

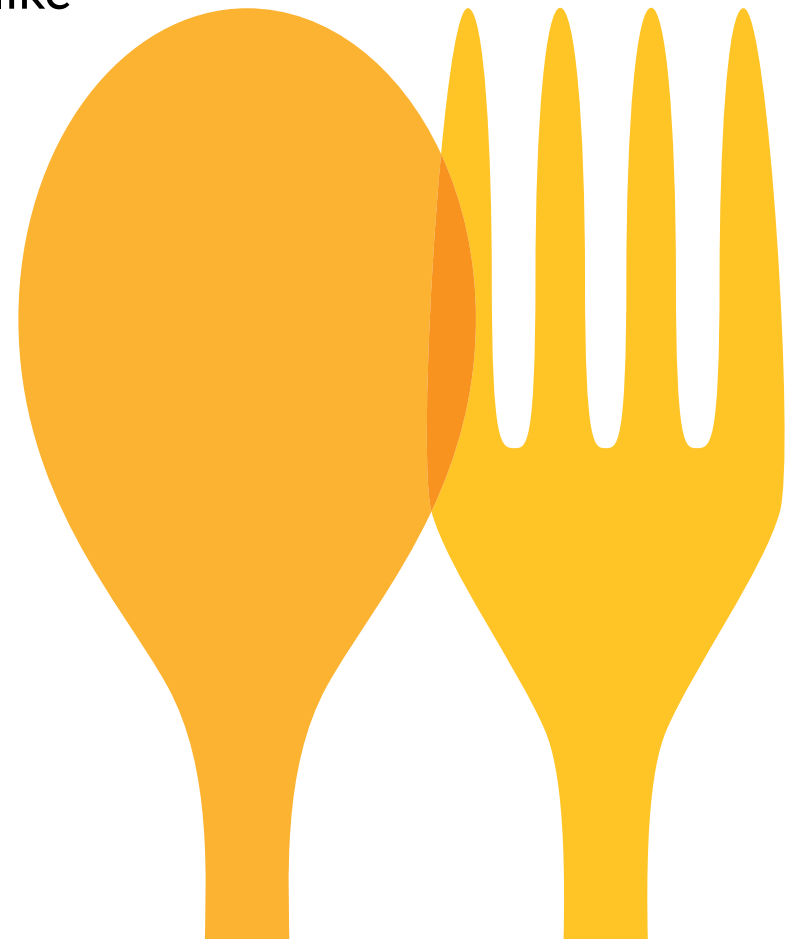


HUNGERCOUNT2008

A COMPREHENSIVE REPORT ON HUNGER AND
FOOD BANK USE IN CANADA

How many is too many?

How many people in Canada go hungry each month? Who are they? Why are they hungry? In a prosperous country like Canada, how many people should we let go hungry? We think questions like these are important. So we counted. And the reality is, **704,414** individuals turn to food banks in an average month – more than a third of them children – in a wealthy country of only 33 million. We think that's 704,414 too many.



Executive Summary

Food bank use has persistently remained above 700,000 people per month since 1997, throughout some of the most economically prosperous years this country has ever seen. With economic uncertainty ahead, there is concern that this number could climb higher still. If we are to figure out how to significantly reduce hunger in Canada, we need to understand who is turning to food banks for help, and why. That is the purpose of *HungerCount*.

What every Canadian needs to know about hunger

In the month of March 2008, 704,414 people were assisted by a food bank in Canada. Thirty-seven percent of those assisted were children.

Many will be surprised to learn that food bank use among working Canadians is growing. A higher percentage of food bank clients than ever before reported employment as their primary source of income. From a low of 11.9% in 2002, it has increased to 14.5% of those assisted this year. More people assisted by food banks are working – the problem is, many jobs just don't pay enough to heat their homes, cover the rent, clothe their families and provide three square meals every day. So, they make choices, and sometimes they reach out for help, including to food banks.

Working people in Canada are struggling as well-paying jobs – those that pay wages adequate to the costs of housing, food, clothing, and other basic needs, and that include non-wage benefits such as supplemental health and dental care

– become harder to find. In July 2007, the retail sector surpassed manufacturing as the largest supplier of jobs in the country. Jobs in the retail sector pay just over half of those in manufacturing,¹ and are less likely to include supplemental non-wage benefits.²

The term “new poor” is gaining currency in some parts of the country, as people attempt to come to grips with the fact that it is possible to be employed and still need assistance from a food bank to make ends meet. This surprising and discouraging fact brings home the reality that people from all walks of life can find themselves at the doorstep of their local food bank.

The continuing need for charitable food assistance across the social spectrum is further illustrated by the fact that families with children constitute 50% of households assisted by food banks, and nearly half of these are two-parent families. The findings of *HungerCount 2008* challenge our stereotypes of Canadians needing help from food banks: those assisted are working people, parents, people with disabilities, seniors, students, homeowners.

Though they provide an essential service to their communities, food banks are not a long-term answer to the problem of hunger in Canada. Food banks serve hundreds of thousands of people every month, and are still unable to reach all of the 2.7 million people experiencing food insecurity at some point during the year.^{3,4,5} Nor is it the case that food banks provide for the total dietary needs of those they assist: the average food bank in Canada provides about five days' worth of food per household, once per month.

There is a way to help

Hunger is a complicated problem, but there are solutions. It is our belief that we all – non-governmental organizations, social service agencies, members of the public, large and small businesses, governments at all levels – have a role to play in the reduction of hunger in Canada. With such a diverse range of stakeholders, we look to the federal government as a critical source of leadership on the issue.

Food Banks Canada respectfully recommends that the federal government take the following steps to reduce hunger in Canada:

- 1 Implement a federal poverty-reduction strategy with measurable targets and timelines.
- 2 Increase the value of the Working Income Tax Benefit, and widen eligibility of the program to include all households with earned incomes below the most recent low income cut-off (LICO).
- 3 Increase the value of the Canada Child Tax Benefit to \$5,000 per child, per year.
- 4 Implement the recent recommendations of the Standing Senate Committee on Agriculture and Forestry with regard to (a) increased funding for rural housing improvement and repair, and (b) a review of rural housing programs to ensure they are effectively meeting objectives.



FAST FACTS

704,414 people were assisted by a food bank in March 2008.

37% of those assisted by food banks are **children**.

Working people make up an increasing percentage of food bank clients.

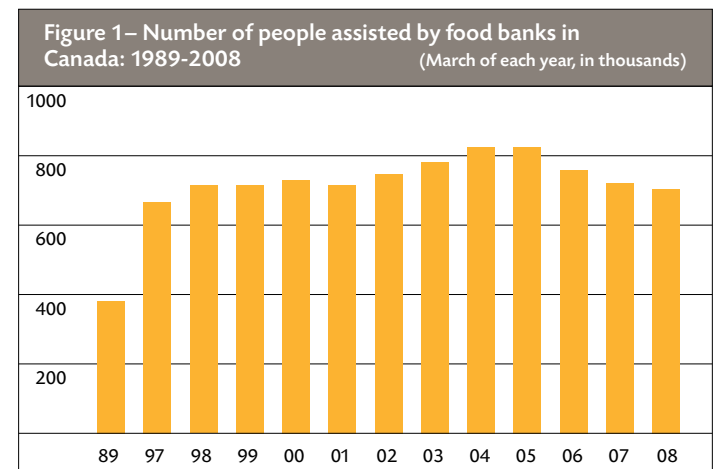
1 The reality of food bank use in Canada

There is nothing typical about people who need assistance from food banks. They are families and single people, seniors and students, people with and without disabilities, homeowners and renters. Though a large number rely on income benefits, they are also – more than ever – working people. They come from the urban and rural areas of every province and territory. They are the parents of your child’s friend, your mother’s elderly neighbour, the man who sells you a newspaper every morning and always has a smile to share.

How many are turning to food banks?

In March 2008, 704,414 separate individuals were assisted by a food bank or affiliated food program in Canada.⁶ This represents a nominal decrease of 2.2% since 2007, while remaining 6% higher than in 1997, the first year comparable data is available. Individuals assisted by food banks in March constituted 2.1% of the national population, compared to 2.2% in the previous year.

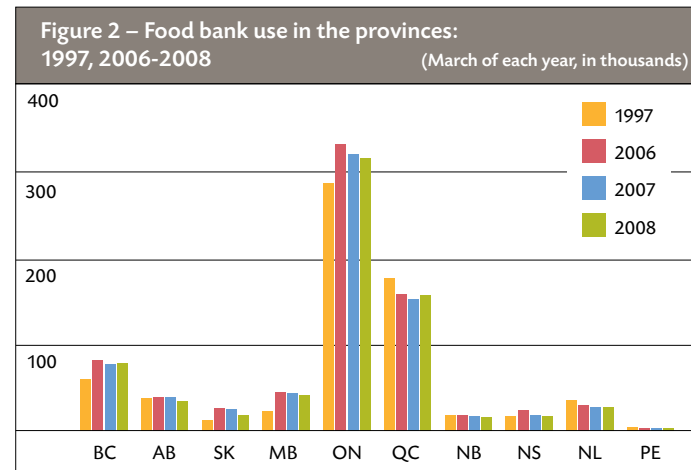
Figure 1 provides information on the number of individuals assisted for each year the *HungerCount* survey has been conducted. It demonstrates that, after the spike in use experienced between 2003 and 2005, the number of people assisted has returned to levels seen between 1998 and 2002.



