

# HUNGERCOUNT2010

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

Food Banks  
Canada



## About Food Banks Canada

Food Banks Canada is the national charitable organization representing and supporting the food bank community across Canada. Our members and their respective agencies serve approximately 85% of people accessing emergency food programs nationwide. Our mission is to meet the short-term need for food, and to find long-term solutions to hunger. Please visit [www.foodbankscanada.ca](http://www.foodbankscanada.ca) for more information.

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A close-up photograph of a person's hand turning a silver door handle on a wooden door. The hand is positioned on the left side of the frame, and the door handle is in the center. The background is a dark blue wall. The text '867,948 Canadians' is overlaid on the right side of the image in a large, bold, yellow font.

# 867,948 Canadians

walked through the front door of a food bank in March 2010 asking for help. That's the highest level of food bank use on record. How did we get here? Could we do more to help? What is the best strategy? There are as many questions... as Canadians who are hungry. Here, some answers – with the hope of reversing the trend.

# Executive Summary



## Highlights

- 867,948** individuals were assisted, March 2010
- +9%** change since March 2009
- 38%** are children
- 11%** report employment income
- 6%** receive Employment Insurance
- 51%** receive social assistance
- 15%** receive disability-related income supports
- 71%** of food banks saw an increase

# 867,948

**In March 2010, 867,948 people were assisted by food banks in Canada. This is a 9% increase over 2009 – and the highest level of food bank use on record.**

Over the last two years, food bank use in Canada has risen by 28% – an unprecedented rate of growth. After four consecutive years of decline, demand for food banks has skyrocketed since the 2008-09 recession. This year, every province experienced an increase in the number of individuals requiring help, and nearly three-quarters of all Canadian food banks helped more people than in 2009.

*HungerCount* shows that the effects of the recession are still being felt across the country. In March of this year, 80,150 people accessed a food bank for the first time – approximately the same level as twelve months earlier. March is a typical month for food bank usage, which means that more than 80,000 people walk through the door of a food bank for the first time every single month.

The need for food assistance increased almost across the spectrum this year: food banks saw more adults, children, and youth; more families with children and more single people; more women and men; more Aboriginal people; more seniors; more people with disabilities.

The picture of those who access food banks has remained remarkably consistent over the years, and 2010 is no different: 38% are children or youth under age 18; 51% of assisted households are families with children, and nearly half of these are two-parent families. A large percentage of those needing support (40%) are single-person households, many of them counting social assistance as their primary source of income. Though fewer people with jobs accessed food banks this year, households with income from current or recent employment are, at 17% of the total, still a significant proportion of those helped.

### **A long-standing problem made worse**

Food banks have been providing food and other assistance to more than 700,000 people each month for the better part of a decade. Adding to this, hundreds of thousands of Canadians have suffered from the effects of the recession, forced to work whatever job they can find, or to apply for social assistance and to access food banks as a last resort.

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Though economic recovery has been slow to take hold, federal and provincial governments are already planning to end stimulus programs, cut spending, and shrink their accumulated debts. It is crucial that they consider their next moves carefully, in light of both the economic issues that have plagued Canadians since the advent of food banks in the 1980s, and the lasting damage faced by individuals and families in this uncertain time.

The number of people living with low income in Canada has not dropped below 2.7 million individuals in any year in the current era. Through decades of overall economic growth, the country's middle class earns no more now than it did in the 1980s, and those in the lowest income group are actually earning less than they did 30 years ago.<sup>1</sup> The manufacturing, forestry, mining, agriculture, and fishing industries have all been weakened, and are able to provide a decent living for fewer and fewer Canadians.

### Let's work together, toward long-term strategies

There is an emerging consensus that these issues, in addition to having personal, economic, and social costs for those directly affected, have a financial cost for all of us. Recent reports from Canada,<sup>2</sup> the United States,<sup>3</sup> and the United Kingdom<sup>4</sup> show how much the health and social consequences of low income cost governments – and taxpayers – in the long run. In Canada, losses related to health care expenditures, the justice system, social assistance, and foregone tax

## Recommendations for reducing hunger and food bank use

- 1 Implement a federal poverty prevention and reduction strategy, with measureable targets and timelines.
- 2 Maintain current levels of federal cash and tax transfers to provincial, territorial, and First Nations governments.
- 3 At the provincial government level, continue to reform income support programs of last resort, based on consultations with those living on low incomes.
- 4 Create a federal housing strategy to increase and monitor investment in affordable housing programs in Canada's cities, towns, and rural areas.
- 5 Make the Employment Insurance system more fair, inclusive, and responsive to changing labour market conditions.
- 6 Increase federal investment in a system of quality, affordable, accessible child care.
- 7 Address the high rates of low income among our most vulnerable seniors.
- 8 Increase investment in the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB), raising the maximum benefit to \$5,100 per child, per year.

revenue stemming from the effects of low income have been estimated at \$24.4 billion annually.<sup>5</sup>

Currently, too many Canadians do not have enough resources to make ends meet, and there are too few supports for low-income and otherwise vulnerable people. Our recommendations suggest ways of preventing Canadians from falling into poverty, and of helping low-income Canadians get back into the economic and social mainstream of their communities.

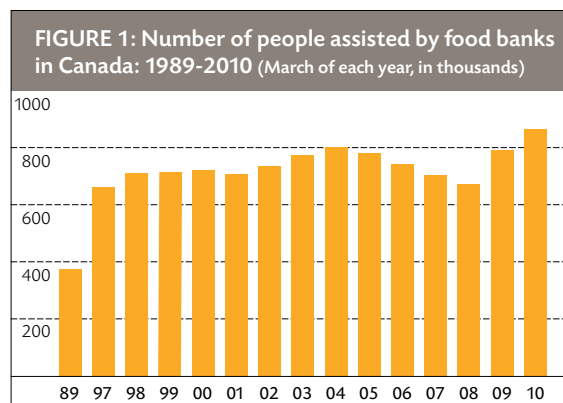
We need our federal and provincial governments to create long-term strategies for preventing and reducing poverty, hunger, and food bank use in Canada. These strategies must be integrated, and they must take account of the experiences of low-income Canadians, and of the changing nature of the economy and the labour market.

SECTION 1:  
RESULTS

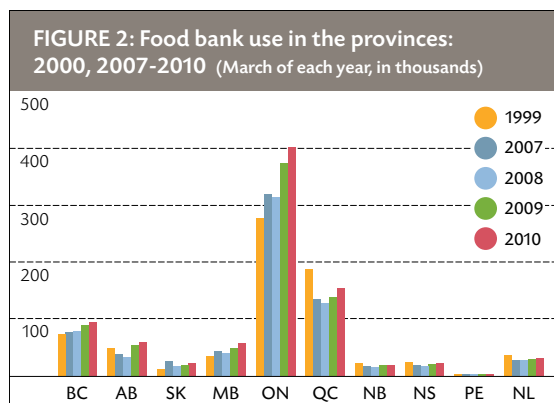
# Food bank use reaches record levels in 2010



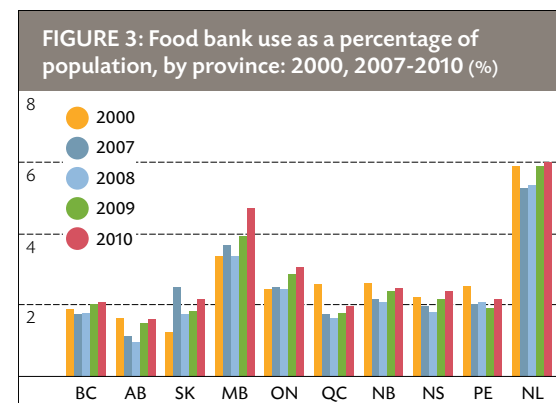
The 2010 *HungerCount* reflects the economic situation in Canada: though the economy is recovering slowly, many Canadians are still feeling the effects of the recent recession. Nearly 870,000 people relied on the assistance of a food bank in order to have enough to eat in March of this year, a 9% increase over the same period in 2009 – and the highest level of food bank use on record in Canada.



867,948 individuals were assisted by a food bank or affiliated food program in March 2010. This is the second year of increased need, following several years of gradual decline.



Food bank use increased in every province in 2010, with particularly high growth in Manitoba, Ontario, and Quebec.



All provinces saw food bank use as a percentage of population increase in 2010. Newfoundland (6%) has the highest percentage served, followed by Manitoba (4.7%) and Ontario (3.1%).

## Food bank use still rising, despite economic recovery

In March 2010, 867,948 separate individuals were assisted by a food bank in Canada. This is an increase of 9.2% over March 2009, and follows an 18% jump in usage between 2008 and 2009.

Canadian food bank use has now reached its highest level on record, passing the previous benchmark of 803,335 in 2004. Hunger continues to grow in our country, despite the economic recovery.

**Figure 1** provides information on the number of individuals assisted by food banks and affiliated food programs<sup>6</sup> for each year national *HungerCount* data is available. This year's findings show the recent sharp upward trend of food bank use in Canada after several years of decrease between 2004 and 2008.

