

# H U N G E R C O U N T

2004

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CANADA'S ONLY ANNUAL SURVEY OF FOOD BANKS & EMERGENCY FOOD PROGRAMS

*Poverty in a land of plenty:  
Towards a Hunger-Free Canada*



Canadian Association of  
FOOD BANKS  
Association canadienne des  
BANQUES ALIMENTAIRES

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Every year, CAFB relies on hundreds of food bank staff and volunteers from every region of the country to help put together this comprehensive project. We greatly appreciate the participation of everyone who contributes their energy year after year in our shared effort to bring an end to domestic hunger and food insecurity in Canada.

## HungerCount 2004

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Canadian Association of  
**FOOD BANKS**  
Association canadienne des  
**BANQUES ALIMENTAIRES**

# The Canadian Association of Food Banks: Who We Are and What We Do

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Founded in 1985, the Canadian Association of Food Banks (CAFB) is a national umbrella organization representing voluntary food charities, including 235 member food banks. CAFB is the voice of food banks in Canada. Members and their agencies serve approximately 90% of people who use emergency food programs nation-wide. CAFB operates the National Food Sharing System (NFSS), coordinating the shipment of food donations through voluntary transport to food banks across the country. CAFB also conducts research, engages in public education and advocates for public policy change to eliminate the causes of hunger, food insecurity and poverty in Canada. CAFB does not receive core funding from any level of government. While CAFB provides food daily for people in need, its ultimate goal is a hunger-free Canada.

CAFB's Plan of Action includes a strong commitment to increasing awareness and working for change. CAFB will continue to:

- Conduct, maintain and promote the use of the *HungerCount* survey
- Meet with politicians and staff at all levels of government to discuss public policy solutions
- Encourage our members and the public to take action
- Develop media relations and public education tools to keep public policy issues related to hunger "top of mind"
- Work together for systemic change with coalition partnerships

Emergency food programs are not the answer: a food drive-weary public can no longer fill the void. To benefit all Canadians, something has to give.

## **Volunteer Your Talents!**

For more information about what you can do, call the Canadian Association of Food Banks at (416) 203-9241 or e-mail us at [info@cafb-acba.ca](mailto:info@cafb-acba.ca). We are always looking for volunteers, or we can put you in touch with emergency food providers in your area.

## ***HungerCount* Background**

Initiated in 1989, *HungerCount* is the only national survey of emergency food programs in Canada. Released on World Food Day each year (October 16th), it has been conducted annually since 1997. The survey reveals trends in food bank use, such as the number of emergency food recipients each year, their demographic profiles, the ways in which local food banks meet the demand, and the amount of staff and volunteer time needed to run the food banks. The information in this survey forms the basis for many CAFB activities throughout the year: CAFB relies on *HungerCount* data to operate the NFSS on a "fair share" basis, present accurate and timely information to donors and media, represent food bank members' key concerns, and advocate on behalf of all food bank users across Canada for changes to public policy that will help improve food security. *HungerCount* findings are used throughout the year by those in community-based organizations, government, research, media and the corporate sector.

# HUNGER FACTS 2004

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## **MORE DEMAND NATIONALLY**

Number of people using a food bank in *one month* of 2004: **841,640**

Population of Nova Scotia: **936,000**

Increase in use since 2003: **8.5%**; since 1997: **26.6%**; since 1989: **122.7%**

Number of food banks: **550\*** (**517 in sample**)

Number of meal programs open in March 2004: **154**

Number of provinces & territories *without* a food bank: **0**

Years since Canada's first food bank opened in Edmonton: **22**

## **MORE DEMAND REGIONALLY**

Highest provincial per capita food bank use: **Newfoundland at 5.67%**

Highest provincial food bank use: **Ontario at 38%**

## **CHALLENGES MEETING DEMAND**

Percentage of food banks with difficulty meeting demand: **47.8%**

Number of meals served in one month: **2.72 million (an increase of 18.8% over 2003)**

Full-time equivalent jobs provided by volunteers in one month: **1,685**

## **MORE WORKING FAMILIES**

Percentage of food bank users with jobs: **13.3%**

Annual income of a four-person family needed to live in a large city at Statistics Canada's (2003)

"low-income cut-off" level (LICO): **\$31,424 (after tax)**

Number of provinces/territories with minimum wage rates above the LICO: **0**

Percentage of food bank users receiving social assistance: **54.4%**

Number of provinces/territories with welfare rates above the LICO: **0**

Actual weekly food expenditure per Canadian household (2.57 individuals) in 2001: **\$86**

## **MORE HUNGRY CHILDREN**

Percentage of food bank users who are children: **39.75% (317,242)**

Years since the federal government promised to eliminate child poverty: **15**

Change in the number of hungry children since then (1989): **166,242**

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*Canadians "seriously concerned" about domestic hunger (Totum Research Inc., 2003): **67%***

*Number of "food bank" mentions in Parliament from Sept/02 to Feb/04 (Hansard): **2***

*Percentage of donations to CAFB spent on charitable work: **+90***

*Amount of government funding for CAFB core operations: **\$0***

*\*This figure reflects the restructuring of the Nova Scotia food banks under one main food bank distribution centre with other programs classified as their member agencies.*

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# 1. Introduction

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*HungerCount* is a leading barometer of hunger, food insecurity and poverty in Canada. The only annual measure of hunger and food insecurity in Canada, it is a snapshot in time: one month in the life of 517 food banks across Canada.

Food banks in rural and urban areas, in every province and territory, provide data on the use of emergency food banks and food programs in their communities. The survey captures information about people who rely on 517 food banks and 2,653 affiliated agencies across the country to meet the most basic of needs. This vast and diverse network of non-governmental providers shares one common experience above all others: recipients depend on them because they do not have enough income to purchase the food they need for themselves and their families. At the same time, food banks are the first to acknowledge that they are not the appropriate vehicle for ensuring that Canadians have sufficient food for themselves and their families.

*HungerCount* goes beyond simply presenting the most current data. It also highlights public policy solutions that must be implemented if food banks are ever going to be able to close their doors (See Section 7 "Discussion"). In spite of some promising initiatives announced by the federal government last year, *HungerCount 2004* reveals that the use of food banks and food programs continues to grow.

The number of people going hungry in Canada is even greater than the *HungerCount* survey demonstrates, as many people in need are either unable to access a food bank or draw on other resources, such as friendship networks. (Che and Chen, 2001) However, as it is the only annual, national survey that exists, CAFB will continue to conduct *HungerCount* to monitor and respond to the demands facing emergency food providers, as well as to measure the progress of our federal, provincial and municipal governments in acknowledging and addressing wide-spread hunger in Canada.

Additional research has confirmed the existence and extent of hunger and food insecurity in Canada. The National Population Health Survey (NPHS) found that 2.5 million people had compromised diets in 1998/1999, and an additional half million people "worried" that they would go hungry due to a lack of income. (Ibid., 13) The federal government acknowledged the existence of the problem when it recommitted to the *Rome Declaration on World Food Security* in 2002, at the "World Food Summit: five years later" meeting. And yet, the number of food banks and the demand being placed on them has only increased each year. Until this trend is reversed, social inclusion will not be a reality in Canada.

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**Food Bank:** A central warehouse or clearing house, registered as a non-profit organization for the purpose of collecting, storing and distributing food, free of charge, directly or through front line agencies which may also provide meals to the hungry. Food banks may also coordinate advocacy, public education and employment programs, as part of the effort to eliminate hunger

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**Affiliated Agency:** An organization that regularly receives a supply of groceries from a central food bank for direct distribution to the public.

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**Grocery Program:** The distribution of groceries from food banks to the public. Food "hampers" or bags of groceries are provided with enough food for several days (at most).

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**Meal Program:** The distribution of prepared meals to the public. May be operated by a food bank, or another agency, such as a soup kitchen, hostel or shelter.

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**Food Security:** Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.

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**Food Insecurity:** The inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet of quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so

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**The Right to Food:** The right to have regular, permanent and unobstructed access, either directly or by means of financial purchases, to quantitatively and qualitatively adequate and sufficient food corresponding to the cultural traditions of the people to which the consumer belongs, and which ensures a physical and mental, individual and collective, fulfilling and dignified life free from anxiety. (UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food)

## 2. Methodology

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In 2004, CAFB sent the *HungerCount* survey to 550 food banks and affiliated agencies, located in every province and territory in Canada. By comparing survey results to data collected at the same time every year since 1997, *HungerCount* shows patterns of food bank use over time. March is the study period because it is considered to be an unexceptional month without predictable high or low use patterns. Survey questions asked food banks to measure or identify:

- The number of people who receive groceries during the month of March. (Each person is counted only once regardless of the number of times that they use the food bank during the study period.)
- Staff and volunteer hours contributed during the study period
- Frequency of food bank use allowed
- Days worth of food provided
- Number of prepared meals served
- Coping strategies to meet demand
- Income sources and family composition of food bank users
- Local trends in food bank use
- Public policy initiatives that would help alleviate hunger in the respondents' regions. Food banks had an option of selecting initiatives from a list and including others that were not provided to them

Although CAFB measures the total number of prepared meals served during the study period, the *HungerCount* survey is not a census of all meal programs in Canada and therefore greatly underestimates national meal program activities. Totals reported indicate the extent of meal program use operated by food banks and their agencies.

As the study evolves, CAFB updates its database of Canadian food banks. New food banks, location changes and closures are documented. New food banks are identified by current participants, provincial coordinators from across the country, CAFB staff and board members, and through media searches.