Residential Schools Settlement Agreement

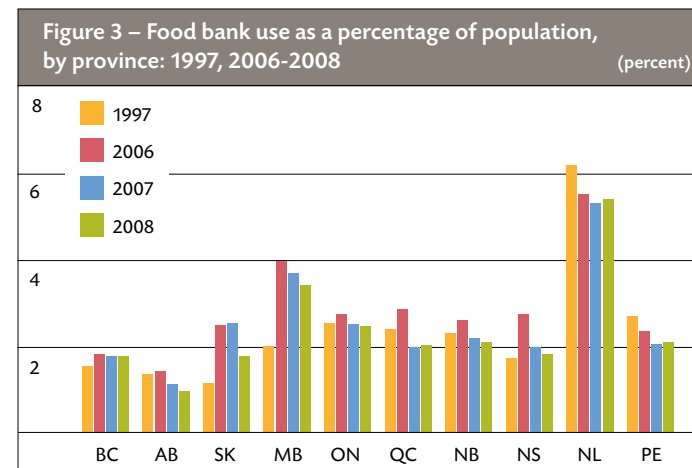
Forty-two percent of food banks in Canada saw an increase in the number of people they assisted in 2008. Furthermore, four out of ten provinces experienced an overall increase in the number of people turning to food banks for help: British Columbia (+ 2.1%), Quebec (+ 3.3%), Prince Edward Island (+ 2.9%), and Newfoundland & Labrador (+ 1.9%).

Figure 2 shows trends in individuals assisted, by province, for March of 1997, 2006, 2007, and 2008.



Food banks in Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia accounted for 78% of food bank use in Canada, a small increase compared to 2007. Taken together, the number of people assisted in these three provinces increased by 0.4% in 2008. Conversely, 79% of the national decrease is accounted for by lower levels of food bank use in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

Figure 3 reveals that, as in past years, food bank use as a percentage of provincial population is highest in Newfoundland & Labrador (5.4%), Manitoba (3.4%), and Ontario (2.4%), with Saskatchewan experiencing a significant decrease – from 2.5% in 2007 to 1.8% in 2008 (see sidebar).⁷ British Columbia, Quebec, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland & Labrador each experienced small increases in food bank use as a proportion of provincial population.



Late in 2007, Residential Schools Settlement Agreement Common Experience Payments (CEP) were disbursed to all former students of Indian residential schools. These payments consisted of \$10,000 for the first year of residence at a residential school, and \$3,000 for each additional year. After consultation with Saskatchewan food banks, Food Banks Canada believes that these payments were a major contributor to the decrease in food bank use in that province in 2008.

Table 1 presents the total number of individuals assisted by food banks in each province, as well as the percentage of those assisted who are children under age 18. It also compares provincial share of the national total with each province's share of national population. This last information supports that contained in Figure 3, revealing higher concentrations of need in Manitoba, Ontario, and Newfoundland & Labrador. Each of these provinces show proportional use higher than the national average of 2.1%.

Table 1 – Food bank use in Canada, by province: March 2008

Province/Territory	Total Assisted, March 2008	% Children	Share of Canadian Total	Share of Canadian Population
British Columbia	78,101	31.2%	11.1%	13.3%
Alberta	33,580	42.4%	4.8%	10.6%
Saskatchewan	17,751	45.6%	2.5%	3.0%
Manitoba	40,464	45.7%	5.7%	3.6%
Ontario	314,258	37.6%	44.6%	38.8%
Quebec	156,215	35.7%	22.2%	23.3%
New Brunswick	15,638	33.2%	2.2%	2.3%
Nova Scotia	16,915	35.0%	2.4%	2.8%
Prince Edward Island	2,892	35.4%	0.4%	0.4%
Newfoundland & Labrador	27,260	38.4%	3.9%	1.5%
Territories	1,340	37.9%	0.1%	0.1%
Total	704,414	37.1%	100.0%	100.0%

How many are assisted by meal programs?

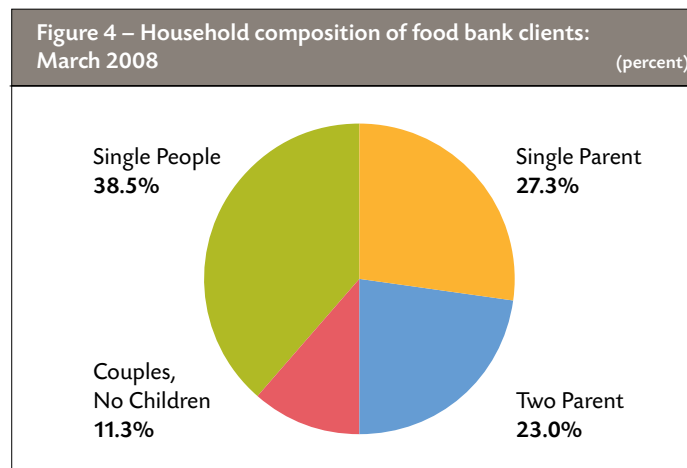
In addition to providing grocery hampers to their clients, many food banks offer meals to those in need through soup kitchens, school breakfast and lunch programs, shelters, drop-in centres, and other venues. During the month of March 2008, food banks and affiliated agencies served a total of 3,091,777 meals. This is a 32% increase over 2007, though the number of meal programs counted (191 in 2008 versus 183 in 2007) has not changed significantly.⁹

FAST FACT

Food banks served a total of 3,091,777 meals in March 2008 alone – a 32% increase over 2007.

Who are the people turning to food banks?

Many of the people helped by food banks are children. In March 2008, 37.1% of people assisted by food banks were children under age 18, a slight decline from 38.7% in 2007. The percentage of assisted households containing at least one child was stable this year, at 50.3%; 23% were dual-parent families. As in past years, a large percentage of those assisted by food banks were single adults with children (27.3%) and without (38.5%), as illustrated in Figure 4.¹⁰



How do food bank clients make ends meet?

This year's findings show that the percentage of households reporting employment as their primary source of income continues to grow. From a low of 11.9% in 2002, the working poor grew to 13.5% in 2007, and to 14.5% in 2008. With 4.8% reporting Employment Insurance as their primary source of income, a total of 19.3% of assisted households are living on the proceeds of current or recent employment.

Table 2 supplies information on the change in percentage of assisted households reporting employment as their primary source of income. Seven of ten provinces – accounting for 72% of the national population – saw an increase in this figure from 2007 to 2008.

Table 2 – Percent of households reporting employment as primary source of income (percent)

	2008	2007
British Columbia	14.4	11.5
Alberta	28.3	27.0
Saskatchewan	12.1	7.0
Manitoba	13.0	14.0
Ontario	17.1	14.2
Quebec	10.3	12.6
New Brunswick	11.2	10.7
Nova Scotia	9.7	9.4
Prince Edward Island	19.5	23.7
Newfoundland & Labrador	10.3	9.5
Canada	14.5	13.5

The loss of well-paying jobs

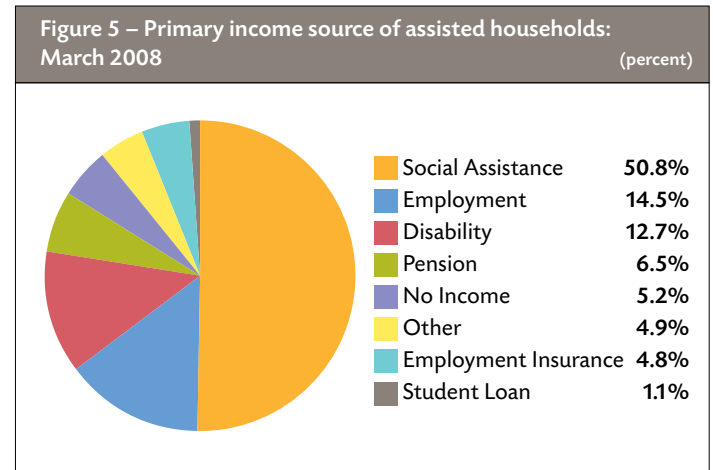
Though unemployment rates in Canada have stayed low in the past year, jobs in manufacturing and forestry have been disappearing. Well-paying jobs – those that pay wages adequate to the costs of housing, food, clothing, and other basic needs, and that include non-wage benefits such as supplemental health and dental care – have increasingly been replaced by jobs that pay less, are part-time or temporary, and are less likely to provide non-wage benefits.

In July 2007, the retail sector – for the first time – surpassed manufacturing as the largest supplier of jobs in the country. According to Statistics Canada, jobs in this sector pay only about half the weekly wage of those in manufacturing. In the accommodation and food services sector (the fifth largest employment category in Canada), weekly pay is even less than in retail, at about \$340 per week.¹¹



The percentage of households reporting provincial disability-related income benefits as their primary source of income held steady in 2008, at 12.1%. When households receiving benefits from private disability pensions are accounted for, the total percentage reporting some type of disability benefit rises marginally to 12.7%.