Seventy-one percent of Canadian food banks reported an increase in the number of people they assisted this March, compared to one year earlier. Every province saw a swell in the need for food banks, with five provinces experiencing double-digit

rises. There were startlingly high jumps in Manitoba (+21%) and Saskatchewan (+20%), and while a large portion of the increase in these provinces was concentrated in Saskatoon, Regina, and Winnipeg, smaller food banks also saw demand for their services rise significantly in 2010. Food banks in Prince Edward Island, Quebec, and Nova Scotia also reported larger-than-average increases over 2009 (13%, 12%, and 11%, respectively).

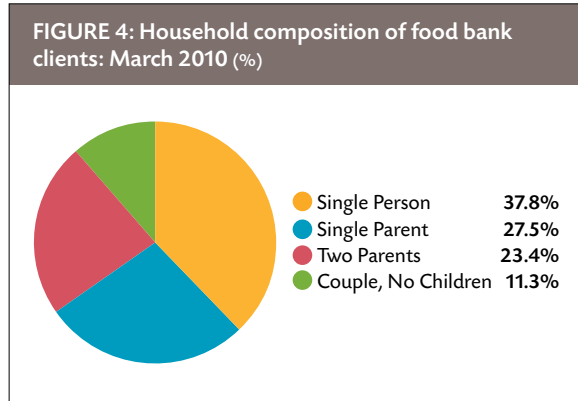
Last year, Alberta and British Columbia, hit hard by the recession, accounted for a large part of the record 18% increase. In 2010, the picture has changed, with the lion's share of the overall national growth concentrated in Ontario (+27,826), Quebec (+16,900), and Manitoba (+10,041). Together, food banks in these provinces accounted for 75% of the national increase in 2010.

**Figure 2** shows trends in individuals assisted, by province, for March 2000 and 2007 to 2010.

In the month of March 2010, 2.6% of the Canadian population was assisted by a food bank, compared to 2.4% in 2009; every province experienced a year-over-year increase in food bank use as a percentage of population. As **Figure 3** shows, food banks in six of ten provinces (British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland & Labrador) are serving proportionally more people than they were 10 years ago.<sup>7</sup>

In March 2010, 80,150 people – or 9.2% of all people assisted that month – walked through the door of a food bank for the first time. This is similar to last year, when 9.1% of those helped were first-time clients. The percentage of people turning to a food bank for the first time was fairly consistent across the country, with the exception of Manitoba, where this was the case for 16% of individuals receiving food.

## Who turns to food banks for help?



Similar to previous years, families with children represented 51% of households helped by food banks in March, with single individuals at 37.8% and couples without children at 11.3%.

**38%** of those turning to food banks are children and youth

**7%** of those helped are seniors

**12%** of people assisted are Aboriginal

Children and youth made up 38% of those turning to food banks for help in 2010. As in past years, those under age 18 saw especially high representation in the prairie provinces. Individuals under 18 accounted for 51% of food bank clients in Manitoba, 44% in Saskatchewan, and 43% in Alberta.

**Table 1** presents the total number of individuals assisted by food banks in each province for 2009 and 2010, as well as the percentage of those assisted in March 2010 who were under 18 years of age.

The household composition of people turning to food banks remained consistent in 2010 compared to past years. The percentage of families with children increased slightly, and now comprise more than half of all households accessing food banks. The proportion of

families headed by single parents grew from 25% in 2009 to 27.5% in 2010, while the proportion of two-parent families was essentially unchanged. The number of single people turning to food banks for help decreased slightly this year, from 39.2% to 37.8% of the total.

**Figure 4** shows the household composition of those assisted by food banks nationally.<sup>8</sup>

The number of seniors helped by food banks rose suddenly this year, from 5.5% of adults in 2008 and 2009 to 7.2% in 2010. Individuals over age 65 represented similar proportions in most provinces, with notable exceptions in Ontario (12%) and Manitoba (15%), where the proportion was higher.

**Table 2** shows the percentage of adults assisted by food banks who are seniors in each province.<sup>9</sup>

TABLE 1: Food bank use in Canada, by province					
Province/Territory	Total Assisted, March 2010	Total Assisted, March 2009	Change, 2009-2010	Percent Change, 2009-2010	Percent Children, March 2010
British Columbia	94,359	89,886	4,473	5.0%	29.7%
Alberta	59,311	53,976	5,335	9.9%	43.1%
Saskatchewan	22,662	18,875	3,787	20.1%	44.1%
Manitoba	57,966	47,925	10,041	21.0%	50.5%
Ontario	402,056	374,230	27,826	7.4%	37.1%
Quebec	154,364	137,464	16,900	12.3%	37.9%
New Brunswick	18,517	17,889	628	3.5%	34.3%
Nova Scotia	22,573	20,344	2,229	11.0%	33.0%
Prince Edward Island	3,068	2,706	362	13.4%	35.5%
Newfoundland & Labrador	30,800	30,014	786	2.6%	37.3%
Territories	2,272	1,429	843	59.0%	52.5%
<b>Canada</b>	<b>867,948</b>	<b>794,738</b>	<b>73,210</b>	<b>9.2%</b>	<b>37.8%</b>

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Unfortunately, the *HungerCount* survey does not include information on seniors receiving free or subsidized meals from age-specific community meal delivery programs. A minority of food banks are able to deliver food to those they assist, and it can be assumed that a large number of seniors rely on meal delivery rather than food banks; *HungerCount* almost certainly underreports the utilization of charitable food assistance among this population.

The number of people assisted by food banks who identify as First Nations, Métis, or Inuit grew again in 2010, and has increased at a faster pace than overall usage since 2008, moving from 10.8% of the total in 2008, to 11.6% in 2009 and 12% in 2010. The overall number of Aboriginal people accessing food assistance programs grew by 26% in 2009, and again by 13% in 2010.<sup>10</sup>

Province/Territory	Adults Assisted	Percent Seniors
British Columbia	66,363	6.2%
Alberta	33,748	4.6%
Saskatchewan	12,668	4.1%
Manitoba	28,693	15.4%
Ontario	252,893	11.8%
Quebec	95,860	3.8%
New Brunswick	12,166	4.5%
Nova Scotia	15,124	7.6%
Prince Edward Island	1,979	7.3%
Newfoundland & Labrador	19,281	5.2%
Territories	1,079	16.5%
<b>Canada</b>	<b>539,854</b>	<b>7.2%</b>

There is considerable variation across provinces, with larger percentages of those accessing food banks and other food assistance programs identifying as Aboriginal in Western Canada.

**Table 3** provides detailed information on Aboriginal people assisted by food banks in each province.

As the number of people helped by food banks has grown overall in the past two years, the number of immigrants and refugees assisted has remained relatively stable. Each month, between 81,000 and 84,000 new Canadians are assisted – accounting for 9% of the total in 2010.<sup>11</sup> Not surprisingly, a majority of immigrants and refugees utilizing the services of food banks are seen in Canada's largest urban centres – including Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, and also smaller centres such as Mississauga, Sherbrooke, and Surrey.

Province/Territory	Total Assisted	Percent Aboriginal
British Columbia	94,359	19.5%
Alberta	59,311	51.0%
Saskatchewan	22,662	52.2%
Manitoba	57,966	38.4%
Ontario	402,056	7.2%
Quebec	154,364	1.4%
New Brunswick	18,517	3.7%
Nova Scotia	22,573	2.7%
Prince Edward Island	3,068	1.9%
Newfoundland & Labrador	30,800	0.2%
Territories	2,272	94.5%
<b>Canada</b>	<b>867,948</b>	<b>12.1%</b>

## Meal programs across the country continue to expand

The provision of prepared meals through soup kitchens, school breakfast and lunch programs, shelters, drop-in centres, and other venues continues to grow in scale. In March 2010, food banks and affiliated agencies served a total of 3,459,544 meals across the country – a 6.4% increase over the number of meals served in March 2009. This is the third straight year of growth for Canadian charitable meal programs, with almost 50% more meals being provided in 2010 compared to 2007.

## Income sources and housing arrangements

- 15%** receive disability-related income support
- 17%** have income from current or recent employment
- 51%** receive social assistance

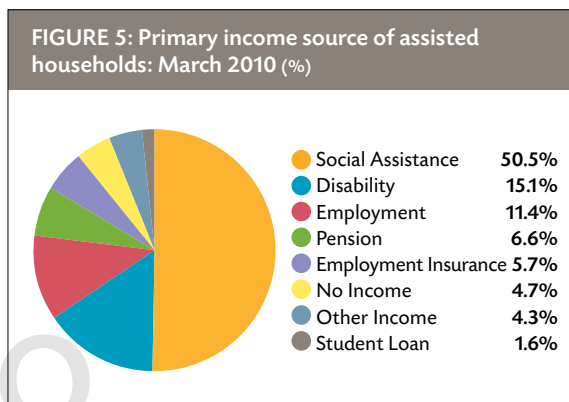
Though food bank use increased overall in 2010, the number of assisted households that reported current employment as the primary source of income dropped slightly this year. The percentage of assisted households with income from current employment has declined from 14.5% of the total in 2008, to 13.6% in 2009, and to 11.4% in 2010. While this can be understood in the context of post-recession weakness in the labour market, less expected was the negligible increase in the proportion of those on Employment Insurance. This figure has grown by less than one percentage point since 2008.

