 2021*, p. 27. <https://hungercount.foodbankscanada.ca/>

¹⁶ Statistics Canada. (2022, February 16). *Consumer price index, January 2022*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220216/dq220216a-eng.htm>

¹⁷ Statistics Canada. (2022, April 20). *Consumer price index, March 2022*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220420/dq220420a-eng.htm>

2022: INFLATIONARY PRESSURES, AND THE SHIFT FROM A STORM TO A HURRICANE

“I believe that the exploding inflation is rendering food prices out of reach for many of our families.”

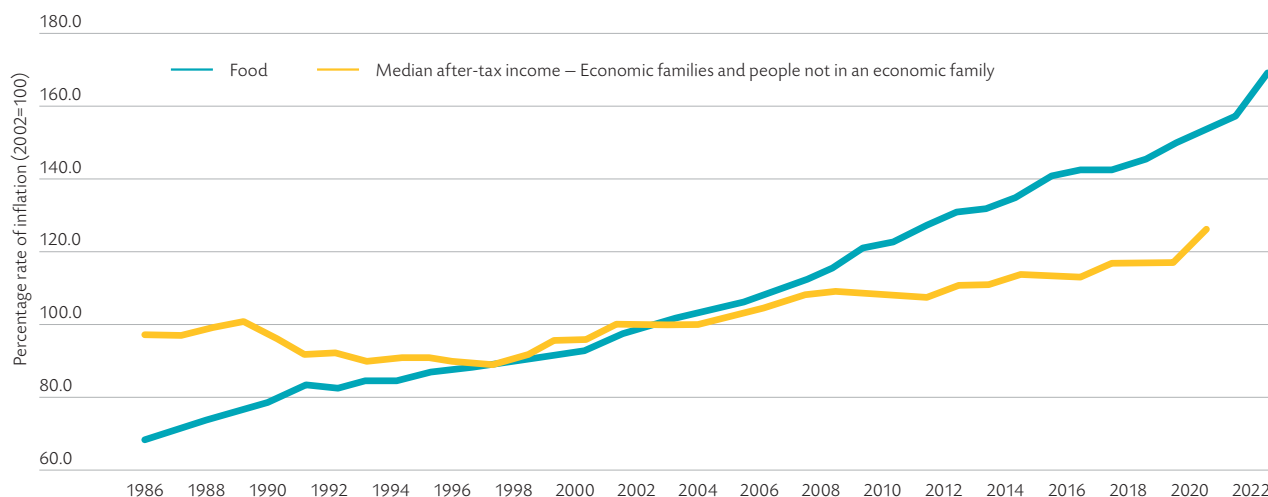
SURVEY RESPONDENT, NOVA SCOTIA



There has been a notable trend of food inflation fast outpacing median incomes for the last two decades. This trend has become especially pronounced since the beginning of this year. People living in low-income households feel the impact of rising food costs very acutely as they spend a greater portion of their limited incomes on food and are less

able to afford strategies such as buying in bulk or storing large quantities of perishable food.¹⁸ Food inflation has been one way to gauge the inadequacy of income support programs such as provincial social assistance,¹⁹ but current trends in food inflation illustrate why middle-income households have also been feeling the pressure.²⁰

Table 2: Food inflation and median after-tax incomes, 1986–2022



Source of data: Data on food prices from Statistics Canada. (2022). *Table 18-10-0004-01 Consumer Price Index, Monthly, not seasonally adjusted*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1810000401>. Income data added from Statistics Canada. (2022). *Table 11-10-0191-01 Income statistics by economic family type and income source*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1110019001>. Note: Income data only available to 2020, when pandemic-related benefits increased incomes. The ending of pandemic-related benefits in 2021 and 2022 may indicate incomes have plateaued at this point, while food inflation has persisted.

¹⁸ See Stapleton, J. (2011). *Less on their plate: Canada's poorest people facing a frightful food crisis*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/monitor/less-their-plate>

¹⁹ See Stapleton, J., & Yuan, Y. (2021). *The welfare diet in 2021: The pandemic and a new age of inflation*. Open Policy Ontario. https://openpolicyontario.s3.amazonaws.com/uploads/2021/12/The-Welfare-Diet-in-a-new-age-of-inflation-v.4_Dec-12-2021.pdf

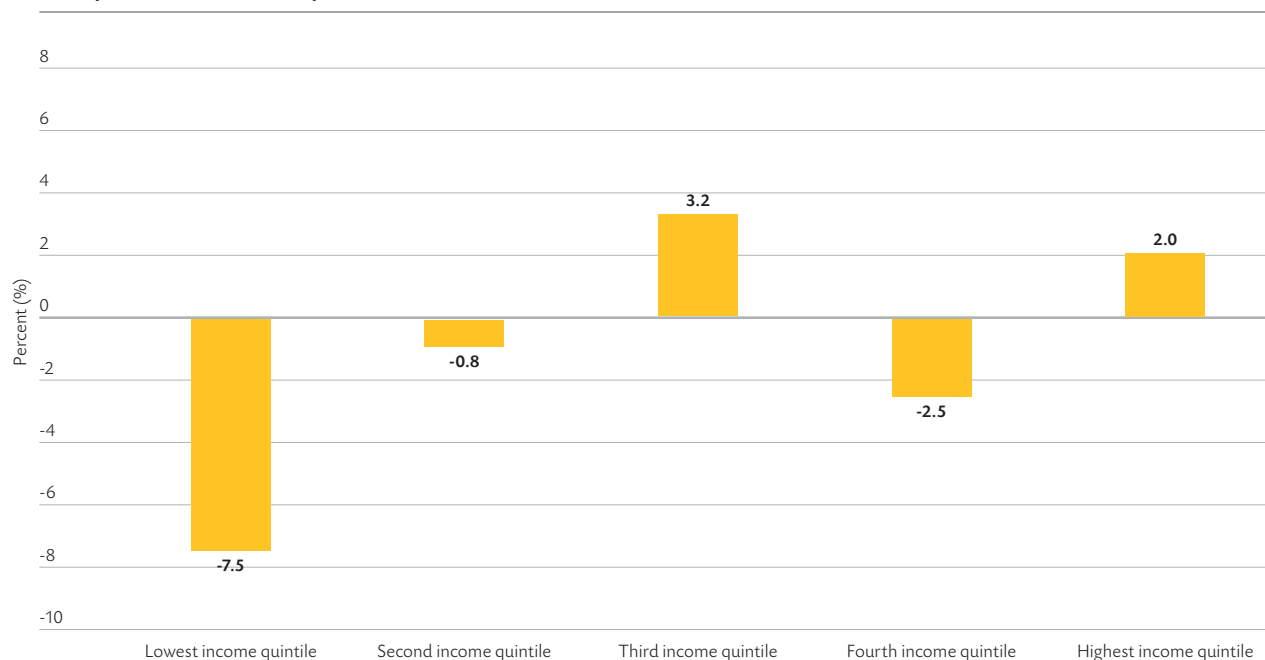
²⁰ See Marple, J., & Billy-Ochieng, R. (2022). *Inflation's toll on Canadian families: The fire is hottest in the middle*. TD Economics. https://economics.td.com/domains/economics.td.com/documents/reports/rb/Inflations_Toll_On_Canadian_Families.pdf

2022: INFLATIONARY PRESSURES, AND THE SHIFT FROM A STORM TO A HURRICANE

With pandemic benefits ending in late 2021 almost in lockstep with the cost of living accelerating in early 2022, the past year has been particularly disastrous for low-income households. The lowest income quintile saw their disposable incomes decline by 7.5 per cent in the first quarter of 2022 compared to the previous year.²¹ Before the pandemic, the majority of households nationwide whose incomes were within this quintile were already spending more than 50 per cent of their income on rent and utilities.²² With the massive increases in the costs of core items like food, rent, and fuel, a proportionately much larger share of this reduced income would go to paying for these essential items.



Table 3: Percentage change in average disposable income per household, by income quintile, first quarter 2021 to first quarter 2022



Source: Statistics Canada. (2022, August 03). *Distributions of household economic accounts for income, consumption and saving of Canadian households, first quarter of 2022*, Table 36-10-0662-01. The Daily. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220803/dq220803a-eng.htm>

²¹ Statistics Canada. (2022, August 03). *Distributions of household economic accounts for income, consumption and saving of Canadian households, first quarter of 2022*, Table 36-10-0662-01. The Daily. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220803/dq220803a-eng.htm>

²² Canadian Rental Housing Index. (n.d.). COST. http://rentalhousingindex.ca/en/#cost_prov (across Canada, the top end of the lowest income threshold ranges from an annual income of approximately \$20,000 to \$33,000).

2022: INFLATIONARY PRESSURES, AND THE SHIFT FROM A STORM TO A HURRICANE

The impact

Rent is a non-negotiable financial priority. When funds are short, it is often food that is sacrificed. For people who spend a greater portion of their incomes on housing-related costs, managing the unpredictable nature of food costs during weekly trips to the grocery store becomes an even bigger challenge. In addition to a record number of food bank visits this year, other data also indicates that many people in Canada have been having a much more difficult time making ends meet.

A survey of the general Canadian population commissioned by Food Banks Canada in March 2022 showed that nearly one in five people had gone hungry at least once during the previous two years due to lack of money, with that ratio reaching one in three for those earning under \$50,000 per year.²³ The same poll showed that nearly 14 per cent of Canadians had received food from a community organization at some point during the same period, with that number being 24 per cent for those earning under \$50,000 per year.²⁴

Further indications reveal that these deprivation rates were not an anomaly. A report from Statistics Canada conducted in late April 2022 showed that more than two in five Canadians reported being affected by rising food prices, and one in five reported they would likely need to access food or meals from a community organization in the next six months.²⁵

“COVID-related work stoppages was a big one, but now it has been displaced by food/fuel price increases and lack of affordable housing.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ONTARIO

Observations from food banks across the network are consistent with the Statistics Canada survey findings. When food bankers were asked about the main reasons for accessing a food bank in March, the cost of food was the top reason. It was mentioned significantly more than it was last year. While fewer respondents mentioned social assistance benefits being too low compared to last year, low social assistance benefits still ranked second highest as a key driver of food bank use. Housing costs remained equally prominent as a driving force, as did low wages or not enough work hours. Significantly fewer respondents mentioned unemployment as their main reason for accessing a food bank, while utility costs ranked significantly higher. Utility costs were reported often in remote and rural areas, as inflation in fuel prices would affect many during the colder months in these regions.



²³ See Appendix A.

²⁴ See Appendix A. “Community organization” can include food banks, community centres, school programs, faith-based organizations, or community gardens.

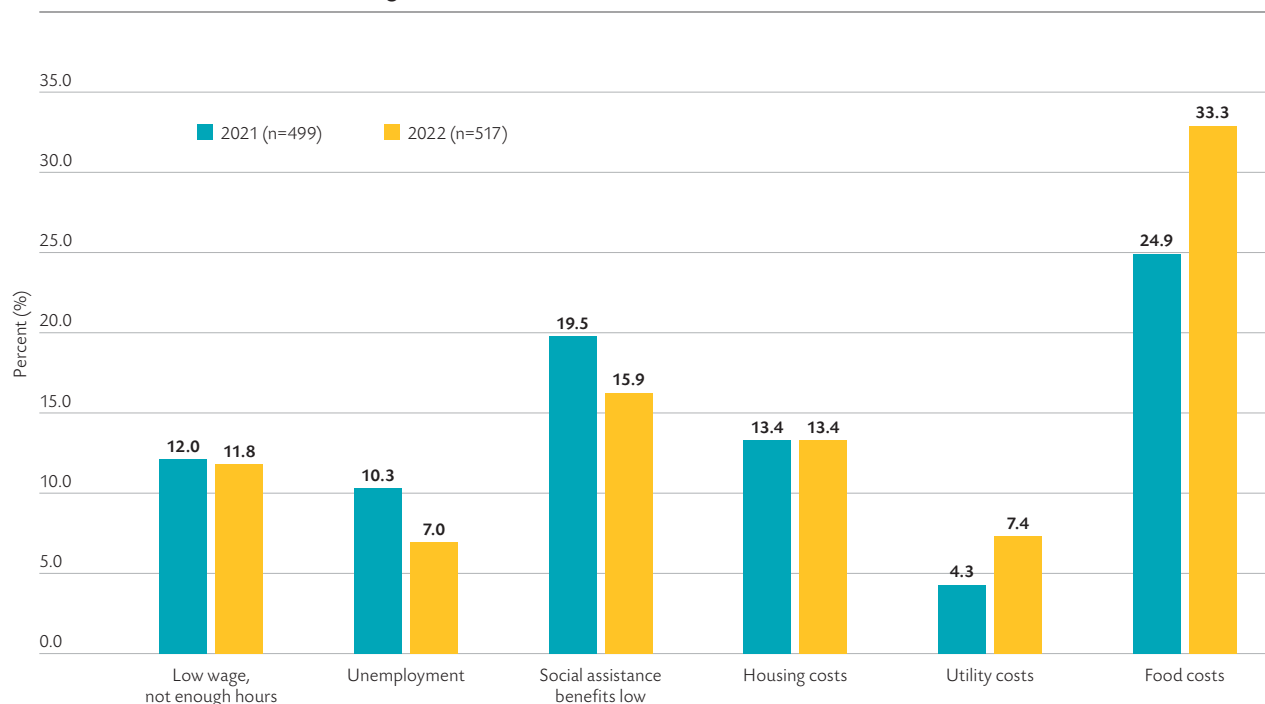
²⁵ Statistics Canada. (2022, June 09). *Rising prices are affecting the ability to meet day-to-day expenses for most Canadians*. The Daily. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220609/dq220609a-eng.htm>

2022: INFLATIONARY PRESSURES, AND THE SHIFT FROM A STORM TO A HURRICANE

“2021 in general brought forward a lot of factors that led to increased food insecurity in our region. CERB coming to an end as well as people being asked to pay back what they received from CERB has been a consistent factor throughout the pandemic that we have heard from our clients...Through the winter of 2021, there was an increase in utility charges within our province that resulted in people in our region having to pay double to triple the amount for utilities than the norm in previous years. These factors, combined with various layoffs, created an overall increase in the need to access the food bank.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ALBERTA