A large but decreasing percentage of households assisted by food banks report social assistance as their primary source of income – from a high of 64.8% in 2001 to lows of 50.7% in 2007 and 50.8% this year. When combined with those whose primary source of income is old age pension (6.5%) and disability-related income supports (12.7%), a total of 70% of those assisted report income benefits as their primary source of income. Figure 5 provides a national overview of primary sources of income for households assisted by food banks.¹²

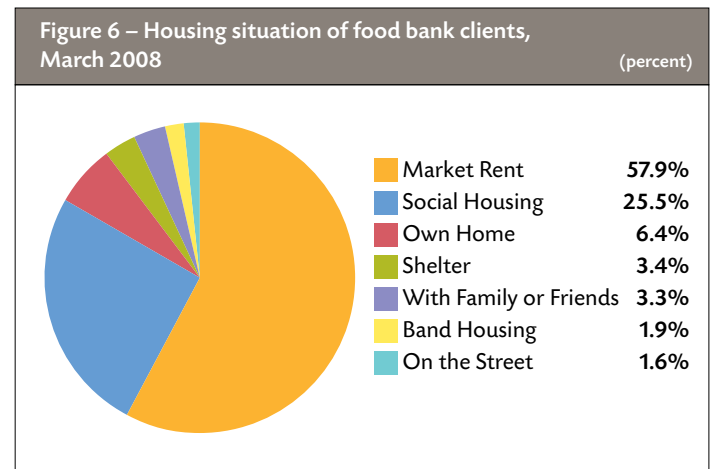


Where do food bank clients call home?

For the second year in a row, *HungerCount 2008* asked food banks about the housing situations of those they assist. Though this year's figures are not directly comparable with those presented in 2007 (response rates for 2008 were higher, and therefore likely to be more representative of the national reality) the results are similar. The large majority of households assisted by food banks reside in rented accommodation, paying either market rent (58%) or subsidized rent (25.5%).

Nationally, more than 8% of those assisted can be considered homeless – living on the street, in shelters, or temporarily with family or friends. Slightly fewer (6.4%) own their homes, while 2% live in band-owned housing.^{13,14}

Figure 6 provides a picture of the housing situation of food bank clients.



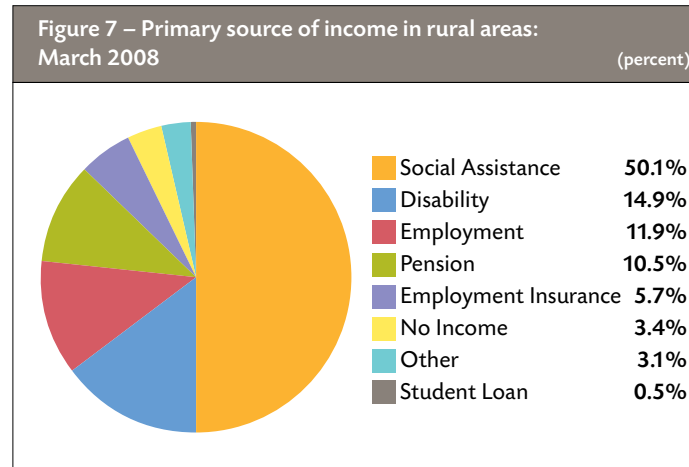
Food bank use in rural Canada

The demographic picture of people assisted by food banks in Canada changes if analysis is restricted to clients of programs located in regions with populations of less than 10,000. Though they serve fewer people than those located in urban areas, rural food banks make up nearly half of food banks in the country.¹⁵

Rural food banks serve both a higher percentage of children (40% compared to 37.1% overall) and seniors aged 65 and over (8.5% compared to 5.7% overall). They assist a higher percentage of families with children (55.2% compared to 50.3% overall), but significantly fewer single-person households (31.5% versus 38.5% overall).¹⁶

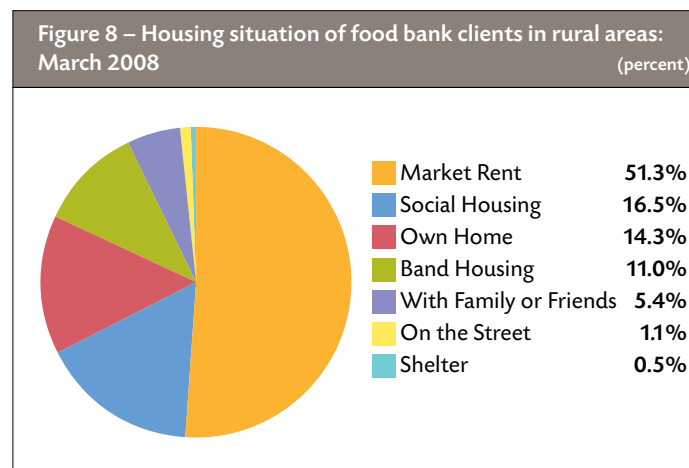
In areas with populations of less than 10,000, those assisted are less likely to report employment as the primary source of income (11.9%), while the percentage living on old age pension jumps to 10.5% of the total.¹⁷

Figure 7 shows the primary income source of assisted households in rural areas.



It is in the category of housing that we see the greatest difference between those assisted by urban food banks and those helped by rural food banks. Similar to findings in 2007, the percentage of households living in a home they own is dramatically higher in rural areas – 14.3% compared to 6.4% overall. Rural households are also much more likely to report living in band-owned housing, at 11% versus 1.9% overall. The percentage living in subsidized housing is significantly lower, at only 16.5% of the total.¹⁸

Figure 8 provides an overview of the housing situations of rural food bank clients.



2

Change is possible: How government policy can help reduce hunger in Canada

We believe that government programs and policy can have a significant impact on the problem of hunger in Canada. Since the mid-1990s, the economy has grown while supports for low-income Canadians have stagnated or been cut^{19,20} and food bank use has barely budged. We are encouraged by the fact that several provincial governments have recently taken more active steps against hunger. With the recent slowdown in the economy, Canadians – more than ever – need this help. They also need the federal government to increase its involvement and spearhead meaningful change.

Provincial policy – Taking steps forward

The past year has seen a number of positive changes with respect to provincial programs that address the problem of hunger in Canada. For example, governments in nearly every province and territory increased minimum wage rates in 2008, with further increases planned in Saskatchewan, Ontario, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, and Newfoundland & Labrador.²¹

Several provinces and territories are transforming their approach to income assistance, moving forward with a constructive vision that sees those collecting welfare benefits as valuable resources in what has been an increasingly tight labour force. These provinces are investing in adult education and training, eliminating disincentives to labour force participation, and restructuring benefits so that all low-income households are treated equally regardless of source of income.

Governments in Ontario, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick have made positive strides on poverty reduction, following Quebec and Newfoundland & Labrador in making the economic advancement of low-income Canadians a priority. In Ontario, the anticipated release of the provincial government's poverty reduction strategy has galvanized large sectors of the population. The report of the Poverty Reduction Working Group in Nova Scotia has had the same effect in that province. The Ontario strategy in particular could act as an important milestone, showing provincial governments across the country that their long-term economic goals can benefit from similar plans.

Federal policy – A need for leadership on hunger in Canada

At the federal government level, the March 2008 federal budget and Conservative election platform largely held to the status quo set by the government in the previous year. For example, the federal government has made the following commitments:

- Establishing a new framework for Aboriginal-focused economic development to “ensure that federal investments help Aboriginal Canadians benefit from viable economic opportunities”;
- Indexation of the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB) to inflation;
- For people with disabilities, (1) the addition of new types of expenses that may be claimed under the Medical Expense Tax Credit, (2) a GST/HST exemption for education and training programs, and (3) expansion of the list of medical and assistive devices that may be purchased GST/HST-free;
- Funding to support the development of agreements between First Nations, provincial governments, and the federal government to enhance education outcomes of First Nations students.²²

While these programs are positive, it is uncertain whether they will result in reductions in the level of hunger in our country. On the other hand, three developments at the federal level are notable for their vision, impact, or range of possibility:

- The creation of the Mental Health Commission of Canada
- The Community Development Trust
- The Residential Schools Settlement Agreement

These three initiatives have led, or are likely to lead, to reductions in hunger in Canada. They highlight the positive role the federal government can play in addressing social issues faced by jurisdictions across the country, and provide lessons for moving forward on further addressing hunger.

1 The **Mental Health Commission of Canada (MHCC)** was created to increase integration of the diverse range of mental health services in the country, and to enable enhanced collaboration among people living with mental illness, social service agencies, governments, researchers, and other stakeholders.²³

The MHCC provides an example of the organizing and visioning role the federal government can play in complex, pan-Canadian issues. It is designed to act as a central resource on research and best practice, while respecting the role of provincial governments in creating mental health strategies that meet their own particular needs. It is built upon a model of both contemporary governance and social policy that can influence a renewed federal approach to the problem of hunger.