As **Figure 5** shows, the proportion of households assisted by food banks reporting social assistance (50.5%) and pension income (6.6%) remained relatively steady, while those receiving disability-related

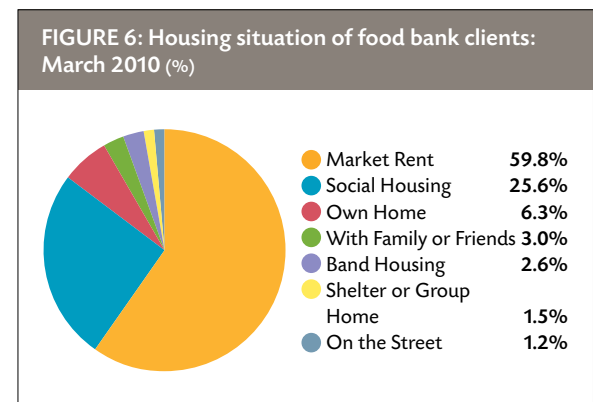
income supports grew to 15%, from 13% in 2008 and 2009.<sup>12</sup>

Consistent with findings in 2008 and 2009, the majority of households helped by food banks in 2010 are living in rental accommodations. Sixty percent pay market rent, and 26% live in subsidized rental housing. Nationally, 3% live in band-owned housing, with higher numbers in provinces with larger Aboriginal populations (e.g. 13% in Alberta, 12% in Saskatchewan, and 11% in Manitoba). Nearly 6% of those helped are homeless, i.e., living temporarily with family or friends, in a youth or homeless shelter, or on the street.

These numbers, seen in **Figure 6**, remain largely unchanged from past years.<sup>13</sup>



*Households with income from current employment dropped to 11.4% of the total this year, while those on EI held steady at 5.7%. Pensioners made up 6.6%, and people on disability supports, 15.1%.*



*The majority of households assisted (85.4%) are renters, while 6.3% own their homes. Nearly 6% are homeless.*

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## Food bank use in rural Canada

The majority of Canada's population is located in urban areas, as are the majority of food bank clients. Nevertheless, hunger is a very real issue in our small towns and rural areas. Forty-five percent of the food banks that contributed information to the 2010 *HungerCount* survey are located in municipalities with populations of fewer than 10,000 people. These 597 organizations assisted 123,777 separate individuals – 14% of the total, up from 11% in 2009 – in March of this year. Of these individuals, 12,180 – almost 10% – were being helped for the first time.

Among rural food banks that reported in both 2009 and 2010, two-thirds experienced an increase in the need for their services. Overall, food bank use in Canada's small towns and rural areas increased by 13% between 2009 and 2010.

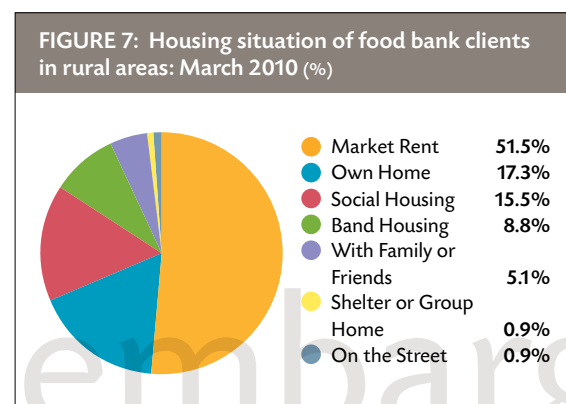
The picture of hunger in rural Canada is qualitatively different from that in urban areas. For example, those helped by rural food banks are much more likely than their urban counterparts to be homeowners – 17% of households helped by rural food banks in March 2010 reported owning their own homes (a notable increase from 15% in 2009). Rural clients are also more likely to be living in band-owned housing. Accordingly, fewer rural food bank clients rent. Of those who do, 52% pay market rent and 16% pay subsidized rent. A larger percentage (5%) report that they are living temporarily with family or friends.<sup>14</sup>

**Figure 7** shows the housing situation of households assisted by rural food banks.

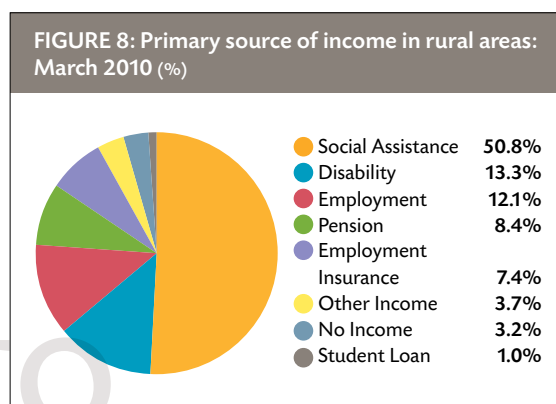
Notably, a higher percentage of rural versus urban food bank clients reported having employment income in 2010 – a reversal from past years. Further, while employment among urban households assisted by food banks has dropped for two years in a row, it is on the upswing at rural food banks.

It is also notable that, as the number of those assisted has increased overall, the number of pensioners accessing food banks in small towns and rural areas has been relatively stable – suggesting a rare island of calm amidst the after-effects of the recession.<sup>15</sup>

**Figure 8** shows the primary income sources of rural food bank clients.



*In rural areas, fewer of those helped are renters (67%), while more (17%) own their homes. 5% are living with family or friends.*



*In rural areas more of those assisted are working (12.1%), on EI (7.4%), or on a pension (8.4%), compared to urban regions.*

**Hunger is a very real issue in our small towns and rural areas. Forty-five percent of the food banks that contributed information to the 2010 *HungerCount* survey are located in municipalities with populations of fewer than 10,000 people.**

**28%** increase since 2008 in the number of people helped

**35%** of food banks ran out of food

**50%** of food banks needed to cut back on the amount of food provided to each household

## Food banks are finding it more difficult to meet the need

Food banks are an essential resource for Canadian families struggling with hunger and food insecurity. Even so, food banks are only able to provide a modest amount of support. Most offer less than five days' worth of food per visit, and the majority are able to offer help only once per month.

Food banks are facing a second consecutive year of increased need. Nevertheless, they have managed to rise to the challenge of helping 28% more people in 2010 than they did two years prior. It is clear, however, that the pressure of increased demand is taking its toll.

The ability to acquire enough food remains the top challenge for food banks, and 57% report buying more food than usual – up from 32% in 2008, prior to the onset of the recession. Half of all food banks had to make the difficult decision to cut back on the amount

of food provided to each household in 2010, whereas only 15% did so in 2008. Twelve percent – more than one in ten food banks – actually turned away individuals and families asking for help, something that was almost unheard of in past years (the figure was 2% in 2008). Six percent were forced to close early, or simply did not open during their regular hours.<sup>16</sup>

Food banks have had to reach out in order to boost donations. Nearly a third have made special appeals to their communities through the media this year, and 16% have made a special appeal to a corporate donor. Food banks also look to local faith communities (34%), service organizations (19%), and other food banks (18%) for help. Even after taking these measures, an astonishing 35% of food banks reported running out of food in 2010.

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# How can we reduce the need for food banks in Canada?

**With food bank use spiking to record levels even as the economy is in recovery, it is more important than ever to understand the causes of hunger in our country. Only then will it be possible to implement policies that can be effective at changing the status quo. This section presents an analysis of the causes of hunger, as well as Food Banks Canada's recommendations for change.**

This year's *HungerCount* findings suggest that it has been a tough year for many. Though economic indicators show that the country is climbing out of recession (more people are working,<sup>17</sup> the manufacturing sector is growing slowly,<sup>18</sup> and Gross Domestic Product has increased steadily since mid-2009<sup>19</sup>), the level of food bank use in 2010 indicates that problems remain.

As more Canadians re-enter the labour force in the coming years, the need for food banks, soup kitchens, and other charitable food programs will likely decrease. However, even as the economy regains its health, we will be faced with a status quo we have come to know too well: for the better part of a decade, food banks have opened their doors each month to more than 700,000 people in need of help.

Many of those needing help don't need it for long – they will come for assistance for three or six months, often after losing a job, and will not be seen again at the food bank after they re-enter the workforce.

Others need help for longer, perhaps a year or two, because of a long-term illness and resulting job loss, because they are working less in order to care for a sick family member, or because they have gone back to school and have few sources of income besides a student loan or social assistance.

Some individuals and families need help for even longer. They might face long-term mental or physical health issues that make it impossible to hold down a full-time job, or live in regions where opportunities for employment are scarce, and therefore are forced to rely on income support programs that do not provide enough money to meet basic needs.<sup>20</sup>

**For the better part of a decade, food banks have opened their doors each month to more than 700,000 people in need of help.**

## Low income is the root of the problem

For all of those needing help, it is low income that brings them to a food bank. And as many as are helped each month, there are still more who are short of food yet don't seek assistance – the most recent information from Health Canada shows that 1.9 million people in Canada worry about not having enough food, can't afford to eat the foods they would like, or go without food because they don't have enough for themselves and their families.<sup>21</sup>

In 2008, more than three million Canadians – including 694,000 children – could not afford the basic

goods and services that most middle-class households would take for granted.<sup>22</sup> From 2007 to 2008, while 849,000 individuals moved out of poverty, another 728,000 lost enough ground to be considered poor by Statistics Canada.<sup>23</sup> In any given year, about 10% of Canadians don't have enough money to make ends meet; over any given five-year period, the number is much higher: between 2002 and 2007, nearly 20% of Canadians experienced at least one year of low income.<sup>24</sup>

Low income and health – that most central Canadian preoccupation – are closely linked. We know

that many of those helped by food banks are in need because they face health issues that prevent them from working on a regular basis. Recent research from the Daily Bread Food Bank found that more than a third of those assisted by charitable food programs in the Greater Toronto Area reported their health to be poor or only fair. Among those who needed help for more than two years, the percentage of those reporting fair or poor health rose to 50%.<sup>25</sup>

## Income and health are intertwined

For many Canadians, poor health is a major barrier to earning enough income to afford life's basics. For others, the relationship is reversed: financial poverty precipitates health problems. Not having enough income means not being able to afford safe housing and sufficient, nutritious food. It means having less of a sense of control over one's life, and foregoing active participation in one's community – not being able to do things like hang out at the coffee shop, invite friends over for dinner, or have grandchildren over to celebrate on holidays.<sup>26</sup> The lack of access to these and other elements of life has a profound impact on one's overall health status.