Table 4: Main reasons for accessing a food bank, 2021 versus 2022



Source of data: Food Banks Canada

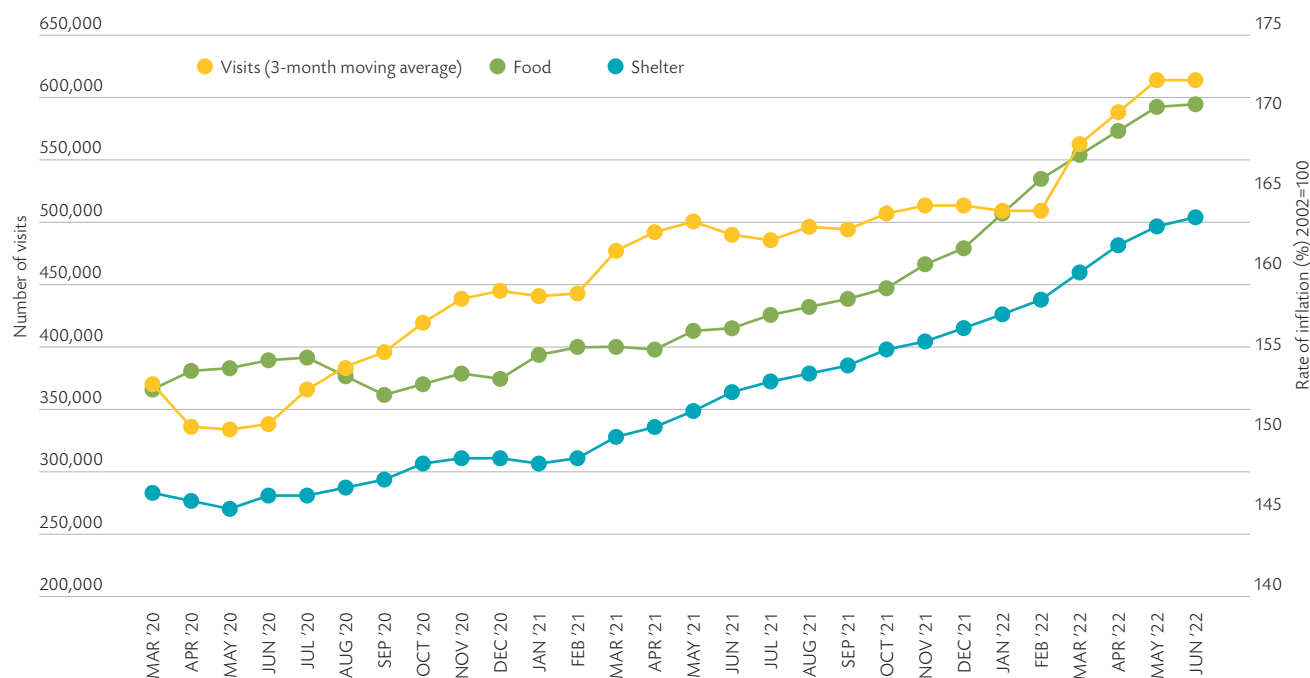
2022: INFLATIONARY PRESSURES, AND THE SHIFT FROM A STORM TO A HURRICANE

Quantitative data collected from the food bank network and Statistics Canada also appears to corroborate these observations. Looking at monthly food bank visits from March 2020 to June 2022 from a sample of food banks, along with monthly food and housing prices during the same period, we can see the impacts of rising inflation that became more pronounced in February and March 2022.

It is important to note that Table 5 shows only two drivers of food bank usage, and this analysis does not examine other important factors such as social assistance caseloads and the impact of changes in income benefits. Further analysis is needed to explore the importance of these factors in order to provide a clearer picture of the contributions of pandemic benefits to the decline in food bank usage in early 2020.



Table 5: Monthly food bank usage, food and housing inflation, March 2020–June 2022



Source of data: Statistics Canada. (2022). *Monthly food bank visits from Food Banks Canada. Food and housing inflation from Statistics Canada. 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 40% of total visits. The Spearman Rank correlation coefficient between food bank visits and food prices is $r = .86$, and housing prices is $r = .93$. The Spearman Rank correlation coefficient between food bank usage and the number of unemployed (not presented here) is $r = -0.91$.

ALBERTA MORE LIKELY TO ATTRIBUTE FOOD BANK USAGE TO UNEMPLOYMENT AND SEES HIGHEST RATE OF INCREASE IN THE COUNTRY SINCE 2019.

“[The main drivers of food insecurity in our community are] ongoing unemployment and the ending of CERB payments, increasing food costs, reduction/changes to benefit payments, insufficient programs for struggling elderly, changes in government funding for COVID lost jobs, expensive housing.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ALBERTA

Compared to pre-pandemic levels, Alberta saw a 73 per cent increase in food bank usage since 2019, more than double the national rate of increase and the highest rate in the country. This is consistent with recent findings based on an analysis from the 2020 Canadian Income Survey (CIS), which showed Alberta experiencing the highest rates of food insecurity in the country (20.3 per cent compared to the national rate of 15.9 per cent).²⁶

It is important to note that food bankers in Alberta were significantly more likely than food bankers in the rest of the country to mention “unemployment” as a top reason for food bank usage. When the HungerCount survey was conducted in March 2022, unemployment rates in Alberta were slightly higher than the national average (6.5 per cent versus 5.3 per cent).²⁷ However, Alberta’s long-term unemployment rate — the percentage of people who have been unemployed for 27 weeks or longer — was the highest in the country in that month: 32.1 per cent of people who were unemployed in Alberta were considered “long-term” unemployed in March 2022, compared to the national rate of 20.5 per cent.²⁸ The loss of income that would be experienced during extended periods of unemployment, combined with inflation, may have contributed to high levels of food insecurity and food bank usage.

²⁶ Tarasuk, V., Li, T., & Fafard St-Germain, A. A. (2022). *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF)*. Retrieved from <https://proof.utoronto.ca/>

²⁷ Statistics Canada. *Labour force survey, March 2022*.

²⁸ Statistics Canada. (2022-09-09). *Table 14-10-0342-01 Duration of unemployment, monthly, seasonally adjusted*. DOI: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1410034201>

**LOOKING
BEYOND
THE OVERALL
TRENDS**

LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS

Looking at the demographic composition and income and housing characteristics of people accessing food banks during this period provides us with insight into who is more likely to access food banks and which groups have been more vulnerable to the events of the last two years.

Age groups

“We are a very diverse school with students/families from opposite ends of the spectrum. We have students who have no food at home, sometimes no shelter. The cost of everything has gone through the roof; students are certainly eating more snacks and asking for lunch foods more in the last few months versus back in September.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, NOVA SCOTIA

Children

Children under 18 represent approximately 20 per cent of the general population but 33 per cent of the food bank population. While the percentage of children accessing food banks continues to slowly decline, children are still greatly overrepresented at food banks. Income supports such as the CCB have been crucial in buffering some of the economic impacts of the pandemic and rising costs of living; however, higher costs related to raising a family in this era of rapid inflation are making households with children vulnerable to poverty and hunger.



LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS

“Due to increased costs all the way around, we’re seeing the number of seniors that we provide for are significantly higher. Some seniors who own their own homes are minimizing the amount of food that they eat so that they have money for utilities and for property taxes.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, BRITISH COLUMBIA

Seniors

While seniors account for a relatively small portion of the food bank population, there has been a statistically significant increase in the number of seniors accessing food banks in the last three years. In 2019, they represented 6.8 per cent of clients. Now they represent 8.9 per cent. This increase corresponds to the increase in people whose main source of income is a pension, from 9 per cent in 2019 to 11.3 per cent in 2022. Generally speaking, seniors have a better model of income support than the working-age population, which has led to reduced food insecurity among this group.²⁹ Despite this support, low-income seniors are vulnerable to high inflation due to having fixed incomes and greater health care needs, and the associated costs of prescription medications.³⁰



²⁹ McIntyre, L., Daniel, J. D., Kwok, C., & Herbert Emery, J.C. (2016). Food insecurity in poor Canadian seniors is greatly reduced when guaranteed annual income kicks in. *Canadian Public Policy*, 42(3), pp. 274–286. <https://www.utpjournals.press/doi/abs/10.3138/cpp.2015-069>

³⁰ Webster, P. (2017). *Medication costs driving seniors to food banks*. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 189(49). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.109-5521>

LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS

“We are a homeless shelter for youth aged 16–24; we are seeing an increase in young people who are not able to stay with family due to rising costs, and who are unable to afford basic necessities with entry-level or minimum-wage jobs.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, NOVA SCOTIA

Young adults

There was a slight increase in the number of adults between the ages of 18 and 30 accessing food support compared to last year, but a decline in usage compared to 2019. Adults in this age group had a particularly tumultuous experience throughout the pandemic, with their wages being impacted by pandemic-related lockdowns throughout 2020.³¹ According to a national poll of the general Canadian population, adults between the ages of 18 and 34 were more likely than other groups to go hungry due to lack of money during the previous two years.³²



³¹ Statistics Canada. (2022). *The contribution of pandemic relief benefits*.

³² See Appendix A.

LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS

Primary source of income

“Food insecurity was an issue before, during and will be after COVID if increases in social assistance/disability supports or a type of basic income are not implemented. Since September 2021, the increased cost of food and gas (magnified since the food bank serves a rural area) has been a major issue. Last September/October, the need was the least in the last two years. Since then, the numbers have been increasing.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ONTARIO

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 nearly 50 per cent 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 impact their ability to participate in regular employment.

Due to the rapid erosion of these incomes compared to general inflation, people across the country, and especially those in single-person households, receive amounts that fall below the official poverty line.³³ Even though the proportion of single-person households has declined compared to 2019, this remains the most common household type accessing food banks, representing 45.4 per cent of households.

Being unable to afford food is a clear indicator of the poverty-level standard of living being experienced by people whose main source of income is social assistance. In 2021, 63 per cent of people whose main source of income was social assistance were food insecure, a rate significantly higher than for people with any other source of income.³⁴ There are strong correlations with social assistance caseloads and food bank use in both Toronto and Calgary, general welfare (Expected to Work – ETW) caseloads in Calgary, and provincial disability support caseloads (ODSP) in Toronto.³⁵

There was a significant drop in the number of food bank clients receiving the general welfare portion of social assistance, from 40.1 per cent in 2019 to 32.3 per cent in 2022. This reflects the decline of general welfare caseload trends nationwide during this period,³⁶ which may be partly due to the expansion of income support benefits throughout the pandemic, along with a more encompassing EI program. This trend may be reversed when EI reverts to its less generous pre-pandemic coverage later this year.

People whose main source of income is provincial disability support represent 16.7 per cent of total households. While holding relatively steady since the beginning of the pandemic, there is a longer-term trend of more clients who receive this form of income needing help than in previous years. This is also reflected in provincial disability caseload data nationwide, as provincial social assistance is increasingly becoming the main source of income support for people with disabilities in Canada.³⁷ This larger trend is referred to by social policy experts as the “welfarization of disability,”³⁸ which may be one reason that people with disabilities are at a higher risk of poverty and were more likely to struggle to afford food during the pandemic.³⁹

³³ Laidley, J., & Tabbara, M. (2021). *Welfare in Canada, 2020*. https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/Welfare_in_Canada_2020.pdf

³⁴ Tarasuk et al. *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021*.

³⁵ The School of Public Policy. (2017, December). *Social policy trends: Calgary food bank clients and social assistance caseloads*. University of Calgary. <https://www.policyschool.ca/publications/social-policy-trends-calgary-food-bank-clients-social-assistance-caseloads/>. And Kneebone, R., & Wilkins, M. (2022). *The sensitivity of food bank visits to social assistance, housing and labour market conditions in Toronto. SSP Research Paper, 15*(10). The School of Public Policy, University of Calgary. <https://www.dailybread.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Foodbank.Kneebone.Wilkins.Mar971.pdf>

³⁶ Maytree. *Social assistance summaries, 2021*. <https://maytree.com/social-assistance-summaries/>

³⁷ Prince, M. J. (2015). Entrenched residualism. In P.-M. Daigneault & D. Beland (Eds.), *Welfare reform in Canada: Provincial social assistance in comparative perspective* (pp. 289–304). Toronto, ON: University of Toronto.

³⁸ Prince. Entrenched residualism.

³⁹ Statistics Canada. (2020). *Impacts of COVID-19 on persons with disabilities*. The Daily. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/200827/dq200827c-eng.htm>. And Statistics Canada. (2022, March 23). *Canadian Income Survey, 2020*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220323/dq220323a-eng.htm>

LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS

Employment

For the first time, there was a significant increase in the number of food bank clients who reported employment as their main source of income, from 12.5 per cent in 2021 to 14.1 per cent in 2022. While the prevalence of food insecurity for people whose primary source of income is employment is relatively low compared to that of people who receive provincial social assistance – 13.7 per cent versus 63.1 per cent – they make up half of all food-insecure households in Canada in absolute numbers.⁴⁰ Given that the most recent food-insecurity data is from 2021, the high rate of inflation combined with these high numbers could be reflective of the jump in need that we are seeing at food banks in 2022.



⁴⁰ Tarasuk et al. *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021*, p. 20.

LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS

Housing type

“The housing crisis has become unmanageable; it is now normal for an adult to rent a room in a house with roommates for \$1200+. People are unable to spare any wages for food due to housing costs and rising food costs.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, BRITISH COLUMBIA

“Affordable housing is a major issue in our rural area. Unfortunately, the thriving real estate market has displaced many of our clients. Those who have been able to find housing in our area have received hefty increases to their rent.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ONTARIO

Market rental

The vast majority (69 per cent) of food bank clients live in market rental housing, which is the main reason food bankers consistently list housing costs as one of the top drivers of food bank usage. In both urban and rural areas, food bankers mention the pressure that rent has put on the overall budgets of their clients.



LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS

Other demographics

“The number one issue in our community is that due to a lack of childcare space, women have to stay at home without pay after their maternity leave. It [is] urgent to make them eligible for employment insurance or any allowance. They take care of raising the next generation, it’s not nothing!”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, QUEBEC

Gender

Women comprise nearly 52 per cent of food bank clients; however, of all household types, female-led, lone-parent households experience the highest rates of food insecurity. In 2021, 38 per cent of this household type experienced food insecurity, compared to rates ranging from 9 per cent to 21 per cent for other household types.⁴¹

Indigenous peoples

The percentage of Indigenous peoples accessing a food bank rose from 8 per cent in 2021 to 15.3 per cent in 2022. With rates of food insecurity already over 30 per cent in 2021,⁴² the combination of a reduction in benefits combined with skyrocketing living costs in 2022 had devastating consequences for Indigenous households. According to a national poll of the general population, 43 per cent of Indigenous people reported eating less than they should at some point between March 2020 and March 2022, compared to 19 per cent for white people.⁴³ During the same period, nearly 26 per cent of Indigenous individuals reported not eating for an entire day due to lack of money, compared to 7.4 per cent of white households.⁴⁴

Racialized groups

In 2022, 32.5 per cent of people who accessed food banks in Canada identified as members of racialized groups, compared to 22.3 per cent for the general population.⁴⁵ In 2021, racialized groups were already facing higher rates of food insecurity compared to non-racialized groups – for example, people who identified as Arab/West Asian at 27.6 per cent, and Black at 22.4 per cent, compared to 13.2 per cent for people who did not identify as members of racialized groups.⁴⁶ Racialized groups are overrepresented in the working poor population and were also impacted by the combination of high inflation and low incomes. In March 2022, 43 per cent of Black individuals and 35 per cent of Latin American/Hispanic individuals reported that they had eaten less than they should have in the previous two years due to lack of money, and nearly 33 per cent of Black individuals and 23.5 per cent of Latin American/Hispanic individuals had gone hungry due to lack of money during the same period, compared to 16 per cent of white individuals.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Tarasuk et al. *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021*.