In February 2004, CAFB staff and coordinators mailed the 18-item survey to the food banks. A team of coordinators from every province collected surveys and verified information. Most coordinators are CAFB Board members with years of experience and are employed by large food banks or food bank networks in their respective provinces. Their expertise helps to ensure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the survey data. Coordinators forwarded completed surveys to the CAFB for data entry and analysis. CAFB staff and coordinators contacted non-responding food banks to encourage their participation and clarify information. Food banks reporting large increases or decreases in emergency grocery program or meal program use are also contacted to verify figures and gather further information regarding these trends. In a small number of cases where actual grocery program figures are not available, coordinators may provide conservative estimates based on newspaper reports, previous food bank use and population statistics.

## 2. National HungerCount Results

In May 2003, the federal government released its Market Basket Measure (MBM), a measure of low income that estimates how much it costs to buy a specific basket of goods and services in different communities across Canada. According to the MBM, 13% of Canadians are “low-income,” meaning they are unable to afford a range of necessities including food (based on Health Canada’s 1998 Nutritious Food Basket), housing, clothing and footwear, transportation and various sundry items.

Canada’s emergency food providers are increasingly challenged to meet the needs of people who struggle to put food on the table every day. The following results of the 2004 *HungerCount* survey focus on food bank and Canadians who need their help.

### Food Bank Use

In Canada today, 550 food banks and more than 2,653 affiliated agencies are in operation (Table 1). In 2004, 517 food banks took part in the *HungerCount* survey, resulting in a national participation rate of 94%.

**Table 1: Food Banks in Canada**

Region	Total # of Food Banks (excluding agencies)	Total # of Food Banks Participating	% of Food Banks Participating	# of Agencies of Participating Food Banks (included in survey)
British Columbia	95	93	97.9	156
Alberta	77	76	98.7	311
Saskatchewan	18	17	94.4	15
Manitoba	40	36	90.0	325
Ontario	216	192	88.9	606
Quebec	18	18	100.0	1,026
New Brunswick	45	45	100.0	14
* Nova Scotia	1	1	100.0	144
Prince Edward Island	6	6	100.0	0
Newfoundland/ Labrador	27	26	96.3	56
Yukon	2	2	100.0	0
Northwest Territories	3	3	100.0	0
Nunavut	2	2	100.0	0
Canada Total	550	517	94.0	2,653

*\*Nova Scotia food banks have restructured their operations under one main food bank with other grocery programs classified as agencies. The figures in this chart reflect this new arrangement. In addition to the 192 of Ontario food banks that completed surveys, the provincial coordinator was also able to collect food bank use statistics from other Ontario food banks and provide conservative estimates for remote areas in the North.*



In March of 2004 alone, 841,640 people received groceries from a food bank, an 8.5% increase since 2003, and a 123% since 1989 (Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Monthly Canadian Food Bank Use: 1989 - 2004**

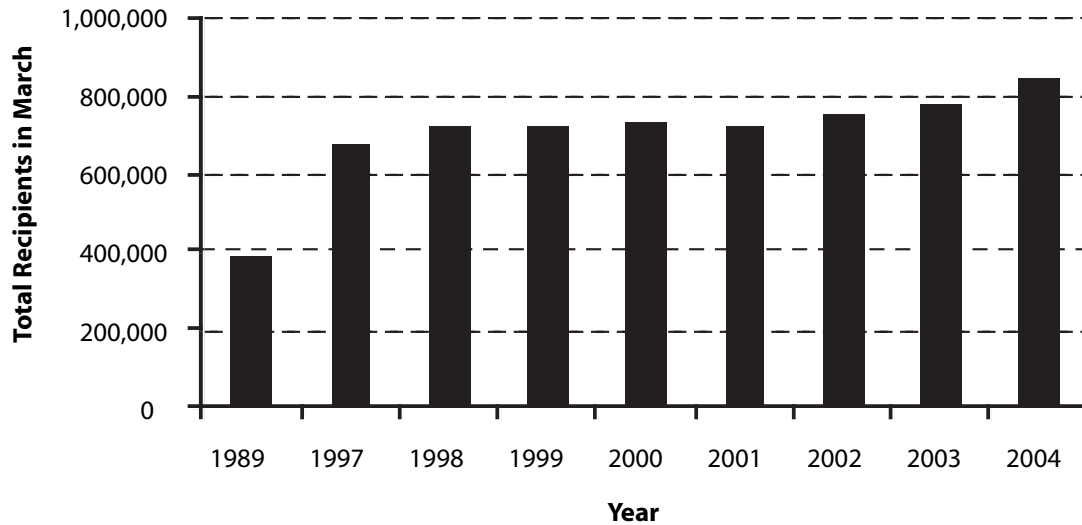
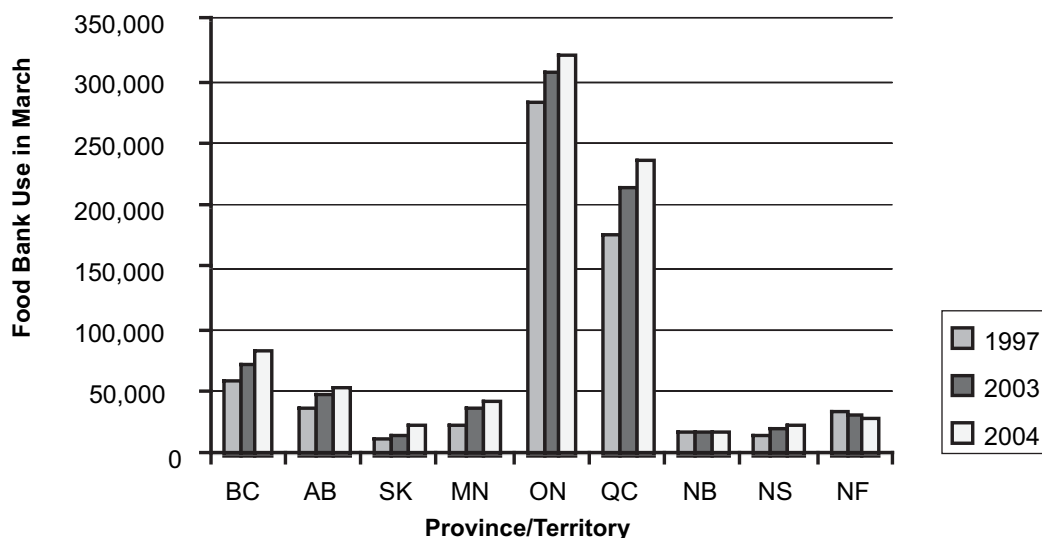


Figure 1 illustrates the dramatic increase in the total number of people using food banks this year. In 2004, 65,714 more people used food banks than in 2003, the largest single year increase since 1997.

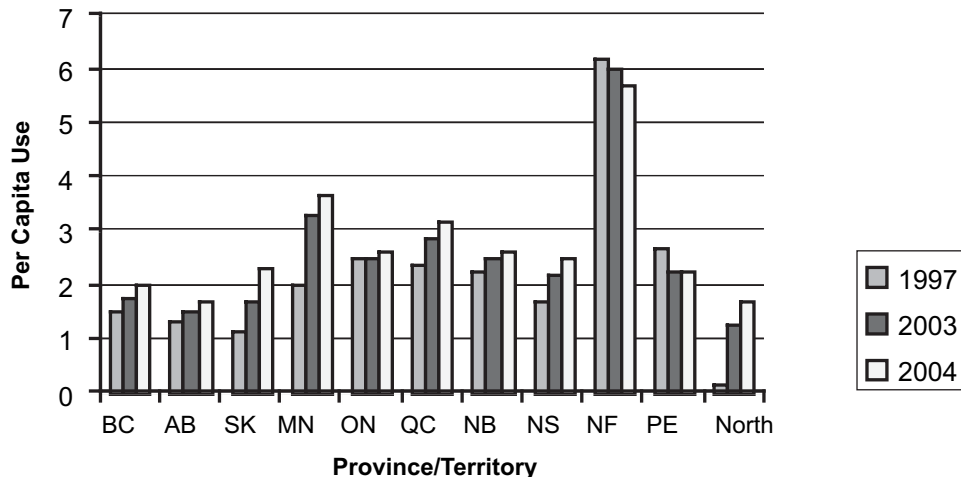
In 2004, every province except Newfoundland showed increases in food bank use. Ontario and Quebec continue to have the most significant increases, as indicated in Figure 2. Although there is a very slight decrease of food bank users in Newfoundland, the province continues to have the highest per capita use (Figure 3). In the North, food bank use increased 32% since 2003.

**Figure 2: Provincial Food Bank Use in March: 1997, 2003, 2004**



*HungerCount* also compares food bank use to population by province to determine per capita food bank use (Figure 3). As a percentage of the provincial population, Newfoundland food banks assist the largest number of people in the country at 5.67%, followed by Manitoba at 3.64%, Quebec at 3.16% and Ontario at 2.64%. Table 2 provides the total number of people assisted by food banks by province or territory, including data on households and individuals. Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia continue to assist the greatest share of recipients.

**Figure 3: Provincial Food Bank Use as % of Population in March: 1997, 2003, 2004**



**Table 2: Total Number of People Assisted by Food Banks in March 2004**

	All Food Banks			Food Banks Reporting by Age			
	Total Assisted	Share (%)	Total Households	Adults	Children	Total Assisted	Total Respondents
British Columbia	84,317	10.02	32,021	46,133	26,320	72,453	88
Alberta	54,574	6.48	14,240	31,132	23,240	54,372	74
Saskatchewan	23,084	2.74	11,120	10,733	9,809	20,542	17*
Manitoba	42,373	5.03	15,583	22,489	19,732	42,221	30
Ontario	322,911	38.37	126,163	193,852	129,059	322,911	176**
Quebec	236,717	28.13	99,425	131,611	80,273	211,884	15
New Brunswick	19,663	2.34	7,861	12,804	6,859	19,663	45
Nova Scotia	23,646	2.81	6,061	11,941	7,949	19,890	1***
Prince Edward Island	3,150	0.37	1,196	1,941	1,209	3,150	6
NFLD/Labrador	29,439	3.50	8,584	17,154	12,073	29,227	25
Yukon	668	0.08	234	455	213	668	2
Northwest Territories	818	0.10	247	428	390	818	3
Nunavut	280	0.03	69	164	116	280	2
Canada Total	84,1640	100.00	322,804	480,837	317,242	798,079	484

Notes: Not all food banks provided household totals:

\* Saskatchewan adult and child figures are based on all 17 participating food banks but not all agencies of participating food banks. Regina food bank was not able to provide an age breakdown for all of its agencies.

