



# HUNGERCOUNT | 2015

*A comprehensive report on hunger and food bank use in Canada,  
and recommendations for change*

01 | EXECUTIVE  
SUMMARY

07 | RECOMMENDATIONS

03 | RESULTS

15 | DETAILED  
FINDINGS

*SNAPSHOT 1: NUMBER  
OF PEOPLE HELPED  
BY FOOD BANKS*

28 | METHODOLOGY

*SNAPSHOT 2: A PICTURE  
OF THE INDIVIDUALS  
AND HOUSEHOLDS  
ACCESSING  
FOOD BANKS*


31 | ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

*SNAPSHOT 3: SOURCE  
OF INCOME AND FOOD  
BANK USE*

The HungerCount report presents results from an annual study of more than 4,000 food banks and other food programs in every province and territory.

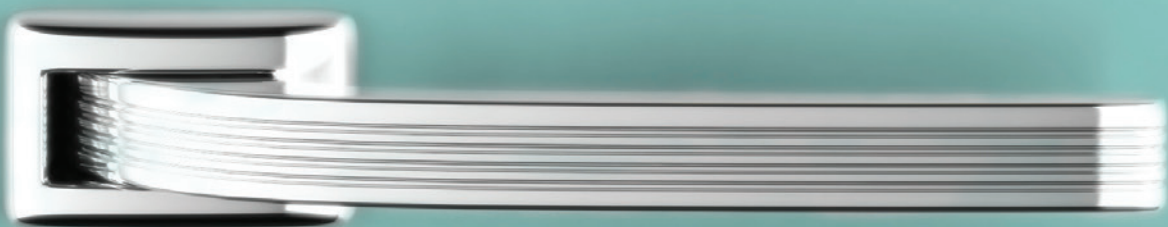


To obtain more information from the **HungerCount** research study, including multi-year tables and data not included in the report, please visit [www.foodbankscanada.ca/HungerCount](http://www.foodbankscanada.ca/HungerCount).



**852,137**

Canadians turn to food  
banks each month



In March 2015, **852,137** people received food from a food bank in Canada. More than one-third of those helped were children.

Food bank use in March was **1.3% higher compared to the same period in 2014 and 26% higher than in 2008, before the start of the global financial crisis.**

Half of the provinces experienced increases in food bank use in 2015. Hardest hit was Alberta, where unemployment increased by **10% between March 2014 and 2015 in the wake of the dropping price of oil. Three-quarters of food banks in this province reported an increase in use. Nationally, 54% of food banks reported an increase in the number of people requesting food assistance.**

It has now been seven years since food bank use reached a low point of **675,735 individuals in March 2008. The need for food banks spiked drastically in 2009 and has hovered at record levels ever since.**

## Who Is Being Helped?

Households that make the difficult decision to ask for help from food banks tend to be the most severely food insecure<sup>1</sup> because their **incomes are too low to cover even the most basic needs:**

- 7%** of households helped by food banks live primarily on income from a pension;
- 16%** of those assisted earn the majority of their income through work;
- 18%** of households receive disability-related income supports;
- 46%** of households accessing food banks are on provincial social assistance benefits.

The households that request assistance are often forced to limit their spending on food because of the **high and relatively inflexible cost of housing:**

- 5%** of households accessing food banks are homeless, with the majority of these living temporarily with family or friends;



7% own their homes;

20% of those assisted live in social housing, with subsidized rents;

67% of households helped live in rental housing and pay market-level rents.

Finally, the **family composition** of those accessing food banks is diverse:

10% of households accessing food banks are couples without children;

44% of those helped are families with children, and nearly half of these are two-parent families;

46% of households assisted are composed of single individuals – a group that continues to grow, having gradually increased from just 30% of the total in 2001.

## Reducing The Need For Food Banks

These figures offer stark evidence of the realities faced by the more than 850,000 people who access food banks each month: the reality that government-managed income benefits are inadequate to support individuals and families who have fallen on hard times; the reality that a job does not always guarantee food security; the reality that safe, quality housing is too often unaffordable.

To address these realities, the **HungerCount** puts forward four broad recommendations to federal, provincial and territorial governments – recommendations that, if implemented, will significantly reduce the need for food banks in Canada:

- 1 Create a basic income to replace provincial social assistance programs;
- 2 Increase the availability of affordable housing;
- 3 Reinstate and enhance employment and training supports for Canadians with low literacy levels;
- 4 Increase access to traditional foods and reduce the cost of store-bought foods in northern communities.



# SNAPSHOT 1: NUMBER OF PEOPLE HELPED BY FOOD BANKS

In March of this year, 78,693 people accessed a food bank for the first time. They may have lost a job, or fallen ill and had to stop working, or faced a rent increase that forced them to cut back their food budget. Individuals accessing a food bank for the first time made up 9.2% of the 852,137 people who received food from a food bank during the month of March.

The 852,137 individuals assisted in March made 1,221,017 visits to food banks. While most food banks are generally able to provide food once per month to each household they assist, others are able to offer help more often. Given that March is an average month in the utilization of food banks, we estimate that food banks will respond to 1,717,760 separate individuals this year, who will make 14,652,204 visits over the course of 2015.

Food bank use in March was 1.3% higher compared to the same period in 2014. The slight increase this year was driven mainly by changes in Alberta, Quebec, Manitoba, and British Columbia. Nationally, the number of people accessing food remains 26% higher than in 2008, before the start of the global financial crisis that sent Canadian food bank use soaring.

In addition to the assistance provided by food banks, Canadian meal programs also served 4,395,601 meals and snacks to a broad population via soup kitchens, shelters, school breakfast programs and other initiatives.

TABLE 1 - FOOD BANK USE IN CANADA, BY PROVINCE

	Total Assisted, March 2015	% Change, 2014-2015	% Change, 2008-2015	% of food banks reporting an increase, 2014-2015	% Children, March 2015	Total Assisted, March 2014	Total Assisted, March 2008
British Columbia	100,086	2.8%	<b>28.1%</b>	59%	31.5%	97,369	78,101
Alberta	67,443	23.4%	<b>82.8%</b>	75%	41.2%	49,766 <sup>2</sup>	33,580
Saskatchewan	26,727	-0.3%	<b>50.6%</b>	74%	45.0%	26,820	17,751
Manitoba	63,791	3.4%	<b>57.6%</b>	58%	41.9%	61,691	40,464
Ontario	358,963	-4.2%	<b>14.2%</b>	49%	33.6%	374,698	314,258
Quebec	163,152	4.0%	<b>27.9%</b>	56%	36.4%	156,895	127,536
New Brunswick	18,986	-3.1%	<b>21.4%</b>	37%	32.3%	19,590	15,638
Nova Scotia	19,722	0.3%	<b>16.6%</b>	58%	31.2%	19,664	16,915
Prince Edward Island	3,153	-8.1%	<b>9.0%</b>	17%	35.1%	3,432	2,892
Newfoundland & Labrador	25,040	-5.9%	<b>-8.1%</b>	38%	37.4%	26,617	27,260
Territories	5,074	9.1%	<b>n/a</b>	25%	39.0%	4,649	1,340
<b>Canada</b>	<b>852,137</b>	<b>1.3%</b>	<b>26.1%</b>	<b>54%</b>	<b>35.8%</b>	<b>841,191</b>	<b>675,735</b>



**80,000**  
people seek help  
for the first  
time each month

## FOOD BANK USE IN RURAL CANADA

In March 2015, food banks in Canadian small towns and rural areas (i.e. municipalities with fewer than 10,000 residents) provided food to 152,245 people, or 18% of all individuals helped by food banks during that month. This is 6.3% higher than was the case during the same period in 2014; 57% of rural food banks reported increases in the number of people accessing their services – rising to three-quarters in Alberta and Saskatchewan.