Few Canadians would argue with the ideas that everyone has the right to good health, that supports and assistance must be available for those experiencing illness, and that preventing ill health is important.

These beliefs have two major implications:

- 1 We must address the factors, including low income and hunger, that negatively influence the health of Canadians. It is now widely accepted that low income has negative effects on the fiscal and social well-being of communities, in addition to its direct influence on the health of individuals. In other words, low income has a cost not merely for those experiencing it directly – it has a cost for all of us via increased public health care expenses, decreased productivity, and other factors.<sup>27</sup>
- 2 We must ensure that sufficient supports exist for those who, whether because of an accident on the job, a bout with cancer, a heart attack, or other physical or mental health issue, are unable to support themselves for a period of time.

Poor health does not have to be an inevitable result of low income. With the right supports and services – for example, adequate income supports, affordable housing, access to quality education and training – a person can earn a low income for a period of time and still maintain their, and their family's, physical and mental health.

Nor does low income need to be an inevitable result of poor health: if a person experiencing health problems is not reduced to selling off physical and financial assets or going into debt to cope with the loss of a job and out-of-pocket health care costs, that person can heal and get back to work without losing economic ground.

## We can do better

Unfortunately, evidence suggests that Canada is failing on both sides of this equation. Children of low income families are more likely to be born with low birth weights, and to experience disability and poor physical and mental health. Lower socio-economic status is a strong predictor of coronary heart disease and Type 2 diabetes.<sup>28</sup> Across the board, individuals in low-income households are much more likely than those with higher incomes to experience a decline in health status.<sup>29</sup>

There is also growing evidence that health problems can have severe effects on the income security of Canadians. Recent research performed for the Canadian Breast Cancer Network (CBCN) found serious shortcomings in the support system for women with breast cancer:

- On average, families of breast cancer patients experience a 10% decline in income during treatment periods.
- 16% of patients have their jobs terminated, and 20% are forced to quit because of the effects of treatment.
- 44% of patients use their savings to cover medical expenses and make up for lost income, and 27% take on debt.
- Because of financial pressures, one-fifth return to work before they are ready.<sup>30</sup>

Though the CBCN study was limited to breast cancer patients, it is not difficult to imagine the breadth of the issue: more than 170,000 Canadians will be diagnosed with cancer in 2010;<sup>31</sup> 1.3 million Canadians have heart disease;<sup>32</sup> another 1.3 million Canadians have diabetes.<sup>33</sup>

**Across the board, individuals in low-income households are much more likely than those with higher incomes to experience a decline in health status.**

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**It is absolutely vital that the nation's central social investments – child care, affordable housing, adult education and training, services for people with mental health issues, social assistance, Employment Insurance, and funding support for innovative community-level programs, among others – be maintained and improved.**

## We must continue to build on our successes

The next few years promise to be ones of fiscal austerity for federal, provincial, and municipal governments. Finance departments across the country are in the process of paring back expenditures, and social programs will no doubt be affected. It is absolutely vital that the nation's central social investments – child care, affordable housing, adult education and training, services for people with mental health issues, social assistance, Employment Insurance, and funding support for innovative community-level programs, among others – be maintained and improved. These investments must be seen for what they are: bulwarks against health problems among low income or otherwise vulnerable Canadians, and barriers against a descent into poverty among those experiencing health problems.

Focusing on the relationship between hunger, low income, and health is just one way of framing the issues that food banks and people requiring food assistance face every day. It is not meant to limit in any way the

broader idea that preventing and reducing hunger, food bank use, and low income is the right thing for Canada. No one in a country as rich as ours should have to go without having enough to eat – or having enough money to afford adequate housing, engage in meaningful recreational activities, or participate in education and training. And while we cannot look to governments alone to address the problems that lie at the root of hunger and food bank use, it is our governments that have the ability to ensure that the services and supports necessary to help Canadians climb out of poverty are widely available and widely effective.

Our recommendations provide guidance on how federal and provincial governments can better act to prevent and reduce hunger, poverty, and poor health. They revolve around the need for a coordinated, strategic, and long-term plan with measurable targets and timelines.

## Recommendations

**1 Implement a federal poverty prevention and reduction strategy, with measurable targets and timelines, developed in consultation with those living in low income, municipal and provincial governments, the non-profit sector, and business.**

The Government of Canada funds and manages a number of programs that count poverty prevention

and reduction as an objective: the Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB), the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB), Labour Market Agreements (LMA), and the Homelessness Partnering Strategy (HPS), to name a few. With notable exceptions (including the CCTB), the outcomes of these programs vis-à-vis poverty reduction are difficult to measure, and little documentation exists to provide an indication of their success.

Beyond the federal government, six provinces and one territory have implemented or are planning substantive poverty reduction initiatives. At the present time, there is no objective mechanism in place to evaluate these initiatives from a pan-Canadian perspective, whether through government-led or government-funded research, federal-provincial-territorial collaboration, or other means. Even a modest poverty prevention and reduction strategy, put in place to rationalize and streamline management of existing programs, solidify evaluation of program spending and outcomes, and provide a forum for reporting and public input, would be a valuable beginning.

Given these and other factors (for example, widespread and sustained calls for such a strategy from social service and advocacy organizations, the planned staffing decrease within Human Resources and Skills Development Canada,<sup>34</sup> and the deleterious effects of the 2008-09 recession), the implementation of a poverty prevention and reduction strategy under the purview of HRSDC is a logical and progressive step in addressing what has almost certainly been an increase in the incidence of low income since 2008.

## 2 Maintain current levels of federal cash and tax transfers to provincial, territorial and First Nations governments.

The Canada Health Transfer and Canada Social Transfer will come up for renewal in 2014, and there will be strong pressures to either reduce these transfers or to impose limits on their growth. Any

such reductions or limitations will have consequent effects on levels of health and social service provision at the provincial level – particularly as it relates to services to low-income people – and will limit provincial governments’ ability to meet their stated poverty reduction goals.

## 3 Continue to reform provincial income support programs of last resort.

While provincial income security programs of last resort go by various names – Income Assistance, Income Support, Social Assistance, Ontario Works, etc. – they have similar characteristics: extremely low benefit levels, a requirement that potential beneficiaries liquidate the majority of personal assets and savings before becoming eligible, and numerous barriers to achieving a foothold in the job market without having benefits quickly and significantly reduced.

Several provinces have initiated constructive welfare reforms in the past few years. For example:

- In the past, families receiving welfare had access to different child benefit programs than those not in receipt of welfare; currently, the majority of provinces now provide monetary child benefits to all resident families, based on their level of income.
- Many provinces have lowered barriers to income support programs geared specifically to people with disabilities; these programs have higher benefit levels and are meant to be less bureaucratically intrusive.
- Several provinces now allow people leaving welfare

to continue to access public health–related benefits (such as prescription drug plans) for a period of time, in order to ease the transition into the workforce.

Even with these improvements, there is still much to do. Across the country, there is a growing understanding that welfare in its current form hurts as much as it helps. With provincial social assistance programs providing incomes between \$3,687 and \$7,947 per year for a single person,<sup>35</sup> it is no wonder that 50% of households accessing food banks count welfare as their primary source of income. Provincial governments must work with those receiving welfare to address this “policy that stomps you into the ground” – as the Premier of Ontario recently called it<sup>36</sup> – and create a program that prevents rather than exacerbates long-term dependency.

## 4 Create a federal housing strategy to increase and monitor investment in affordable housing programs in Canada’s cities, towns, and rural areas.

Food banks consistently report that the high cost of housing is a primary cause of the need for their services.<sup>37</sup> If housing was more affordable, Canadians would not need to scrimp on food purchases in order to pay the rent. As noted in previous *HungerCount* reports, housing has been a particularly troublesome issue in Alberta and Saskatchewan, where the cost of housing rose as fast or faster than wages during boom times.<sup>38</sup>

The Wellesley Institute recently noted that private rental vacancy rates in Canada have hovered below

3% nationally since the late 1990s. Though nearly 800,000 new homes were built between 2001 and 2006, less than 13% of these were constructed for the 30% of Canadian households who are renters. To keep up with population growth, it would have been necessary to build more than 1.1 million new homes during this period. There is a current deficit in the availability of housing, contributing to the fact that more than 150,000 people do not have a place to sleep, 700,000 live in overcrowded situations, and at least 450,000 live temporarily with family or friends.<sup>39</sup>

While solving the crisis in housing affordability is not an easy prospect, neither is it an impossible goal – there are currently a number of innovative proposals for reform at the municipal, provincial, and federal levels.<sup>40</sup> The federal government has made progress in the area through federal–provincial affordable housing agreements, and through investments in social housing made in the 2009 and 2010 budgets. However, with the current government preparing to introduce spending reductions in 2011, progress on housing risks being stalled.