⁴² Tarasuk et al. *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021*.

⁴³ See Appendix A.

⁴⁴ See Appendix A.

⁴⁵ Statistics Canada. (2017). *Census Profile. 2016 Census*. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E>

⁴⁶ Tarasuk et al. *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021*, p. 28.

⁴⁷ See Appendix A.

LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS

“Poverty in areas where immigrants live has also been a factor in increasing our meal distribution services.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, QUEBEC

Length of time in Canada

Newcomers to Canada who have been in the country for 10 years or less account for 17.2 per cent of food bank clients, they are more likely to be employed in low-wage, precarious jobs, leaving them vulnerable to the rapidly rising costs of both rent and food, particularly in larger urban areas.

“Driving causes in the community that we serve are severe government cuts to university budgets and resulting tuition increases and cuts to student supports on campus. The end of CERB and COVID creates uncertainty around housing, job insecurity, and an inability to plan ahead (for students).”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ALBERTA

Post-secondary students

There was a significant increase in the number of post-secondary students accessing food banks in 2022 compared to both 2019 and 2021: 7.1 per cent of clients were post-secondary students in 2022 compared to 4.7 per cent in 2021 and 5 per cent in 2019. Younger adults being hard hit by the economic impacts of the pandemic may be one reason food-insecurity rates are very high among post-secondary students, with nearly 57 per cent reporting some level of food insecurity in fall 2021.⁴⁸ The impact of inflation on both rent and food costs in 2022 would add to these challenges, and likely hit post-secondary students living near campus particularly hard.



⁴⁸ Meal Exchange. (2021). *2021 national student food insecurity report*. www.mealexchange.com/resources

LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS

People whose main source of income is employment

“Our increased numbers have mostly been the category of the working poor. People on minimum wage that can no longer stretch their dollars to cover their ‘need’ items.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ALBERTA

“Families with two working parents at minimum wage still need the food bank to help them make ends meet. People are no longer focused on ‘getting ahead,’ they are focused on surviving from one day to the next. A very sad outlook for such a great country.”

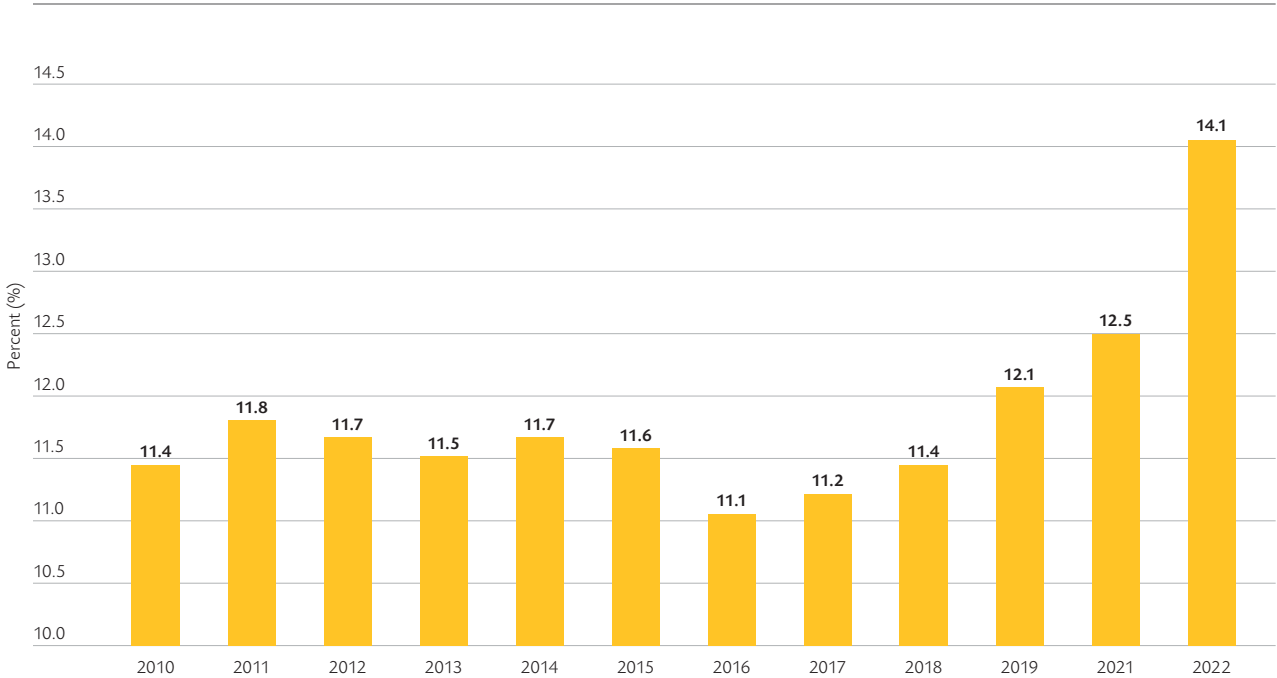
SURVEY RESPONDENT, ONTARIO

In this year’s HungerCount survey, food bankers nationwide observed seeing more clients from working households who had never visited a food bank before. This is not just anecdotal. For 10 years, people whose main source of income is employment accounted for between 11 and 12 per cent of the food bank population. This year, just over 14 per cent of those accessing food banks in Canada are currently employed. This figure is consistent with other indicators showing that having a job does not necessarily protect against the impacts of the rapidly rising costs of living. As seen in other studies conducted throughout the pandemic, the increased number of working poor accessing food banks is another indicator of the racialization of poverty.



LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS

Table 6: Percentage of food bank clients whose main source of income is employment, 2010–2022



Source of data: Food Banks Canada

“This new wave of people is mostly working poor and experiencing great shame and embarrassment when seeking help.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ONTARIO

“We believe the driving causes of food insecurity in our Okotoks community are: skyrocketing cost of living, high food prices, increased cost of fuel and enormous utility bills in the winter months. Many of our clients have employment; however, their rates of pay have not increased to cover all of these burgeoning costs.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ALBERTA

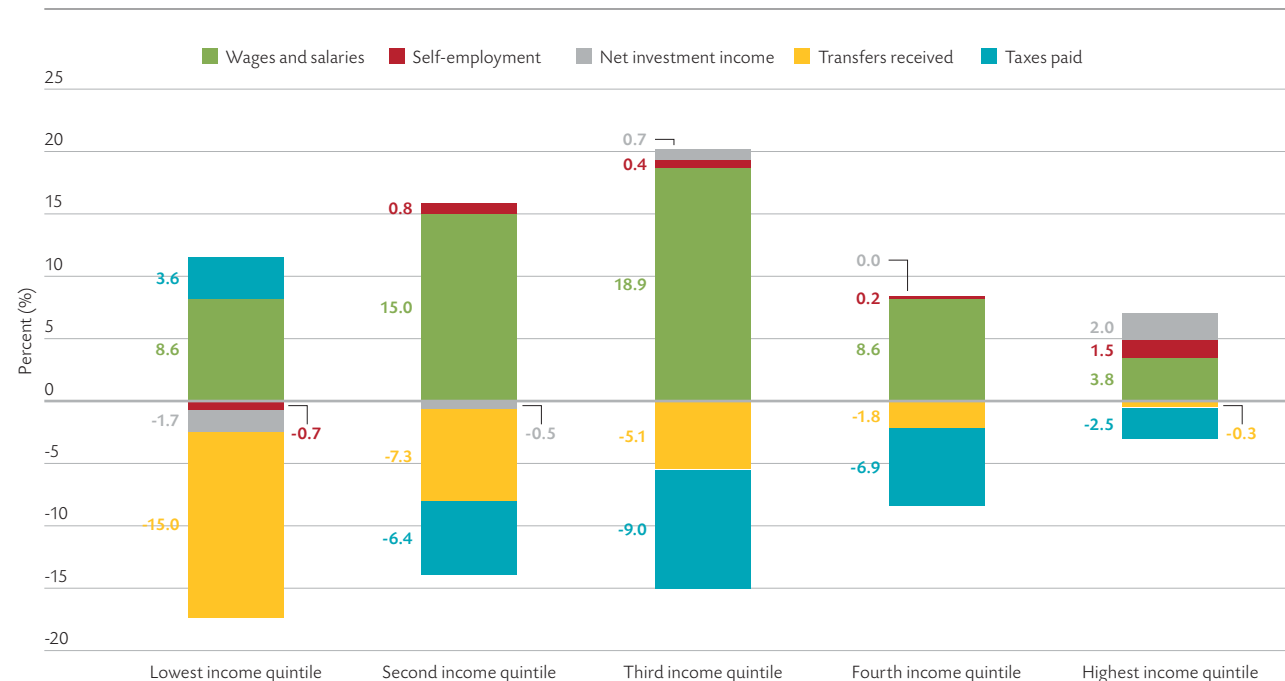
LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS

With inflationary pressures such as rising food and housing costs and declining wages, this very large sector of Canadian households is seeing increased food insecurity. According to the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, two thirds of Canadian workers have experienced a decline in real wages since the start of the pandemic, with average wage growth at 2.7 per cent per year and inflation at 3.4 per cent.⁴⁹ Furthermore, low-wage workers are not likely to see real wage growth.⁵⁰ This means that those low-wage households who were previously marginally food secure may now be food insecure, and those who were marginally food insecure may be experiencing worsening forms of food insecurity.

Lower-income workers who contract COVID-19 are particularly vulnerable because of inadequate paid sick days or caregiving days. Before the pandemic, nearly 58 per cent of the Canadian workforce did not have access to paid sick leave; for people earning less than \$25,000 per year, that figure was 75 per cent.⁵¹

The expiry of pandemic-related income benefits such as the CRB had the biggest impact on lowest-wage workers, who are already the most likely to be experiencing food insecurity. While the lowest income quintile saw an 8.6 per cent increase in their wages in the first quarter of 2022 relative to the first quarter of 2021, these gains were negligible compared to the decrease in government transfers of 15 per cent in the same period.⁵²

Table 7: Change in disposable income by income quintile, including contribution of each income component, first quarter 2022 relative to first quarter 2021



Source: Statistics Canada. (2022, August 03). *Distributions of household economic accounts for income, consumption and saving of Canadian households, first quarter of 2022*, Table 36-10-0662-01. The Daily. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220803/dq220803a-eng.htm>

⁴⁹ Macdonald, D. (2022) *Pressure cooker: Declining real wages and rising inflation in Canada during the pandemic, 2020–22*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. <https://policyalternatives.ca/sites/default/files/uploads/publications/National%20Office/2022/04/Pressure%20cooker.pdf>

⁵⁰ Macdonald. *Pressure cooker*.

⁵¹ Yalnizyan, A. *After CERB: Understanding the inadequacy of paid sick leave provisions in Canada*. Atkinson Foundation. https://atkinsonfoundation.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/After-CERB-Understanding-the-Inadequacy-of-Paid-Sick-Leave-Provisions-in-Canada_June-17-2020-1.pdf

⁵² Statistics Canada. *Distributions of household economic accounts*.

LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS

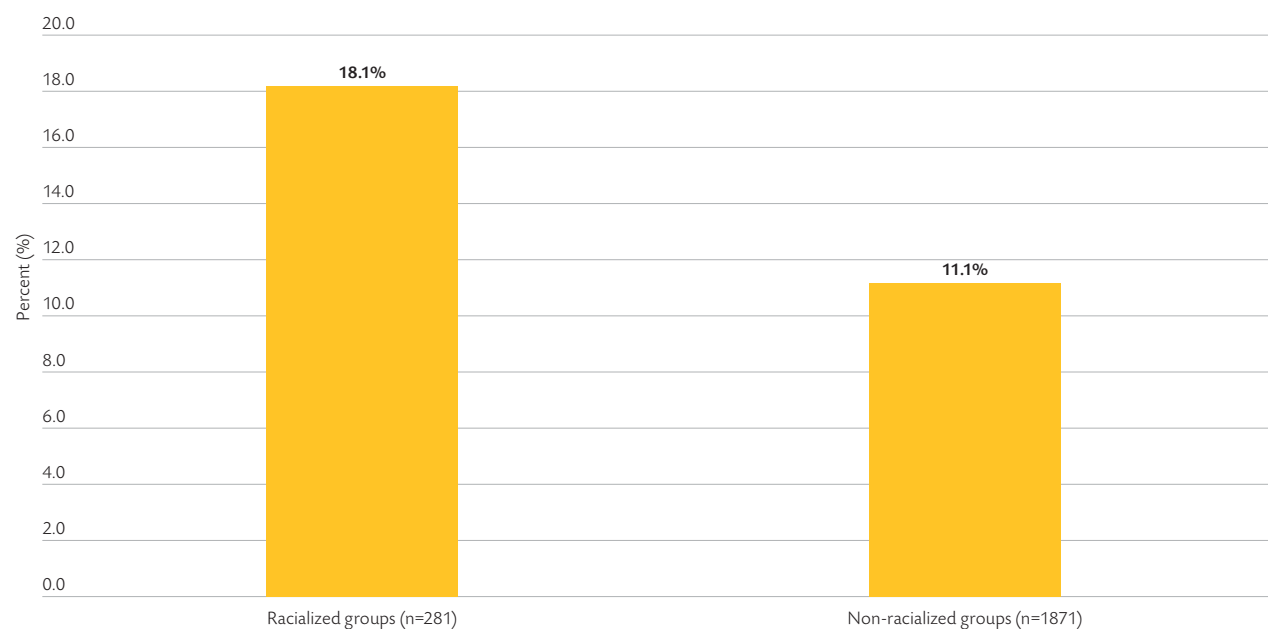
The working poor and the racialization of poverty

In the *HungerCount 2021* report, we noted that larger urban centres were more likely to see large increases in need, mostly because of the economic impacts of the pandemic such as unemployment, and to see clients who identified as belonging to a racialized group.⁵³ This year, with unemployment being less of a reason for food bank use and the significant increase in the number of working poor accessing food bank services, further exploration is needed to show the demographic characteristics of those who are working but also facing the greatest difficulties when it comes to managing the increased cost of living.