\*\*Ontario adult and children figures are based on 176 completed surveys, food banks that did not complete surveys but provided data and conservative estimates for remote areas in the North.

\*\*\* Nova Scotia adult and child figures are based on 71 agencies that operate grocery programs.

## Meal Program Use

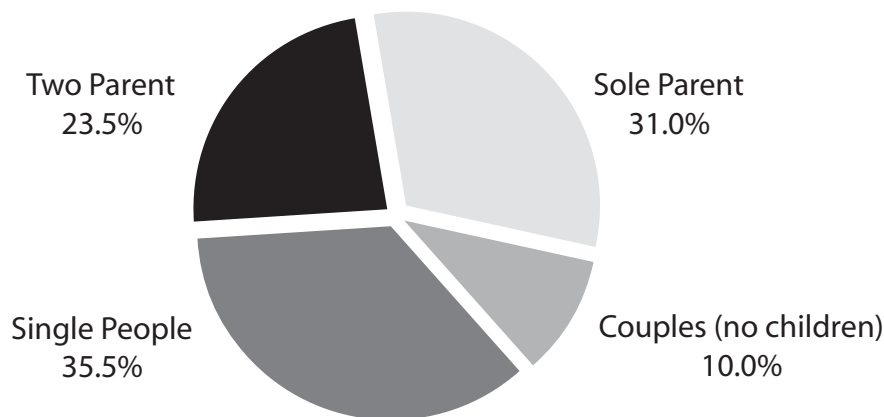
Many food banks administer meal programs in addition to managing emergency grocery distribution. *HungerCount* provides an indication of the depth of food insecurity in Canada by asking food banks to report whether they or their agencies provide this additional service; however it must be noted that it is beyond the scope of *HungerCount* to capture the many meal program providers operating independently of food banks. Among food banks and their affiliated agencies, in March 2004, 154 meal programs provided 2.72 million prepared meals, an increase of 18.8 % from 2003.

## Food Bank Users: Individuals, Families and Source of Income

Who is using food banks? According to a breakdown by age of food bank recipients, of the 798,079 people who received emergency groceries from a food bank in March 2004, 317,272 (39.75%) were children under 18 years of age (Table 2).

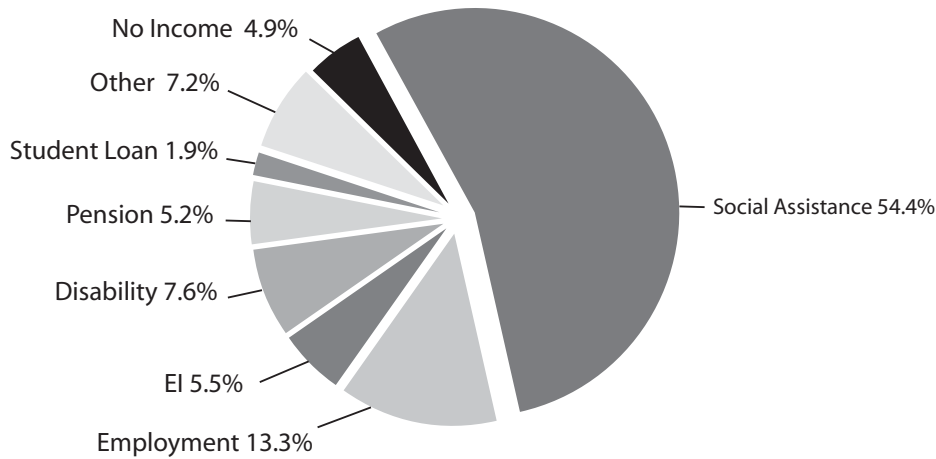
*HungerCount* also examines family composition: singles, couples without children, single parent families and two parent families. (Figure 4) Based on a weighted estimate from 483 surveys, the overall proportion of two-parent, sole-parent, single people and couples without children remains similar to 2003, with a small increase in the number of single people (1.5%), many of whom are seniors. Over half (54.5%) are families with children.

**Figure 4: Family Composition of Food Recipients**



More people with employment income are using food banks (Figure 5). Based on a weighted estimate with data provided by 385 food banks, 13.3% of users cited a job as their primary source of income, a .3% increase since March 2003 and a 1.4% increase since March 2002. This indicates a growing number of low income families who are working but are unable to make ends meet. The majority of food bank users, however, cite government assistance as their primary source of income (approximately 60% of respondents). Other sources of income include disability assistance, pensions, student loans, and for 4.9% of users, no income at all.

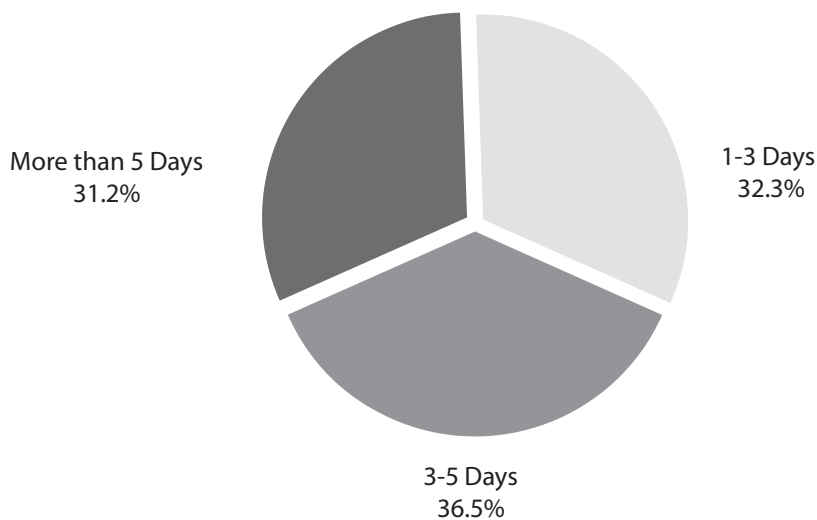
**Figure 5: Primary Income Source of Food Recipients**



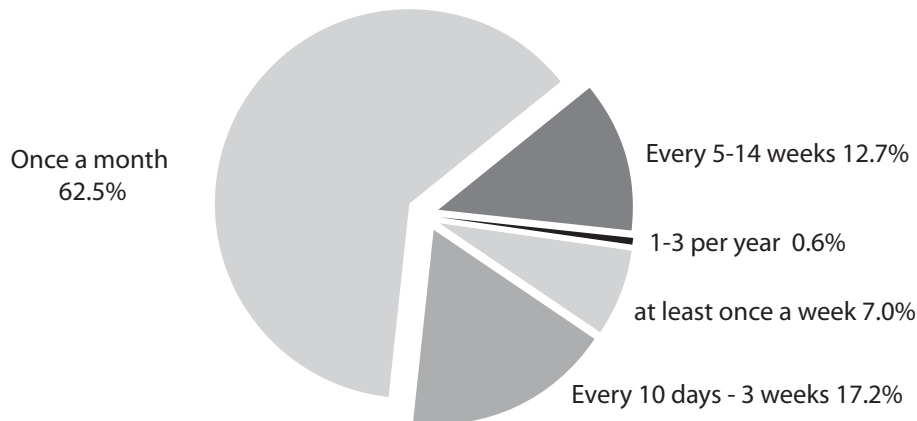
**Food Bank Operations**

Food banks are unable to keep up with the increasing demand for food. As Figure 6 shows, many or most can only provide a few days worth of food a month.

**Figure 6: Days Worth of Food in Hamper**



Based on findings from 462 food banks, the average (median) food bank provides 4.0 days worth of food in their food hampers

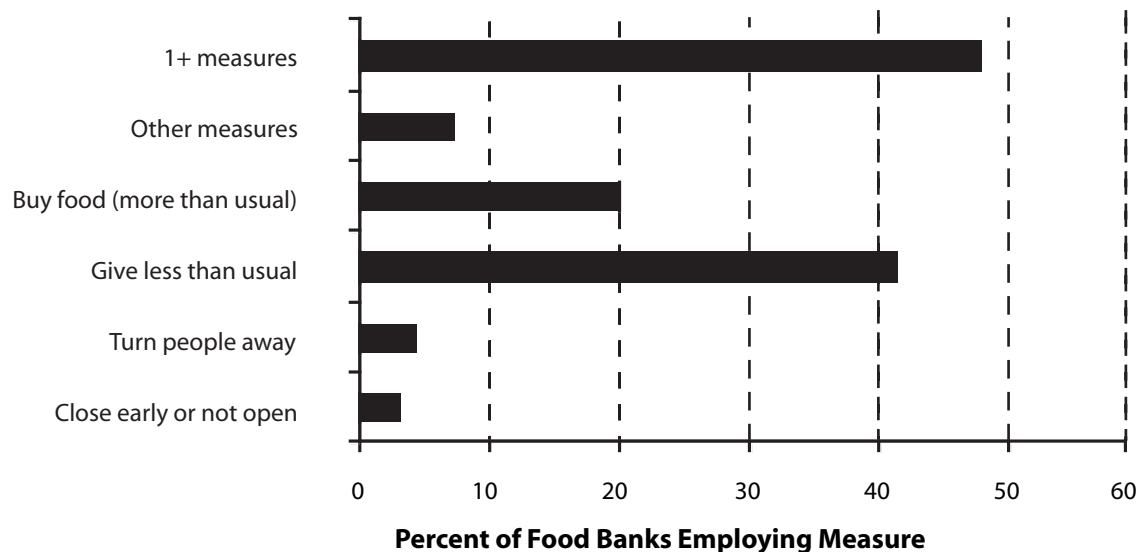
**Figure 7: Frequency of Food Bank Use Permitted**

Most food banks limit how often people can access emergency groceries to ensure that the greatest number of people receives at least minimum help. Based on findings collected from 488 surveys, 62.5% of food banks limit recipients to one visit a month. When supplies run low, most food banks avoid turning away people in need and instead take other measures, such as providing less food on each visit.