2 The **Community Development Trust** was established in response to the rising Canadian dollar, economic restructuring, and mounting job losses in the manufacturing and forestry sectors. It will provide up to \$1 billion to provinces and territories “to assist workers and communities that are experiencing hardship due to international economic volatility.”²⁴ It will be welcomed in hard-hit areas such as Windsor, Thunder Bay, and northern British Columbia and Quebec, where manufacturing and forestry jobs are becoming more scarce by the day.





The Trust utilizes the fiscal power of the federal government while leaving provinces and territories free to set priorities. For example, in Saskatchewan and British Columbia the trust will be exclusively used to address weakness in the forestry sector^{25,26}; in Nova Scotia, the funds will be used more generally to diversify the provincial economy and help workers transition to sustainable employment²⁷; the Quebec government will focus on workers hurt by downturns in manufacturing and forestry, and on investments in the province's burgeoning high-technology sector.²⁸

3 The **Residential Schools Settlement Agreement** came into effect in September 2007, and resulted in the disbursement of significant funds to individuals who had resided at recognized residential schools.

This year's provincial *HungerCount* report from Saskatchewan points out that residential school settlement payments were

likely a key factor influencing the decrease in food bank use in that province in March 2008. Similar information has been reported to Food Banks Canada by directors of food banks in the territories.

The payments provided a much-needed boost for First Nations households, and it is the hope of Food Banks Canada that any resulting decline in hunger and food bank use will be permanent. The Agreement provides a model of a program that acknowledges and actively addresses the presence of underlying factors – in this case prejudice, discrimination, and physical and mental abuse – that make the economic playing field distinctly uneven, and that raise barriers to the economic success of particular communities in Canada.

We acknowledge the vision of these initiatives. The findings of *HungerCount 2008* make it clear that there is much more to be accomplished.

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Recommendations

With food bank use remaining stubbornly above 700,000 people per month since 1997, it is clear that more must be done. We all have a role to play in reducing hunger – individuals, non-governmental organizations, small and large businesses, governments at all levels – and we need a body that can tie diverse stakeholders together. Hunger is a national problem, and we need leadership from the federal government to effectively address it.

Insufficient income is the single most important variable influencing hunger in Canada.^{29,30,31} Individuals and families who turn to food banks do so because they do not have enough money to pay for food on top of what is required for housing and other necessities. For this reason the majority of our recommendations point to initiatives that will lead to an increase in the incomes of Canadians living in poverty, thereby reducing hunger.

Our recommendations are informed by a vision of the federal government as a body with the ability to help individuals and families overcome the social and economic barriers that keep them from moving beyond a need for food banks. These recommendations build upon existing programs that have wide public support, and that touch the lives of a significant number of Canadians.

Recommendation 1:

Create a federal poverty-reduction strategy with measurable targets and timelines

To be effective, this strategy must include:

- Realistic indicators with which to measure progress;
- Cooperation with a full range of stakeholders, including provincial, territorial, and First Nations governments;
- Creation of a dedicated, accountable governmental body to organize and orchestrate the plan.

A federal poverty reduction strategy will bring into the picture those left out by existing programs at the federal level. The creation of a dedicated governmental body will enable increased coordination of programs operated out of various federal government departments. Like the Mental Health Commission of Canada, this body can encourage cooperation and collaboration among the range of stakeholders already involved in the fight against hunger, and act as a central resource moving forward.

Between April and October 2008, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Human Resources, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities had made significant progress on its *Federal Contribution to Reducing Poverty in Canada* study. The Committee is the most logical forum through which a strategy can be developed, and we hope it will finish its important work in this area.





Recommendation 2: Improve the Working Income Tax Benefit

The percentage of those assisted by food banks reporting employment as their primary source of income increased in almost every province between 2007 and 2008. The employment trends noted in *HungerCount 2007* – the replacement of full-time, well-paying employment by part-time, temporary, low-paying jobs with few extra-wage benefits – have become more clear in the past year.

As of July 2007, there are now more jobs in Canada's retail sector than in manufacturing. Jobs in this sector pay just over half of what manufacturing workers earn. Retail employees often work part-time, and work far fewer hours in a given week. In the accommodation and food services sector – the fifth-largest employment sector in Canada – average weekly pay is even less, at approximately 35% of the average manufacturing wage.³²

The recently introduced Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB) is helping to address this problem, though the program needs improvements. The WITB is meant to provide an incentive for low-income Canadians to enter or stay in the workforce, and provides up to \$500 to single adults earning between \$3,000 and \$12,833 per year, and up to \$1,000 to families earning between \$3,000 and \$21,167 per year.

While the WITB will put needed cash into the pockets of hungry Canadians, we believe that changes are needed if the program is to meet its objectives. For a single individual earning \$9,500, the maximum WITB amount of \$500 – provided as a lump sum or in three instalments of \$167 – will only go so far.

Similarly, for a two-parent family of four living in New Brunswick with a household income of \$13,000 (for example), an extra \$1,000 will raise net income to \$3,567 *below* social assistance levels in that province.

Improvements will make it more likely that the benefit will truly act as an incentive to enter or stay in the workforce. Food Banks Canada therefore recommends:

- Increasing Basic WITB levels up to \$2,400 per year, with concomitant increases to the Family WITB and WITB Supplement.
- Widening eligibility of the WITB to include – with consideration of existing eligibility rules, family size, and community size – all households with earned incomes below the most recent low income cut-off (LICO).

Recommendation 3: Strengthen the Canada Child Tax Benefit

After more than a decade of robust economic health, many families with children continue to struggle to make ends meet. Thirty-seven percent of individuals assisted by food banks are children under the age of 18, and half of assisted households are families containing at least one child. The fact that both single-parent and dual-parent families continue to need help from food banks signals that parents are having trouble adequately meeting the costs of supporting their families.

The Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB) was designed to help reduce child poverty, and to help parents with the costs of raising children. It provides a maximum yearly amount of \$3,271 for a family's first child, \$3,041 for the second, and \$3,046 for each additional child. By providing an income boost to parents, the benefit makes a real difference in their ability to better provide for the basic needs of their children.

The CCTB is a model federal program, providing help to families across the country. This year's *HungerCount* findings, as well as the fact that child poverty in 2006 (the most recent year for which information is available) was only marginally lower than in 1989,³³ demonstrate that more can be done. Thus, our third recommendation is to:

- Increase the value of the Canada Child Tax Benefit to \$5,000 per child, per year.

Recommendation 4: Improve housing for rural Canadians

Stakeholders across the political spectrum have realized that housing affordability and homelessness are critical issues in Canada. The federal government has acknowledged these problems through ongoing funding of the Homelessness Partnering Strategy, and through its support of federal-provincial affordable housing programs.

One of the most surprising findings of *HungerCount 2008* is that more than 14% of households assisted by food banks in rural areas reside in a home that they own (compared to 6.4% overall). Based on anecdotal information, we understand that many of these homes are owned outright, and families are able to pay yearly residential taxes only because of the help they receive from food banks and other social service agencies. We have also heard that this housing is likely to be in an advanced state of disrepair.

A recent report of the Senate Standing Committee on Agriculture and Forestry³⁴ supports this picture, and makes the case that federal funding for rural housing repair and improvement is seriously inadequate to need. Given these findings, we support the Standing Committee's recommendations with regard to rural housing:

- Increase federal funding allocated to housing repair and improvement in rural areas.
- Initiate a review of housing repair and improvement programs to ensure they are effectively meeting objectives.



After more than a decade of robust economic health, many families with children continue to struggle to make ends meet. Thirty-seven percent of individuals assisted by food banks are children under the age of 18, and half of assisted households are families containing at least one child.

3 Provincial perspectives on hunger

Findings from this year's *HungerCount* survey varied greatly from province to province. With the exception of the growth in the percentage of working people resorting to food banks, the numbers show few truly national trends in 2008. Looking beyond the numbers, food banks are all facing similar challenges: the need for charitable food assistance remains high, the costs of operations are rising, and many expect donations of food and funds to drop as the Canadian economy stalls. The following provincial reports provide insights into these challenges at the provincial level, and allow for a unique understanding of food bank use across the country.

Looking beyond the numbers, food banks are all facing similar challenges: the need for charitable food assistance remains high, the costs of operations are rising, and many expect donations of food and funds to drop as the Canadian economy stalls.

British Columbia

Submitted by the Canadian Association of Food Banks – British Columbia Branch, Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by Dr. David Murray, Abbotsford Community Services Food Bank

It is with no joy that we have to report that food bank usage in B.C. is on the increase once again. Although the increase is minimal (2.1%) it is still staggering to know that 78,101 people visit a food bank at least once a month in British Columbia.

What is most disturbing is that 24,368 B.C. children find themselves caught in the fallout of families trying to provide enough food to feed themselves on a daily basis. These figures parallel the fact that B.C. has the dubious distinction of leading the nation in children living below the poverty line for the fifth year in a row, at 21.9%.³⁵ First Call's Michael Goldberg states: "It is time for B.C. with the worst child poverty rates, to wake up to the reality and start taking its responsibilities seriously."³⁶

Mahatma Gandhi suggested that poverty among children "is the worst form of violence." More than one million children live in poverty in Canada. We must not let this injustice plague and haunt the most vulnerable. It is time to take a stand to protect our most valuable resource – our children.