# SNAPSHOT 2: A PICTURE OF THE INDIVIDUALS AND HOUSEHOLDS ACCESSING FOOD BANKS

The **HungerCount** study tracks both the number of individuals and the number of households assisted by food banks. The 852,137 individuals (i.e. 546,771 adults and 305,366 children) helped in March were members of 372,678 households. A close examination of the characteristics of the individuals and households helped in March offers a view into the diverse range of people who walk through the door of a food bank on any given day.

More than one-third of the individuals accessing food banks in March were children; 44% of households assisted were families with children, split almost evenly between single-parent and dual-parent families.

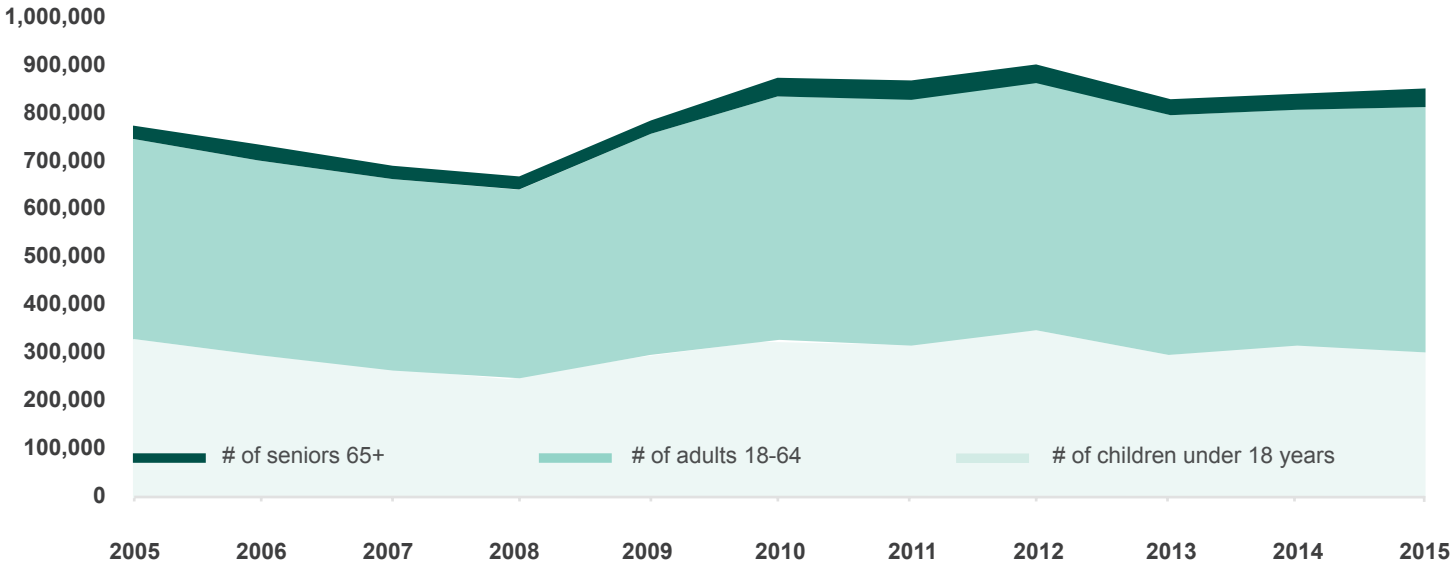
Households composed of single people accounted for 46% of all those receiving food from food banks in March

(though they account for only 28% of all Canadian households). This group has consistently increased since the 2008-2009 recession, growing from 39% of the total in 2008 and from 30% in 2001. The growth in single-person households is related to the fact that, in 2015, the number of adults accessing food banks grew by 3%, while the number of children actually decreased slightly by 1.6%.

Nationally, 16% of individuals accessing food banks self-identified as First Nations, Métis or Inuit. Additionally, just over 1 in 10 people helped were immigrants or refugees who had arrived in Canada in the past ten years.

**More than one-third of people helped by food banks are children.**

FOOD BANK USE IN CANADA, 2005 - 2015





## SNAPSHOT 3: SOURCE OF INCOME AND FOOD BANK USE

Food banks exist to fill the gap for households whose income is insufficient to meet the most basic cost of living. While this gap is most obvious among households that receive government-managed benefits like social assistance or disability benefits, food banks also consistently report that one in every six households they serve live primarily on income from employment.

A quick look at the incomes of the most financially struggling Canadians provides ample evidence of why food banks continue to be so necessary. (As a benchmark for the following information, it costs about **\$18,000 per year** for a single person and about **\$36,000 per year** for a family of four – and much more in northern and/or isolated regions – to afford the most basic standard of living in Canada<sup>3</sup>).

- Nearly two million seniors receive the Guaranteed Income Supplement,<sup>4</sup> and live on about **\$17,000 per year**.<sup>5</sup> (7% of households helped by food banks live on a pension).
- To provide just one example of widespread labour market struggles in the country, four million Canadians work in sales and service occupations, with median earnings of just **\$17,700 per year**.<sup>6</sup> (16% of households accessing food banks earn the majority of their income from current or recent employment).

- More than 780,000 people receive disability-related income supports through provincial social assistance programs,<sup>7</sup> which provide a very meagre average income of **\$10,801 per year**.<sup>8</sup> (18% of households assisted by food banks live primarily on public or privately-managed disability-related income supports).
- More than one million people in Canada receive social assistance (not including disability-related income supports).<sup>9</sup> A single person on social assistance lives on an average of **\$8,035 per year**; for a family of four, the program provides an average income of **\$23,783 per year**.<sup>10</sup> (46% of households that receive food from food banks are on social assistance).

**Millions of Canadians are trying to make ends meet with incomes that fall far below what is necessary to afford even the most basic cost of living.**

## REDUCING THE NEED FOR FOOD BANKS

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Food banks, soup kitchens and other charitable food programs are proud of the work they do every day to help Canadians put enough food on the table. These organizations are adapting to changing times by increasing the variety of food available to the people they help, and by providing services that go beyond the simple provision of food. The charitable food network today is radically different from what existed in the 1980s, when food banks first started opening their doors in Canada.

While food banks provide an essential service in their communities, they are nevertheless a partial and imperfect solution to the problems caused by widespread poverty and food insecurity.

The following policy recommendations focus on reducing poverty and food insecurity so that significantly fewer Canadians will find themselves in a situation where they need to ask food banks for help. The recommendations are realistic, pragmatic and achievable and, if implemented, will lead to an increase in the health and quality of life of hundreds of thousands of Canadians and a real decline in the need for food banks.

# 1 Create a Basic Income to Replace Provincial Social Assistance Programs

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Successive **HungerCount** reports have made the case that the food bank network acts as an unofficial Canadian safety net, trying to fill the gaps left by provincial social assistance programs. Social assistance offers a level of support that is plainly inadequate to meet the needs of our most vulnerable citizens, and 70% of households on social assistance are food insecure.<sup>11</sup>

It has been clear for many years that welfare is a broken system. Individuals and families must be at the brink of destitution to qualify for the program and it can be very difficult to climb out of poverty once one is in the system. Benefit levels are unreasonably low,<sup>12</sup> the administrative bureaucracy is extremely difficult to navigate, and stigmatization of those in need is widespread.<sup>13</sup> The system seems beyond repair.

The time has come for the provinces and territories to dismantle what has become an understaffed, stressed, and ineffective bureaucratic system that hurts more than it helps. There exist several viable models for a *basic income* – administered through the tax system – that would eliminate the bureaucracy, the intrusiveness, and the stigma associated with welfare. Our recommendations include this significant, forward-thinking plan, as well as several other common-sense actions.