## **5** Increase investment in the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB), raising the maximum benefit to \$5,100 per child, per year.

Though the federal CCTB (including the National Child Benefit Supplement, or NCBS) has not increased in real dollars in recent years, several provinces have taken steps to raise the value of benefits for families with children. For example, when fully implemented, the recently-introduced Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) – which is paid in combination with the CCTB – will provide up to \$1,100 per child, per year to families in that province,

bringing non-taxable benefits much closer to the \$5,100 benchmark.

A global approach to increasing the CCTB would see the federal government simply increase benefit levels, leaving provincial governments to modify their own programs as necessary. Investment in CCTB payments could also come at the provincial level, or in a federal–provincial combination. Whatever their structure, we recommend that child benefits be offered on a progressive basis and tied solely to household income.

In Ontario, recent changes in the province’s regime of child benefits were a key element in a gradual restructuring of welfare, and accomplished three major goals:

- Equity between Ontario households was increased by basing payments on income rather than enrolment in social assistance – now all families with children have access to provincial child benefits.
- Parents leaving welfare for work are able to continue to receive the same child benefits, easing the transition into the workforce and decreasing the likelihood of re-enrolment in social assistance.
- Increased benefits are more effective in addressing child poverty, and in recognizing the social contribution made by parents.

## **6** Increase federal investment in a system of quality, affordable, accessible child care.

With the possible exception of Quebec, there is currently no organized system of early learning and child care in Canada. Parents needing child care must cobble together a combination of family-based, before- and after-school, publicly-funded and private

arrangements. As the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada points out, this is particularly difficult for single parents (the majority of whom are single women) and for women in general. High quality, affordable, accessible child care is a key factor in women’s equality in a nation where women continue to perform a disproportionate amount of unpaid caregiving work.<sup>41</sup>

A recent report from the Centre for Spatial Economics suggests that every \$1 invested in early learning and care will boost the economy in the long run by \$2.40. The report highlights a perspective that views the spending of public funds on particular social goods as *investments* rather than simple costs, and predicts several additional benefits that would result from a growth in public support in this area:

- Increased labour force participation among parents, resulting in higher employment earnings.
- Higher future incomes resulting from a decrease in school drop-out rates and improved rates of post-secondary educational participation.
- Increases in future parental earnings thanks to enhanced work experience and post-secondary education completion rates.<sup>42</sup>

## **7** Address the high rates of low income among our most vulnerable seniors.

There is much to be proud of in Canada’s accomplishments with respect to the income security of those over age 65. Whereas a third of seniors had incomes below the after-tax low income cut-off (LICO-AT) in 1977, today only 6% live in poverty.<sup>43</sup> This has been achieved thanks to broad labour force participation among both men and women, the

maturation of public and private employment-related pension benefits, and public investment in income-replacement programs for low income seniors, including Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS).

Nevertheless, to say that only 6% of seniors live in low income is to ignore a more nuanced reality. A closer look at the numbers reveals that certain groups of seniors are at much greater risk of low income. For example, in 2008:

- 15.6% of unattached, single seniors (201,000 individuals) lived in low income.
- 17.1% of unattached, single female seniors (155,000 individuals) lived in low income.
- Low-income seniors living alone had incomes that, on average, were 38% below the LICO-AT.<sup>44</sup>

Given these findings, which are fleshed out in more detail in the recent Food Banks Canada policy paper, *Fairness for Canadian Seniors – A Reality Check on Pensions*,<sup>45</sup> we urge the federal government to take the following actions:

- Continue to increase uptake of the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) among low income seniors. Community groups across the country, with support from federal, provincial, and municipal governments, have done much to address this issue; however, more than 150,000 eligible seniors still do not currently receive the GIS.<sup>46</sup>
- Increase GIS benefit levels. While the OAS and GIS bring many low-income seniors above the LICO-AT, the maximum OAS/GIS payment of about \$14,000 per year is still quite meagre for single people.

- Implement a strengthened GIS for single, unattached seniors. An overweighting of benefits to this population may help to bring rates of low income more in line with seniors living in couples.

## 8 Make the Employment Insurance system more fair, inclusive, and responsive to changing labour market conditions.

On the heels of the 2008-09 recession, the federal government implemented several welcome changes to the Employment Insurance program. From January 2009 to September 2010, the maximum EI benefit period was extended by five weeks for all regular beneficiaries, and many eligible long-tenured workers received extended income benefits (up to 20 additional weeks) if they were enrolled in a training program.

These changes, while positive, did not address the fact that EI coverage has declined since the 1990s, and that many of Canada's unemployed are not eligible for regular benefits because they have not worked enough hours, or have cycled in and out of the workforce over a number of years. For those working in part-time and/or temporary jobs, or who have a tenuous connection to the labour force, social assistance is often the only option during periods of unemployment.


Though the federal government has worked to decrease the likelihood that individuals will need to fall back on social assistance – the Working Income Tax Benefit is one example – it remains the case that there is no middle ground between Employment Insurance and welfare. Verbal reports from food banks across the country suggest that many

Canadians thrown out of work during the recession have exhausted their Employment Insurance benefits and are still unable to find work, and have turned to welfare and community food banks as a last resort.

A number of commentators have made proposals to address these problems, including decreasing the number of work hours needed to qualify for EI, eliminating regional differences in qualifying requirements, increasing the proportion of income replaced by the program, and extending benefit periods. More recently, labour experts have argued for an extension of the post-recession special measures outlined above, given that the economic recovery has been slow to spread, and the unemployment rate in September 2010 stood at 8.1%, up from 5.8% in January 2008.

In the short term, hundreds of thousands of Canadians not eligible for EI are getting along by working part-time jobs, applying for social assistance benefits, spending their savings, selling assets, and making a monthly visit to the food bank. In the longer term, the eligibility rules of EI raise barriers to people with tenuous connections to the labour force, and make it difficult to build income, assets, and continuity in life and work.

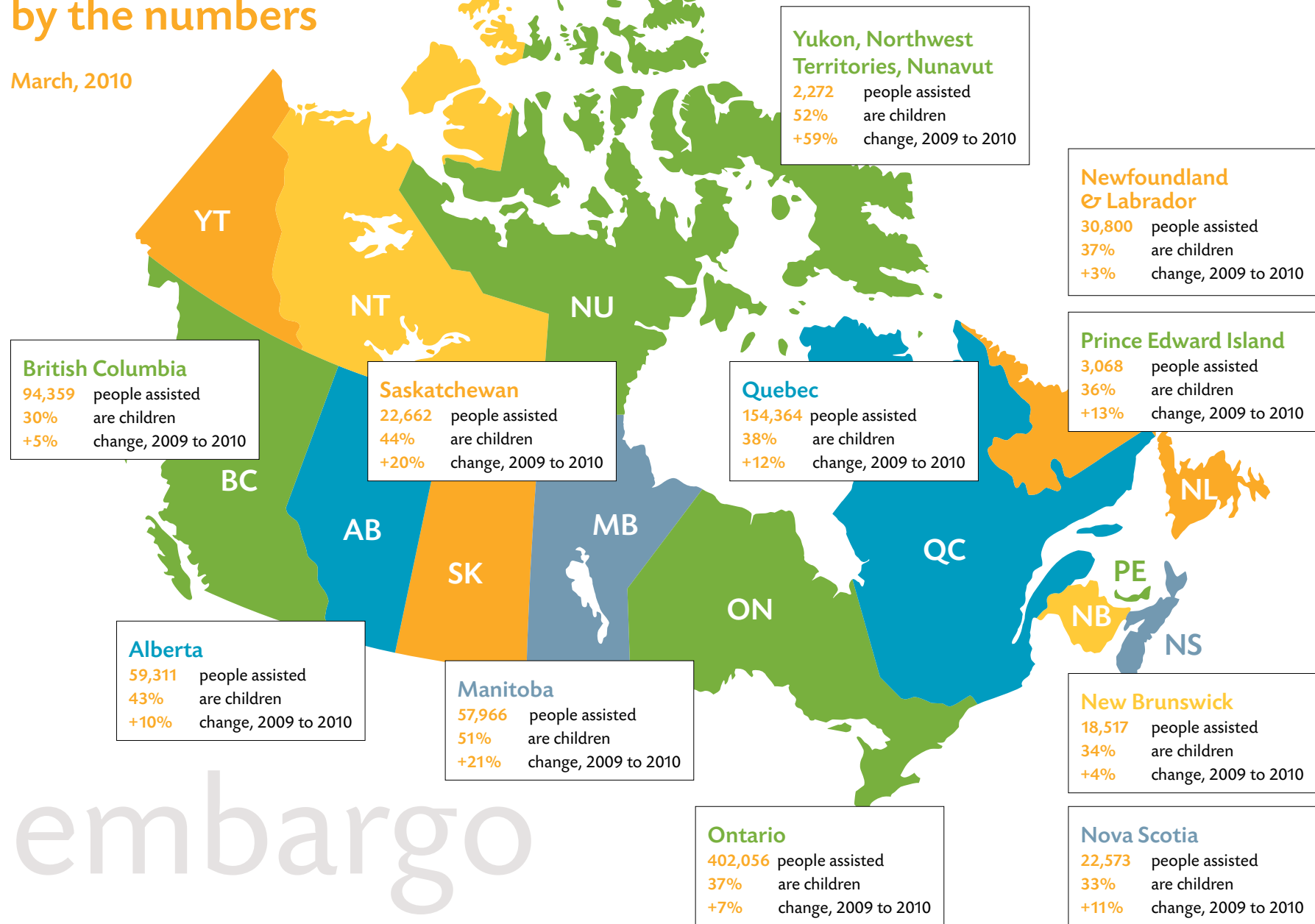
# Provincial perspectives on hunger



This year's provincial *HungerCount* reports reveal a common concern across the country: the economic recovery has not resulted in greater household food security for Canadians. These reports explain why food bank use has increased in the past year and make it clear that, while there are reasons for optimism, too many Canadians will continue to struggle to provide enough food for themselves and their families if we do not change our approach to hunger and low income.