Given the marked increase in food bank users from March 2003, Figure 8 shows that almost half of food banks were at risk of not being able to meet the demand in their communities in March of this year and were forced to seek other ways to remain open. Over 40% provided less food while 20% purchased more food than they normally would. This is a departure from last year when more than

40% bought more food as a response to the food shortage and an indication that food banks today may have fewer resources at their disposal.

Food banks operate in large and small urban centres and in rural areas across Canada. They rely on volunteers to help paid staff ensure that those in need receive food. In March 2004, of food banks able to supply information about volunteer and staff hours, volunteers contributed 252,732 hours of service, the equivalent of 1,685 full time jobs per month, to 478 food banks. Paid staff provided another 108,266 hours in 500 food banks. As the need for emergency food rises, so does the number of food banks. Since 2000, of the participating food banks that reported the year they were established, 55 new food banks have opened.

**Figure 8: Food Bank Responses to Food Shortages**

## 4. Provincial/Territorial HungerCount Results

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As a national organization, CAFB focuses primarily on the federal government's social and economic policies. Most policy initiatives, however, transcend jurisdictions particularly when it comes to the economic access to food.

This section outlines 'the state of hunger' in each province and territory, incorporating regional *HungerCount* 2004 data and a report from provincial food bank coordinators. The section closes with a brief discussion of the challenges facing local governments across the country. In every region, food banks report that inadequate social assistance benefits and minimum wage rates followed closely by a lack of affordable housing, are among the primary reasons for the growing demand for emergency food assistance.

### BRITISH COLUMBIA

#### Food Bank Trends

In British Columbia, 84,317 people used food banks in March 2004, an increase of 16% in one year. Almost 8,000 more children needed emergency food in 2004 than in 2003, an increase of 41.7%.

#### The People and the Province

In January 2002, the government announced cuts to welfare benefits and further tightening of eligibility. (Keith, Seth and Long, 2003) The government also instituted a new two-year "time limit" rule (within a five year period) and a two-year "independence test" requiring new recipients to prove financial independence for the two prior consecutive years. (Ibid.,2003) Food banks have inevitably picked up the slack. According to one recent study, even prior to these changes, families who were working but earning minimum wage were paying a disproportionate share of their income for shelter *and* food compared to other Canadians. (Dieticians of Canada and the Community Nutritionists Council of BC, 2002)

In the winter of 2003/04, the government asked people who were on disability allowance to reapply for their pensions. The application form increased from two pages to 30 pages and needed input from a physician. At the last minute, the government added two more exemptions. Subsequently, food bank operators noticed a notable increase in the degree of depression and stress among their recipients. Yet in the end, of the thousands of people who were put through the onerous process of reapplication, only 400 were declared ineligible.

Two additional developments have been noted: more seniors are using food banks and people who used to

donate small regular amounts are now standing in line for food.

Robin Campbell, BC's provincial *HungerCount* coordinator, reports:

*People are now relying on the food bank for their total source of nourishment because the money is used for other basic living expenses.*

*Also, in order to continue to qualify for welfare, people are required to complete endless paperwork and reporting. It has created an atmosphere of suspicion and mistrust and many low-income people are becoming more depressed and desperate. When you lose hope, you lose the will to survive.*

### ALBERTA

#### Food Bank Trends

In March of 2004, 54,574 people visited a food bank in Alberta, an increase of 11.9% since 2003. Food banks in Alberta served an additional 2,500 children in 2004. This represents an increase of 12.4% from 2003.

#### The People and the Province

Alberta is a \$40 billion economy. Yet the minimum wage is \$5.60 and there are 77 food banks and 372 affiliated agencies in the province. The welfare rate is \$400 for a single person and a typical bachelor suite costs \$380-\$400. The combination of low income and relatively high rents results in insufficient funds for food at the end of the month.

Marjorie Bencz, Executive Director of Edmonton Gleaners' Food Bank and Alberta Food Bank Network Association and provincial *HungerCount* coordinator, comments:

*Anyone with a low income is becoming more and more marginalized. The cost of living has increased and the*

*living wage has not kept pace. I find it ironic and unfortunate that if there is a province that could afford to do something about poverty, Alberta could, but we are regressing. The dividends from this poor investment will have a price later. We are already paying the price in increasing costs for mental health services, medical services, and safety and security in the community. The safety net should be there for all people who earn a low income.*

## SASKATCHEWAN

### Food Bank Trends

In March 2004, 23,084 people visited food banks, increasing last year's number of visits by 37%. Almost 2,000 more children needed food banks in 2004, an increase of 24% from 2003.

### The People and the Province

Food bank use in rural Saskatchewan has resulted from changes in agriculture and farming. Significant migration of First Nations people off the reserves is putting more pressure on urban delivery systems. The number of young single mothers with children in the province is also increasing. The young women drop out of school, are then at a disadvantage in finding employment, and consequently they and their children resort to social assistance. The Saskatchewan food banks offer training, a day care and support from social workers as part of the food bank structure to help people not only to survive, but to find a meaningful level of existence.

Wayne Hellquist, *HungerCount* coordinator for Saskatchewan, says:

*We need more training for people to move away from dependency. The level of support payments should increase to meet the cost of living. Unless we deliberately change the way we do business, we can't expect anything ever to change. I want to be part of the solution, not part of the problem.*

## MANITOBA

### Food Bank Trends

In Manitoba, in March of 2004, 42,373 people visited a food bank, a 10% increase since 2003. Almost 1,900 more children used food banks in the province in 2004, an 11% increase since 2003.

### The People and the Province

The use of food banks has increased across Manitoba, especially in rural areas. Increases in the costs of living for items such as utilities and gas leave insufficient money for food. The number of young men and single women with children using food banks is growing. Other agencies are also calling for help from food banks, the most desperate being day care centres or inner city schools attended by children from low-income families. Food banks supply these establishments with lunches and snacks.

Manitoba's provincial *HungerCount* coordinator, Heidi Magnuson-Ford says:

*If government would take care of the most basic level of needs for people, such as food, housing and a living wage, there would be less pressure on other systems such as health, education and justice. The foundation is people not systems. If government takes care of people, other systems will improve.*

## ONTARIO

### Food Bank Trends

In Ontario, 322,911 people visited a food bank, a 5% increase since 2003. Children account for 40% of food bank clients in the province.

### The People and the Province

In the May 2004 Budget, the Ontario government allotted \$106 million for a 3% increase in welfare and disability rates in the province. This was the first rate increase in 11 years. While a welcome first step, the increase amounts to an extra \$15.60 a month for a single person on Ontario Works (welfare), and is unlikely to have much impact on food bank use. Although announced, the increase has not yet come into effect. A new computer system brought in by the previous Ontario government, despite costing \$500 million to implement, cannot factor in an increase in rates. The Liberal government has instead opted to provide social assistance recipients with two lump sum payments this year in lieu of a rate increase. The official increase is expected to take effect early 2005 once the computer glitches are ironed out. The provincial government also increased the minimum wage for the first time since 1995, from \$6.85 to \$7.15. This is the first in a series of planned increases that will bring it to \$8.00 by 2007.

Even with these recent changes, the erosion of income security benefits for working age adults continues to be the primary factor behind the rise in food bank use. Welfare rates were cut 21.6% in Ontario in 1995, and have declined in value by over 35% in the last 11 years when inflation is considered. Combined with the increasing costs of housing, which accelerated after rent controls were largely eliminated in 1998, food bank clients in main cities have little after-rent income to purchase food. In the Greater Toronto Area, rent alone consumes just over 75% of income on average for families renting in the private rental market (Olyphant and Thompson, 2004).

Employment income is no longer sufficient to escape poverty and hunger and earn a sustainable living. In the Greater Toronto Area, 33% of families using food banks have at least one family member working (a small percentage of which are children under 18). Welfare itself continues to make the leap to paid employment very difficult. A single person on Ontario Works can only earn \$143 per month (or 5 hours a week at minimum wage) before employment income is deducted dollar for dollar from social assistance cheques. Welfare recipients who enter the work force in low-paying jobs will lose prescription drug and dental benefits. Also, any added income from employment is "clawed-back" in programs such as rent-geared-to-income housing and day care subsidies. Once the variety of government programs have gotten their share of any extra dollar of earned income, many find themselves worse or at least no better off for having found a job.

Sue Cox, Ontario *HungerCount* Coordinator believes that:

*Governments at all levels need to address the issues of low-wage earners. This includes extending prescription drug and dental benefits to the working poor, as well as examining new options to enhance incomes, such as wage supplements. Special attention should be paid to particular groups that have trouble integrating into the labour market, especially recent immigrants who cannot get their skills and education recognized. A restructuring of the welfare system in Ontario is necessary such that children are "taken out of welfare" and funded through a combination of the Canada Child Tax Benefit and a new Ontario Child Benefit.*

## QUEBEC

### Food Bank Trends

In the province of Quebec, 236,717 people used a food bank in March 2004. This is a 10% increase since 2003. More than 80,000 food bank users were children.