## Our Recommendations

- Dismantle existing social assistance bureaucracies and create a *basic income*, administered through the tax system. Ensure that basic income has a logical relationship to the level of earnings offered through work.
- Remove non-cash benefits from social assistance and make these benefits available to all low-income households, regardless of their eligibility or participation in other government programs. Such benefits include but are not limited to child care subsidies, affordable housing supplements, and drug and dental insurance.
- In the short term, release clear and detailed information on the number of people receiving social assistance, entry and exit from the program, length of time in receipt of benefits, household characteristics of program participants, and program expenditures. Currently, the public has very little access to information on the costs and impact of social assistance.

## Facing illness alone

“Grant” is in his mid-fifties and works in a small specialty grocery store in one of Canada’s larger cities. He is quiet and serious, doing well for himself. A few years ago when he was working in the construction sector, he fell ill and was unable to do the heavy lifting his job required. He was let go with no severance and he hadn’t worked enough hours to qualify for Employment Insurance. He had no choice but to go on social assistance, which provided less than \$600 per month to live on. He went to his local food bank and soup kitchen for company and so he could get enough to eat while he recovered from his illness.<sup>24</sup>



## 2 Increase the Availability of Affordable Housing

Food banks consistently report that the high cost of housing is one of the most important drivers of the need for food assistance. There is not enough affordable housing to meet the need, leaving far too many Canadians to use their food budgets to pay the rent.

As the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (CHRA) has noted, affordable housing rests on the foundation of *social housing*, which serves as protection against homelessness for the most vulnerable Canadians.<sup>15</sup> Our system of social housing is premised on the idea that households should not pay more than 30% of their income on housing that is in good condition and has enough room for all household members. It is further based on the idea that it makes moral and practical sense to subsidize adequate housing for those who cannot afford it.

Since the 1950s, social housing in Canada has been supported by billions of dollars transferred to housing providers by the federal government via Social Housing Operating Agreements. This system is now in jeopardy as these agreements expire. Funding has already decreased from \$2 billion to \$1.6 billion per year and will continue to decrease until it reaches zero in 2040.

While other federal funding for affordable housing and homelessness prevention exists, it cannot replace the support provided through Social Housing Operating Agreements.<sup>16</sup> The CHRA estimates that 334,000 households are at high risk of losing their homes as housing providers are forced to raise currently-affordable rents when their agreements with the federal government expire.

This situation is happening in an environment of general unaffordability in many of Canada's major rental housing markets.<sup>17</sup> For a person earning \$17,700 per year working in the retail sector in Toronto, Calgary, or Vancouver, the prospect of paying only 30% of income on rent (i.e. \$443 per month at this income level) is more fantasy than reality. It is even more of a fantasy for someone taking in \$8,000 from social assistance.

### Our Recommendations

- Reinvest half of the savings from expiring Social Housing Operating Agreements to create a federal Social Housing Operating Fund, in agreement with the provinces and territories. This fund would be made available to social housing providers to cover costs related to rent subsidies, capital repairs, maintenance, and retrofits.
- Implement targeted federal tax reforms to support the development of rental housing in an effort to increase the number of units and make housing more affordable. Options include allowing the rollover of capital gains that are re-invested in new, purpose-built rental housing, or a social housing tax credit for the creation of subsidized rental units.
- Undertake an assessment of the forward-thinking, government-led “Housing First” approach to determine the consequences this federal policy change may have on affordable housing. We recommend that the federal government convene key stakeholders between all levels of government as well as local charities, social workers, and civil society groups to identify, discuss, and remedy any unintended negative consequences of the Housing First approach introduced by the federal government in 2013.

## Disability benefits are not enough

“Carla” was once a sailing instructor, with a good job and a happy life. Unfortunately, she was in an accident that had severe, lasting physical effects. She has ongoing residual pain from the accident. Carla hasn’t worked in many years; she survives on disability benefits, but she really struggles to make ends meet. Carla is a fixture in the community, including at the food bank, where she goes each month to be able to have enough to eat.



### 3 Reinstate and Enhance Employment and Training Supports for Canadians with Low Literacy Levels

Nearly half of Canadians between the ages of 16 and 65 operate at Level 1 or Level 2 literacy, and do not have the literacy capacity necessary to effectively learn new job skills:

- At Level 1, an individual has very poor literacy skills; they may be unable to read instructions well enough to be able to give the correct amount of medicine to a child (17% of Canadian adults are at Level 1 or lower).
- At Level 2, people are able to develop everyday coping skills, however they may find it difficult to understand and master the complex tasks and concepts required in the modern workforce (32% of Canadian adults are at Level 2).<sup>18, 19</sup>

If Canada is to have a capable and flexible workforce, it is clear that much more needs to be done to increase Canadians' literacy. Unfortunately, support for Canadians with the lowest literacy levels has decreased.

Prior to 2014, federal funding for adult education and training was shared with provinces via two confusingly-named streams – Labour Market Agreements (\$500 million per year, with a focus on unemployed people not eligible for Employment Insurance) and Labour Market Development Agreements (\$2 billion per year, with a focus on unemployed people who are eligible for EI).

In April 2014, the new Canada Job Fund replaced the Labour Market Agreements. The amount of funding (\$500 million per year) remained the same, however the focus changed substantially. By 2017, provinces will be required to spend \$300 million of the Fund each year on the new Canada Job Grant, which exclusively supports training that is chosen, directed and partially paid for by employers.

The Canada Job Fund has taken \$300 million per year away from programs directed at people most at risk of failing in the labour market and redirected those funds to people who are already employed. While provincial governments can make up for this loss by utilizing funds from the \$2 billion Labour Market Development Agreements (which are also due to be renegotiated), the reality is that these funds are not going to fill a \$300 million gap without other programming being affected.

While the Canada Job Grant arguably adds an important measure of employer direction in the adult education and training landscape, the most vulnerable workers have lost valuable and necessary support in the transition.

### Our Recommendations

- Reinstate \$300 million per year in federal funding dedicated to education and training for unemployed adults with low literacy levels, i.e. those most at risk of failing in the labour force.
- Change eligibility criteria for all federal funds transferred through Labour Market Development Agreements (\$2 billion per year) so that all unemployed Canadians, rather than only those who are eligible for Employment Insurance, can access education and training through related programs.

## 4 Increase Food Security and Reduce Hunger in Northern Communities

In Canada's territories, 1 in every 5 households skips meals because there isn't enough food in the house, or eats suboptimal food because they can't afford better.<sup>21</sup> This has drastic consequences for the health of northerners.<sup>22</sup>

First Nations, Métis and Inuit people in northern Canada are experiencing a destabilizing transition from a subsistence to a market/mixed economy. Decreased access to traditional foods and increased reliance on store-bought goods are central aspects of this transition, due to factors including:

- The effects of the residential school tragedy, including the loss of traditional knowledge of how to hunt and survive on the land;
- Changes in animal behaviour and availability due to climate change and other factors;
- Obsolescence of traditional knowledge re: harvesting traditional food in an environment altered by climate change;
- High costs related to hunting and trapping;
- Decreased appetites for a traditional diet among a quickly growing youth population.<sup>23</sup>

In the North, particularly outside the major cities, the cost of store-bought food can be astronomical. The high cost of food, a lack of job opportunities, high levels of poverty, and decreasing consumption of traditional foods have combined to create a serious and pressing public health emergency.

### Our Recommendations

- Drastically enhance federal, provincial, and territorial initiatives to support and expand community knowledge of traditional foods in a changing climate, including via programs that increase access to the tools required for hunting on the land.
- Replace the current system of last-resort social assistance with a basic income that is tied to the true cost of living in various regions of Canada (see Recommendation 1).
- Collect and publicize information on the cost of food across the north, rather than only in communities that are eligible for the Nutrition North Canada subsidy, as is currently the case.
- With respect to Nutrition North Canada:
  - a. Set targets for the cost of food in Nutrition North Canada-eligible communities as well as in communities that are not eligible for the program, and increase investment to meet these targets.
  - b. Determine community eligibility for Nutrition North Canada based on current need rather than past use of the Food Mail program.
  - c. Subsidize the transportation of food by sealift, rather than only by air.