What is equally alarming to food banks across B.C. is that we see the number of employed people standing in food bank lines continuing to grow. The 2008 *HungerCount* figures tell us that 14.4% of our clients are working. This is a 26% increase over last year. Although we are very pleased that many of our clients are taking the initiative to provide for themselves and their families, we are very concerned that an increasing number still cannot make enough to provide adequate food resources for themselves or their children.

In Canada, 41% of low-income children live in families where at least one income earner has a full-time job all year.³⁷ A March 2007 Environics study found that "88% of Canadians believe that increasing the minimum wage to a level that will raise workers in full-time jobs out of poverty is an effective way to reduce the gap" between rich and poor. Increasing the minimum wage and federal employment tax credits would go a long way toward alleviating this growing issue in British Columbia.

As we contemplate how to address the issues of poverty and hunger here in B.C., perhaps we would do well to heed the words of Muhammad Yunus, who wrote, "The poor themselves can create a poverty-free world – all we have to do is to free them from the chains that we have put around them."³⁸

It is true that we need to address steep housing costs, liveable wages, Canada's National Child Benefit, workplace literacy, and numerous other issues. Canada's most unacceptable problem is that we have far too many poor children – by any measure.

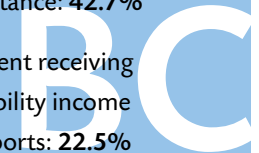
Individuals assisted,
March 2008: **78,101**

Percent children: **31.2%**

Percent reporting
employment income:
14.4%

Percent receiving social
assistance: **42.7%**

Percent receiving
disability income
supports: **22.5%**



Alberta

Submitted by the Alberta Food Bank Network Association (AFBNA), Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by Marjorie Bencz CM, Edmonton's Food Bank, and Richard Le Sueur, AFBNA

Individuals assisted,
March 2008: **33,580**

Percent children: **42.4%**

Percent reporting
employment income:
28.3%

Percent receiving social
assistance: **33.8%**

Percent receiving
disability income
supports: **12.2%**

At least one major bank predicts the Alberta surplus will total \$12 billion in 2008 – and it may be more than the total surpluses of Ottawa and all other provincial governments combined.³⁹ Alberta's population stands at close to 3.5 million, representing an annual growth of 2%. Alberta added 9,600 workers to its labour force in March, pushing the employment level over the two million mark for the first time in the province's history. Employment has grown by 3.3% and Alberta continues to have the lowest unemployment rate amongst the provinces, at 3.4%.

As reported in the last few *HungerCount* reports, Alberta's strong economy has a dark side. There are inherent problems associated with the economy for the working poor, those who are under- or unemployed, and those struggling on fixed incomes. With continued increases to housing costs, individuals and families living in poverty struggle to make monthly payments, and food insecurity becomes a serious issue. As in previous years, a large percentage of those assisted by Alberta food banks report that their main source of income is employment, but employment income is not keeping pace with rising costs.

Housing and employment can vary greatly across Alberta due to the influence of the energy bonanza on specific communities. Because of the intensity and impact of a number of these factors, many community food banks are attempting to provide services to more people, while others are finding that the number of clients and donations has changed little from 2007.

Another area of concern is for those receiving non-employment incomes. Seniors are having difficulty keeping up with basic living expenses on fixed pensions. One food bank noted that "We are seeing an increase in seniors accessing daily free bread and surplus out front." People on social assistance face similar problems: despite the strong economy and provincial surpluses, Alberta provides one of the lowest levels of social assistance in Canada, particularly when compared to average provincial after-tax income.

Notwithstanding the high employment rate in Alberta, there are areas of the province where industries have become more efficient, creating a net loss of jobs. As a rural food bank indicated, "We need employment for people in the northern areas that once had employment in local sawmills, trapping, commercial fishing, etc., but it no longer exists."

For the most part, food banks in Alberta are well supported by their communities. They rely on members of the public to provide volunteer time, financial and in-kind contributions, and of course, food. One major concern expressed by a number of food banks is their need for funds or grants for operations, including facilities, trucking, staff costs, and food purchases.

In July of 2008, the Royal Bank of Canada reported that the province's economy "has cooled from the boiling point of recent years," and that "earlier outsized price increases have led to an erosion in housing affordability." It also reported that growth in Alberta will be at a "more sustainable pace."⁴⁰ Let's hope that in the future, people experiencing hunger in Alberta find the situation more sustainable.

Recommendations to the provincial government:

- Create a common approach, a cohesive plan, and a data sharing method for dealing with affordable housing and homelessness;
- Create and adequately fund programs to ensure safe, affordable housing for seniors, people with disabilities, and others on fixed incomes;
- Increase benefits for people needing income security programs including AISH (Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped); benefit rates should be based on a market value approach.



A large percentage of those assisted by Alberta food banks report that their main source of income is employment, but employment income is not keeping pace with rising costs.

Saskatchewan

Submitted by Food Banks of Saskatchewan, Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by Linda Robinson, Adult Centre for Employment Readiness and Training, Regina & District Food Bank

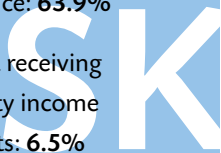
Individuals assisted,
March 2008: **17,751**

Percent children: **45.6%**

Percent reporting
employment income:
12.1%

Percent receiving social
assistance: **63.9%**

Percent receiving
disability income
supports: **6.5%**



Saskatchewan may be in the midst of an economic surge, but not everyone is benefiting from the growth in our communities. Though the growing economy has stimulated an increasing population and labour market, it has also resulted in higher living costs and a shortage of affordable living accommodations. For many, salaries have not reflected changes in annual inflation rates, moving the working poor further and further into the pool of lower income residents. More seniors on fixed incomes are appearing at food bank doors.

Even though the minimum wage was increased in Saskatchewan in October 2007, the benefits are virtually lost amongst the rising costs of food, rent, and gas. Food prices have increased such that healthy foods are more expensive to purchase than foods that can lead to health and other problems. For those living any distance from food banks, rising fuel costs add yet one more barrier, and significantly impact the ever-increasing maintenance and service costs of running food banks.

Jobs may be plentiful in Saskatchewan, but low literacy skills and limited education prohibit many from filling these positions. Government funding for programming such as life skills (e.g. building self-esteem, self-confidence, family relationships),

nutrition and General Educational Development (GED) preparation is increasingly difficult to attain, yet these programs are important steps in moving forward for a very vulnerable group of people.

Food bank use in Saskatchewan has fluctuated, in large part because of the residential school settlements that were disbursed to First Nations families late in 2007. These funds provided a temporary boost in many of our clients' incomes, and hopefully will contribute to improvements in health and well-being. Next year's *HungerCount* will certainly reflect whether or not this was the case.

Still prevalent is the problem – “do I buy food or pay the rent?” Landlords are selling off their lower-rent properties, at high prices, to large companies that complete much needed upgrades and improvements – but at what cost to renters? Some buildings are undergoing conversions to condos, making the lack of affordable housing even worse. Rental rates have increased significantly, displacing many individuals and families from their homes. An increase in the cost of homes has further distanced the opportunity for many to become homeowners.

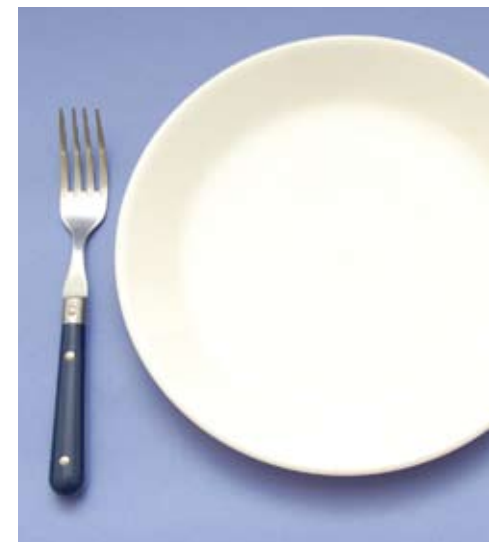
Are food banks playing a vital role in our communities? One Regina & District Food Bank customer indicated: "I go to the food bank about once per month. When I go there it helps me a lot because with rent increases I couldn't make it sometimes. I'm very thankful the food bank is there."

Saskatoon residents spoke out about what being assisted by the food bank means to them: "Being able to feed my family," "helps out a lot," "everything," "eating and living." Few found the experience humbling or humiliating.

In larger centres, where clients have access to extra services, the most appealing are programs on budgeting, cooking skills, and income tax preparation. Transportation assistance, training and employment programs, and provision of free clothing are other services clients find helpful.

Bill Hall, Executive Director of the Food Banks of Saskatchewan, reports: "While we have seen a temporary drop in food bank usage at some of our food banks, the issue of trying to make ends meet at the end of the month is still a major issue for many in Saskatchewan. What concerns me the most is the rise of single people and employed people using our food banks. It shows that although more people are employed in this province, wages really haven't kept up with the cost of living."