### The People and the Province

In December 2002, Quebec's National Assembly adopted a unique law to combat poverty and social exclusion. A network of organizations, conceived to make poverty reduction a governmental policy priority, championed Bill 112. Since the 2004 election, Bill 112 has been abolished and cuts to social services and health programs have continued.

In Quebec, poverty is especially prevalent among single-parent families, single people between the ages of 45 and 59, recent immigrants, people with disabilities and people of Aboriginal origins. (Noel, 2002.)

Maryse Lizotte, *HungerCount* coordinator for Quebec, reports that overall there has been an increase in the number of working poor, single mothers and people over 60 who are not yet eligible for pensions:

*These are people who have worked all their lives to raise families, but they have lost a job and now have to go on welfare and use food banks.*

Lizotte is working on a long-term plan to establish a community farm where people who are hungry could develop and farm the land and reap the benefits of the harvest that is produced.

## NEW BRUNSWICK

### Food Bank Trends

In New Brunswick, 19,663 people visited a food bank compared to 18,875 people in 2003, an increase of 4% from 2003. Over 450 more children used food banks in the province in 2004, an increase of 7% from 2003.

### The People and the Province

The use of food banks is increasing as jobs dwindle, prompting young adults to leave the province. Although a few factories remain, major industries, such as farming, forestry, fishing and agriculture are in general decline. Those travelling from Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland to the rest of Canada in search of employment, pass through New Brunswick and, en route, use food banks and community kitchens.

Many do not qualify for employment insurance, not having accumulated enough hours of work, and thus rely on welfare; yet welfare rates in the province have not risen along with the rise in the cost of living. In fact, New Brunswick has had the lowest welfare rates in Canada for



the past 10 years. A single employable adult receives \$158 monthly and, to compound matters, inflation continues to cut into this meagre income.

The number of seniors using a food bank in New Brunswick has risen from 12 to 60 in one year. Some are living on \$200 to \$300 a month. The situation can be particularly serious for those with medical needs since the cost of medication consumes a significant portion of their income.

Bill Cockburn, provincial *HungerCount* coordinator for New Brunswick, says:

*There is no one solution. The economy is weak, and affordable housing is inadequate. Everything is resource based and there are very few long-term jobs. Job creation for individuals does not seem to help. Government could help to develop small businesses.*

## NOVA SCOTIA

### Food Bank Trends

In Nova Scotia, 23,646 people used a food bank in 2004, a 17% increase since 2003. Children represented 40% of food bank users in the province.

### The People and the Province

Minor policy changes were made in the past year. In March 2004, the Nova Scotia government announced 500 new user fee increases for services, averaging about 6.5% and covering birth through death, to begin April 1, 2004. A couple on income assistance and expecting their first child may now, once the mother is in her seventh month, qualify for a shelter allowance of \$600 (the rate for three people as opposed to \$550 allowed for a couple). The basic assistance allowance was raised from \$180 to \$184 per month in the spring budget. Minimum wage was increased to \$6.50 per hour as of April 1, 2004, yet this remains a deficient amount.

Dianne Swinemar, Provincial *HungerCount* coordinator, comments:

*For the Nova Scotia minimum wage to have the same purchasing power as it had at its peak in 1976, the current rate would have to increase to at least \$8.00.*

A study released by GPI Atlantic, found that the number of involuntary part-timers are growing and accounted for 31% of all part-time workers in Nova Scotia in 2001. Based on Statistics Canada data, the study also found that the national average for involuntary part-timers is 26%. The overall number of part-time employees in Nova Scotia continues to rise disproportionately to the total work force. In 1976 part-time employment consisted of 12.5% of the workforce and in 2001, it was 17.8%. (GPI Atlantic, 2004)

Swinemar, worried about the rapid increase of food bank users, declares:

*The solutions that address the issues of hungry families and children are band-aid. We are not enabling families to cope better within their own environments. Band-aid solutions are more and more fragmenting for the families.*

## PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

### Food Bank Trends

In Prince Edward Island, in March 2004, 3,150 people, of which 1,209 were children, needed assistance from a food bank. This is a slight increase from 2003, when 3,118 people, of which 1,144 were children, used a food bank.

### The People and the Province

There are six food banks in PEI. Food bank use increased during fish bank closures in the fall of 2003. Clients who had not used a food bank for eight to ten years were returning.

As a result of a dismal tourism season last year, those who rely on this sector for employment were unable to accumulate enough work hours to qualify for EI. The following winter months, therefore, were especially difficult. The trend seems to be more working poor families with children, including both single parents with children and two-parent families, who cannot keep up with the costs of raising their children and hence rely on food banks.

*HungerCount* coordinator, Mike MacDonald, suggests that:

*Everything in PEI is based on economic development. No one wants to be on EI or welfare. We have a capable work force. They just need an opportunity to work. We have the work force. We need the jobs.*

## NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

### Food Bank Trends

In Newfoundland and Labrador, 29,439 people used a food bank, a 5% decrease from the 31,132 people who visited a food bank in the previous year. This may, in part, be a reflection of heavy migration from the province. The per capita use in Newfoundland remains the highest in Canada.

### The People and the Province

There has been a slight decrease in the use of food banks since 2003, however, demand is increasing among rural and remote areas. Populations are moving and unemployment remains high. This has had an impact on larger towns: incidences of labour unrest have erupted within iron ore communities and among employees of the local telephone company. Conditions are further aggravated by the migration of youths to the mainland, leaving behind an older, aging population.

The situation is exceptionally arduous for this latter demographic. The number of seniors using the food banks has increased ten to eleven percent. Mobility is limited for seniors living in a rural area who, therefore, need access to a vehicle. Yet gasoline and insurance prices are rising, making it progressively difficult for someone on a fixed income to get by. Furthermore, those with special dietary requirements, such as diabetics, find it particularly challenging to cope financially especially since food banks are not equipped to accommodate their needs.

Provincial *HungerCount* coordinator, Eg Walters, comments:

*We are seeing what we used to call the 'traditional families,' Mom and Dad and kids, who can't make ends meet. Food bank use usually spikes in the summer months when the kids do not get the balanced meal they would get at school. We have been lucky to have companies do food drives for us at times of the year other than Christmas or Thanksgiving.*

*Hunger knows no season.*

## THE TERRITORIES: YUKON, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES AND NUNAVUT

### Food Bank Trends

In Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut, there has been a sharp upsurge in food bank use from 1,334 in 2003 to 1,766 or 32% in 2004. Children account for 41% of food bank users. Many are single men living in nearby shacks or in the men's shelter; others are families with young children.

Bringing food into Nunavut is expensive. The food bank received \$11,000 worth of food last year and the initial cost of bringing this amount in was \$7,000. Fortunately, a local company donated \$2,000, resulting in a net transportation cost of \$5000. In addition to prohibitive transportation costs, the donated food does not cater to cultural preferences. It tends to consist of standard supermarket fare, not seal meat or other foods customary to the population.

### The People and Nunavut

Nunavut is the largest jurisdiction in Canada. It occupies one fifth of Canada's landmass. It is, however, a marginal jurisdiction and very poor. The administration is decentralized across a vast area. The theory behind de-centralization was to generate more employment but instead this may have reduced efficiency.

The food bank is well-organised, with 35 volunteers and a community that donates food regularly. However, given the limited food supplies, it is only able to give out food every two weeks. Those using the food bank are primarily individuals who have exceptional needs with respect to education and housing, such as those with disabilities. The clientele is the most disadvantaged in the community, suffering from unemployment, lack of housing, health and addiction problems, suicide and spousal abuse.

A food bank volunteer from Nunavut says:

*There are now regulars using the food bank and I can see no change in the foreseeable future. There's nothing more basic than putting meat or potatoes on a plate. We know we are making a difference.*

## The People and Yellowknife

In Yellowknife, the local food bank provides food twice a month, spending about \$4,500 of donated money a month in the local grocery store.

Most food bank users are on social assistance and a few are on EI. Many in the community may need the assistance of the food bank but do not go because of the stigma associated with food bank reliance. Most individuals claim the food is for two adults, but since there is a “no questions asked” policy there is no way of verifying the accuracy of this information.

Most people live in subsidized housing, although some live in the bush. There are low wage jobs available but many face significant obstacles in terms of renting living space, namely prohibitive rents and low vacancy rates; for example, a market-priced bachelor apartment rents for \$1,100 a month and the vacancy rate is 1%. Some individuals move to Yellowknife seeking employment and, upon discovering there is none available, are confronted by severe economic insecurity.

Applying for welfare can be a lengthy process: applicants can wait up to a month for an appointment, only to be told to return at a later date. In the meantime, there are no food vouchers or emergency funds on hand. The food bank in this region and the Salvation Army, which provides assistance six times a year, are both ill-equipped to meet the demand for food, being restrained by a scant supply of food and other resources.

Pat Martin, *Hunger Count* Coordinator in Yellowknife says:

*Government should provide more income security. In a family, the first adult gets \$160 and this decreases down the line until the fourth child who gets \$45 a month for food. There is not enough to live on.*

# 5. A 7-Point Plan For Government To Ensure A Hunger-Free Canada\*

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Canada's food banks will continue to do their part to meet the immediate needs of hungry people. Without policy changes that address *economic* security, however, people will continue to rely on food banks. The Canadian Association of Food Banks (CAFB) recommends that the federal government adopt the following 7- Point Plan as a necessary measure towards realising a hunger-free Canada.