While we cannot currently disaggregate HungerCount data in order to explore the demographic characteristics of people who recorded employment as their main source of income, a national poll of over 4,000 Canadians commissioned by Food Banks Canada provides further insight.⁵⁴

Racialized populations who were working at some point throughout the pandemic were more likely to have needed to access a food program during that time: 18 per cent of people who accessed a food program since March 2020 were identified as racialized, compared to 11 per cent who did not.

Table 8: Accessing a food program while working for pay at any point since March 2020, racialized groups relative to non-racialized groups



Source of data: Food Banks Canada

⁵³ Food Banks Canada. (2021). *HungerCount 2021*.

⁵⁴ Statistics in this section are derived from data collected from a national poll commissioned by Food Banks Canada and conducted by Mainstreet Research from February 25 to March 2, 2022, among a sample of 4,009 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in Canada. See Appendix A for more results from this poll.

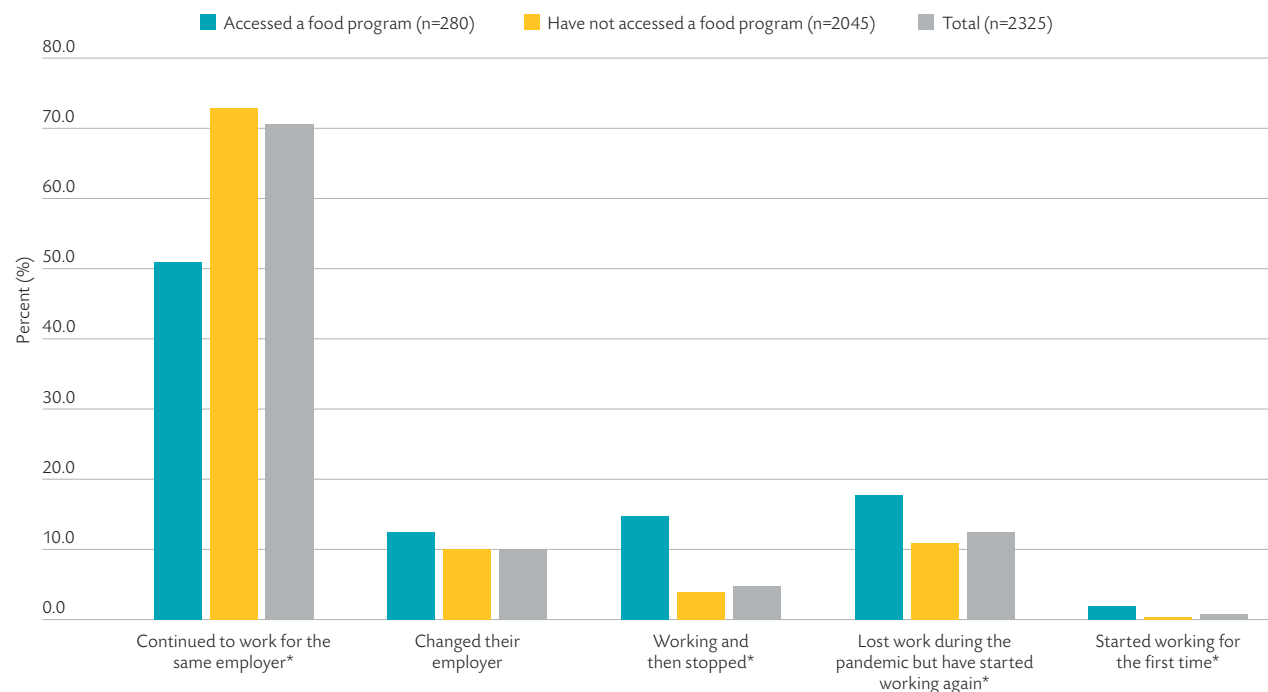
LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS

It is important to note that while the employment situation for some respondents who accessed a food program changed at some point during the pandemic, the majority (just over 50 per cent) who had accessed a food program mentioned that they had been working continuously for the same employer.

These results mirror what was seen both before and in the early stages of the pandemic, with racialized populations being overrepresented in working poor households pre-pandemic, or more likely to lose their jobs or have their hours reduced in mid-2020.⁵⁵



Table 9: Continuity of employment and food program access



*Statistically significant differences were found at $p < .05$

Source of data: Food Banks Canada

⁵⁵ Stapleton, J. (2019). *The working poor in the Toronto Region: A closer look at the increasing numbers*. Metcalf Foundation. <https://metcalffoundation.com/publication/the-working-poor-in-the-toronto-region-a-closer-look-at-the-increasing-numbers/>. And Hou, F., Frank, K., & Schimelle, C. (2020). *Economic impact of COVID-19 among visible minority groups*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/45-28-0001/2020001/article/00042-eng.htm>

LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS

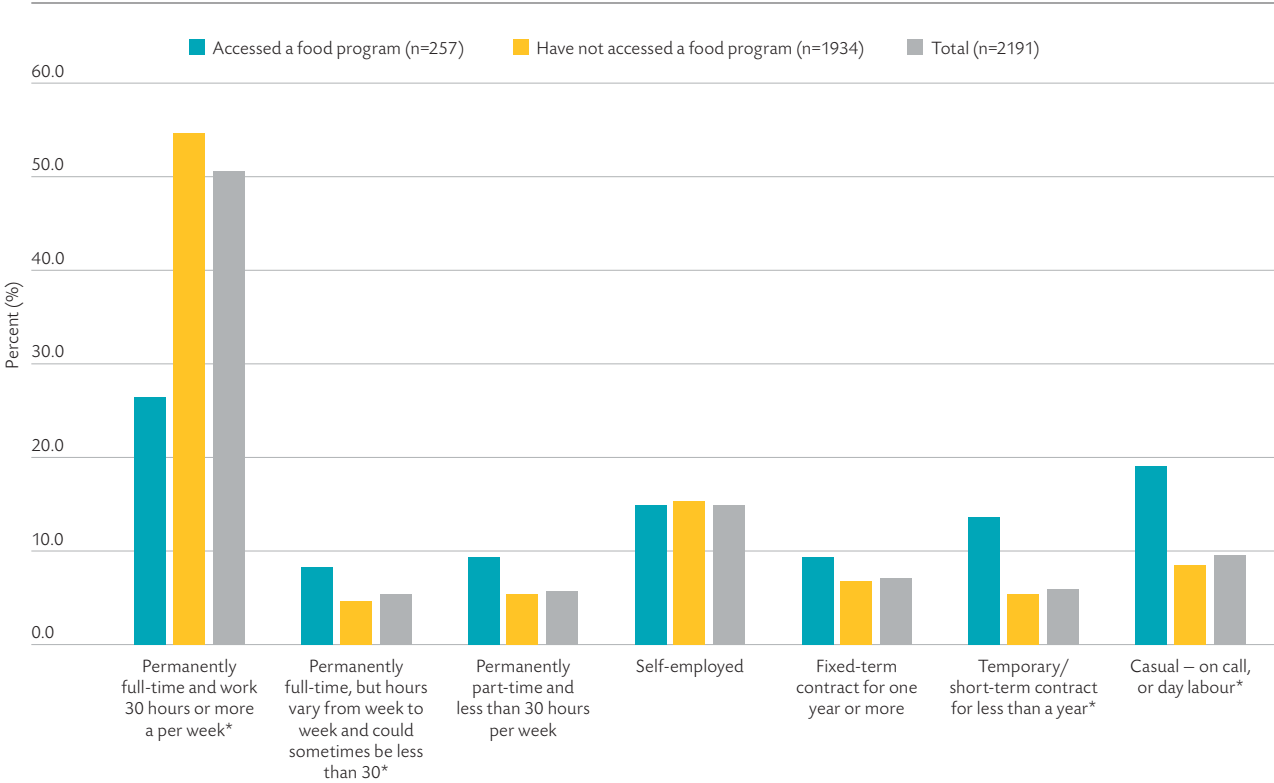
“We are seeing a lot people without work permits due to immigration status as well as people working in the tourism industry where they get their hours cut and make very low wages.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, BRITISH COLUMBIA

The results of the national poll also provide insight into the potential impacts of the increasing precariousness of the labour market. They illustrate that workers in temporary, casual, or variable employment arrangements were significantly more likely than permanent employees with 30 hours or more a week to have accessed a food program since the start of the pandemic.



Table 10: Type of employment during COVID-19 pandemic



*Statistically significant differences were found at p < .05
Source of data: Food Banks Canada

LOOKING BEYOND THE OVERALL TRENDS

“[The leading causes of food insecurity in our community are] the incredible increases in housing and food, layoffs and work that is not secure or only part-time.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ONTARIO

This is consistent with findings from other studies that show that people with precarious employment living in low-income households are more likely to have difficulty making ends meet (even when compared to people in other low-income households that have secure employment) or experience food insecurity.⁵⁶

Official Labour Force Survey data does not provide an accurate sense of the number of precarious, temporary, or casual work arrangements due to various limitations in the data collection methodology.⁵⁷ However, there is little doubt that precarious work has been increasing, particularly with the increase in temporary or casual work.⁵⁸ Demographic groups who are at a higher risk of experiencing poverty – for example, recent newcomers and Indigenous peoples – are also more likely to be employed in precarious, non-permanent work arrangements.⁵⁹

⁵⁶ Lewchuk, W., Lafleche, M., Dyson, D., Goldring, L., Meisner, A., Procyk, S., Rosen, D., Shields, J., Viducis, P., & Vrankulj, S. (2013). *It's more than poverty: Employment precarity and household well-being*. Toronto: Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) research group. https://pepso.ca/documents/2013_itsmorethanpoverty_report.pdf. And McIntyre, L., Bartoo, A. C., & Emery, J. C. (2014).

When working is not enough: Food insecurity in the Canadian labour force. *Public Health Nutrition*, 17(1): 49–57. doi: 10.1017/S1368980012004053

⁵⁷ Lewchuk, W. (2021). Collective bargaining in Canada in the age of precarious employment. *Labour and Industry*, 31(3): 189–203. And Fong, F. (2018). *Navigating precarious employment in Canada: Who is really at risk?* Chartered Professional Accountants Canada. https://www.cpacanada.ca/-/media/site/operational/sc-strategic-communications/docs/g10475-sc_navigating-precarious-employment-in-canada_who-is-really-at-risk_en_final.pdf

⁵⁸ CBC News. (2019, May 14). *Number of temp workers jumped by 50% in last 20 years, StatsCan says*. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/business/temporary-workers-employment-1.5135310>

⁵⁹ Lamb, D., Banerjee, R., & Verma, A. (2021). Immigrant-non-immigrant wage differentials in Canada: A comparison between standard and non-standard jobs. *International Migration*, 59(5): 113–33. <https://doi.org/10.1111/imig.12808> and Lamb, D., & Verma, A. (2021). Nonstandard employment and indigenous earnings inequality in Canada. *Journal of Industrial Relations*, 63(5). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00221856211021128>



FOOD INSECURITY AND FOOD BANK USE IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Food bank clients who identify as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit represent 15.3 per cent of people accessing food banks across the network – a significant jump from 8 per cent last year.

Whereas last year the combination of income security programs such as the CRB and local community-led food initiatives contributed to a reduction in need compared to before the pandemic, that progress was erased with the ending of those income benefits combined with significant cost-of-living increases. Concurrent with the impacts of global warming and already skyrocketing food and fuel costs in remote and northern regions, the urgency of this issue cannot be understated.

Even before the current inflation shock, Indigenous populations nationwide faced extremely high rates of food insecurity. The most recent food-insecurity data based on results from the 2020 CIS shows 30.7 per cent of Indigenous households to be food insecure, a ratio that is twice that of white households.⁶⁰ As the CIS does not account for on-reserve communities, rates of food insecurity in these areas could be as high as 50 per cent.⁶¹

While the CIS has not yet released data for the territories, results from the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) from 2017 to 2018 show food-insecurity rates that are significantly higher than the national average, ranging from 16.9 per cent in Yukon to 21.7 per cent in the Northwest Territories to 57 per cent in Nunavut, compared to 12.7 per cent for the country as a whole during the same period.⁶² A study by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami reports even higher food-insecurity rates, ranging from 68.4 per cent in Nunatsiavut to 77.6 per cent in Nunavut.⁶³

“It is our belief that the needs have increased since COVID benefits are gone and that the price of food and utilities has increased dramatically. Rents are too high.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ALBERTA



⁶⁰ Tarasuk et al. *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021*.