- d. Legislate a program budget escalator based on inflation.
- e. Increase opportunities for northern input on which food items are subsidized by the program.
- f. Enrich program responsiveness, as well as community knowledge of Nutrition North Canada, by increasing communication between the Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, the Nutrition North Canada Advisory Board and participating communities.

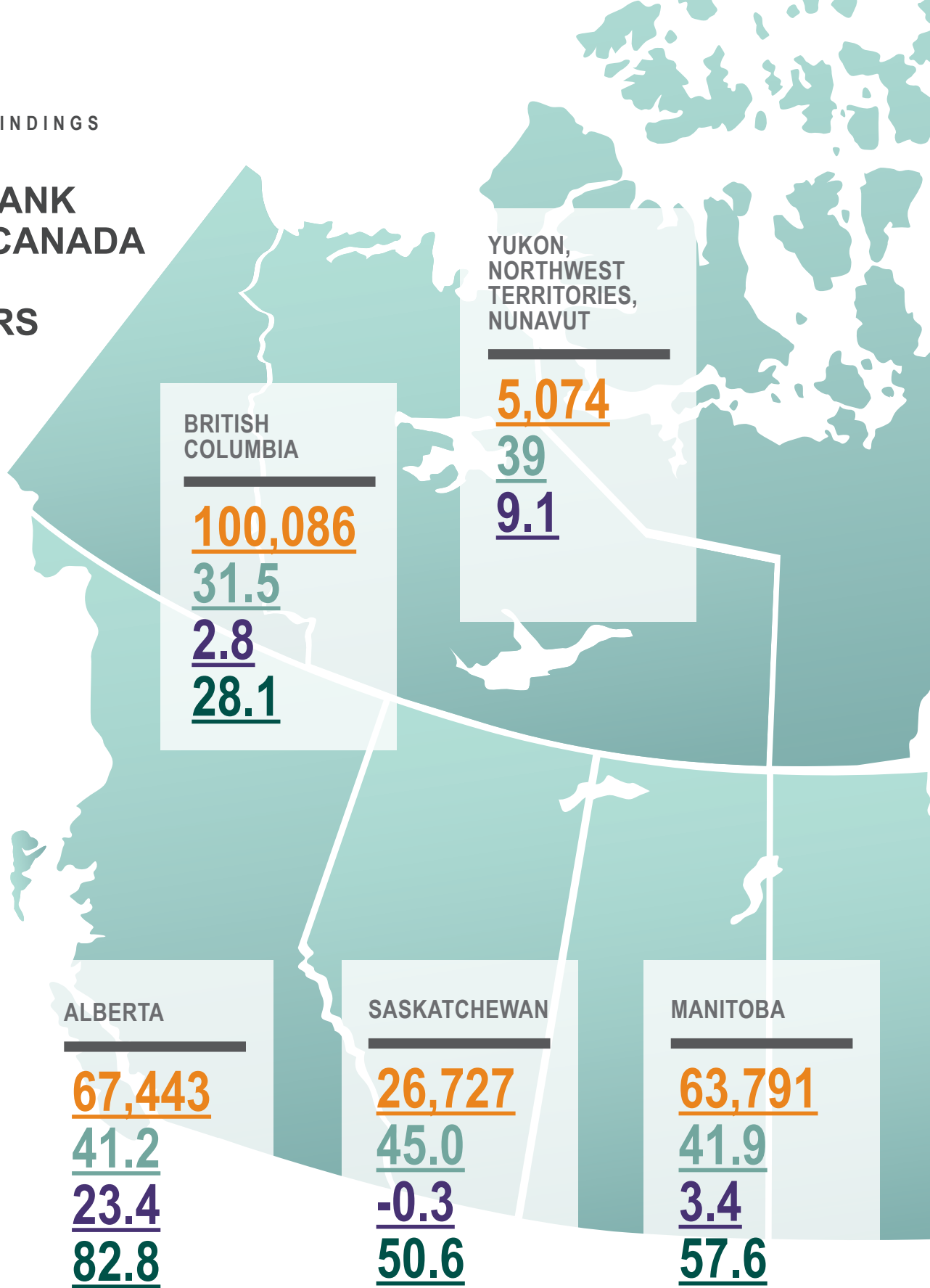
## Raising a family in tough times

“George” is married and a proud father of three teenage boys. His family life is happily busy, though his kids’ boundless appetites can be a source of stress. George works full time in a factory and, though the sector has a reputation for good wages, he earns only minimum wage. He has spent months searching for additional part-time work to help pay the bills and afford more nutritious food. He is frustrated that his hard work isn’t paying off, saying, “It’s one thing to have a job – it’s another to have that job put food on the table after paying all your bills.” George accesses his community food bank once a month in order to better be able to meet his growing boys’ food needs.



# FOOD BANK USE IN CANADA BY THE NUMBERS

MARCH, 2015



- PEOPLE ASSISTED
- CHILDREN %
- CHANGE, 2014 - 2015 %
- CHANGE, 2008 - 2015 %

## CANADA

852,137 35.8 1.3 26.1

### NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

25,040

37.4

-5.9

-8.1

### PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

3,153

35.1

-8.1

9.0

### QUEBEC

163,152

36.4

4.0

27.9

### ONTARIO

358,963

33.6

-4.2

14.2

### NEW BRUNSWICK

18,986

32.3

-3.1

21.4

### NOVA SCOTIA

19,722

31.2

0.3

16.6

## > CANADA

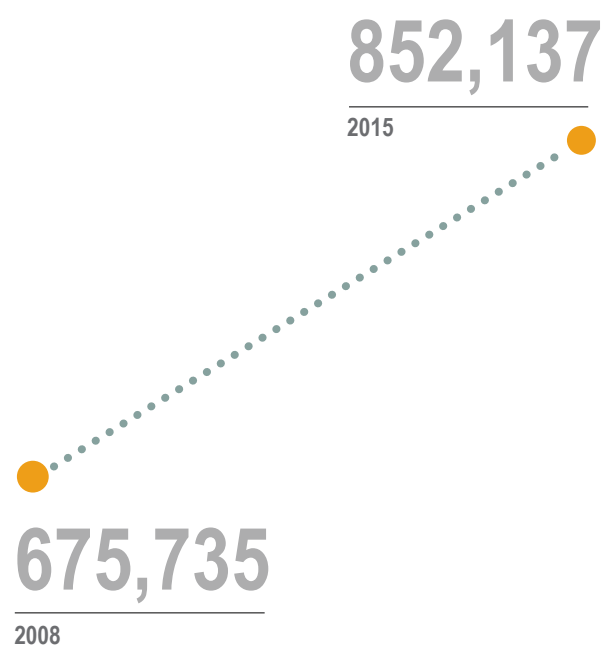
KEY FINDINGS %	2015
Children	35.8
Seniors	4.9
Change, 2014-2015	1.3
Change, 2008-2015	26.1
Food banks reporting an increase	54.3

PRIMARY SOURCE OF INCOME %	ALL	RURAL
Job Income	11.6	11.5
Employment Insurance	4.0	4.5
Social Assistance	46.3	51.6
Disability-Related Income Support	18.3	14.4
Pension	7.1	8.7
Other	12.7	9.3

HOUSEHOLD TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Two-Parent Families	20.6	19.3
Single Parent Families	22.9	21.5
Couples With No Children	10.9	13.9
Single People	45.6	45.1

HOUSING TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Market Rental	66.6	60.6
Social Housing	22.0	19.0
Homeowners	7.0	15.3
Homeless	4.4	5.1

### INDIVIDUALS ASSISTED BY FOOD BANKS



## BRITISH COLUMBIA

100,086 people received food from a food bank in British Columbia in March – 32% were children. This is the highest level of food bank use on record in the province.