## 1. Canada Social Transfer (CST)

- ▶ Increase federal investments in the CST.
- ▶ Split the CST to create separate funding streams for post-secondary education and welfare.
- ▶ Negotiate a new funding formula for transfers for social assistance and social services with the provinces and territories and ensure that it provides sufficient, stable and predictable funding and recognises regional economic variations.

## 2. Living Wage

- ▶ Raise the federal minimum wage and establish a federal/provincial commission to make recommendations on how to improve the availability of "living wage" jobs.
- ▶ Establish a policy to ensure that government contracts are awarded to companies that provide living wage jobs.

## 3. Employment Insurance (EI)

- ▶ Reform the EI program to ensure that workers who pay into the program are able to access their own benefits in the event of job loss.
- ▶ Reduce the number of hours needed to qualify for EI to 350 and restore benefits to two-thirds of eligible salary.

## 4. National Child Benefit (NCB) Supplement

- ▶ Increase the NCB to a maximum of \$4,900 by 2007/2008.
- ▶ Enact legislation that prevents provincial governments from clawing back the NCB supplement from the poorest families in the country.

- ▶ Alternately, the federal government should consolidate the benefits, thereby eliminating the clawback while creating a comprehensive child benefit system for Canada.

## 5. Affordable Housing

- ▶ Develop a national housing strategy that will commit the Canadian government to develop 25,000 units of affordable housing annually.
- ▶ Fulfill the 2004 election promise to invest an additional \$1.5 billion over five years in affordable housing initiatives.
- ▶ Renew the commitment to existing community homelessness initiatives by allocating \$128 million each year for three years to rehabilitate existing units.

## 6. Regulated Child Care

- ▶ Carry out the 2004 election promise to develop a national early learning and child care program with an investment of \$5 billion over five years that legislates principles of quality, universally accessible/affordable and developmentally – focused child care.

## 7. A National Anti-Poverty Law

- ▶ Create a law that commits the Canadian government to meet the challenges of poverty.
- ▶ End inappropriate reliance on charitable organizations, volunteer efforts and individual generosity to deal with the needs of hungry citizens and children.
- ▶ Enshrine the right to food in domestic law, which would be consistent with the Canadian government's commitment to the right to food in international law through United Nations Treaties.
- ▶ Improve the national safety net by increasing funds transferred to provinces for social services and introduce principles to ensure that social assistance provides enough income for all individuals and families who lack other means of support.

\* Based on recommendations outlined in "Pathways to Progress: Structural Solutions to Address Child Poverty." Campaign 2000 Policy Perspectives. May, 2004.

## 6. CAFB Policy Priorities

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CAFB recommends that specific, concrete and measurable objectives with timelines be developed to monitor national progress on eliminating hunger, food insecurity and poverty. The tables below show CAFB's positions, as articulated in the *Position Statement on the Rome Declaration on World Food Security & Canada's Progress on Its Domestic Commitment to Improve Access to Food (June 2002)* and the responses of government to date.

### I. The Canada Social Transfer (CST)

CAFB Position	2004 Update
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Split the CST into separate funding streams for post-secondary education and welfare to ensure greater transparency and accountability in federal transfers.</li><li>• Enhance investments in the CST.</li><li>• Reinstate mandatory national standards as conditions for social assistance funding: (a) base the receipt of welfare solely on need (b) eliminate residency requirements (c) establish a welfare appeals process (d) remove forced work for welfare (e) provide enough assistance to meet basic needs.</li><li>• Establish a process to ensure provincial conformity with standards and restoration of funding levels to the 1995-1996 pre-CHST levels.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The 2003 promise to divide and replace the former Canada Health and Social Transfer (CHST) with a Canada Health Transfer (CHT) and a Canada Social Transfer (CST) was fulfilled in 2004.</li><li>• However, the current CST is a block fund that lumps funding for post-secondary education with funding for social assistance and social services.</li><li>• Funding for post-secondary education and social services remains far below 1992-93 levels, while cash transfers for health care have increased since 1995.</li></ul>

### II. LIVING WAGE JOBS

CAFB Position	2004 Update
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Government must help create and support living wage* jobs.</li><li>• The increase in casual, part time, contract and temporary jobs, has led to more “working poor,” people without adequate access to food. Government should establish a policy to ensure that government contracts be awarded to companies that provide living wage jobs.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Provincial minimum wage rates remain well below the poverty level, whether using the Market Basket Measure, the Low Income Measure or Low-Income Cut-Off.</li></ul>

\* Wages that support an adequate standard of living including food, housing, health care, transportation and other needs, without reliance on public and private subsidies.

### III. EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE REFORM (EI)

CAFB Position	2004 Update
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Employment Insurance (EI) program needs substantial reform to ensure that workers who pay into the program are able to access their own benefits in the event of job loss.</li> <li>• The Canadian Labour Congress (CLC) has outlined an equitable program which would “protect workers in all forms of employment; insure unemployment, pregnancy and parental leave, temporary sickness and income support while training; end UI discrimination against women, youth, older workers and workers in seasonal industries; protect at least 70% of the unemployed; remove features that blame the unemployed for their layoff; simplify the program, and ensure a benefit structure and financing of UI that reflects regional unemployment differences.”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• EI surplus continues to be used to pay down the federal deficit rather than improving benefits to workers who paid into it.</li> <li>• Despite the \$40 billion surplus and having paid into the program, many are forced to seek social assistance in the event of job loss.</li> <li>• The conditions for equity outlined by the CLC have not been met and were not referred to in the 2004 campaign platform.</li> </ul>

### IV. THE NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT (NCB) SUPPLEMENT

CAFB Position	2004 Update
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enact legislation that prevents the lowest-income families, that is, those receiving social assistance, from being deprived of the NCB supplement at the provincial and territorial levels.</li> <li>• Raise the NCB to a maximum of \$4,900 per child by 2007.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The provincial governments of Ontario, Alberta, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island and the Territories continue to claw back the NCB supplement from families receiving social assistance.</li> <li>• Currently, the NCB will reach \$3,243 by 2007.</li> </ul>

## V. NATIONAL HOUSING STRATEGY IMPLEMENTATION

CAFB Position	2004 Update
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government must implement a national housing strategy that meets the needs of Canadians and ensures the right to housing.</li> <li>• Government must adopt the 1% Solution which stipulates that it devote 1% more of its total budget to housing &amp; encourage provincial and municipal governments to follow their lead.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 1% Solution has not been introduced.</li> <li>• The 2004 election campaign promised to invest an additional \$1.5 B in affordable housing initiatives over five years.</li> <li>• Millions of federal dollars have remained unspent because of intergovernmental wrangling. With the appropriate political will, federal and provincial governments have the ability to break the housing logjam.</li> </ul>

\* Launched in 1998 by the Toronto Disaster Relief Committee (TDRC). In the mid-1990s, federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments spent about one percent of their budgets on housing. Since then, governments have made substantial housing cuts. The One Percent Solution calls for governments to double their commitment to housing programs by restoring and renewing housing spending.

## VI. ECONOMIC ACCESS to REGULATED CHILD CARE

CAFB Position	2004 Update
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensure access to regulated childcare by (a) giving provincial governments adequate, stable &amp; long-term funding (b) introducing mandatory national standards to ensure quality of service delivery &amp; (c) establishing a mechanism for ensuring provincial compliance with national standards.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 2004 platform promises to introduce a national early learning and child care program with an investment of \$5B over five years that legislates principles of quality, universal, accessible (affordable) and developmentally focused child care.</li> </ul>

## VII. ENSURING THE RIGHT to FOOD

CAFB Position	2004 Update
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Solutions do exist. What is needed is the political will to implement them. Private charities and food banks are not the solution. The federal government is urged to consult with affected communities and sectors, including food banks, in their pursuit of effective solutions to eradicate poverty and food insecurity.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Even though nutritional adequacy can be regarded as the single most important determinant of health, the responsibility to food insecurity continues to lie with community-based, ad-hoc food programs.</li> </ul>

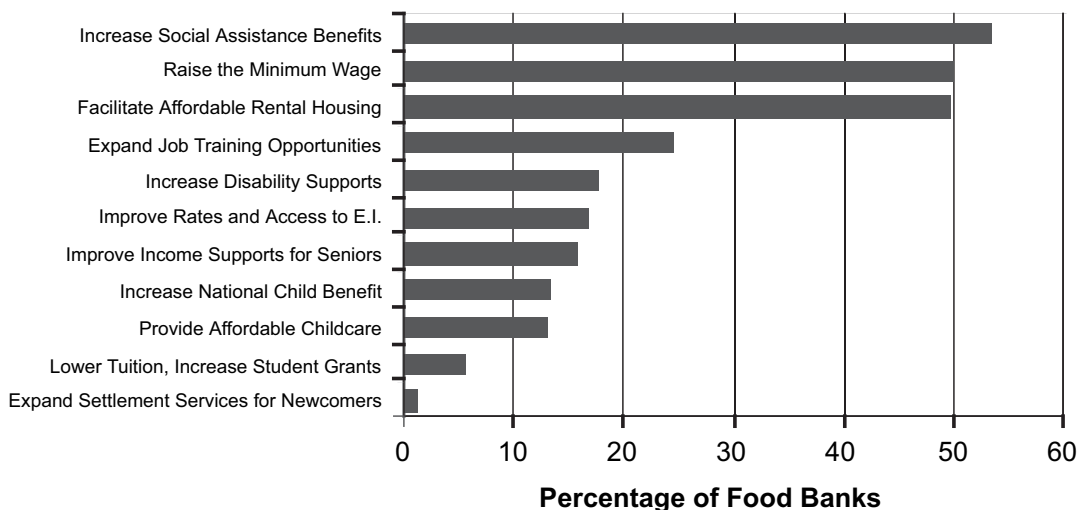
## VIII. ENSHRINING the RIGHT to FOOD in DOMESTIC LAW

CAFB Position	2004 Update
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The federal government must enshrine the right to food in domestic law, consistent with its international commitments.</li> <li>• The right to food cannot and should not be realized through expanded charitable or food relief programs, such as food banks or food stamps</li> <li>• The right to food cannot be attained without realizing the right to an adequate standard of living and the right to housing.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Even though nutritional adequacy can be regarded as the single most important determinant of health, the responsibility to food insecurity continues to lie with community-based, ad-hoc food programs.</li> </ul>

### The Basis of CAFB Policy Priorities

In the 2004 *HungerCount* survey, respondents were asked what measures could be taken to combat hunger and poverty among adults and children in Canada. Figure 9 highlights their priorities, based on the experiences of front-line food bank staff and volunteers across the country.