⁶¹ Batal, M., Chan, H. M., Fediuk, K., Ing, M. Berti, P. R., Mercille, G., Sadik, T., & Johnson-Down, L. (2021). *First Nations households living on-reserve experience food insecurity: Prevalence and predictors among ninety-two First Nations communities across Canada*. *Canadian Journal of Public Health*, 112(Suppl 1): 52–63. <https://doi.org/10.17269/s41997-021-00491-x>

⁶² Statistics Canada. (2020). *Table 13-10-0385-01 Household food security by living arrangement*. <https://doi.org/10.25318/1310038501-eng>

⁶³ Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. (2021). *Inuit Nunangat food security strategy*. https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ITK_Food-Security-Strategy-Report_English_PDF-Version.pdf

FOOD INSECURITY AND FOOD BANK USE IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

In 2020, COVID-19 income support programs helped to profoundly reduce income-based poverty among Indigenous people just as they did among non-Indigenous people. However, while income-based poverty rates decreased from 18.6 per cent in 2019 to 11.8 per cent in 2020 for Indigenous people, the rate was still double that of non-Indigenous people (6.6 per cent).⁶⁴

“Many cannot afford to work because of the costs of childcare and the punitive nature of earning income from social assistance and rent subsidy clawbacks. In many cases we are called when monthly cheques have been reduced as a result of the above.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

“The price of food in Northern Canada has skyrocketed since the pandemic; we are seeing more and more middle-income families having to avail themselves of the food bank monthly. Food security and the lack of fresh fruit and vegetables are also a concern here in the North.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, NEWFOUNDLAND

“The cost of food, cost of gas, being in the North – the food has to travel further and spoils faster.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, BRITISH COLUMBIA

“Climate – eight months of winter is not conducive to local food security – housing, heating, fuel and electricity costs.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES

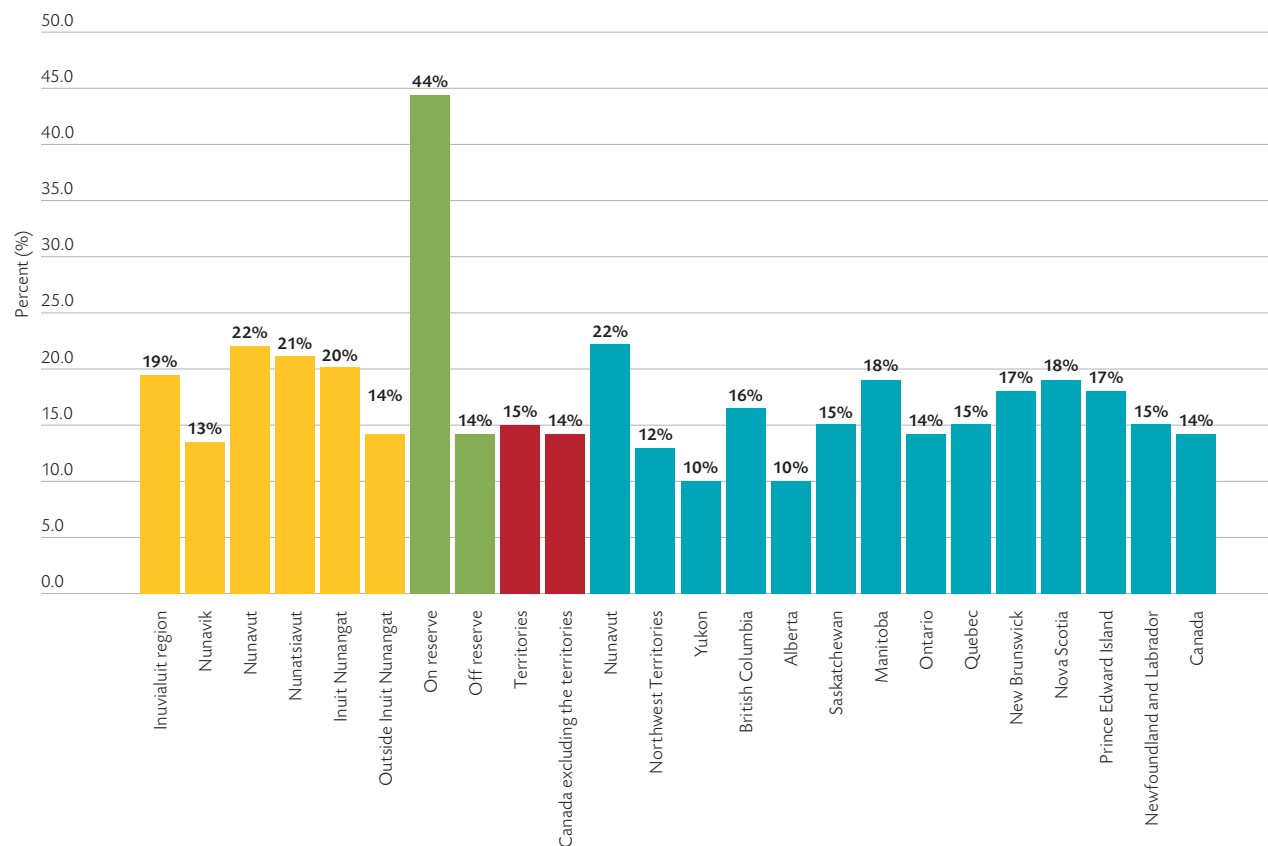
The pronounced gap in income between people living in primarily Indigenous communities versus the general population can also be demonstrated using the Low Income Measure (LIM), which measures relative low income among different populations.⁶⁵ Pre-pandemic, low-income rates were significantly higher in many regions with large numbers of Indigenous people, including on reserves; they show 44 per cent of people living on low incomes compared to the national rate of 15 per cent in 2016. It is particularly concerning that this disparity does not account for the differential costs of living in these areas – such as food, transportation, and fuel – and so the true disparity is likely to be substantially greater.

⁶⁴ Statistics Canada. (2022, March 03). *Canadian income survey, 2020*. The Daily. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220323/dq220323a-eng.htm>

⁶⁵ As noted by Harding and St-Denis, the LIM uses a low-income threshold that is half of the median Canadian household income but does not factor in regional differences in the ability to afford a certain standard of living.

FOOD INSECURITY AND FOOD BANK USE IN INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

Table 11: Percentage of people living on low incomes, by selected level of geography, 2016



Source: Harding, A., and St-Denis, X. (2021). *Income Research Paper Series: Low-income statistics for the population living on reserve and in the North using the 2016 Census*. Statistics Canada. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2021005-eng.htm>

In the general Canadian population, those in the lowest income quintiles saw their disposable income drop the most in 2022 compared to 2021.⁶⁶ Given the rates of low income in Indigenous communities as compared to the general Canadian population, the combination of the reduction in income along with massive inflation was particularly devastating for these communities.



⁶⁶ Statistics Canada. *Distributions of household economic accounts*.

RACING AGAINST THE CLOCK: NORTHERN COMMUNITIES, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND FOOD ACCESS

In addition to low income levels, the lack of access to traditional foods and the high cost of food in local grocery stores present barriers to food security in the North. Food banks from northern areas that participated in the HungerCount mentioned that transportation costs and related difficulties are leading to high food prices. The impacts of rapid inflation in the price of gas and food are exacerbated in the North, where the cost of food was already far higher than in major cities⁶⁷ and people incur higher energy expenses to adequately heat their homes in the colder months.

The impacts of climate change are yet another contributing variable affecting food security in the North. Global warming continues to impact both traditional food access and access to store-bought market food due to the reduced availability of winter road access.

Winter roads are crucial for the transportation of fuel, construction material, food, and other supplies, as transporting them by air would be extremely expensive.⁶⁸ One way to demonstrate the potential risk faced by Northern communities due to reduced winter road availability is based on a methodology recommended by Zhang et al. for the National Research Council of Canada, illustrated in the map below.⁶⁹ While many communities throughout the North already face persistent challenges with various transportation routes due to variable climate conditions, some are at particularly high risk of reduced food access within the next 30 years due to the potential impacts of global warming.

⁶⁷ Government of Canada. (2021). *Cost of the revised Northern food basket in 2020–2021*. <https://www.nutritionnorthcanada.gc.ca/eng/1634927939937/1634927989569>

⁶⁸ Barrette, P. D. (2018). *The Canadian winter road infrastructure and climate change adaptation: Prospective solutions through R&D*. National Research Council Canada. <https://nrc-publications.canada.ca/eng/view/object/?id=46ba2a4c-b74f-4ca0-9562-fd56bb870a46>

⁶⁹ Zhang, M., Roghani, A., Hill, L., & Barrette, P. (2021). *Development of a winter road climate risk and vulnerability review framework 2020–2021 update*. National Research Council Canada. Retrieved from <https://doi.org/10.4224/40002078>. With thanks to the staff at Esri Canada for producing this map for our report.

COMMUNITIES AT RISK OF REDUCED FOOD ACCESS DUE TO CLIMATE CHANGE

Food Access Risk Due to Winter Road Availability High emissions climate scenario for period 2021-2050

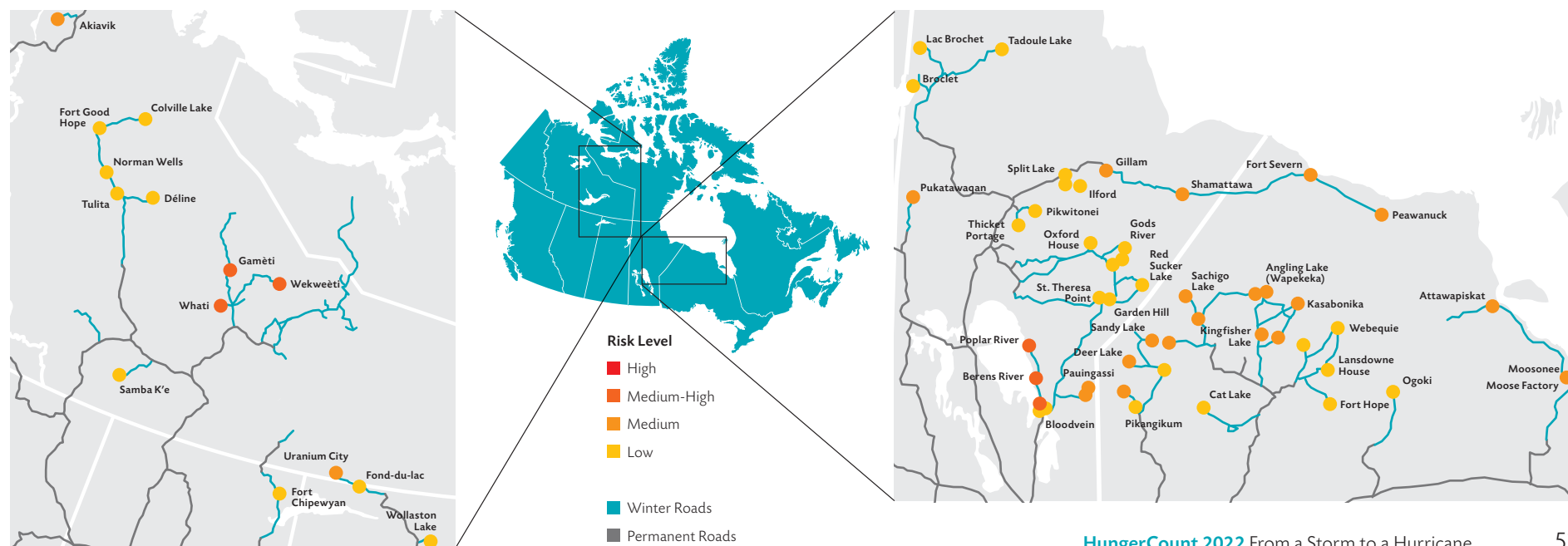
Communities in Northern Canada already face significant challenges regarding food insecurity, and climate change threatens to exacerbate this trend. For many communities, winter roads are the primary form of land-based access. However, this link to food and other resources is in danger with

a warming climate. This map uses a risk score to categorize winter roads in terms of their accessibility and shows a high emissions scenario for 2021-2050. The risk score was based on five factors:

- Absolute number of Freezing Degree Day decline
- Length of Winter Road
- Total number of Water Crossings
- Percentage change in Freezing Degree Days
- Length of Water Crossings

The result of this weighted multi-criteria analysis was applied to each road. As communities may be connected to multiple winter roads, the highest risk score in that particular network was applied to the community.

Communities Connected to Ice Roads



“As each season changes with the impacts of climate change, which are more prevalent in our northern communities that are shown in the accompanying map, those communities have more and more limited access to basic services as well as healthy, nutritious foods on a daily basis.

Many of our communities who still rely heavily on traditional hunting, fishing and trapping have noticed changes in the migratory patterns and locations of the animals they hunt/fish/trap during the harvest.

JASON STEVENS, NORTHERN PROGRAM OFFICER FROM SAPOTAWEYAK CREE NATION IN THE TREATY 4 TERRITORY



The community members have adjusted their hunting and fishing methods, and moved their camps to follow the migration of the animals/fish, with the hopes of providing their families and communities with traditional country foods along with the teachings and knowledge to pass on to the future generations.

Many of our communities in the North have limited or no road access, with some communities having developed ice road systems where they only have a three-to-four-month timeframe to transport the goods and other items that are so large that the cost of air freight would be worth more than the goods themselves.

Those ice road systems are the main source for delivering goods and products. At this time, our communities are against the clock to have nutritious, quality food delivered in large quantities and to have some variety of healthy foods delivered with the cost of these items rising on a daily basis.



THE STORM'S AFTERMATH

THE STORM'S AFTERMATH: THE PANDEMIC AND ITS SOCIAL FALLOUT

“This past year I have seen the mental health of our clients rapidly decline. Many clients in our community are dealing with mental health issues, drug addiction and homelessness since the pandemic.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, SASKATCHEWAN

The pandemic, food insecurity, and mental health are strongly correlated. When asked about the leading causes of food insecurity in their community, food bankers were far more likely to identify mental health and related issues, such as addiction, as a factor in 2022 than they were in 2021. Additionally, 63 per cent of food bankers saw increasing mental health support as one of the top policy priorities to reduce hunger in their communities, compared to 50 per cent in 2019. Whether these observations were corroborated directly through increased client demand, or indirectly through seeing the associated challenges their clients faced, food bankers on the front lines articulated the myriad ways these cumulative events have impacted their clients.

A 2018 Statistics Canada study showed that people who experience “stressful life events” — for example, losing a job or income, being a victim of a crime, suffering from a serious injury or illness, or dealing with family or relationship stress — have an increased risk of experiencing greater food insecurity for up to two years into the future.⁷⁰ During the COVID-19 pandemic, many households could have experienced multiple stressful events, from the loss of a job to illness to social isolation.



⁷⁰ El-Hajj, A., & Benhin, E. (2021). *Association between food insecurity and stressful life events among Canadian adults*. Longitudinal and International Study of Adults Research Paper Series. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-648-x/89-648-x2021001-eng.htm>

THE STORM'S AFTERMATH: THE PANDEMIC AND ITS SOCIAL FALLOUT

Mental health, food insecurity, and food bank use

“In terms of their mental health, food insecurity can lead to depression, anxiety, and other mental problems. This fragility may increase their needs in terms of food aid support.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, QUEBEC

“Mental health supports are still lacking. People who are struggling with mental health issues and limited access to assistance find it very challenging to maintain employment.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ALBERTA

In their survey responses, food bankers repeatedly identified and emphasized the mental health challenges of their clients. It is very clear that the pandemic impacted people's mental health and that poor mental health is significantly correlated with food insecurity.