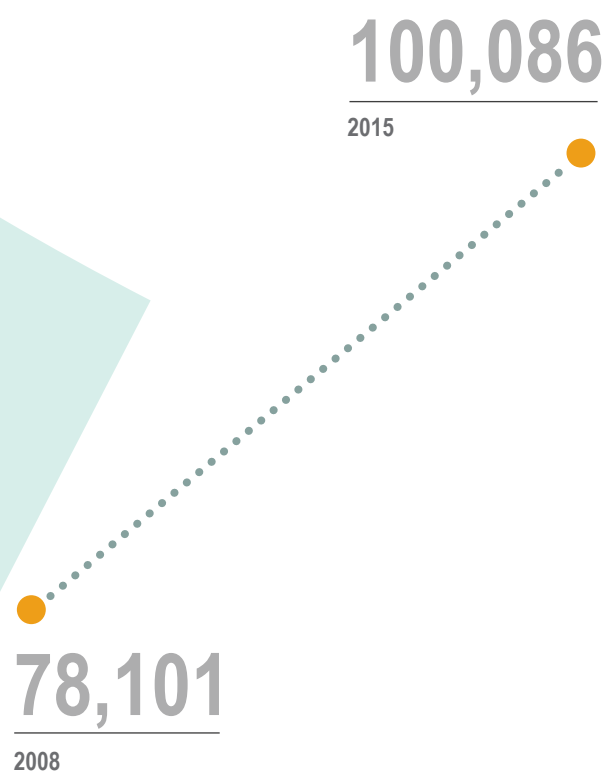
KEY FINDINGS %	2015
Children	31.5
Seniors	5.2
Change, 2014-2015	2.8
Change, 2008-2015	28.1
Food banks reporting an increase	59.3

PRIMARY SOURCE OF INCOME %	ALL	RURAL
Job Income	11.3	10.1
Employment Insurance	3.6	4.5
Social Assistance	33.1	41.4
Disability-Related Income Support	31.7	24.5
Pension	8.2	8.2
Other	12.3	11.2

HOUSEHOLD TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Two-Parent Families	15.6	17.9
Single Parent Families	19.5	17.9
Couples With No Children	11.3	13.6
Single People	53.6	50.5

HOUSING TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Market Rental	74.0	65.7
Social Housing	13.3	12.4
Homeowners	7.1	12.4
Homeless	5.6	9.5

### INDIVIDUALS ASSISTED BY FOOD BANKS



## ALBERTA

67,443 people received food from a food bank in Alberta in March – 41% were children. Nearly one-third of households helped were working, the highest among Canadian provinces.

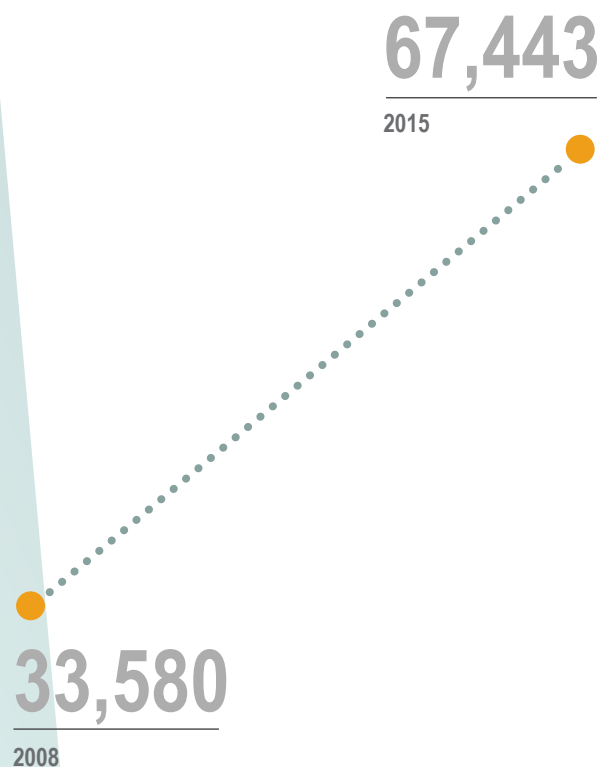
KEY FINDINGS %	2015
Children	41.2
Seniors	3.1
Change, 2014-2015	23.4
Change, 2008-2015	82.8
Food banks reporting an increase	75.0

PRIMARY SOURCE OF INCOME %	ALL	RURAL
Job Income	28.7	21.1
Employment Insurance	4.5	2.9
Social Assistance	31.7	36.0
Disability-Related Income Support	13.1	15.3
Pension	6.3	11.8
Other	15.7	12.9

HOUSEHOLD TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Two-Parent Families	26.5	25.9
Single Parent Families	32.2	28.6
Couples With No Children	7.7	11.4
Single People	33.7	34.1

HOUSING TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Market Rental	65.7	41.9
Social Housing	23.9	39.8
Homeowners	5.7	8.5
Homeless	4.7	9.8

### INDIVIDUALS ASSISTED BY FOOD BANKS



## > SASKATCHEWAN

26,727 people received food from a food bank in Saskatchewan in March. 45% were children – the highest among all provinces. Nearly 20% of households helped were working, up from just 12% in 2008.

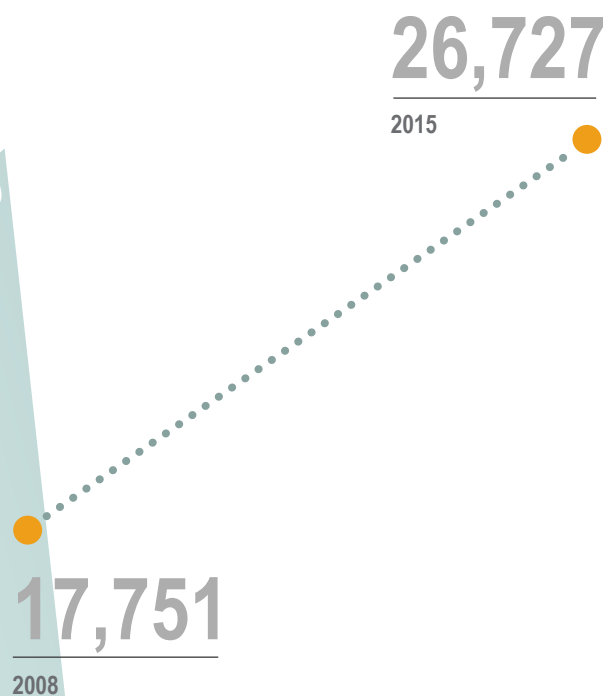
KEY FINDINGS %	2015
Children	45.0
Seniors	3.0
Change, 2014-2015	-0.3
Change, 2008-2015	50.6
Food banks reporting an increase	73.6

PRIMARY SOURCE OF INCOME %	ALL	RURAL
Job Income	17.9	13.0
Employment Insurance	2.8	2.7
Social Assistance	49.0	57.7
Disability-Related Income Support	10.7	6.5
Pension	6.7	8.8
Other	13.0	11.3

HOUSEHOLD TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Two-Parent Families	22.4	28.6
Single Parent Families	30.3	29.5
Couples With No Children	7.9	9.0
Single People	39.5	32.9

HOUSING TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Market Rental	65.3	33.8
Social Housing	22.4	49.8
Homeowners	6.6	12.4
Homeless	5.7	4.0

### INDIVIDUALS ASSISTED BY FOOD BANKS



## MANITOBA

63,791 people received food from a food bank in Manitoba in March – 42% were children. Food bank use in Manitoba is now almost 58% higher than before the 2008-09 recession.