**Figure 9: Policy Priorities of Canadian Food Banks**



Over half of 509 food banks and agencies responded that an increase in social assistance benefits to allow people an adequate standard of living would have the greatest impact on hunger and poverty in Canada. Raising the minimum wage is a close second at 49.9%, followed by the need to create affordable housing at 49.5%.

While the priorities listed above were most often mentioned by emergency food program operators, other policy initiatives that would also ease hunger and poverty in Canada are job creation programs, electricity and fuel

caps, expansion of addiction treatment and mental health programs, and improved access to transportation.

As one food bank operator says:

*We are running faster and faster to keep up with providing food for hungry people who simply don't have enough money. We are trying to create a situation to meet the immediate need, but the real solution rests with government economic policy.*



## 7. Discussion

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### **Hunger is a serious concern for Canadians, but food banks are not the answer**

*Anyone can lose a job; anyone can go through a marriage break-up or become ill. Most people are just two paycheques away from using the food bank. There are too many holes in the safety net (HungerCount 2004 Coordinator, Alberta)*

In a 2003 independent research poll commissioned by CAFB, sixty-seven percent of adult Canadians said that they were seriously concerned about hunger in Canada. (Totum Research Inc., 2003) Over 80 percent of respondents in the same survey said they believed that the government is responsible for finding solutions. The depth of concern is not surprising given that 41 percent of respondents claimed to personally know someone who used a food bank in 2003. (Ibid., 2003)

Despite the fact that two out of three Canadians have deep concerns about hunger, its raw pain is hidden in communities across Canada. As the findings in this survey show, more Canadians, including children, depend on food banks today, revealing the largest single year increase in food bank use since 1997. As recently as September 8, 2004, the federal government said it was looking forward to a “boost from a hotter-than-expected economy.” (Gordon:Toronto Star: September 8, 2004). Yet, hunger continues to fly below the radar of our decision-makers.

### **Food is a key determinant of health**

*Food used to be called a basic human need along with water, peace, shelter, education and primary health care. It has also been called a prerequisite for health. Food security is now listed among the social determinants of health. It is clearly a determinant of a lot of things – life, health, dignity, civil society, progress, justice and sustainable development. (McIntyre, 2003, p.46)*

In their election platform, the Liberals stated “...we must measure our progress as a nation by the standard of care we set among the least privileged among us. Strengthening our social foundations means improving Canada’s quality of life.” The Liberal party also declared that it would focus on improvements to health care, the issue that matters most to Canadians. But what about the factors that play a role in determining the health of people in Canada?

*Lineups at food banks are as important as lineups at emergency wards.*

(Goar:Toronto Star: May 5, 2004)

Hunger, poverty and health go hand in hand. Whether one lives in a developed or developing country, experts around the world agree: “In any social well-being model, nutritional adequacy would be regarded as the single most determinant of health.” (McIntyre, 2003, p.47) Root causes of hunger, such as poverty, must be addressed if it is to be effectively abolished. Mackinnon (2004) suggests that although we treat the poor equally when they become ill, we ignore the poverty that leads to ill health.

According to a report by the Federal, Provincial and Territorial Advisory Committee on Population Health (1999), there is strong evidence of a positive correlation between social and economic status and quality of health. The report highlighted the following:

- Only 47% of Canadians in the lowest income bracket rate their health as very good or excellent, compared with 73% of Canadians in the highest income group.
- Low-income Canadians are more likely to die earlier and to suffer more illnesses than Canadians with higher incomes, regardless of age, sex, race and place of residence.
- At each rung up the income ladder, Canadians have less sickness, longer life expectancies and improved health.
- Studies suggest that the distribution of income in a given society may be a more important determinant of health than the total amount of income earned by the members of that society. Large gaps in income distribution lead to increases in social problems and poorer health among the population as a whole.

Canadian governments at the federal and provincial levels are focusing on healthcare, yet according to Senator Michael Kirby’s report on Canada’s health care system (Kirby, 2002), only 25% of the health of a population is attributable to the quality of the healthcare system, while 75% is explained by biology, prevention, the physical environment, and one’s socio-economic status.

## Your next-door neighbour?

*People using the food bank could be your next door neighbour. You'd never know it. I've sometimes delivered a hamper of food to a family and have the kids jump into my arms and the Mom in tears because I delivered food.*

(Eg Walters, *HungerCount 2004* coordinator, Newfoundland)

Every year since 1997, the Canadian Association of Food Banks (CAFB) has been conducting *HungerCount* to investigate the number of Canadians using food banks. The 2004 *HungerCount* captures information about those people who rely on 517 food banks and 2,653 affiliated agencies for their most basic food needs. CAFB estimates that food banks account for 90% of the market share of emergency food suppliers. Measuring food bank use, however, greatly underestimates the number of hungry families. McIntyre (2003) asserts that food bank visitors are generally distinct from other hungry families in that the former tend to largely consist of single parents, individuals from larger families or individuals who depend on social assistance. Typically, for those with additional resources, visiting a food bank tends to be a last resort. The 1996 National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth found that 66% of hungry Canadians who had the support of family and friends were more likely to turn to them in times of need and did not use a food bank. (Statistics Canada, 1996) As the *HungerCount* data demonstrate, many food bank users rely on income security programs to get by, (see Figure 5) therefore those who use food banks are not only economically insecure but also lack personal and social support systems.

## Hunger is a systemic problem

The findings in this study are a significant testimony to the causal factors of hunger beyond the individual. Hunger is often the result of sudden vicissitudes in living arrangements, such as the depletion of already insufficient social assistance funds, childbirth, a death in the family, employment loss and sickness, for which one is materially ill-prepared to cope with. These individuals and families are the most vulnerable to food insecurity since there is little buffering them from hunger when life's adversities befall them. In 2004, here is what people say about why they need food banks:

*My EI, welfare, child support... is late or I was cut off.*

*I'm waiting almost two weeks for a welfare intake appointment.*

*I have nothing until my EI benefits start in about six weeks.*

*I work part-time, my hours were cut.*

*I work full-time and still don't make enough to make ends meet.*

*My husband took all the money and left me with the kids.*

*There's almost nothing left after I pay my rent.*

*I just got out of jail.*

*I just started a new job and won't get paid for two weeks.*

No amount of money or reform within the health care system will improve the overall health of Canadians until geographically based income and social disparities are addressed. This requires partnerships with provincial and municipal governments, the education sector, labour, the private sector and community organizations. (Scott and Lessard, 2002). Collaborative efforts between all levels of government and groups dedicated to a civil society are needed to deal with food insecurity.

Government social assistance and welfare programs are grossly under-funded. They provide incomes far below Statistics Canada's estimated 2003 poverty line. People requiring social assistance or welfare receive only 28% to 59% of the actual poverty line established in the largest city in each province. Real incomes have fallen or have stagnated in every province. In fact, between 1976 and 1995, the minimum wage fell by more than 25% in eight out of 10 provinces. (McIntyre, 2003) According to the Caledon Institute of Social Policy, minimum wages in Canada are lower in relation to current wages than they were 25 years ago and are lower than in most industrialized countries. (Campaign 2000, 2004). In Canada, two million adults are in low wage jobs. It shouldn't be a surprise then that child poverty is high because it is linked to low wages. (UNICEF, 2000) High employment levels in a country are therefore not necessarily indicative of low poverty rates. The same is true for a country's degree of wealth: Canada rates among the top five industrialised nations for child poverty, along with the United States, Italy the United Kingdom and Australia, at 15.7%.

Beginning in the 1990's, governments began restructuring social programs. Between 1995 and 1998, the provinces lost \$7 billion in federal transfers forcing the provinces to make cuts to their own programs. Consequently, many chopped welfare rates and tightened eligibility rules for social assistance and/or benefits. This situation was further exacerbated by a decline in full time jobs with wages

adequate to support individuals and families, their concomitant replacement by contract work and part time jobs, and the 1993 decision by the federal government to stop funding affordable housing construction. The following are examples of how policy changes to the broader social services system have played out in regions across the country:

*From 1997 to 2003, there were 43.5% less people on welfare in British Columbia. At the same time, food bank use increased by 22.9%. This figure does not include other food sustaining programs.*

*(Robin Campbell, BC HungerCount coordinator)*

*In Red Deer, Alberta, food bank use increased from 42 people in 2003 to 180 people in 2004 in the first two weeks of July. In Brooks, Alberta food bank use is up 30% in 2004 because a local company cut shifts. (CBC Radio, Calgary)*

*We get anywhere from 300 to 700 calls daily to make appointments for folks at food banks across the city. (Winnipeg Harvest Agencies)*

*The average income of food bank users in the Greater Toronto Area is \$11,160. Only 3% of food bank users own their own property. Half of food bank clients, and one-third of their children, go hungry at least once a week." ("GTA food bank use at its highest". William Lin, Toronto Star August 2, 2004)*

*As the fishing, farming, forestry and agriculture industries decline, the use of food banks is increasing in New Brunswick. People traveling from PEI, Nova Scotia and Newfoundland to get to the rest of Canada all pass through New Brunswick and use food banks and community kitchens on their journey to urban centres to find jobs. (Bill Cockburn, New Brunswick 2004 HungerCount Coordinator)*

## Making a hunger-free Canada a reality

Ensuring that people have the means to feed themselves and their children is a complex problem would entail:

- i) anti-poverty legislation,
- ii) a policy for food security so that children and adults in Canada have enough safe and nutritious food for an active, healthy life,
- iii) strategies for affordable housing,
- iv) jobs with adequate incomes,
- v) access to social insurance and unemployment incomes programs,
- vi) regulated child care,
- vii) tax benefits,
- viii) incorporation of the right to food in domestic law.