# Food bank use in Canada by the numbers

March, 2010



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# British Columbia

94,359

Submitted by Food Banks British Columbia, Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by Arlene Kravitz, Food Banks British Columbia



## Highlights

**94,359** individuals were assisted, March 2010

**+5%** change since March 2009

**30%** are children

**11%** report employment income

**6%** receive Employment Insurance

**44%** receive social assistance

**21%** receive disability-related income supports

**60%** of food banks saw an increase

**Food bank use in British Columbia continues to rise. Rural communities have been the hardest hit; Kathryn Molloy, Executive Director at People for a Healthy Community on Gabriola Island, states, "We are seeing increased numbers – especially young families – and reduced donations. With the winter months coming and seasonal work coming to an end, we will need more support than ever."**

Employment in British Columbia has rebounded significantly since the recession, though the decrease in full-time employment in September suggests that the recovery is still in process and many are still finding it difficult to break back in to the labour market. The number of households assisted by food banks with income from employment is down for the second year in a row.

The number of two-parent families requiring help has increased from 18.7% in 2009 to 19.9% in 2010. The percentage of homeowners now seeking help has also increased. The issue of a "living wage" is a prevalent one in British Columbia. Families who work for low wages face impossible choices: buy food or heat the house, feed the children or pay the rent. The result can be spiralling debt, constant anxiety, and long-term health problems. In many cases, it means that

the adults in the family are working long hours – often at two or three jobs – just to pay for basic necessities. They have little time to spend with their family, let alone time to help their children with school work or to participate in community activities.

Although the rate of children receiving help from food banks has decreased from 31.4% in 2009 to 29.6% in 2010, child poverty is a regrettable and painful reality in British Columbia. Though poverty rates in B.C. have moved up and down over the years, they are consistently among the highest in Canada. Children remain poor because their parents remain poor. We want to give children the best possible start in life, yet we ignore the needs of parents who are struggling to do their best amid the many demands of parenting in today's busy world.

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Because of the vastness of our province, transportation of donated food is a major concern and some rural food banks have had to close their doors early and turn people away due to lack of supplies. Although other food banks want to assist, getting the food to some locations is difficult and expensive.

Some food banks have seen increases of between 14 and 20% over the past year. In addition, many donors are one step away from becoming food bank clients – a situation we have seen all too often in recent years. If a small community loses an employer – which in some cases may be the largest

source of jobs in the area – many food bank donors quickly become clients. Thus, at the time when the community food bank needs more help, its sources of support shrink.

Year after year, B.C. food banks have identified three policy areas that, if addressed, would decrease the need for food banks in our province: raising the provincial minimum wage, increasing investment in affordable housing, and increasing Income Assistance benefit levels. Without improvements in these and other areas, too many individuals and families will continue to need help from food banks for the foreseeable future.

**Though poverty rates in B.C. have moved up and down over the years, they are consistently among the highest in Canada.**

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# Alberta

Submitted by Alberta Food Banks, Member of Food Banks Canada  
Prepared by Richard LeSueur, Alberta Food Banks

# 59,311



## Highlights

<b>59,311</b>	individuals were assisted, March 2010
<b>+10%</b>	change since March 2009
<b>43%</b>	are children
<b>19%</b>	report employment income
<b>6%</b>	receive Employment Insurance
<b>39%</b>	receive social assistance
<b>16%</b>	receive disability-related income supports
<b>73%</b>	of food banks saw an increase

Last year, we reported that there had been a dramatic shift in the economic situation in Alberta, as the provincial economy went from boom in 2008 to bust in 2009. The province was hit hard by the recession, seeing unemployment rates double and a large surplus turn into a deficit. Food banks transitioned from a semi-normal routine of juggling daily challenges to being incredibly overstretched, responding to an overall increase in usage of 60%.

For 2010, the economic situation appears to have levelled off. Reports indicate that the Alberta economy is recovering but hasn't returned to the high levels of growth that it boasted prior to the recession. A large proportion of the population has yet to experience the benefits of the slow recovery.

Food banks are often considered to be the bellwether of social and economic trends. When looking at the family composition of food bank clients in 2010, little has changed from 2009, though the number of clients has risen by 10% in the same period. This suggests that the need for food banks is up across the board.

Over several months in the spring of 2010, there was a decrease in the number of Albertans collecting Employment Insurance. What is not clear is whether

this was due to individuals obtaining jobs or running out of benefits. With the unemployment rate continuing to hover around 6%,<sup>47</sup> it seems that many people coming off of EI benefits have failed to find employment.

In late summer, Statistics Canada indicated a loss in full-time jobs in Alberta, yet the unemployment rate went down. One reason for this is an increase in part-time employment. As a result, people displaced from full-time positions are working, but for fewer hours and likely without the extra-wage benefits that accompany full-time positions.

Interestingly, for the first time in several years, the percentage of those assisted by food banks who reported job income dropped significantly, while those

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on EI, social assistance, disability-related income supports, pensions, and student loans have increased noticeably.

During the past year, individuals and families have continued to struggle to meet monthly expenses, resulting, in some cases, in ongoing food insecurity. It was stated in last year's report that seniors were an area of concern, and they remain a concern in 2010, since seniors must keep up with basic living expenses on a fixed income.

Once again this year, food banks across the province have been seriously stretched as they needed to spend more on food purchases and make special appeals to the public for support. Thankfully, communities in Alberta continue to support their local food banks with both food and funds when the need arises.

**Over several months in the spring of 2010, there was a decrease in the number of Albertans collecting Employment Insurance. What is not clear is whether this was due to individuals obtaining jobs or running out of benefits.**

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# 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



## Highlights

**22,662** individuals were assisted, March 2010

**+20%** change since March 2009

**44%** are children

**14%** report employment income

**4%** receive Employment Insurance

**60%** receive social assistance

**3%** receive disability-related income supports

**52%** of food banks saw an increase

**Eating healthy comes at what price? Imagine not having a choice of fresh vegetables, fruits, or a nourishing meal in front of you at the end of the day. Imagine coping with the pressures of unexpected increases in the cost of food, utilities, fuel, and housing on a fixed income.**

During March 2010, 22,662 people in Saskatchewan turned to food banks compared to 18,875 in March 2009. This is an increase of 20%. How is it possible, in a province that weathered the recent recession better than most, that so many individuals and families are still turning to their local food bank?

“Being poor is not a personal decision for people,” says Bill Hall, Executive Director of Food Banks of Saskatchewan. “But the reality is that many people, because of their lack of resources, live just one pay cheque away from being on the street.” At any time, a disaster or unplanned circumstance, such as a marriage breakup, illness, fire, job loss, bad weather, or an unexpected expense, can cause a person or family to go over the edge financially. Across the province, the effects of cold, wet weather played havoc within the farming industry, and also interrupted stable

employment in the oil industry when heavy trucks couldn’t access the muddy oil fields.

As is the case every year, families with children continue to depend on food banks. Of the reported 22,662 food bank clients in Saskatchewan, 10,001 were children. Hard-pressed to meet monthly bills, parents determined food to be the most flexible necessity, and mined their food budget for the funds to survive. This situation often leads to unhealthy diets featuring low-cost foods that lack nutritional value and are high in sugar and carbohydrates.

In a recent report by the Public Health Nutritionists of Saskatchewan, the cost of a “nutritious food basket” (a list of 63 basic food items suggested by *Canada’s Food Guide*, including fruit, vegetables, and dairy products) was pegged at \$205 per week for a family of four.<sup>48</sup> The study showed significant variance in pricing

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across the province, with healthy food in rural and northern areas often being priced higher than in the larger cities, due at least in part to extra trucking and fuel costs.

Migration to Saskatchewan has been on the rise in the past few years and has seriously limited the availability of affordable housing. Between April 1, 2009, and April 1, 2010, Saskatchewan's population increased by 16,091 people. Some food banks reported an abundance of job opportunities but no available or affordable housing. Paul Merriman, CEO for the Saskatoon Food Bank and Learning Centre, adds, "Times are very difficult for those who do not have a living wage. Affordable housing

is at crisis levels and this is definitely affecting our clients." Conversely, other food banks reported having available housing and rental properties in their respective regions, but few jobs.