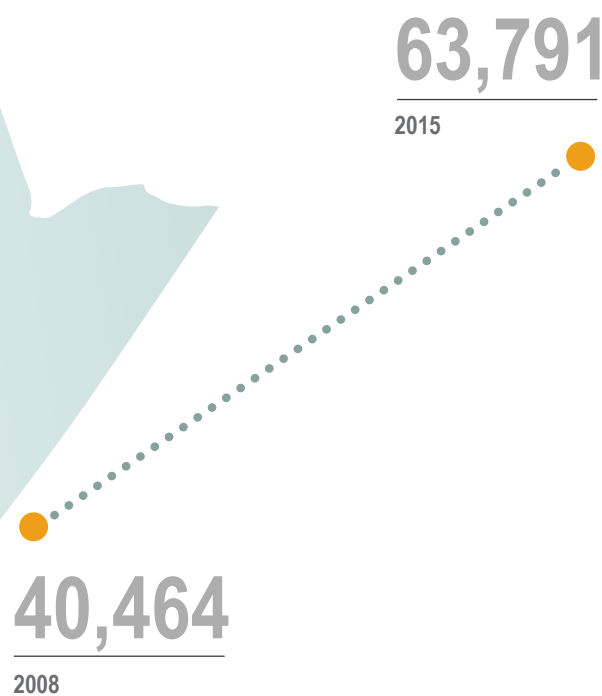
KEY FINDINGS %	2015
Children	41.9
Seniors	5.5
Change, 2014-2015	3.4
Change, 2008-2015	57.6
Food banks reporting an increase	61.7

PRIMARY SOURCE OF INCOME %	ALL	RURAL
Job Income	12.7	9.5
Employment Insurance	4.1	4.1
Social Assistance	53.5	57.1
Disability-Related Income Support	9.7	9.1
Pension	12.3	12.6
Other	7.7	7.6

HOUSEHOLD TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Two-Parent Families	27.0	23.3
Single Parent Families	20.6	29.4
Couples With No Children	15.3	13.8
Single People	37.0	33.5

HOUSING TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Market Rental	46.4	43.5
Social Housing	35.6	35.6
Homeowners	12.2	15.7
Homeless	5.9	5.1

### INDIVIDUALS ASSISTED BY FOOD BANKS





## ONTARIO

358,963 people received food from a food bank in Ontario in March – 34% were children. Nearly one-third of households helped in the province live primarily on disability-related income supports.

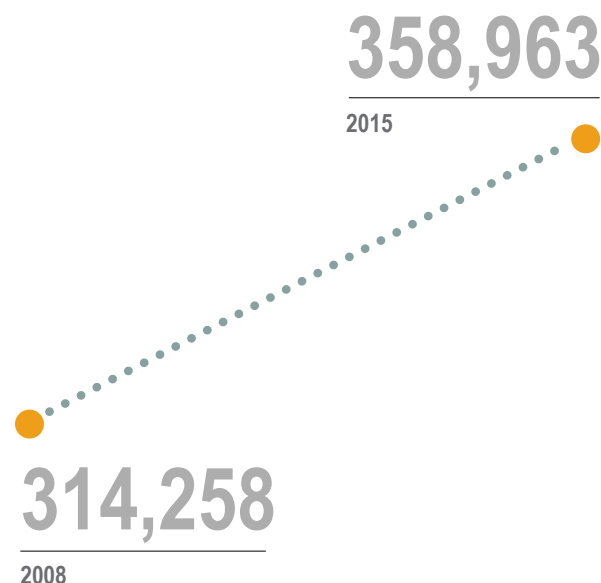
KEY FINDINGS %	2015
Children	33.6
Seniors	5.4
Change, 2014-2015	-4.2
Change, 2008-2015	14.2
Food banks reporting an increase	48.6

PRIMARY SOURCE OF INCOME %	ALL	RURAL
Job Income	8.5	9.6
Employment Insurance	2.3	3.1
Social Assistance	36.7	29.8
Disability-Related Income Support	31.5	33.2
Pension	6.9	9.7
Other	14.1	14.6

HOUSEHOLD TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Two-Parent Families	17.9	20.9
Single Parent Families	23.3	23.0
Couples With No Children	9.5	13.7
Single People	49.3	42.4

HOUSING TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Market Rental	68.6	64.9
Social Housing	22.2	17.5
Homeowners	5.5	13.9
Homeless	3.7	3.6

### INDIVIDUALS ASSISTED BY FOOD BANKS



## QUEBEC

163,152 separate individuals received food from a food bank in Quebec in March – 36% were children. This is the third consecutive year food bank use has increased in the province.

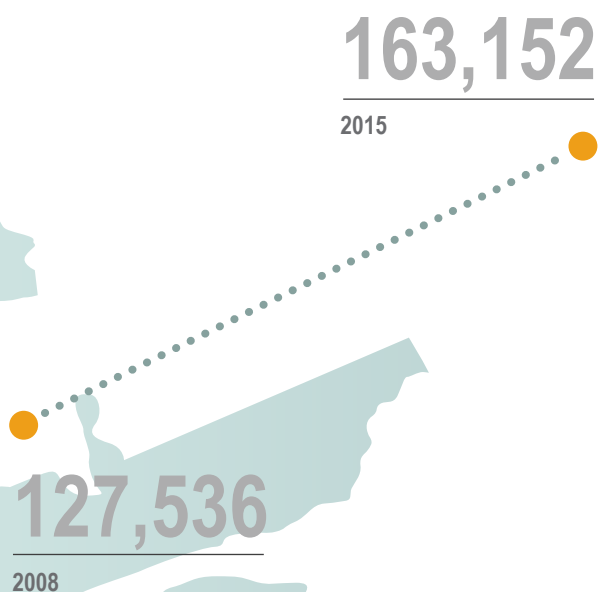
KEY FINDINGS %	2015
Children	36.4
Seniors	5.2
Change, 2014-2015	4.0
Change, 2008-2015	27.9
Food banks reporting an increase	56.0

PRIMARY SOURCE OF INCOME %	ALL	RURAL
Job Income	10.5	10.5
Employment Insurance	4.8	5.4
Social Assistance	61.4	65.0
Disability-Related Income Support	3.3	4.4
Pension	7.1	7.7
Other	12.9	7.0

HOUSEHOLD TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Two-Parent Families	21.8	17.5
Single Parent Families	21.7	21.0
Couples With No Children	11.1	13.1
Single People	45.4	48.4

HOUSING TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Market Rental	69.6	66.5
Social Housing	18.0	14.0
Homeowners	6.9	15.9
Homeless	5.5	3.6

### INDIVIDUALS ASSISTED BY FOOD BANKS



## NEW BRUNSWICK

18,986 people received food from a food bank in New Brunswick in March – 32% were children. Food bank use in New Brunswick is more than 20% higher than before the 2008-09 recession.

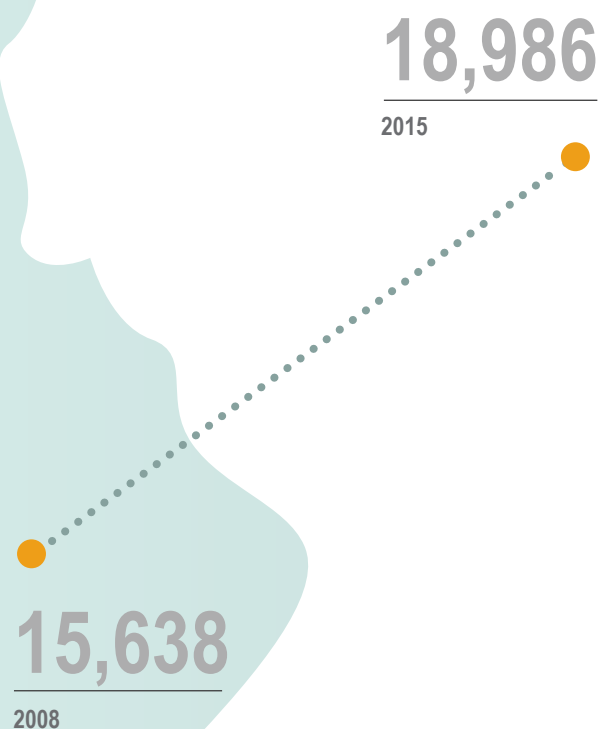
KEY FINDINGS %	2015
Children	32.3
Seniors	4.0
Change, 2014-2015	-3.1
Change, 2008-2015	21.4
Food banks reporting an increase	37.3