Paul Merriman, Executive Director of the Saskatoon Food Bank, indicated that "Our numbers at the Saskatoon Food Bank have been rising steadily throughout 2008. We have seen sharp increases in first time users to the food bank. Some months we have seen the first-time user rates up over 300% from 2007. We are in the midst of an economic boom in Saskatoon, but unfortunately people are seeing a rise in their cost of living. The wages people are earning at the lower end of the pay scale are not enough to cover their food costs."



Though the growing economy has stimulated an increasing population and labour market, it has also resulted in higher living costs and a shortage of affordable living accommodations.

Manitoba

Submitted by the Manitoba Association of Food Banks, Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by Karen Flett, Winnipeg Harvest

Individuals assisted,
March 2008: **40,464**

Percent children: **45.7%**

Percent reporting
employment income:
13%

Percent receiving social
assistance: **55.9%**

Percent receiving pension
income: **12.7%**

In Manitoba, the safety net is strengthening slowly, and we note with hope the increasing availability of jobs with the potential to offer living wages. The Manitoba Association of Food Banks has been a part of a multi-group campaign in support of raising social assistance benefit levels, and shelter rates for social housing units. A \$25 monthly increase to welfare and some small increases in social housing benefits have helped put real cash into some low-income households.

The support of the Manitoba Chambers of Commerce has added strength and vision to this work, and has contributed to some of the successes of the campaign. It is not over yet and there are more needs and issues on which to move forward.

We have also been supporting the Community Income Tax Filing program to ensure many low-income Manitobans have access to transfer programs such as the child tax benefits and GST credits available through the income tax filing system.

The 2007 Manitoba Child and Family Poverty Report Card, prepared by the Social Planning Council of Winnipeg, shows that Manitoba has made no appreciable gains in reducing child poverty since 1989. According to the report, the after-tax child poverty rate in Manitoba is 14%, the second highest in the country. Moreover, 83% of low-income children live in families with employment income, and 60% live in families with at least one parent working full time all year.⁴¹

We hear from child care agencies that many parents are struggling to feed their families at home, and rely on the agencies to provide meals and snacks throughout the day. Educators report that children arrive at school hungry, and some junior high school teachers report that some students have no food at home whatsoever. As a consequence, schools are requesting more food than ever from food banks in the province.

When walking on the streets in Winnipeg you can see people who are homeless, hungry and without needed supports. It is too often the case that people walking through the doors of Manitoba food banks to request food are also in need of affordable housing and related supports. “Couch surfing” seems to be the latest trend hitting our streets. Social housing, affordable bachelor suites and apartments are always in need.

A recent report revealed that, in Winnipeg, the vacancy rate for apartments has dropped dramatically, from 6.6% in 1991 to 1.5% in 2007. There are 52,430 private rental housing units in the city, but only 70 bachelor units available for rent. Average rent for a bachelor apartment has jumped more than 11% in two years, from an average of \$405 in 2005 to \$451 in 2007. The social assistance rate allowance for rent for a single person, including heat and water, stands at only \$271 per month.⁴²

A 2005 report on Aboriginal homelessness estimates that as many as 10,000 people in Winnipeg are part of the “hidden homeless” community – that is, they are living temporarily with friends or family. An estimated 3,500 new immigrants are expected to arrive in Winnipeg in 2008, putting further pressure on the tight rental market. Supportive housing options, which provide safe, affordable, and structured environments specifically for those living with mental illness and substance issues, are almost non-existent.⁴³

The Aboriginal and northern communities in Manitoba include some of the most disadvantaged in the province. The Aboriginal population is very young, with 36% under 15 years of age (compared to 18.9% among the non-Aboriginal population). In 2006, Aboriginal children accounted for more than one in four of all Manitoba children under 15 years of age. The median age for Aboriginal people is about 24 years as compared to 39 in the non-Aboriginal population. This difference has some serious and immediate labour market implications.

The 2006 census reports 175,395 Aboriginal Manitobans, representing 15.5% of all people in the province and 15% of all Aboriginal people in Canada. Winnipeg has a significantly larger Aboriginal population than any other Canadian city, and Aboriginals are the fastest growing cultural group.

A larger percentage of Aboriginal Manitobans 15 years of age and older were employed in 2005 (59%) than in 1996 (40%), though the employment rate remained low compared to the overall provincial rate of 65%. While unemployment decreased by 25% between 1996 and 2001, Aboriginal people in Manitoba had an unemployment rate four times that of the non-Aboriginal rate in 2001.^{44,45}

Overall, while the Aboriginal population in Manitoba has made significant gains, a number of barriers to health and well-being remain. Aboriginal children are more likely to live in poverty and are more likely to be in the child welfare system. Issues of access to basic community infrastructure and service, adequate housing, formal education, and skilled labour are common.

In Manitoba we are actively building stronger relationships with community-based groups to work to reduce poverty and food bank use.



In Manitoba, 83% of low-income children live in families with employment income, and 60% live in families with at least one parent working full time all year.

Ontario

Submitted by the Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB), Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by Nicola Cernik and Adam Spence, OAFB

Individuals assisted,
March 2008: **314,258**

Percent children: **37.6%**

Percent reporting
employment income:
17.1%

Percent receiving social
assistance: **43.1%**

Percent receiving
disability income
supports: **21.3%**

This year has been marked by great uncertainty and the prospect of difficult times ahead in Ontario. Current economic conditions, rising food prices, increasing energy costs, job losses within the manufacturing sector, and the replacement of full-time with part-time or temporary employment has left hundreds of thousands of Ontarians worried about how they will feed their families. This year, more than ever, neighbours who previously supported their local food bank with financial donations or volunteer hours, are now turning to it for assistance. These are indeed troubling times.

Nearly 300 food banks from Windsor to Ottawa and Thunder Bay to Niagara Falls tracked data on those they served during the month of March. Ontario's food banks remain a necessary service to 315,000 Ontarians – 2.4% of the provincial population – in hundreds of villages, towns, large urban and smaller suburban centres. Almost 40% of those served by Ontario's food banks are children – equal to more than 100,000 children every month. In addition, nearly 738,000 meals were served by meal programs supported by Ontario's food banks, an increase of 41% over 2007 figures.

We believe that consistent demand is being driven by rising prices. We are experiencing significant short- and long-term price increases in many staple foods in Canada. When looking at six-month, one-year, five-year and ten-year intervals, it is clear that the price of food is on the rise. There appears to be an accelerating increase in cost for many items at a rate beyond inflation in the short-term, with well over half of the food items

on the retail price index increasing faster than inflation since November 2007.

In addition, there is a significant difference in the rate of change for food items in Ontario's grocery stores. Healthier foods such as bread, milk, and eggs are increasing at a much faster rate than less healthy foods such as processed cheese and fruit-flavoured crystals. The price of bread alone has increased by 87% since 1998, going from an average of \$1.30 to \$2.43 for a single loaf. One kilogram of ground beef has increased by 65%, going from an average of \$3.69 to \$6.10.⁴⁶

Remote northern Ontario communities have food prices that are already substantially higher than the Canadian average. The price of food in remote, fly-in communities in Northern Ontario is astonishing. Many remote communities that already struggle with issues of hunger and poverty face the reality of food costs that are an average of 86% greater than the Canadian average.⁴⁷ It is not unusual to see 20 diapers for \$25, a bag of oranges or flour for \$10, or a case of baby formula for over \$50. It is likely that the cost of all foods in these isolated communities will continue to escalate with the price of airline fuel, as much must be transported in by plane. Any further increases in the price of food will add further stress to grocery bills that are already stretched beyond their limit.

The challenges of rising food prices are further compounded by increases in the price of gasoline and household energy. Many low-income households require an automobile for essential

transit to work or school. Unfortunately, the price of gasoline has increased by 62% since 2003. This increase translates into an additional expenditure of \$800 per year for gasoline, which is roughly equivalent to one month's rent for a person living in a major urban centre in Ontario.

The cumulative effect of rising food, gasoline, and energy bills is reducing or eliminating income gains, or placing some households deeper into poverty. Many working families or single earner households have been able to weather the initial storm given median wage and minimum wage increases. However, fixed-income households, including social assistance recipients and seniors, have witnessed a significant reduction in spending power in the past year.

Ontario's food banks are at the front line of social and economic trends, and many are beginning to feel the impact of rising prices and changing economic times. A significant number have been forced to spend more money on food, or have seen a reduction in staple food items. Many food banks report that individuals have been forced to turn to them because of the rising price of food, fuel, and energy. These trends are not yet severe,

but many food banks are worried about what challenges the next year will hold.

We believe that now is the time to be bold. This does not mean that we should be risky with public funds or quick to make poorly reasoned decisions. But we should not choose to focus on short-term efficiency and risk management over long-term progress and prosperity. We must apply the conviction of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, who invested in the backbone of American society to create institutions and social programs that saved a nation from destitution. We must also apply the conviction of Lester Pearson who established Canada as a progressive and fair nation during turbulent political and economic times with the introduction of universal health care, a national pension plan, a national student loan program, and a national labour code.