Changes to our daily social and economic lives because of COVID-19, along with the accompanying social distancing and isolation guidelines, led to worsening mental health. In May 2020, 38 per cent of Canadians said their mental health was worse than before the pandemic began. Respondents felt more anxious, depressed, lonely, sad, and stressed.⁷¹ Self-rated mental health declined further in late 2021 compared to late 2020.⁷²

The Canadian Perspectives Survey Series 2 survey conducted during the pandemic showed a clear correlation between poor mental health and food insecurity. For example, households with moderate or severe food insecurity were more likely to report their self-perceived mental health as fair or poor and their symptoms of anxiety as moderate or severe.⁷³ This relationship has been observed over the years in the Canada Community Health Survey.⁷⁴



⁷¹ Guerrero, M., & Barnes, J. (2022). *Profiles of mental health and their association with negative impacts and suicidal ideation during the COVID-19 pandemic: A Canadian perspective*. Statistics Canada. DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.25318/82-003-x202200800002-eng>

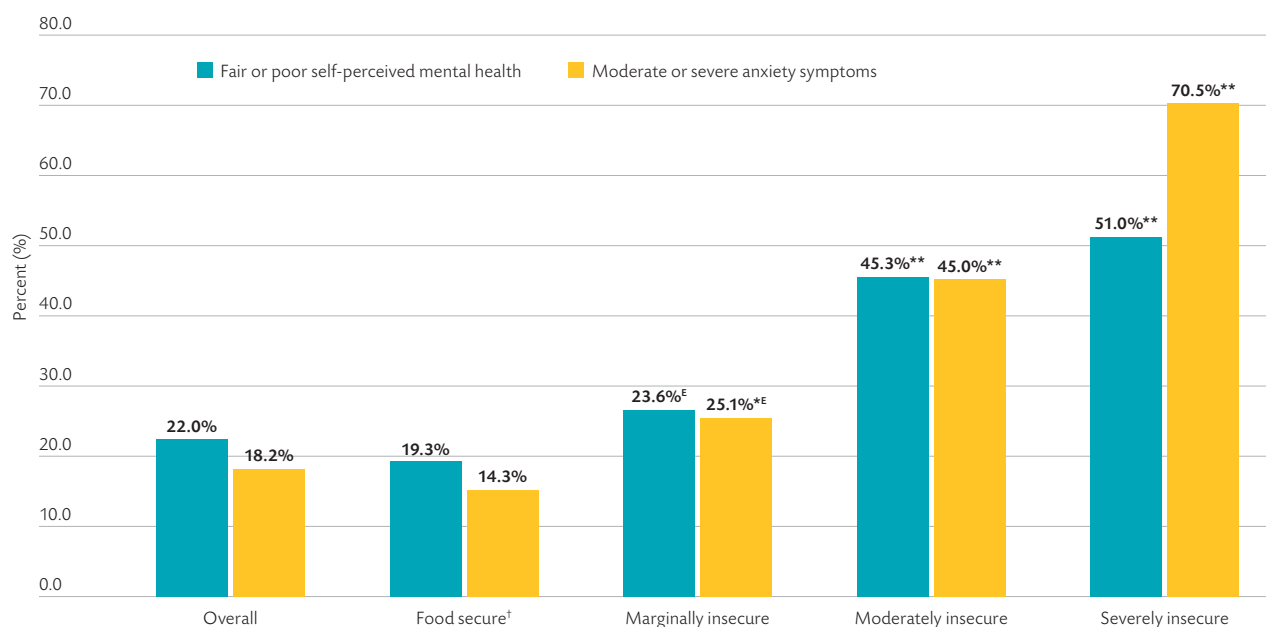
⁷² Statistics Canada. (2022, June 07). *Self-rated mental health decreases after another year of the COVID-19 pandemic*. The Daily. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220607/dq220607e-eng.htm>

⁷³ Polsky, J., & Gilmour, H. (2020). *Food insecurity and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Statistics Canada. DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.25318/82-003-x202001200001-eng>

⁷⁴ PROOF. (2016). *Food insecurity and mental health*. <https://proof.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/mental-health-fact-sheet.pdf>

THE STORM'S AFTERMATH: THE PANDEMIC AND ITS SOCIAL FALLOUT

Table 12: Prevalence of fair or poor self-perceived mental health and moderate or severe anxiety symptoms by household food security status, household population aged 15 or older, Canada, excluding territories, 2020



[‡] Interpret with caution (coefficient of variation 16.6% to 33.3%)

^{*}Significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.05$)

^{**} Significantly different from reference category ($p < 0.01$)

[†] Reference category

Source: Polsky, J., & Gilmour, H. (2020). *Food insecurity and mental health during the COVID-19 pandemic*. Based on analysis of data from the Canadian Perspectives Survey Series 2: Monitoring the effects of COVID-19. DOI: <https://www.doi.org/10.25318/82-003-x202001200001-eng>. Note: The chart here does not include confidence intervals as in the source document.



THE STORM'S AFTERMATH: THE PANDEMIC AND ITS SOCIAL FALLOUT

Social isolation and reduced community support systems

“Our community also currently has very limited health care, including a doctor shortage, and our clients are not receiving the mental health care they deserve. Many clients do not even have a family doctor and must go to the ER for medical services instead of being able to make doctor appointments. Programming has not been consistent due to the pandemic making supports not as helpful as they were previously. Clients have made less progress meeting goals and making changes. All of these issues have worsened since March 2021 and contribute to food insecurity in our community.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ALBERTA

Food banks also spoke about how social isolation and the disintegration of community supports that existed prior to the pandemic have led to worsening mental health. Isolation in seniors, for example, can lead to greater food insecurity. Having a “very weak sense of community belonging” or living alone is significantly correlated with food insecurity among people aged 65 and over.⁷⁵

With changes in the labour market, difficulty finding volunteers, and rising costs associated with inflation, there are possibly fewer community support programs now than in 2019. The impact of this is experienced by food banks and is something they associate as a cause of food insecurity in their community.



⁷⁵ Kansanga, M. M., Sano, Y., Bayor, I., Braimah, J. A., Nunbogu, A. M., & Luginaah, I. (2021). Determinants of food insecurity among elderly people: Findings from the Canadian Community Health Survey. *Ageing & Society*, 42(9). <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0144686X20002081>

THE STORM'S AFTERMATH: THE PANDEMIC AND ITS SOCIAL FALLOUT

Addictions

“The exponential increase in the cost of housing, paired with a lack of available subsidized housing, often leads our clients to compromise on physical safety and food security which can cause stress and an increase in addiction and mental health issues.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, NOVA SCOTIA

Another aspect of mental health that was identified by food banks was addictions. Deaths related to substance use increased by 91 per cent from April 2020 to March 2022 compared to April 2018 to March 2020.⁷⁶ Mental illness and addiction can often serve as a disability, impairing a person's ability to work and maintain housing, both of which are essential to food security. Food insecurity can worsen addictions and vice versa.⁷⁷

Food banks often mention housing issues alongside addiction and mental health problems as reported by clients. Food banks, especially traditional hamper programs, must adapt to continue to serve the increasing number of clients who are experiencing housing instability or are under-housed. Without the proper space to store and cook food, clients need more ready-to-eat foods more frequently.



⁷⁶ Government of Canada. (2022). *Health infobase: Opioid- and stimulant-related harms in Canada*. <https://health-infobase.canada.ca/substance-related-harms/opioids-stimulants/>

⁷⁷ Men, F., Fischer, B., Urquia, M. L., & Tarasuk, V. (2021). Food insecurity, chronic pain, and use of prescription opioids. *SSM—Population Health*, 14: 100768 . <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmph.2021.100768>

THE STORM'S AFTERMATH: THE PANDEMIC AND ITS SOCIAL FALLOUT

Family breakdowns

“The most common reason for using the food bank has been due to losing a job or family break-ups and the cost of food, gas, and/or housing.”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, ONTARIO

Divorce, separation, and familial breakdowns increase the likelihood of a household experiencing food insecurity.⁷⁸ Research conducted in April–May 2020 showed that difficulties associated with COVID-19 led to worsening family conflicts and increasing anxiety among Canadians.⁷⁹ Closures and isolation measures meant households delayed separation plans, as indicated by the sharp drop in the number of divorces in 2020.⁸⁰

“[The driving causes of food insecurity in our community include] living with people who may make it difficult to have autonomy over food (such as an abusive family member/partner).”

SURVEY RESPONDENT, NOVA SCOTIA

Some food banks also reported that clients had been at greater risk of exposure to intimate partner violence since the start of the pandemic. Approximately half of the residential facilities that house people experiencing abuse in Canada received an increased number of calls in the first year and a half of the pandemic.⁸¹ Intimate partner violence can cause a range of physical and psychological health issues. Studies from the United States also show relationships between intimate partner violence and food insecurity in a household.⁸² The breakdown of families and intimate partner violence were also mentioned by food banks as causes of food insecurity for some households.

It is difficult to disentangle these concerns from each other as they are dynamically interrelated. For example, financial and food insecurity or physical health challenges can negatively affect mental health. If a person's mental health is deteriorating, they may be unable or less able to maintain a job and earn an income, which leads to worsening food insecurity. Food banks are seeing an increase in these kinds of situations.



⁷⁸ El-Hajj & Benhin. *Association between food insecurity and stressful life events*.

⁷⁹ Mohanty, J., Chokkanathan, S., & Alberton, A. M. (2022). COVID-19-related stressors, family functioning and mental health in Canada: Test of indirect effects. *Family Relations*, 71(2): 445–462. <https://doi.org/10.1111/fare.12635>

⁸⁰ Statistics Canada. (2022, March 09). *A fifty-year look at divorces in Canada, 1970 to 2020*. The Daily. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220309/dq220309a-eng.htm>

⁸¹ Ibrahim, D. (2022). *Canadian residential facilities for victims of abuse, 2020/2021*. Statistics Canada. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/85-002-x/2022001/article/00006-eng.htm>

⁸² El-Hajj & Benhin. *Association between food insecurity and stressful life events*.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

A DUAL PATH TOWARD A BETTER ROAD AHEAD

In last year's HungerCount report, we raised alarms about the post-pandemic recovery and what it could mean for Canada's economy and people. There were clear signs that the road to recovery would be bumpy, but few could have expected just how dire things would get for so many individuals and families.



As our current report points out, the past year has seen historic inflation for basic necessities like food, fuel and housing, while the invasion of Ukraine has led to massive disruptions in supply chains, the global food supply, and global economics.

What does this all mean for people living in Canada? Groceries are more expensive, gas is more costly, basic necessities are taking more of our incomes, housing is harder to afford, and governments are reluctant to offer the assistance that was rightfully available at the height of the pandemic.

While all people in Canada have felt the pinch in one way or another, it is clear that some groups are being particularly affected more than others. As the data plainly shows, longstanding fissures in our social safety net are being exposed in the midst of this economic turmoil.

Food banks are seeing an increasing number of seniors and people living on fixed incomes walk through their doors. People who are employed (or who were recently employed) are turning to food banks more often because their incomes are still too low, even with a job. Students who may have had enough budgeted for their previous academic years are now being forced to turn to their local food banks as well.

What the number of food bank visits showed us this year is that no one is safe from these economic challenges.

What the data also shows us is that while food insecurity can affect anyone, this past year's economic climate has exposed and further entrenched the deep poverty that existed before the current economic downturn.

While inflation continues to be unbiased in its wrath, many people in Canada have the incomes and savings needed to weather the storm. Others aren't so lucky – already having been living in deep poverty prior to the current inflationary crisis, being able to 'scrape by' has gone from dire to impossible for far too many. As governments at all levels in Canada look to the road ahead in building a more resilient Canada, it is crucial that attention not only be put on temporary solutions to address recent inflationary issues, but also toward the long-term solutions needed to reduce the systemic poverty that has existed for decades.

This means developing a much stronger social safety net through a dual focus – one that balances the need to reduce the cost of living (increase affordability) while also striving to increase people's incomes (reduce poverty).

A dual approach of addressing the root causes of food bank use, which are low incomes and poverty, while also targeting the more recent acute causes, which relate to the skyrocketing costs of living, can pave the way for a more resilient Canada where no one is left behind, and no one goes hungry.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A MINIMUM INCOME FLOOR

PLANKS ARE IN PLACE, BUT LARGE CRACKS REMAIN

While far from perfect, it can be said that there are currently two existing pillars to Canada's income floor – seniors, who have an income floor through the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), Old Age Security (OAS) and Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), and families with children, who have an income floor through the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) that will soon be bolstered by a national affordable childcare program.

These two foundational pillars are important, yet imperfect advancements in Canada's social safety net. Currently, seniors and families with children represent only two of the four necessary pillars that could help lead us toward a Canada-wide minimum income floor.

In addition, Canada's income floor must include a pillar for those living with a disability and for single unattached working-age adults (singles). All together, these four pillars must be developed and improved to bring us closer to a minimum income floor for all people in Canada.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A MINIMUM INCOME FLOOR

THE EXISTING PILLARS: SENIORS AND FAMILIES

While seniors and families with children represent the two existing pillars of Canada's income floor, many individuals in these groups still struggle with food insecurity. In fact, families with children (both lone parents and couples) represent 26 per cent of all food-insecure households, and still 17 per cent of seniors are living with food insecurity.⁸³

At food banks this year, seniors were one of the more alarming upwards shifts in visitor trends. Up by 2 per cent, those with pensions as their main income source now represent 11 per cent of food bank visitors. As for families with children, while food banks have seen a hopeful decrease in the number of children visiting a food bank since the introduction of the Canada Child Benefit (CCB), still one in three served are children. This representation of children in food banks remains disproportionate as children represent only 20 per cent of the general population.

What has become clearer over the past months is that no household is unaffected by increases in inflation and the cost of living. Those with fixed incomes, like seniors, struggle to stretch their dollars to accommodate higher grocery and utility bills. Families' grocery bills and housing costs are increasing, too. It is important that the government does not forget about these groups, despite the strong systems supporting them. In the long term, the federal government must continue to improve and increase the benefits being offered for seniors and families with children.

⁸³ Tarasuk et al. *Household food insecurity in Canada*, 2021.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A MINIMUM INCOME FLOOR

PILLAR 3: PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

In March of this year, 17 per cent of food bank users stated that disability support was their main source of income. This number is increasing and has reached alarming heights in Ontario and B.C., where 30 and 24 per cent of food bank users stated that disability support was their main source of income, respectively.

Not a single province (with federal benefits included) provides single people who live with a disability with a sufficient income. This discrepancy can be as much as \$13,578 per year, where Albertans on the Barriers to Full Employment (BFE) program subsist on \$11,430 annually.⁸⁴

The result of this inadequate system is a disproportionate number of people on disability support seeking outside help. When the benefits offered don't go far enough to provide basic necessities, those receiving disability support find themselves heading to the food bank. The proportion of food bank visitors who rely on disability support compared to the general population level is shocking. For example, in Ontario only 4.3 per cent of the population is receiving provincial disability support,⁸⁵ meanwhile 30 per cent of food bank users indicate disability support as their main income source. The numbers peak in Alberta, where those receiving disability supports are 840 per cent more represented in food banks.