Migration has also contributed to an upswing in daily living costs in some areas because of increased demand for child care, utilities, clothing, household furnishings, and medication. These higher living costs are not being compensated with increases to salaries or income assistance programs. As Wayne Hellquist, CEO of the Regina & District Food Bank, states, "The disparity continues to grow between those fully engaged in the economy versus those who are on some form of assistance or a fixed income."

**How is it possible, in a province that weathered the recent recession better than most, that so many individuals and families are still turning to their local food bank?**

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# Manitoba

57,966

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

Prepared by Karen Flett, Winnipeg Harvest



## Highlights

57,966	individuals were assisted, March 2010
+21%	change since March 2009
51%	are children
12%	report employment income
5%	receive Employment Insurance
49%	receive social assistance
6%	receive disability-related income supports
73%	of food banks saw an increase

In early 2010, Manitoba was counted as one of the top economic performers among Canadian provinces, with the second lowest unemployment rate and second-best economic performance in terms of GDP growth.<sup>49</sup> Despite these positive developments, food bank use in Manitoba increased by 21% from March 2009 to March 2010. Food banks in the province now serve almost 58,000 people each month – at 4.7% of the population, this is one of the highest rates in Canada.

More than 50 food banks across Manitoba recorded information on the people they served during the month of March. It is clear from the numbers they provided that hunger is a growing problem across the social spectrum in the province. Seventy-three percent of food banks experienced an increase in need for their services in 2010. More than 60% of households assisted by food banks are families with children, and more than 40% of these are dual-parent families. More than half of all individuals helped are children and youth under the age of 18.

In the current economic situation, it is extraordinarily difficult for many families to deal with unanticipated circumstances or new expenses. In the year leading up to the survey period, part-time employment in

Manitoba grew by 13%, while full-time employment was down by 3%.<sup>50</sup> Part-time jobs are less likely to offer extra-wage benefits such as health, dental, or prescription drug coverage. Any significant new expense, unexpected illness, or time off to care for a family member can mean the difference between the ability to cover costs and the need for emergency food assistance.

Food banks in the province have expressed the need for both a guaranteed annual income and an increase in affordable housing. As in many jurisdictions across Canada, people in Manitoba who are in the lowest income brackets often have to dip into their grocery money to pay rent. This is especially the case for those on Income Assistance: a single person on

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Income Assistance in Winnipeg would have to spend close to 95% of their monthly benefit for rent on a one-bedroom apartment. Those on disability income assistance pay over 80% of their monthly income on housing costs.<sup>51</sup> Manitobans face both an extremely low rental housing vacancy rate, and high food prices, especially in the northern parts of the province.

The government of Manitoba has committed \$950 million per year to combat poverty through their *All Aboard* poverty reduction strategy. New initiatives have been launched under the program, including additional help for rent payments, expanded child care, and an affordable housing strategy.<sup>52</sup> Despite these positive steps, it is clear that there is much more to be done. The Manitoba Ombudsman's report, released in May, highlighted the need to reform the Employment and Income

Assistance program. The Ombudsman highlighted the continuing barriers to employment that people on income assistance face, and the need for better communications surrounding administrative arrangements and policies.<sup>53</sup> The report lays out clear recommendations for the improvement of Manitoba's income support program of last resort.

In the aftermath of the 2008-09 recession, it is crucial that the provincial and federal governments develop a long-term plan to address the fact that, although Manitoba seems to be succeeding on many economic indicators, too many of its citizens are falling behind. We encourage the provincial government in particular to continue to expand their support for those in need through the *All Aboard* framework and look forward to the final measures, which will be announced in 2011.

**Any significant new expense, unexpected illness, or time off to care for a family member can mean the difference between the ability to cover costs and the need for emergency food assistance.**

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# Ontario

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

402,056



## Highlights

<b>402,056</b>	individuals were assisted, March 2010
<b>+7%</b>	change since March 2009
<b>37%</b>	are children
<b>11%</b>	report employment income
<b>4%</b>	receive Employment Insurance
<b>45%</b>	receive social assistance
<b>23%</b>	receive disability-related income supports
<b>74%</b>	of food banks saw an increase

**Despite claims to the contrary, the recession is not over. Hundreds of thousands of Ontarians continue to struggle to make ends meet and cannot make it through the month without accessing the services of Ontario's food banks.**

Part-time or precarious work with no extra-wage benefits, rising hydro prices combined with a hot and humid summer, and increasing costs of goods and services have once again caused an increase in the number of Ontarians turning to food banks. As a result, Ontario's food banks continue to struggle to keep food on the shelves and to keep their doors open to their communities.

Nearly 450 food banks and affiliated food programs from Windsor to Ottawa and Thunder Bay to Niagara Falls tracked data on those served during the month of March. While we knew from speaking to people on the front lines that client numbers were continuing to increase, we were astonished to learn that food banks helped a staggering 402,000 Ontarians – 3.1% of Ontario's population – in hundreds of villages, towns, and large urban and smaller suburban centres across the province. This represents an increase of 7.4 % compared to last year, and a 28% increase over 2008. Nearly 40% of those served by Ontario's food

banks each month – almost 150,000 individuals – are children. In addition, more than 924,000 meals were served by meal programs supported by Ontario's food banks, an increase of 25% over last year.

Many working families and single-earner households have been able to scrape by thanks to median and minimum wage increases. However, fixed-income households, including social assistance recipients and seniors, are struggling more than ever. The percentage of people forced to turn to food banks who are over age 65 has increased from 4% in 2009 to 12% in 2010, representing a 195% increase in just one year. As an increasing number of Ontarians rely on retirement incomes that have not kept up with increases in living costs, including property taxes, hydro, and food, food banks will find more and more seniors walking through their doors looking for assistance. For many, this will be the first time they have had to ask for this kind of help.

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The increase in the number of Ontarians accessing their services has had a profound effect on the already stretched resources of food banks. Almost 60% reported purchasing more food in 2010 than they would in normal circumstances, and many food banks' shelves were so bare that they had to make a special appeal to the wider community, a corporate partner, or a neighbouring food bank so that they could continue to serve their clients. To help fill the void – as well as to increase the amount of fresh produce in food banks – many of Ontario's hardworking and generous farmers donated fresh produce from their fields, despite the lack of any financial compensation or tax benefit to do so.

It is morally wrong and socially unjust that so many of our friends, relatives, and neighbours go to bed hungry every night. Year after year, food banks continue to provide food and numerous other vital social supports to hundreds of thousands of Ontarians. We need change. We need our governments to step up and provide effective social programs that allow families and individuals to live with dignity. We need politicians to be bold and make well-reasoned decisions for the long-term good of our citizens. We need help, because Ontario's food banks cannot – and should not – have to shoulder this responsibility forever.

**Many working families and single-earner households have been able to scrape by thanks to median and minimum wage increases. However, fixed-income households, including social assistance recipients and seniors, are struggling more than ever.**

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# Quebec

Submitted by Food Banks Quebec, Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by Richard Décarie, Food Banks Quebec

# 154,364



## Highlights

**154,364** individuals were assisted, March 2010

**+12%** change since March 2009

**38%** are children

**9%** report employment income

**6%** receive Employment Insurance

**64%** receive social assistance

**5%** receive disability-related income supports

**With a significant increase of 12.3% in the number of people assisted by food banks and affiliated food programs from 2009 to 2010, and a major increase of 38% in the number of people helped since 2008 (including meal programs), Quebec remains one of the provinces most affected by food insecurity.**

In March 2010, nearly 1,000 food assistance programs, affiliated with 18 regional food banks, helped more than 310,000 people (including 154,000 through grocery programs) to meet their basic food needs.

The findings of this year's *HungerCount* survey are a valuable response to the prejudice that exists against those helped by food banks, as they show that no one is immune to low income and hunger. Among those supported by food programs in March 2010, 38% were children, and 11.6% were immigrants. Fifteen percent of assisted households included at least one person who was working or able to work.

Regardless of one's family situation, the difficulties presented by increasingly complex social change can be exacerbated by illness, family separation, the loss of one or more jobs in the same household, a death in the family, or budget difficulties, especially those associated with returning to school. Member organizations offer

a range of different services to support thousands of families. Thirty-nine percent of assisted households are composed of single people, 12% are couples without children, and close to 50% are families with children (of which half are single-parent families).

The food bank network in Quebec – a true “one-stop service” – retrieves large amounts of food on a daily basis from businesses and from the public in order to serve its clients 365 days a year, three meals per day. The success of such organizations is largely based on inestimable human capital, which consists of both paid and voluntary labour. In March alone, the Food Banks Quebec network was supported by 4,325 employees and 17,350 volunteers.

Sustainable development is a fundamental objective for food assistance programs in Quebec. The Food Banks Quebec network is able to save tonnes of healthy, nutritious food that, because of the nature

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of our food system, would otherwise be sent to landfill. Health also remains a priority for food banks in Quebec, and nutritious foods are prioritized over products that do not contribute to the attainment of dietary requirements, particularly for young children.

Among households accessing food assistance services in March 2010, 6.5% of households owned their home, 60% were private sector tenants, 24% lived in public housing, 2.5% lived in shelters or group homes, 3.3% were temporarily housed by family and 2.3% lived on the street.