We need to do what is right, what is just, and what fits with our stated values as a nation, which is to ensure that all citizens have equal opportunity to a high quality of life.



Remote northern Ontario communities have food prices that are already substantially higher than the Canadian average.

Quebec

Submitted by l'Association québécoise des banques alimentaires et des Moissons (AQBAM), Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by Richard Décarie, AQBAM

Individuals assisted,
March 2008: **156,215**

Percent children: **35.7%**

Percent reporting
employment income:
10.3%

Percent receiving social
assistance: **59.6%**

Percent receiving
disability income
supports: **2.1%**

In Quebec, economic analysts agree that the economy is slowing down, and that the rise in the cost of fuel has had a direct impact on the population, and an indirect one via inflation of the price of consumer goods. The results of *HungerCount 2008* in Quebec are similar to those of last year.

This year we are undergoing a restructuring of the Association that will end in May 2009. With ongoing improvements in the organization, data collection improves every year and enables us to provide increasingly exact data on the situation of hunger and of people in need.

A 2007 AQBAM survey on the role of local food banks (18 regional food banks and more than 1,000 local organizations) in providing food, referrals, and follow-up to assisted households shows the extent to which the food bank network is used as a launching pad for the social inclusion of people in need. *HungerCount 2008* shows that there is a certain stability in the use of food banks in Quebec, although the economy seems to be slowing down, which might lead to an increase in 2009.

New Brunswick

Submitted by the New Brunswick Association of Food Banks, Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by George Piers, Fredericton Community Kitchen

Individuals assisted,
March 2008: **15,638**

Percent children: **33.2%**

Percent reporting
employment income:
11.2%

Percent receiving social
assistance: **62.9%**

Percent receiving
disability income
supports: **7.7%**

The *HungerCount* in New Brunswick shows a continued downward trend in the usage of food banks throughout the province. The majority of food banks reported a decrease in the number of people they assisted in March of this year, while soup kitchens showed a small increase. This is primarily due to the economic upward swing we have experienced in New Brunswick, the result of construction in buildings and infrastructure. There has also been a boom in manufacturing, mainly in Moncton and St. John. The sections of the province that have seen an increase in the use of food banks and soup kitchens are primarily those depending on the forestry industry.

New Brunswick continues to face an ongoing shortage of affordable housing for the less fortunate. This has taken an interesting turn, with government having the money to develop these units, but not being able to convince contractors to develop them.

Food and commodity prices have been affected by higher gasoline prices and fuel expenses, which means that our clients have less disposable income. For example, a mother of two living on social assistance stated that, after accounting for the cost of a rent increase, fuel, electricity, and other bills, she had only \$20 left for food for herself and her two young children to last the month.

This allowed her to purchase 33 packages of dried noodles and a tube of toothpaste. She was able to obtain three days' worth of food from a food bank, and turned it into six days' worth – the rest coming from what she could glean in apple orchards and from vegetables thrown away by producers. This mother will be taking an opportunity provided by the newly-formed Population Growth Secretariat to go back to school and take a hairdressing course.

The New Brunswick government recently commissioned two secretariats. The first is the result of recommendations of the Bradshaw report, and will be responsible for the non-profit sectors in the province. Its first principle is funding and stability for non-profit organizations (NPOs).

As the representative of taxpayers, the government is prepared to invest in NPOs when the investment benefits the people of New Brunswick. Moving forward, the province will fund qualified NPOs on a multi-year basis, will ensure that funds are used as intended, and will be prepared to account for the investments that are made.

New Brunswick NPOs are prepared to assist the government as an equal partner in the development of our province. Stable, multi-year government funding with a minimum of paperwork and professional services would improve the ability of NPOs to assist the government in the improvement of our society by:

- a) Assuring timely financial assistance to permit sound budgeting;
- b) Reducing costs of preparing applications;
- c) Standardizing criteria for the administration of government assistance;
- d) Ensuring the criteria for accounting to funding bodies.

The second secretariat, focused on population growth, has been commissioned to find ways of encouraging New Brunswickers to stay in New Brunswick or return to the province; to encourage an increase in the immigrant population; to expand placements in community colleges; and to better train our population in the service industry.

Hopefully with the assistance of the two secretariats and the different approach by government, we will continue to see the number of people assisted by food banks and soup kitchens decrease in the coming year.



A mother of two on social assistance stated that, after she accounted for a rent increase, utilities, and other bills, she had only \$20 left to feed herself and her two young children for the month.

Nova Scotia

Submitted by FEED Nova Scotia, Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by Dianne Swinemar, Becky Mason, and Julianne Acker-Verney, FEED Nova Scotia

Individuals assisted,
March 2008: **16,915**

Percent children: **35%**

Percent reporting
employment income:
9.7%

Percent receiving social
assistance: **54.9%**

Percent receiving
disability income
supports: **10.9%**

For the fourth year in a row, the number of people reported to have accessed support from Nova Scotia's community food programs in March was down slightly from the previous year. Yet, the *Report of 2007 Food Costing* reveals that income-related food insecurity is the daily reality for many families. Nova Scotia, at 14.6%, has a significantly higher percentage of families reporting moderate to severe levels of income-related food insecurity than the Canadian average (9.2%).⁴⁸ We must be careful not to interpret the findings of the *HungerCount* in isolation of other quantitative and qualitative indicators.

Late winter and early spring in Nova Scotia often produce treacherous walking and driving conditions, and March 2008 was particularly bad. Storms and icy conditions resulted in many food banks closing for as many as four days in March. Those food bank agencies that remained open during the bad weather and through icy conditions had fewer people coming through the door than usual. Good Friday and Easter Monday also resulted in some food programs closing on days they would ordinarily be open. In total, some of our member food banks and food assistance programs ended up being closed for at least one day a week for three weeks during March 2008.

We cannot definitively state how people who would have accessed a food bank, meal program or other food assistance program coped with these closures. One thing is for sure: the inability to provide food for themselves and their families is a stressor that commands a tremendous amount of energy and effort from many Nova Scotians regardless of the reason. It is unsettling but realistic to expect that many folks spread their food supplies as thinly as they could, called on family and

friends for support, or simply did not eat sometimes just to make it through.

Meanwhile, some food programs are reporting a change in the demographics of their clients. In some rural communities in particular, the number of young families is decreasing, while the number of recently retired and elderly people is on the rise. This is particularly concerning when one considers that the senior population is projected to reach just under 25% of Nova Scotia's population by 2026.⁴⁹ Labour market participation has also been projected to peak in 2008 and decline thereafter as the general population ages, retires, and is not replaced by younger workers. In addition, it is reasonable to expect that obtaining food for a nutritious diet will continue to cost more in rural Nova Scotia than in urban settings.⁵⁰

With the rising cost of food and fuel not being offset by increases in wages or other income, we can anticipate that Nova Scotians on low and fixed incomes will be experiencing very difficult times ahead. The cost of heating oil has skyrocketed by more than 30% over the past 12 months, currently costing as much as \$1,400 to fill a 909-litre oil tank.⁵¹ As a result, many families who warm their homes with oil furnaces are feeling increasing financial pressure. Food banks across Nova Scotia are among the agencies that receive requests for assistance with fuel costs. Some families have found themselves in desperate conditions that include warming rooms with electric ovens, burning wood in unsafe conditions, and turning off heating appliances to save money. Unfortunately, this situation may become even more critical, as Nova Scotia Power Inc. (the primary producer of electricity in Nova Scotia) has requested a

12.1% residential rate hike, which would take effect in January 2009. With the manufacturing and resource sectors experiencing a downturn and the cost of food, fuel and power increasing, we at FEED Nova Scotia are looking at the upcoming months with significant trepidation.

There are encouraging signs, however. The provincial government's appointment of the Poverty Reduction Working Group (PRWG) and a commitment to introduce a strategy that will reduce poverty in Nova Scotia provides some hope. The PRWG, recognizing the need for systemic change in attacking poverty in Nova Scotia, produced a report with four primary recommendations:

1. Nova Scotia's poverty reduction strategy must include a commitment of resources and be entrenched in legislation;
2. The strategy must be based on collective responsibility – involving all government departments, the private sector, communities, and individuals;

3. Social Assistance support must move away from “last resort” to a proactive and progressive support system;
4. The implementation plan submitted by the PRWG must be included in the strategy.

It seems that Nova Scotia is a long way from seeing food banks and other food assistance programs become obsolete. Although the provincial government's support for a poverty reduction strategy is encouraging, with the minimum wage just reaching \$8.10 per hour (effective May 2008) and not scheduled to reach \$9.65 per hour until October 2010, we anticipate that poverty will deepen for many Nova Scotians and become a new reality for others. More people, regardless of their source of income, will likely find themselves on the steps of a food bank for the first time as they scramble to feed their families while juggling increased expenses for food, fuel, housing, and recreation.



With the rising cost of food and fuel not being offset by increases in wages or other income, we can anticipate that Nova Scotians on low and fixed incomes will be experiencing very difficult times ahead.