There is hope in the much-anticipated Canada Disability Benefit. Said to be modelled after the GIS program,⁸⁶ this benefit will result in the first substantial income floor for persons with a disability. The questions that remain unclear are how restrictive the benefit will be and how much it will offer. On average, provincial social assistance rates fall below Canada's official poverty line, the Market Basket Measure (MBM), by an average of \$9,390 a year.

Many advocates fear that this new federal benefit could lead to cutbacks on provincial supports. Historically, when new federal programs are put in place, provinces often cut provincial programs. In this case, it is very clear that this cannot happen.

This is a moment for provinces and the federal government to work together and close the gap. However far the new Canada benefit goes, provincial legislatures must go the rest of the way. Canada needs to get to the point where assistance rates don't mean an automatic trip to the food bank. As it stands, many people receiving disability support cannot afford to feed and house themselves properly, and as a result, they are prevented from moving to a life beyond poverty.

⁸⁴ Tarasuk et al. *Household food insecurity in Canada*, 2021.

⁸⁵ Laidley, J., & Tabbara, M. (2021). *Welfare in Canada*, 2020. Maytree. https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/Welfare_in_Canada_2020.pdf

⁸⁶ Inclusion Canada. (2021). *Canada Disability Benefit: A vision and design outline*. <https://inclusioncanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Canada-Disability-Benefit-Vision-and-Design-July-2021-FINAL.pdf>

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A MINIMUM INCOME FLOOR

PILLAR 4: UNATTACHED SINGLES

For many years now, Food Banks Canada's annual HungerCount report has highlighted that single working-age adults account for a consistently increasing percentage of the people who need help from a food bank.

Over the last decade, the percentage of single people using food banks has increased significantly, having grown from 38 per cent of households helped by a food bank in 2010 to almost half of all households helped (45 per cent) in 2022.

Looking at the staggering economic statistics for this group, it doesn't take long to determine why food banks have seen this jump. Using Canada's Official Poverty Measure (the Market Basket Measure), just under one in 10 Canadians live below the poverty line. If we look at only unattached (i.e., single) working-age people, that figure jumps to 33 per cent: one in every three single adults lives in poverty.⁸⁷

Of the nearly 2 million people living in deep poverty in Canada, 50 per cent of them are singles.⁸⁸ These individuals are living with incomes that are below 75 per cent of the already inadequate poverty line and on average, they're earning \$6,700 a year.⁸⁹

Given these statistics, it is hardly surprising that close to one in five single adults experience food insecurity and that so many need support from a food bank to make ends meet.⁹⁰

This is a population that, from a government program perspective, has few places to turn and seems to have been largely forgotten by federal and provincial governments. Many members of this group have mental health issues that are exacerbated by poverty and low incomes.

Many people in this situation have mental health issues that also go untreated because they have a lack of supports, are stuck in a cycle of inadequate social assistance or disability-related supports, or have lost a job and have nowhere to turn for new training and education programs to equip them to re-enter the workforce. All these issues have been exacerbated by the recent economic downturn and heightened cost of living.

For decades, governments have focused policies on specific subsets of the population, such as families and seniors, but have routinely overlooked single, working-age adults as a group that requires targeted action. Among those people who are unable to work, many are receiving social or disability assistance but cannot climb out of poverty because of the grossly inadequate supports and strict conditions that come with these programs. In other words, they are being held back by the system that is meant to help them.

⁸⁷ Food Banks Canada. (2017). *Nowhere to turn*. https://foodbankscanada.ca/nowhere-to-turn_final_en/

⁸⁸ Kapoor, G. T., Tabbara, M., Hanley, S., & McNicoll, S. (2022). *How to reduce the depth of single adult poverty in Canada: Proposal for a Canada working-age supplement*. Maytree. <https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/canada-working-age-supplement-report.pdf>

⁸⁹ Kapoor et al. *How to reduce the depth of single adult poverty in Canada*.

⁹⁰ Statistics Canada. *Household food security by living arrangement*.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A MINIMUM INCOME FLOOR

We recommend that the government:

1

Swiftly introduce the Canada Disability Benefit with assurance that no clawbacks will come from provincial governments and that harmony exists between provincial assistance levels and the federal program to bring all persons with a disability up to, or above the MBM.

A) Amend the MBM for persons with a disability to reflect the realities of a higher cost of living for those facing long-term disability.

4

Make single, low-income adults a priority consideration in all future poverty reduction measures, including an expanded and modernized EI, to ensure that this vulnerable population is no longer left behind.

2

Fund and develop, in collaboration with the provinces and territories, multiple Minimum Income Floor pilot projects of various types across the country in various provinces and territories (in both rural and urban communities).

A) Within at least one pilot, consider a model based on the reformatting of the Canada Workers Benefit, where recipients do not need to have a base income to receive a minimum allotment.

B) Collect and analyze data from these pilot projects over multiple years to determine the type of Minimum Income Floor that is best suited to Canada's needs and accounts for Canada's regional differences.

5

Develop new mental health measures as part of future health accords with the provinces and territories that include a specific focus on the needs of single, working-age adults.

3

In the short term, allow all low-income households to have access to the non-cash benefits that are currently only available to those on social assistance (e.g., childcare subsidies, affordable housing supplements, drug and dental insurance).

6

Ensure all federal benefits are indexed to inflation and that agreements with provincial governments explicitly forbid clawbacks of provincial social supports for new federal benefit programs.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

A PERSISTENT PROBLEM THAT REQUIRES URGENT SOLUTIONS

While there are many factors that push Canadians into food banks, one of the most pressing is the increasingly high cost of housing. Put simply, shelter is a non-negotiable priority for any individual or family. As shelter costs rise, households are sacrificing everything they can to keep a roof over their heads. This struggle often leads to fewer or no meals, poor health, debt, increased stress and mental illness, and the inability to pay other bills.

This March, 13.4 per cent of food bank users stated that their main reason for visiting a food bank was due to high housing costs. In a separate poll, three out of every five people in Canada reported housing as the largest obstacle to affording food – up from only one in five in 2020.⁹¹

Affordability isn't the only concerning issue in Canadian housing. Nationally, 45 per cent of renters are living in a dwelling that is either inadequate, unsuitable or unaffordable, while 23 per cent of renters are in core housing need.

The most troubling area of the housing market is not with those who own their home, but for those who rent. Once again this year, as our data shows, a majority of food bank visitors (two in three) live in market rental housing. Many of these renters are living within the lowest income groups and can spend well over 30 or 50 per cent, or even more, of their income on shelter costs.⁹² Spending this portion of income on housing is considered a "crisis" level, leaving little left over for other basic needs such as food and putting people at risk of homelessness.

A slight glimmer of hope emerged with the federal government's introduction of the National Housing Strategy (NHS) in 2017, something that Food Banks Canada had advocated for over many years.

As part of the NHS strategy, the federal government committed to spending around \$20 billion (equally matched by the provinces and territories for a total of \$40 billion) over 12 years, with the ultimate goal of removing 530,000 (half of) households from core housing need and reducing the number of chronically homeless people by half by 2030.⁹³

Those were positive developments backed by sound government policy, yet very little, if anything, has been done since the strategy was announced to help people who currently need the support of food banks because of their high housing costs.

Most of the NHS investments have been put toward loans for the development of market housing rather than directly addressing the needs of the people who most need help. A 2019 Parliamentary Budget Office report found that the NHS changed very little in terms of how much funding the government invested in affordable housing. In fact, it found that the NHS actually slightly reduced the funding targeted for those in core housing need.⁹⁴ Meanwhile, the erosion of affordable housing far outpaces its creation: for every affordable unit created, four are removed from the market.⁹⁵

⁹¹ Statistics in this section are derived from data collected from a national poll commissioned by Food Banks Canada and conducted by Mainstreet Research from February 25 to March 2, 2022, among a sample of 4,009 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in Canada. See Appendix A for more results from this poll.

⁹² Canadian Rental Housing Index. (n.d.). *COST*.

⁹³ Government of Canada. (2017). *A place to call home: Canada's first National housing strategy*. <https://eppdscrmssa01.blob.core.windows.net/cmhcprodcontainer/sf/project/placetocallhome/pdfs/canada-national-housing-strategy.pdf>

⁹⁴ Segel-Brown, B. (2019, June 18). *Federal program spending on housing affordability*. Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. <https://www.pbo-dpb.gc.ca/en/blog/news/federal-program-spending-on-housing-affordability>

⁹⁵ Housing Policy and Research Exchange. (2021, July 30). *Getting to 2030 – Examining how Budget 2021 helps Canada achieve its housing goals, and what we need to do from here* [Submission to Canada's Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation]. Maytree. <https://maytree.com/publications/getting-to-2030/>

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

A PERSISTENT PROBLEM THAT REQUIRES URGENT SOLUTIONS

While units are being built and converted, there are still millions of Canadians looking for affordable housing. Right now, Canadians need more support to help cover the cost of housing. If the government is to find success in helping Canadians access affordable housing, they will need to focus both on (1) building and introducing new affordable units, and (2) helping make the existing market more affordable.

In Manitoba, the rent assist program aids 33,000 residents each year by providing funds that help bring rental costs closer to 30 per cent of income.⁹⁶ It was found that the added benefit allowed individuals to “focus on other aspects of their life such as furthering their education, raising and/or gaining custody of their children, and rebuilding their mental and physical health.”⁹⁷

Further, 70 per cent of the tenants surveyed identified that the benefit allowed them to buy healthier groceries. With rents being a rather stable expense compared to others, the benefit allowed residents to make smart planning decisions with their funds.⁹⁸ Robust rent assist programs, like the program offered in Manitoba, can go a long way in reducing poverty and food insecurity among all renters.

Trends in food bank visits also point to another issue in the housing sector – students. Post-secondary students visiting food banks are up significantly from 2021, now representing 7.1 per cent of food bank visitors. It’s no surprise to find that post-secondary students are struggling so heavily when a large majority are allocating more than 30 per cent of their income to rents that have increased substantially over the past four years.⁹⁹

This means that a vast majority of students are in core housing need in a market that is trending up. With students spending much of their time studying, there is little opportunity to earn additional income. On average, most student incomes are less than \$20,000 a year. Despite this, rents are 25 per cent higher for students than the rest of the population.¹⁰⁰ While housing is a nation-wide issue that impacts more than just students, there is a clear weakness in the student housing sector.

While the high cost of housing has been a root cause of food bank use for many years, the acute urgency of the matter and the need for government intervention has never been clearer.

⁹⁶ Cooper, S., Hajer, J., & Plaut, S. *Assisting renters: Manitoba’s Rent Assist in the context of Canada’s national housing strategy*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba Office. <https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/assisting-renters>

⁹⁷ Cooper et al. *Assisting renters*.

⁹⁸ Cooper et al. *Assisting renters*.

⁹⁹ Utile. (n.d.). *Data and research*. <https://www.utile.org/en/data-and-research>

¹⁰⁰ Utile. (2022). *On student housing in Canada – Research report*. https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/604e1456a8cd2bab84c72bc8/6312321ae56ed92137241afb_FLASH_20220902_ENG_VF.pdf

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

A PERSISTENT PROBLEM THAT REQUIRES URGENT SOLUTIONS

We recommend that the government:

1

Immediately implement a national rent assist program based on an expanded version of the Canada Housing Benefit and include the development of an on-reserve rent assist program.

2

Explore community-targeted funding for the acquisition of affordable housing. In other words, providing capital funding (loans and grants) to non-profits so they may purchase and provide rental properties at or below the median market rent.¹⁰¹

3

Introduce new investments and address an important omission of the National Housing Strategy, to build supportive housing for people with mental and physical health disabilities, particularly for low-income and marginalized populations.¹⁰²

4

Develop stronger regulations or taxations of financial entities (REITs, private equity funds, asset management companies, and pension funds) in the housing market.

¹⁰¹ The Housing Policy and Research Exchange. 2021. *Getting to 2030*.

¹⁰² Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. (2018). *Alternative Budget 2019: No time to lose*. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/afb2019>

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

LOW-INCOME WORKERS

WHEN A JOB STILL ISN'T ENOUGH

In the peak of the pandemic, unemployment rates across Canada reached frightening heights, with 13 per cent of all Canadians being unemployed at the time.¹⁰³ As the economy began to recover, the unemployment rate decreased to record lows in June and July of 2022. On its way down, unemployment rates had already reached a healthy level of 5.3 per cent in March, at the time that Food Banks collected HungerCount data.¹⁰⁴

Despite this strong recovery and increase in employment across Canada, the wages now flowing into the pockets of workers are clearly not going far enough. As our report data shows, 14 per cent of people seeking help from food banks indicated that their main source of income came from a job.

Worse yet, when including those who are currently collecting EI, Canada's labour force represents 20 per cent of food bank visitors. These people are Canada's working poor. Individuals who, despite their best efforts to work, still come home with too little money to feed themselves and their families.

And while one in five is a striking number, the working poor actually account for 40 per cent of those living in poverty in most parts of the country.¹⁰⁵ More shocking, 52 per cent of food-insecure households report jobs as their main income source.¹⁰⁶

This large number of struggling workers is due, by and large, to the increase in precarious and unreliable work. People in temporary and term-based work "are more likely to report fewer hours of work, experience more frequent periods of unemployment, and earn less money than those who have secure, full-time work".¹⁰⁷

There are many factors that lead to working people in Canada visiting food banks. Individuals with lower wages are often more likely to struggle with the increasing costs of living and are seen regularly in food banks. However, the most significant challenges come for those who work temporary, casual or part-time work, and for racialized Canadians (+7 per cent compared to non-racialized).

In a country where working hard no longer means that you're guaranteed an adequate income, people need a social safety system that guarantees their peace of mind. In the 2018–2019 fiscal year, EI covered only 39 per cent of Canada's unemployed workers, compared to over 80 per cent in the early 1990s.¹⁰⁸ Now, almost 40 per cent of households whose main source of income is EI are reporting some level of food insecurity.¹⁰⁹

While the federal government has made commitments to review the current inadequate EI program, there has been no headway and the process is rolling into a slow stop. As conditions in Canada's economy worsen, there is no time for slow and drawn-out processes. Action is needed today.

¹⁰³ Statistics Canada. (2022). *Chart 2 Unemployment rate up in August*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220909/cg-a002-eng.htm>

¹⁰⁴ Statistics Canada. (2022). *Chart 2 Unemployment rate up in August*.

¹⁰⁵ Stapleton. *The working poor in the Toronto region*.

¹⁰⁶ Tarasuk et al, V., Li, T., & Fafard St-Germain, A. A. (2022). *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021*.

¹⁰⁷ Stapleton. *The working poor in the Toronto region*.