PRIMARY SOURCE OF INCOME %	ALL	RURAL
Job Income	9.3	8.3
Employment Insurance	4.7	4.7
Social Assistance	67.1	70.2
Disability-Related Income Support	6.3	6.5
Pension	6.4	6.0
Other	6.3	4.3

HOUSEHOLD TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Two-Parent Families	17.8	18.1
Single Parent Families	20.1	20.4
Couples With No Children	12.2	14.0
Single People	49.9	47.5

HOUSING TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Market Rental	59.5	52.6
Social Housing	16.5	17.1
Homeowners	21.0	26.8
Homeless	3.1	3.5

### INDIVIDUALS ASSISTED BY FOOD BANKS



## NOVA SCOTIA

19,722 people received food from a food bank in Nova Scotia in March – 31% were children. One-quarter of households assisted in the province receive the majority of their income from a disability or old-age pension.

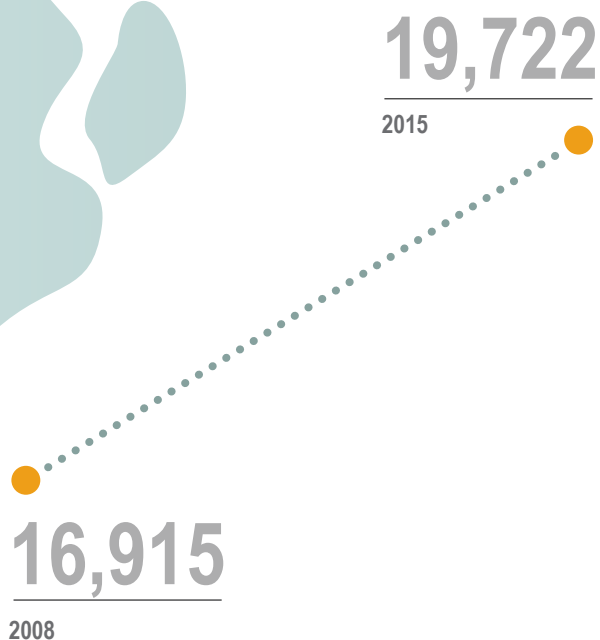
KEY FINDINGS %	2015
Children	31.2
Seniors	5.5
Change, 2014-2015	0.3
Change, 2008-2015	16.6
Food banks reporting an increase	58.0

PRIMARY SOURCE OF INCOME %	ALL	RURAL
Job Income	9.7	9.2
Employment Insurance	3.6	3.5
Social Assistance	55.5	61.6
Disability-Related Income Support	15.5	9.4
Pension	8.5	9.5
Other	7.3	6.8

HOUSEHOLD TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Two-Parent Families	21.0	18.0
Single Parent Families	16.4	15.5
Couples With No Children	17.1	19.8
Single People	45.5	46.7

HOUSING TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Market Rental	68.9	67.9
Social Housing	15.4	12.2
Homeowners	13.3	17.1
Homeless	2.3	2.8

### INDIVIDUALS ASSISTED BY FOOD BANKS



## PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

3,153 people received food from a food bank in Prince Edward Island in March, of which 35% were children. 16% of households helped are working, and 15% are on Employment Insurance – the highest among all provinces.

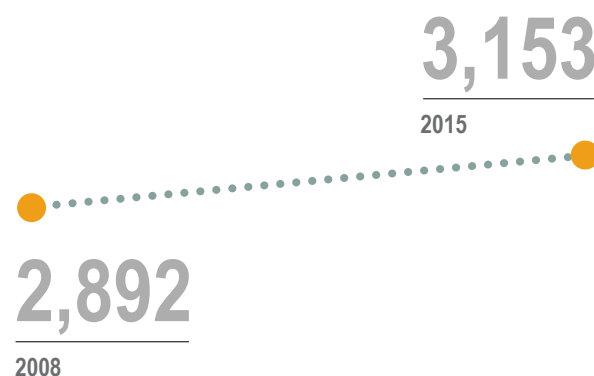
KEY FINDINGS %	2015
Children	35.1
Seniors	4.1
Change, 2014-2015	-8.1
Change, 2008-2015	9.0
Food banks reporting an increase	16.6

PRIMARY SOURCE OF INCOME %	ALL	RURAL
Job Income	15.8	22.1
Employment Insurance	14.9	19.6
Social Assistance	42.5	29.9
Disability-Related Income Support	10.5	10.7
Pension	9.7	10.0
Other	6.6	7.7

HOUSEHOLD TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Two-Parent Families	24.7	30.9
Single Parent Families	21.1	26.2
Couples With No Children	8.2	6.5
Single People	46.0	36.4

HOUSING TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Market Rental	63.2	45.2
Social Housing	21.4	27.4
Homeowners	13.5	25.2
Homeless	1.8	2.2

### INDIVIDUALS ASSISTED BY FOOD BANKS



## NEWFOUNDLAND & LABRADOR

25,040 people received food from a food bank in Newfoundland and Labrador in March – 37% were children. Though the number of people helped is 8% lower than in 2008, food banks provided food to nearly 5% of people in the province, the second highest level in the country.

KEY FINDINGS %	2015
Children	37.4
Seniors	4.0
Change, 2014-2015	-5.9
Change, 2008-2015	-8.1
Food banks reporting an increase	38.2

PRIMARY SOURCE OF INCOME %	ALL	RURAL
Job Income	8.9	3.9
Employment Insurance	12.3	4.7
Social Assistance	71.3	76.6
Disability-Related Income Support	0.6	4.3
Pension	6.1	6.6
Other	0.8	3.8

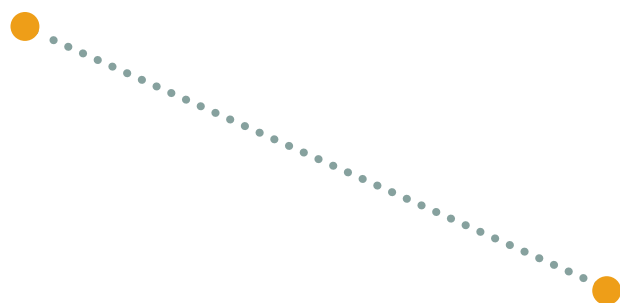
HOUSEHOLD TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Two-Parent Families	24.4	18.1
Single Parent Families	35.0	22.2
Couples With No Children	11.2	20.0
Single People	29.4	39.7

HOUSING TYPE %	ALL	RURAL
Market Rental	20.7	50.8
Social Housing	67.1	29.7
Homeowners	11.7	16.1
Homeless	0.5	3.5

### INDIVIDUALS ASSISTED BY FOOD BANKS

27,260

2008



25,040

2015

## METHODOLOGY

The primary purpose of the annual **HungerCount** study is to provide a national and provincial snapshot of food bank and meal program use in Canada. This is accomplished by counting the number of individuals who receive groceries from food banks during the month of March and by counting the number of meals and snacks prepared and served by a variety of organizations. Information is collected on the number of unique individuals that receive food from food banks, the total number of visits to food banks, and total meals and snacks prepared and served by meal programs. 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 **HungerCount** survey additionally asks participating organizations to record information on several characteristics of those assisted by their respective food banks, including (at the individual level) age category, gender, Aboriginal identity, immigration/refugee status and student status, and (at the household level) primary source of income, household composition, and housing type. The survey also collects information on various operational aspects of participating organizations.