Prince Edward Island

Submitted by the Prince Edward Island Association of Food Banks, Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by Mike MacDonald, Upper Room Food Bank

Individuals assisted,
March 2008: **2,892**

Percent children: **35.4%**

Percent reporting
employment income:
19.5%

Percent receiving social
assistance: **41.7%**

Percent receiving
Employment Insurance:
16.3%

PEI

Although last year's *HungerCount* report showed a decrease in food bank use on Prince Edward Island, there has been a 3% increase in the number of people assisted between 2007 and 2008. As in past years, children make up 35% of the individuals assisted each month. Over 2% of Islanders are forced to turn to food banks to put food on their dinner tables.

The provincial government, along with other organizations, has been taking steps to diversify our economy and industries, but farming, fishing, and tourism remain as the top three sectors of employment. These industries have had their share of struggles due to high fuel costs, high energy costs, and poor weather.

Housing and its related costs (electricity, heat, and maintenance) continue to have a major impact on households. With rents expected to increase by as much as 9% in 2009, food bank staff are bracing for an increase in those needing assistance. In P.E.I., increases in the cost of energy have outpaced the rest of Canada,

with gasoline up 26%, electricity up 25%, and fuel oil increasing by 44% as of August.⁵²

The Prince Edward Island government has been attempting to address some of the problems that affect individuals using food banks. Minimum wage increased to \$7.75 per hour on May 1, and then to \$8.00 per hour on October 1, 2008. The government also made a \$200,000 donation to the Salvation Army home heating program, and has been working with municipalities and the private sector to improve on public transportation.

With the uncertainty in the global economy, worry and panic continue to affect many people assisted by food banks. They are concerned about how this may affect their employment and the programs they rely on.

Housing and its related costs (electricity, heat, and maintenance) continue to have a major impact on households. With rents expected to increase by as much as 9% in 2009, food bank staff are bracing for an increase in those needing assistance.

Newfoundland & Labrador

Submitted by the Community Food Sharing Association of Newfoundland & Labrador (CFSA), Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by Eg Walters, CFSA

This past year has seen a slight increase in food bank usage throughout our province. This is in contrast to the previous three years which showed a modest decrease. While the economic boom continues on the Eastern Avalon Peninsula, it carries with it a negative impact for the less fortunate among us. Housing prices have increased in some areas by as much as 20% due to the recent agreement between our provincial government and the oil industry on the Hebron development. For low-income families, owning a house is getting out of reach as speculation of a large influx of workers for several megaprojects has driven prices up. Rental accommodations are also being impacted and no new social housing projects are in the works.

Despite the growing economy on the east coast, rural Newfoundland continues to suffer the impact of problems within the fishery and pulp and paper sectors. An aging workforce in the fishery, combined with lack of product to catch and process, is causing many workers to seek employment outside our province. Many are opting to work the 21/7 turnaround in the oil sands in Alberta while their families stay at home. Others have made the break and have pulled up stakes and permanently moved out west.

There is great uncertainty in central Newfoundland over the future of the Abitibi-Bowater paper mill. A restructuring of this facility would see the loss of some 170 direct jobs. An impasse between the union and management could very well lead to the closure of the plant, which would be devastating for the area. On the surface, there seems to be no desire from the provincial government to become involved in financial stimulation for this facility.

As with all Canadians, we are being affected by the high cost of gasoline and heating fuels. This is reflected in the cost of items that require transportation before being consumed. As an island, nearly all of our consumables are transported to and throughout our province. Grocery prices are being increased to cover the higher transportation costs and, when combined with the sharp rise in the price of flour, it is no wonder that many families are depending on food banks just to get by.

Food banks will continue to exist to help those who have been marginalized by society. It is our hope that one day all Canadians will be able to put their hand into their own pocket, take out their hard-earned cash, and choose and purchase what they want on their dinner table.

Individuals assisted,
March 2008: **27,260**

Percent children: **38.4%**

Percent reporting
employment income:
10.3%

Percent receiving social
assistance: **71%**

Percent receiving
Employment Insurance:
14.2%



4 Conclusion – Moving forward on reducing hunger in Canada

Though they provide an essential service to their communities, food banks are not a long-term solution to the problem of hunger in Canada. Food banks serve hundreds of thousands of people every month, and are still unable to reach all of the 2.7 million people experiencing food insecurity at some point during the year.⁵³ Nor is it the case that food banks provide for the total dietary needs of those they assist: the average food bank in Canada provides about five days' worth of food per household, once a month.

Food banks are one of several resources people use to cobble together enough food to feed themselves and their families every month. This struggle to make ends meet has costs for all of us.

On one hand are the personal costs – for the child having difficulty paying attention in school because of hunger, for the senior experiencing health problems stemming from a poor diet, for the young person in rural Canada who wishes to stay in her community but can't find work, for the older blue-collar worker who has been laid off and is unable to access retraining opportunities.

On the other hand are the social costs – the lost contributions from young people unable to reach their full potential, the funds spent addressing health care problems that would be better managed through prevention, the emptying-out of rural communities, the wider consequences of hundreds of thousands of older workers facing layoffs in manufacturing and forestry.

We must work together to reduce hunger in Canada because it makes economic sense, and also because it is the right thing to do. No person in our prosperous country needs to go without food – we have the resources and ingenuity to address this problem, if we make it a priority.

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- 15 Findings on rural food banks include information from all provinces with the exception of Quebec.
- 16 Based on surveys from 300 food banks, including 36 Nova Scotia agencies. Weighted by total number of people assisted by grocery programs.
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Methodology

The primary purpose of the annual *HungerCount* survey is to provide a national snapshot of food bank use in Canada. This is accomplished by counting the total number of individuals who receive groceries from food banks and their affiliated agencies during the month of March. Each person is counted only once, regardless of the number of times they receive assistance during the data collection period. March has been chosen as the study period because it is an unexceptional month, without predictable high or low use patterns. Since March is used consistently, we are able to make relevant comparisons in use patterns over time. The survey also measures volunteer and paid staff hours contributed during the study period, frequency of food bank use allowed, days' worth of food provided, total number of prepared meals served, and coping strategies used when food banks risk running out of food. Demographic characteristics of those assisted by food banks, including primary income source, household composition, and housing type were also measured in 2008.

Surveys were sent to all known Canadian food banks in February 2008. When necessary, *HungerCount* Provincial Coordinators contacted food banks prior to the submission deadline to clarify survey questions. Completed surveys were returned to Provincial Coordinators, who checked responses for accuracy and completeness before forwarding copies to Food Banks Canada.

Throughout the summer, Food Banks Canada staff worked with *HungerCount* Provincial Coordinators to collect outstanding surveys and resolve any inconsistencies in responses. Survey data were entered into a database, checked for accuracy, and analyzed by Food Banks Canada staff and volunteers. In cases where actual grocery program figures were not available for operating food banks, conservative estimates were produced in consultation with Provincial Coordinators, using 2007 figures as a guide.

Table 3 – Food Banks in Canada

Province/Territory	Known Food Banks	Participating Food Banks	% of Food Banks Participating	No. of Agencies Included
British Columbia	92	83	90%	230
Alberta	98	77	79%	300
Saskatchewan	29	27	93%	174
Manitoba	51	49	96%	250
Ontario	325	268	82%	841
Quebec	18	18	100%	1,046
New Brunswick	52	52	100%	40
Nova Scotia	1	1	100%	145
Prince Edward Island	6	6	100%	5
Newfoundland & Labrador	28	28	100%	47
Territories	7	6	86%	0
Total	707	615	87%	3,078

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HungerCount 2008 Provincial Coordinators

Dave Murray, Abbotsford Community Services (British Columbia)

Marjorie Bencz CM, Edmonton's Food Bank (Alberta)

Richard Le Sueur, Alberta Food Bank Network Association (Alberta)

Linda Robinson, ACERT, Regina and District Food Bank (Saskatchewan)

Karen Flett, Winnipeg Harvest Food Bank (Manitoba)

Nicola Cernik, Ontario Association of Food Banks (Ontario)

Richard Décarie, Association québécoise des banques alimentaires et des Moissons (Québec)

George Piers, Fredericton Community Kitchen Inc. (New Brunswick)

Dianne Swinemar, FEED NOVA SCOTIA (Nova Scotia)

Eg Walters, Community Food Sharing Association (Newfoundland & Labrador)

Mike MacDonald, Upper Room Food Bank (Prince Edward Island)

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Katharine Schmidt, Marzena Gersho, Alexandra Baril, Aruna Boodram, Julianne M. Acker-Verney, Becky Mason, Wasifa Zarin, Rachele Cosme, Christine Pich, Cheryl Carter

Translation

Dana Carciumaru

HungerCount was prepared by

Shawn Pegg

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2968 Dundas Street West,
Suite 303
Toronto, Ontario
M6P 1Y8

Tel: 416-203-9241

Toll-free: 1-877-535-0958

Fax: 416-203-9244

info@foodbankscanada.ca

www.foodbankscanada.ca