¹⁰⁸ Busby, C., & Gray, D. (2021, March 10). *A new voluntary EI program would bring more workers under safety net*. Policy Options Politiques. <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/march-2021/a-new-voluntary-ei-program-would-bring-more-workers-under-safety-net/>

¹⁰⁹ Tarasuk et al. (2022). *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021*.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS LOW-INCOME WORKERS WHEN A JOB STILL ISN'T ENOUGH

We recommend that the government:

1

Develop a new program within EI that specifically supports older workers (aged 45–65) who lose employment at a later age and who may need specific training and education programs catered to their needs to help them re-enter the modern workforce.

2

Permanently broaden the EI qualifying definition of “employment” to include self-employed and precarious work.

3

Review and reduce the number of qualifying “hours of employment” needed (currently between 420 and 700 hours of insurable employment) to better reflect the nature of modern jobs and working situations.

A) Include a specific stream for seasonal workers who may work as few as 12 to 16 weeks a year.

4

Immediately expand the Working-While-on-Claim (WWC) provisions in EI to allow workers to retain more of their income from temporary/part-time work while on EI without losing benefits or having their income clawed back.

5

Extend the maximum duration of EI benefits beyond 45 weeks, to 52 weeks, followed by a staggered reduction in cash benefits while retaining access to non-cash EI supports (such as training and education) so that people are not forced into our broken and grossly inadequate provincial social assistance system once their EI benefits run out.

6

Work with provinces to reduce the clawbacks and improve harmony between social assistance and EI.

7

Expand EI sickness benefits beyond 15 weeks to keep people off provincial disability programs, which provide meagre supports and are very difficult to climb out of.

8

To better support low-wage workers currently employed:

A) Improve the Canada Workers Benefit (CWB) by increasing the maximum payout, especially for those earning below the poverty line.

B) Introduce government incentives to encourage businesses to pay living wages to all employees.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

NORTHERN AND REMOTE FOOD INSECURITY

FORGING A PATH TOWARD BRIGHTER DAYS

Northern food insecurity remains a significant concern for Food Banks Canada. Due to the increased cost of housing and food, along with the ongoing impacts of climate change, the issue of northern food insecurity will likely worsen over the coming months and years. Already, food banks are seeing highly concerning increases in the number of Indigenous people visiting food banks – making up 15.3 per cent of visitors compared to 8 per cent last year. With a majority of northern and remote communities being home to largely Indigenous peoples, this increase is indicative of a growing issue in the remote North. While consecutive federal governments have attempted to address this problem with various targeted programs and initiatives, it is clear that the current approach is failing.

Food Banks Canada has worked over the last few years to suggest ways to improve the Nutrition North program and northern food insecurity in general. However, we remain concerned that food costs in the North have remained largely unchanged since the beginning of the Nutrition North program in 2011. For example, in Iqaluit, Nunavut, the cost of a nutritious food basket to feed a family of four in March 2018 was approximately \$1,721.56. The same basket of food would cost about \$868 in Ottawa.¹¹⁰

Recent data released by Statistics Canada shows that the Nutrition North subsidy has not had the impact on food costs that many hoped for when the program was first introduced almost a decade ago. As shown in the most recent numbers released by Nutrition North Canada, the average cost of the Revised Northern Food Basket in March 2018 was actually over 2 per cent higher than it was in March of the previous year, and only 1 per cent lower than in March 2011, prior to the launch of the Nutrition North program.¹¹¹

Measures announced by the program in 2018, such as new supports for traditional hunting and gathering programs (a measure that Food Banks Canada has advocated for), and a new Inuit-Crown working group to address future challenges, are welcomed, but they are unlikely to be adequate to address the multiple challenges facing the North. This is all made worse by the recent surge in food inflation and the cost of living.

Beyond Nutrition North, household food insecurity in the North has grown rampant. In the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, food insecurity rates reach 17, 22 and 57 per cent, respectively.¹¹² In 2020, the federal government recognized this challenge in a report on northern food insecurity by saying that “due to several factors, Northerners – in particular, women, children and Indigenous peoples – are more at risk of experiencing food insecurity than other Canadians.”¹¹³

These high food insecurity rates can be explained by consistently lower wages among those living in the North, high housing and energy costs, and devastating impacts from colonialism, systemic racism and climate change that are preventing the gathering of traditional and reliable food sources.¹¹⁴

With household food insecurity levels still unacceptably high in the territories and social assistance income that has decreased in real terms, it is time for the federal government, in collaboration with the territories, to review their food security strategies in the North.

Food Banks Canada, along with many food banks in the food banking network, are doing what they can to support struggling northern communities, but high shipping costs are stretching already limited funding to its limit, especially with recent inflationary pressures.

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

¹¹⁰ Ottawa Public Health. (2018). *Nutritious food basket: The price of eating well in Ottawa*. https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/resources/Documents/2018_NFB-Report_EN.pdf

¹¹¹ Government of Canada. (2019). *Cost of the revised Northern food basket*. <https://www.nutritionnorthcanada.gc.ca/eng/1548078467819/1548078497301>

¹¹² Leblanc-Laurendeau, O. (2020, March 01). *Food insecurity in Northern Canada: An overview*. Library of Parliament. https://lop.parl.ca/sites/PublicWebsite/default/en_CA/ResearchPublications/202047E

¹¹³ Leblanc-Laurendeau, O. *Food insecurity in Northern Canada*.

¹¹⁴ Bratina, B. *Food security in northern and isolated communities: Ensuring equitable access to adequate and healthy food for all report of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs*. House of Commons. <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/432/INAN/Reports/RP11420916/inanrp10/inanrp10-e.pdf>

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

NORTHERN AND REMOTE FOOD INSECURITY

FORGING A PATH TOWARD BRIGHTER DAYS

We recommend that the government:

1

Immediately start working toward a Minimum Income Floor (see recommendation #2 in the Minimum Income Floor section above) and away from the current broken social assistance system that keeps far too many northern Canadians in a cycle of poverty and food insecurity.

2

In collaboration with Indigenous communities and organizations, initiate a comprehensive review of Nutrition North Canada to determine why the program is only minimally achieving its objectives of reducing the cost of food in the North.

3

Working in partnership with local groups, create a Canada-wide Northern Development and Revitalization Plan that is focused on the research and development of regional programs that aim to train workers and grow commerce in strategic economic sectors like tourism, natural resources, and local/regional business.

4

Develop funding for a national program of community-based representatives whose focus is on connecting their communities to funds and resources that are available to northern communities, yet too often go unused for lack of awareness. These representatives will provide an opportunity for knowledge sharing across communities from coast to coast to coast.

5

Develop incentives and strategies to keep capital in the North and work to reduce temporary workers coming into communities for work and leaving without contributing to the local economies.

6

Expand access to Internet for all communities above the 50th parallel so that communities may capitalize on the growing remote workforce.

A) Offer additional training for remote work skills and funding for the procurement of work-from-home supplies.

APPENDIX

A

APPENDIX A:

RESULTS FROM THE NATIONAL POLL OF THE CANADIAN POPULATION ON EXPERIENCES OF HUNGER AND FOOD PROGRAM USAGE

The aforementioned statistics on experiences of hunger and food program usage among individuals (separate from those provided from the HungerCount survey) were derived from a national poll commissioned by Food Banks Canada and conducted by Mainstreet Research from February 25 to March 2, 2022, among a sample of 4,009 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in Canada. The survey was conducted using automated telephone interviews (Smart IVR). Respondents were interviewed on landlines and cellular phones. The survey is intended to represent the voting population in Canada. The margin of error for the poll is +/- 1.5% at the 95% confidence level. Margins of error are higher in each subsample.

The methodology for the HungerCount survey that provides the main data for this report is in the Methodology section.

By gender and age

	Total	Male	Female	Non-binary	18–34	35–49	50–64	65+
Ate less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food since March 2020	22.9%	22.8%	23.0%	40.0%	27.6%	24.8%	21.2%	16.5%
Hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food since March 2020	19.0%	19.9%	18.0%	33.8%	27.2%	19.5%	15.0%	12.4%
Did not eat for a whole day during COVID-19 because there wasn't enough money to purchase food	8.9%	10.1%	7.7%	20.0%	12.2%	9.1%	7.8%	5.7%
Accessed food or meals from a community organization before March 2020	8.8%	8.2%	9.4%	24.8%	9.8%	9.2%	9.8%	5.7%
Accessed food or meals from a community organization since March 2020	13.9%	13.3%	14.5%	24.7%	16.4%	14.7%	13.7%	9.8%
Unweighted frequency	4,009	1,814	2,085	110	634	1,242	1,261	872
Weighted frequency	4,009	1,985	2,014	10	1,115	1,004	1,104	786

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By region

	Total	BC	Alberta	Prairies	Ontario	Quebec	Atlantic
Ate less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food since March 2020	22.9%	21.0%	28.2%	25.4%	22.6%	19.6%	28.9%
Hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food since March 2020	19.0%	19.2%	24.8%	23.1%	19.7%	13.4%	20.2%
Did not eat for a whole day during COVID-19 because there wasn't enough money to purchase food	8.9%	9.6%	12.2%	10.9%	9.8%	5.2%	8.5%
Accessed food or meals from a community organization before March 2020	8.8%	8.5%	9.1%	12.3%	9.0%	7.3%	10.4%
Accessed food or meals from a community organization since March 2020	13.9%	12.5%	17.3%	18.2%	14.3%	11.2%	14.3%
Unweighted frequency	4,009	404	447	411	1,412	1,056	279
Weighted frequency	4,009	546	453	261	1,537	936	275

APPENDIX A:

RESULTS FROM THE NATIONAL POLL OF THE CANADIAN POPULATION ON EXPERIENCES OF HUNGER AND FOOD PROGRAM USAGE

By racial identity

	Total	Caucasian	Black	Latin American/Hispanic	East Asian	South Asian	Indigenous	Other
Ate less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food since March 2020	22.9%	19.1%	42.8%	34.6%	22.4%	14.1%	45.0%	32.3%
Hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food since March 2020	19.0%	15.8%	32.7%	23.5%	15.2%	16.4%	42.5%	27.8%
Did not eat for a whole day during COVID-19 because there wasn't enough money to purchase food	8.9%	7.4%	13.9%	11.9%	8.0%	5.1%	25.8%	12.0%
Accessed food or meals from a community organization before March 2020	8.8%	6.8%	16.4%	17.7%	9.3%	7.0%	32.7%	8.0%
Accessed food or meals from a community organization since March 2020	13.9%	11.1%	27.2%	24.7%	10.8%	8.8%	44.0%	14.9%
Unweighted frequency	4,009	2,948	252	111	101	117	162	318
Weighted frequency	4,009	2,921	249	113	117	133	145	331

APPENDIX A:

RESULTS FROM THE NATIONAL POLL OF THE CANADIAN POPULATION ON EXPERIENCES OF HUNGER AND FOOD PROGRAM USAGE

By income and education

	Total	<\$50K	\$50K–\$75K	\$75K–\$100K	>100K	HS or less	College	Univ. degree
Ate less than you felt you should because there wasn't enough money for food since March 2020	22.9%	38.6%	13.7%	8.6%	3.6%	40.6%	25.9%	12.1%
Hungry but didn't eat because there wasn't enough money for food since March 2020	19.0%	33.1%	10.2%	6.2%	2.3%	36.3%	20.1%	9.6%
Did not eat for a whole day during COVID-19 because there wasn't enough money to purchase food	8.9%	16.5%	3.3%	2.4%	1.2%	20.0%	8.4%	3.8%
Accessed food or meals from a community organization before March 2020	8.8%	15.2%	5.0%	2.6%	1.5%	16.5%	9.4%	4.7%
Accessed food or meals from a community organization since March 2020	13.9%	24.2%	7.5%	3.4%	2.8%	26.2%	14.7%	7.2%
Unweighted frequency	4,009	1,826	944	616	623	878	1,315	1,816
Weighted frequency	4,009	1,852	964	593	600	904	1,282	1,822

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.

Food bank universe

Within Food Banks Canada's network there are 10 provincial organizations; 770 affiliate food banks, with nearly 3,000 agencies included in them; and 4 direct affiliates in the 3 territories. There are also independent food banks operating outside the network that are included in the survey.

Data collection

The HungerCount survey is sent out to food banks in February of each year, and the data is collected for the month of March. We use March as the study period because it is an unexceptional month, without predictable high- or low-use patterns. Since March is used consistently, we can track usage patterns across times.

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

The survey is available through an online link and as a PDF and Word document. It is sent to food banks and meal programs through the provincial organizations and directly to food banks not affiliated with Food Banks Canada. 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 on the online survey as 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 the month of March to provide a better representation of the need for food banks across Canada.

A "visit" counts each person once for each time they 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 for 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 how often people in their community can access the services of their food bank, driven by their mission, community need, and available resources. In some cases, people can visit a food bank multiple times per month; in other cases, they 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 recently have been 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.

OUR METHODOLOGY

Analyzing the data

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

We recognize that errors arise in any data collection process. Food Banks Canada undertakes extensive follow-up with food bank outliers (those who deviate +/-25% in any given year). However, because the +25% range produced too many outliers due to the dramatic rise in clients seen by food banks across the country this year, this range was altered on a province-by-province basis to target true outliers. The analysis performed by Food Banks Canada staff used Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). To arrive at the overall usage number, primary data is received directly from organizations. We combine total visits from all responding valid surveys and calculate household results using only surveys with complete data in those categories.

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

To analyze responses to client demographics, a sample of food banks that responded to the relevant questions was used. Where comparisons of demographic items are presented, samples were tested for statistical significance using the Mann-Whitney U test (also called the Wilcoxon rank-sum test). This is a non-parametric test that looks for differences between two independent samples.

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 data being 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, SRDC found that HungerCount is a survey program providing rich data concerning vulnerable, and typically under-represented, populations. HungerCount provides a robust snapshot in any given year of food bank 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 2022 survey

Province	# of affiliates	# of orgs. participating	Food bank only	Meal only	Both	# of agencies, incl. in affiliate surveys	Total # of orgs. represented
AB	106	154	103	12	39	587	741
BC	102	126	90	0	36	576	702
MB	1	13	7	0	6	374	387
NB	59	64	49	4	11	91	155
NL	53	57	53	0	4	20	77
NS	136	138	91	32	15	35	173
NT	1	9	8	0	1	8	17
NU	1	8	6	1	1	4	12
ON	143	612	453	102	57	793	1,405
PEI	6	6	4	0	2	16	22
QC	32	1,180	377	377	426	0	1,180
SK	37	43	36	0	7	110	153
YK	1	1	1	0	0	0	1
Total	678	2,411	1,278	528	605	2,614	5,025

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