These changes need to be made now before another generation is subjected to poverty and its inherent outcomes: hunger, ill health and social isolation. Quite simply, the issue of poverty must be placed onto the agendas of governments because, as the findings in this survey indicate, hunger, poverty and health are inextricably linked.

The 2004 *HungerCount* report outlines the public policy initiatives that will help alleviate some of the underlying factors that have led to increased food bank use. The challenge is immense and complex: solutions to poverty, hunger and food insecurity do not neatly align themselves within a narrow policy area, a sole piece of legislation, one level of government or fall within a limited geography.

It is time to reinvest in Canada's most valuable asset: its people.

## 8. Every Canadian Can Help To Eliminate Hunger In Canada

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Every Canadian can play a part in creating a hunger-free Canada. Take this *HungerCount* to your local Member of Parliament (MP) and ask them to state their position on eliminating hunger and poverty in Canada.

To help you find and contact your local MP:

Parliament of Canada postal code or name search of MP's: [www.parl.gc.ca](http://www.parl.gc.ca)

You can also contact the political parties directly:

Liberal Party of Canada: [www.liberal.ca](http://www.liberal.ca)

New Democratic Party of Canada: [www.ndp.ca](http://www.ndp.ca)

The Conservative Party of Canada: [www.conservative.ca](http://www.conservative.ca)

Bloc Québécois: [www.blocquebecois.org](http://www.blocquebecois.org)

For a complete directory of Canadian political parties visit: <http://home.ican.net/~alexng/can.html>

### Appendix 1: Table 3: Provincial Breakdown of Selected 2004 HungerCount Results

2004 Item	Canada	BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NB	NS	PEI	NF
Total Volunteer Hours	252,732.0	47,416.5	26,109.0	7,982.0	25,611.0	89,868.5	20,494.0	22,573.0	8,252.0	933.0	3,396.0
Total Staff Hours	108,266.0	12,697.0	23,093.0	2,412.0	2,931.0	28,212.0	26,782.0	8,975.0	1,089.0	743.0	1,278.0

N.B. - Due to reporting changes that were made this year, the national figures for total volunteer hours & total staff hours, in particular the figures in Quebec, are significantly underestimated.

#### Family & Household Composition - Estimated Percentages (weighted by total number of people assisted in grocery programs)

Sole-Parent	31.0	33.1	28.7	29.9	33.5	31.5	29.4	34.4	27.1	23.6	38.6
Single People	35.5	35.9	30.4	43.8	36.1	32.8	40.6	29.9	31.3	26.9	20.1
Couples No Children	10.0	13.1	14.7	9.8	5.5	10.3	8.3	14.2	15.3	17.2	10.9
2-Parent	23.5	17.9	26.2	16.5	24.9	25.4	21.7	21.5	26.3	32.3	30.4
Students	5.6	3.3	5.7	4.2	0.8	8.1	not available	3.8	2.1	4.2	1.2
Seniors	6.4	6.7	7.5	6.1	1.2	7.1	not available	8.3	11.6	12.6	2.9

#### Income Sources - Estimated Percentages (weighted by total number of people assisted in grocery programs)

Social Assistance	54.4	63.0	36.3	76.0	60.2	43.4	55.2	55.5	59.0	36.7	80.1
Employment	13.3	7.7	25.5	4.7	11.4	21.0	8.0	11.8	10.0	17.5	9.2
Employment Insurance	5.5	4.3	4.7	2.0	4.4	2.9	4.8	13.7	7.4	35.0	7.5
Disability Support	7.6	10.5	9.4	1.6	1.1	18.2	1.1	5.2	10.7	3.4	0.5
Pension Income	5.2	5.2	5.2	4.0	8.5	4.3	6.2	6.2	7.2	6.6	0.5
Student Loans	1.9	0.8	3.6	7.0	1.9	1.0	2.7	1.5	0.7	0.1	0.1
Other	7.2	3.2	6.4	3.5	3.2	4.6	16.8	4.0	1.7	0.1	0.3
No Income	4.9	5.3	8.9	1.2	9.3	4.6	5.2	2.1	3.3	0.6	1.8

#### Amount of Food in a Hamper - Percentage of Food Banks

1-3 Days	32.3	36.8	8.3	41.2	42.9	33.1	not available	36.0	21.6	66.7	50.0
3.5-5 Days	36.5	39.1	25.0	17.6	35.7	36.0	not available	40.0	54.1	33.3	50.0
More than 5 Days	31.2	24.1	66.7	41.2	21.4	30.8	not available	24.0	24.3	0.0	0.0

#### Frequency of Food Bank Use Permitted - Percentage of Food Banks

At least once a week	7.0	15.1	2.8	6.3	9.7	5.7	not available	0.0	4.4	0.0	0.0
Every 10 days - 3 weeks	17.2	12.9	6.9	25.0	58.1	17.1	not available	16.0	17.8	0.0	5.6
Once a month	62.5	58.1	56.9	50.0	25.8	66.3	not available	84.0	75.6	100.0	77.8
Every 5 - 14 weeks	12.7	14.0	29.2	18.8	6.5	10.9	not available	0.0	2.2	0.0	16.7
1 - 3 per year	0.6	0.0	4.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	not available	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

#### Measures Taken due to Lack of Food - Percentage of Food Banks

1+ measures taken	47.8	46.6	31.0	50.0	45.7	47.7	not available	53.8	65.9	66.7	70.6
Close early/do not open	3.1	7.0	0.0	0.0	5.7	2.4	not available	7.7	0.0	16.7	0.0
Turn people away	4.4	7.0	0.0	6.3	5.7	4.1	not available	7.7	2.3	33.3	0.0
Buy food	20.0	38.6	26.8	37.5	37.1	40.2	not available	46.2	65.9	66.7	64.7
Give less food	41.1	24.1	15.5	37.5	22.9	16.5	not available	23.1	13.6	50.0	17.6
Other	7.2	10.2	2.8	18.8	5.7	8.0	not available	7.7	0.0	0.0	5.9

# References & Recommended Resources: Hunger, Food Insecurity & Poverty in Canada

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## INTERNET LINKS

### Hunger and Food Insecurity (Canada):

Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Food Security Bureau: [www.agr.gc.ca/misb/fsb/FSB2eng.html](http://www.agr.gc.ca/misb/fsb/FSB2eng.html)

Caledon Institute for Social Policy: [www.caledoninst.ca](http://www.caledoninst.ca)

Campaign 2000: [www.campaign2000.ca](http://www.campaign2000.ca)

Canadian Association of Food Banks: [www.cafb-acba.ca](http://www.cafb-acba.ca)

Canadian Council on Social Development: [www.ccsd.ca](http://www.ccsd.ca)

Canadian Food Security Network: [www.ryerson.ca/~foodsec/fd.htm](http://www.ryerson.ca/~foodsec/fd.htm)

Canadian Labour Congress: [www.clc-ctc.ca](http://www.clc-ctc.ca)

Canadian Policy Research Networks: [www.cprn.com](http://www.cprn.com)

Canadian Social Research Links: [www.canadiansocialresearch.net](http://www.canadiansocialresearch.net)

Citizens for Public Justice: [www.cpj.ca](http://www.cpj.ca)

Council of Canadians: [www.canadians.org](http://www.canadians.org)

Daily Bread Food Bank: [www.dailybread.ca](http://www.dailybread.ca)

Federation of Canadian Municipalities: [www.fcm.ca](http://www.fcm.ca)

Mazon Canada: [www.mazoncanada.ca](http://www.mazoncanada.ca)

Meal Exchange: [www.mealexchange.com](http://www.mealexchange.com)

National Anti-Poverty Organization: [www.napo-onap.ca](http://www.napo-onap.ca)

National Children's Alliance: [www.nationalchildrensalliance.com](http://www.nationalchildrensalliance.com)

National Council of Welfare: [www.ncwcnbes.net](http://www.ncwcnbes.net)

PovertyNet: [www.povnet.org](http://www.povnet.org)

Statistics Canada Community Profiles: [www.statcan.ca/start.html](http://www.statcan.ca/start.html)

Tristat Resources: [www.shillington.ca](http://www.shillington.ca)

### Hunger and Food Insecurity (International)

America's Second Harvest: [www.secondharvest.org](http://www.secondharvest.org)

Canadian Food Grains Bank: [www.foodgrainsbank.ca](http://www.foodgrainsbank.ca)

Centre on Hunger and Poverty: [www.centreonhunger.org](http://www.centreonhunger.org)

Community Tool Box: <http://ctb.lsi.ukans.edu>

FIAN: [www.fian.org](http://www.fian.org)

Food First: [www.foodfirst.org](http://www.foodfirst.org)

Food Research and Action Center: [www.frac.org](http://www.frac.org)

Hunger Free America: [www.hungerfreeamerica.com](http://www.hungerfreeamerica.com)

Sustain (U.K.): [www.sustainweb.org/poverty\\_index.asp](http://www.sustainweb.org/poverty_index.asp)

United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization: [www.fao.org](http://www.fao.org)