During the study, surveys were sent to all known Canadian food banks and meal programs in February 2015. When necessary, **HungerCount** Provincial Coordinators contacted organizations prior to the submission deadline to ensure a high response rate and to clarify survey questions. Completed surveys were returned to Provincial Coordinators, who checked surveys for completeness before forwarding paper or electronic copies to Food Banks Canada.

Food Banks Canada staff and volunteers 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. In cases where surveys were not completed by operating food banks, conservative estimates were produced in consultation with Provincial Coordinators using 2014 figures as a guide.

**TABLE 2 - HUNGERCOUNT SURVEY PARTICIPATION**

PROVINCE/TERRITORY	No. of organizations reporting food bank information (no meal program)	No. of organizations reporting meal program information (no food bank)	No. of organizations reporting food bank and meal program information	No. of agencies included	Total no. of organizations
British Columbia	57	1	39	322	419
Alberta	111	20	63	368	562
Saskatchewan	27	0	9	58	94
Manitoba	45	2	7	317	371
Ontario	421	115	164	824	1,524
Quebec	292	278	412	0	982
New Brunswick	40	4	16	27	87
Nova Scotia	93	61	0	22	176
Prince Edward Island	3	0	3	11	17
Newfoundland & Labrador	30	0	5	64	99
Territories	12	2	4	0	18
<b>Canada</b>	<b>1,131</b>	<b>483</b>	<b>722</b>	<b>2,013</b>	<b>4,349</b>

## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup>Households with severe levels of food insecurity are those that have reduced their food intake and have experienced disrupted eating patterns because they cannot afford enough food. See V. Tarasuk & R. Loopstra (2012). The relationship between food banks and household food security. *Canadian Public Policy*, Vol. XXXVIII, No. 4.

<sup>2</sup>In this year's report, information from 37 partner agencies of the Calgary Food Bank has been included for the first time. These 37 organizations reported providing food to 6,043 people in March 2015. Information from these organizations is not included in the "% Change, 2014-2015" or the "% Change, 2008-2015" entries for Alberta. The people to whom they provided food are included in the overall 2015 figure of 67,443 for the province.

Elsewhere, there were notable large decreases in reported food bank use from two large food banks in Saskatchewan and Ontario. These decreases were the result, respectively, of a change in operational policy and a change in data collection and reporting procedures. Together, these food banks reported 9,452 fewer separate individuals assisted by food banks in March 2015 compared to March 2014.

<sup>3</sup>As measured by the Market Basket Measure of low income. See: Human Resources and Skills Development Canada (2010). *First comprehensive review of the Market Basket Measure of low income*. Ottawa: Government of Canada. [http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection\\_2011/rhdcc-hrsdc/HS28-178-2010-eng.pdf](http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2011/rhdcc-hrsdc/HS28-178-2010-eng.pdf).

<sup>4</sup>Government of Canada (2015). *Quarterly report of Canada Pension Plan and Old Age Security monthly amounts and related figures – July to September 2015*. <http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/services/pensions/infocard/julsep15.shtml#topic3>.

<sup>5</sup>This figure takes account of the various pension top-up amounts offered by provincial governments over and above the Guaranteed Income Supplement. See: Government of Canada (2015). *Old Age Security payment amounts*. <http://www.servicecanada.gc.ca/eng/services/pensions/oas/payments/index.shtml>.

<sup>6</sup>Statistics Canada (2013). *Table 202-0106 – Earnings of individuals, by selected characteristics and National Occupational Classification (NOC-S), 2011 constant dollars, annual*. Ottawa: Government of Canada.

<sup>7</sup>Caledon Institute of Social Policy (2015). *Canada social report – Social assistance combined summaries, 2014*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

<sup>8</sup>This average does not include Saskatchewan Assured Income for Disability (\$13,978 per year) or Alberta Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped (\$19,446 per year). See: Caledon Institute of Social Policy (2014). *Welfare incomes 2013*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

<sup>9</sup>Caledon Institute of Social Policy (2015). *Canada social report – Social assistance combined summaries, 2014*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

<sup>10</sup>Caledon Institute of Social Policy (2014). *Welfare incomes 2013*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy.



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<sup>11</sup> V. Tarasuk, A. Mitchell & N. Dachner (2014). *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2012*. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF).

<sup>12</sup> Caledon Institute of Social Policy (2014). *Welfare in Canada 2013*. Ottawa: Caledon Institute of Social Policy.

<sup>13</sup> J. Mosher & J. Hermer (2005). *Welfare fraud: The constitution of social assistance as a crime*. [https://apps.osgoode.yorku.ca/osgmedia.nsf/0/271AE1B3D9D286D38525709A00521FBC/\\$FILE/Welfare%20Fraud%20Report.pdf](https://apps.osgoode.yorku.ca/osgmedia.nsf/0/271AE1B3D9D286D38525709A00521FBC/$FILE/Welfare%20Fraud%20Report.pdf).

<sup>14</sup> Food Banks Canada (2010). *Policies that reduce hunger: What would decrease the need for food banks in Canada?* Toronto: Food Banks Canada. <http://foodbankscanada.ca/getmedia/59d40cb9-a89b-4bb6-978e-695701ff076b/national-hunger-count-poll-2008-2010.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Canadian Housing and Renewal Association (2015). *Housing for all: A national voice for affordable housing and homelessness in Canada*. Ottawa: CHRA. [http://www.chra-achru.ca/media/content/Pre%20budget\\_August%202014\\_en.pdf](http://www.chra-achru.ca/media/content/Pre%20budget_August%202014_en.pdf).

<sup>16</sup> Government of Canada (2015). *Investment in affordable housing*. <http://actionplan.gc.ca/en/initiative/investment-affordable-housing>.

<sup>17</sup> Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2015). *Canada's national vacancy rate is stable with regional variations*. Ottawa: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

<sup>18</sup> Employment and Social Development Canada (2014). *Indicators of well-being in Canada*. Ottawa: Government of Canada.

<sup>19</sup> Canadian Council on Learning (d/u). *Measuring literacy in Canada*. <http://www.ccl-cca.ca/CCL/Reports/LiteracySelfAssessment/aboutliteracy.html>.

<sup>20</sup> B. Hayes (2015). *Canada Job Grant: "An amazing success" but for whom?* <https://brigidhayes.wordpress.com/2015/05/11/canada-job-grant-an-amazing-success-but-for-whom/>.

See also: B. Hayes (2015). *The Canada Job Fund: An overview of the federal transfer to provinces and territories*. Ottawa: CUPE.

<sup>21</sup> V. Tarasuk, A. Mitchell & N. Dachner (2014). *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2012*. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF).

<sup>22</sup> National Aboriginal Health Organization (d/u). *Overview of Inuit health*. <http://www.naho.ca/inuit/overview-of-inuit-health/>.

<sup>23</sup> Council of Canadian Academies (2014). *Aboriginal food security in northern Canada: An assessment of the state of knowledge*. Ottawa: The Expert Panel on the State of Knowledge of Food Security in Northern Canada, Council of Canadian Academies.

<sup>24</sup> The three individuals profiled in this section of the report are real people who shared their stories with Food Banks Canada. Names have been changed, and the stock images are for illustration only.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Food Banks Canada thanks the hundreds of thousands of people accessing food programs and the thousands of staff and volunteers who, every year, contribute information to the **HungerCount** report. Without their efforts and participation this research would not be possible.

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## About Food Banks Canada

Food Banks Canada supports a unique network of over 3,000 food-related organizations in every province and territory, assisting more than 800,000 Canadians each month. Together our network shares over 200 million pounds of essential, safe, quality food annually; provides social programs that help to foster self-sufficiency; and advocates for policy change that will help create a Canada where no one goes hungry. Visit [www.foodbankscanada.ca](http://www.foodbankscanada.ca) for more information.

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