In 2010, Food Banks Quebec undertook a major shift concerning the services it provides to its member agencies and, indirectly, the services its members provide to people confronted with poverty. Governance of the Member Council and the Board

of Directors was restructured to better meet the requirements of the food industry for the twenty-first century.

Food Banks Quebec is currently building its capacity to facilitate increased food donations in the province, with the goal of recuperating 20-30% of healthy foods that currently go to waste. On October 12th, Food Banks Quebec launched “Campagne MANGER,” along with its new web 2.0 site. As proud members of Food Banks Canada and a strong multi-sector partnership, food assistance organizations in Quebec envision a bright future, one in which people facing poverty are able to live with dignity, and where things get better every day.

**The findings of this year’s HungerCount survey are a valuable response to the prejudice that exists against those helped by food banks, as they show that no one is immune to low income and hunger.**

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# New Brunswick

# 18,517

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

Prepared by George Piers, Fredericton Community Kitchen



## Highlights

**18,517** individuals were assisted, March 2010

**+4%** change since March 2009

**34%** are children

**13%** report employment income

**9%** receive Employment Insurance

**61%** receive social assistance

**6%** receive disability-related income supports

**66%** of food banks saw an increase

The need for food banks in New Brunswick has increased by 4% over the last year, following a 14% increase between 2008 and 2009. These increases are to a great extent due to people moving back from other provinces, and to the continued shut-down in the forestry industry.

There also appears to be a shift in population from some rural areas to the urban centres. Many people have moved to New Brunswick's cities seeking employment, and are only able to find jobs that pay minimum wage, which makes them candidates for assistance from food banks. Some of the shift has consisted of single people moving to urban areas to access social services, health care, and drug and alcohol treatment programs, which can be few and far between in small towns and rural areas.

Moncton and Fredericton have been hot spots for the construction industry, and demand for labour is high. Thanks to this and other economic development, Moncton has seen a decrease in the need for its food banks. Construction is beginning to expand in St. John as well, which hopefully will take some pressure off food banks in that area.

In New Brunswick, nearly a third of food banks are operated completely by volunteers, and have no paid staff. Another third have only one or two staff members. Food banks are stretched, and are finding it increasingly difficult to meet the need for their services. We know that, in addition to the more than 18,000 people assisted each month by New Brunswick food banks, there are many others who need help but do not seek or receive assistance.<sup>54</sup>

Some of those not receiving the help they need are people working full-time jobs, who find it impossible to access food banks during the day. For example, Linda is a highly motivated woman who works full time as a cleaner, earning minimum wage. She has a young son and daughter, and faces a number of extra costs related to the fact that her son has a disability. Though unable to get to the food bank during the week, she uses the local soup kitchen on the weekends to make her food budget last a little longer.

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Linda's situation is distressing and, unfortunately, not unusual. Though food banks provide a great service to their communities, there is only so much they can do. Food bank use has grown too high in our province, and we need a concerted effort from the federal and provincial governments to reduce it. People like Linda should be able to work full time and not have to resort to food assistance to make ends meet. The same is true of those on income assistance or living on a pension.

During the first nine months of 2010, there were 25 small subsidized apartments made available to single people on income assistance in the Fredericton area, and many more housing units were made available to families throughout the city. There has also been progress in this area in Moncton and St. John. We hope to see this continue under the new Conservative government. While New Brunswick is a "have-not" province, we have done well in helping those less fortunate, and can continue to do so, even in difficult economic times.

**In New Brunswick, nearly a third of food banks are operated completely by volunteers, and have no paid staff. Another third have only one or two staff members. Food banks are stretched, and are finding it increasingly difficult to meet the need for their services.**

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# Nova Scotia

22,573

Submitted by FEED NOVA SCOTIA, Member of Food Banks Canada

Prepared by Dianne Swinemar, Becky Mason, and Julianne Acker-Verney, FEED NOVA SCOTIA



## Highlights

**22,573** individuals were assisted, March 2010

**+11%** change since March 2009

**33%** are children

**12%** report employment income

**8%** receive Employment Insurance

**50%** receive social assistance

**12%** receive disability-related income supports

**68%** of food banks saw an increase

**Results from *HungerCount* 2010 reveal that the majority of Nova Scotia food banks – including FEED NOVA SCOTIA member agencies – met an increased demand for food support in March 2010 compared to March 2009.**

This is not surprising when results are considered within the context of: the increased socio-economic pressures experienced by people living on low and fixed incomes; the anecdotal information provided by front-line food bank workers; the increased demand for assistance reflected in monthly statistics over the past year; and the apparent reluctance of our federal and provincial governments to demonstrate strong leadership on the issues of hunger and poverty.

The Atlantic region as a whole is considered to have fared the economic recession quite well. Nova Scotia is expected to experience economic growth of 1.8% in 2010 – a moderate level of growth that is expected to continue in 2011.<sup>55</sup> Despite this, and despite the gains in global demand for provincially produced commodities such as tires and paper,<sup>56</sup> the recession continues to affect communities in significant ways at every level. The loss of manufacturing jobs, caused by market instability and the impact on trade of a strong Canadian dollar,<sup>57</sup> has caused shifts in community

demographics. Specifically, working age adults are moving their families in search of stable employment – which is proving increasingly difficult to find.<sup>58</sup>

Food bank coordinators throughout the province indicate that people in communities of every size are on the move. The transient population is very evident to food bank workers – those to whom people turn for help when their hopes and expectations for secure and stable employment, a liveable wage, and suitable housing go unmet.

The out-migration of working-age adults is particularly difficult for rural communities. Population figures in Nova Scotia and across the country reveal that the rural population continues to decline in favour of urban communities.<sup>59</sup> Rural food bank coordinators speak of layoffs and shutdowns that contribute to an underlying sense of uncertainty. Families that stay in their communities experience a shrinking economic base and a decline in the communities' overall capacity

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to support services, businesses, and events. At the same time, preliminary findings from research currently being conducted by FEED NOVA SCOTIA indicate rural families can experience an increased need for support.<sup>60</sup>

FEED NOVA SCOTIA appreciates the complexities associated with making a demonstrable change in the lives of people who are impoverished, but action is needed now at both the federal and provincial levels. We look forward to the introduction of progressive policies that will lift people out of hunger and poverty, and we encourage all elected and appointed federal politicians to support a quick passage of Bill C-545, *An Act to Eliminate Poverty in Canada*. In Nova

Scotia, we encourage the Government to expedite the release of the Employment Support and Income Assistance (ESIA) redesign, and to engage the public in discussions to support effective and speedy implementation.

As elsewhere in Canada, the issue of hunger and poverty in our province is persistent and complicated. It is our opinion that successful alleviation will only be achieved through strategic commitment to innovative solutions. We look to government, community, and corporate leaders to step up to the plate with firm resolve to end the anguish poverty causes for too many Nova Scotians.

**Any significant new expense, unexpected illness, or time off to care for a family member can mean the difference between the ability to cover costs and the need for emergency food assistance.**

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# Prince Edward Island

# 3,068

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

Prepared by Mike MacDonald, Upper Room Food Bank



## Highlights

<b>3,068</b>	individuals were assisted, March 2010
<b>+13%</b>	change since March 2009
<b>36%</b>	are children
<b>20%</b>	report employment income
<b>24%</b>	receive Employment Insurance
<b>37%</b>	receive social assistance
<b>6%</b>	receive disability-related income supports
<b>100%</b>	of food banks saw an increase

Prior to 2010, food bank use in Prince Edward Island had remained relatively stable over a number of years, and actually decreased slightly in 2009. This year, however, PEI has experienced a 13% increase in the number of people turning to food banks for help. More than 3,000 people accessed food assistance in March of 2010, and all of the province's food banks reported increased demand.

Almost a quarter of households turning to food banks in PEI list Employment Insurance (EI) as their primary source of income, up 5% compared to last year. At the same time, the number of households reporting employment income remained close to a fifth of the total. Clearly, having a job is not necessarily a guarantee of adequate income.

While provincial Gross Domestic Product actually expanded during 2009,<sup>61</sup> not all Islanders are feeling the benefits of economic growth. Many of the available jobs are seasonal, temporary, or do not offer enough hours to provide the income necessary to make ends meet. For those unable to work, or to find work, social assistance benefits are barely equal to the cost of housing, which forces people to access food banks so they can make it to the end of the month.

The high cost of housing continues to be one of the main reasons that people in PEI turn to food banks. Many are finding high rents, combined with high energy costs, unaffordable – and the problem is not limited to renters. Thirteen percent of households assisted by food banks in the province are homeowners, and this figure rises to 28% in rural areas.

Food banks are having much more trouble meeting the need for their services than in the past. The majority of food banks in PEI took emergency measures to address food shortages in March. The most commonly reported action was to cut back on the amount of food provided to each household, which in PEI stands at three to five days' worth of food in the best of times. Half of food banks also reported

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purchasing more food than usual to keep up with demand.

Food banks in PEI have been assisting more than 2,600 people every month for more than a decade. We, as a province, need to find long-term solutions to this problem. There have been positive developments; for example, the minimum wage was increased to \$9 per hour in 2010. While this

was undoubtedly welcomed by Islanders working low-wage and seasonal jobs, it remains the case that many issues – the high cost of housing and low social assistance benefits, among others – remain to be addressed.

**While provincial Gross Domestic Product actually expanded during 2009, not all Islanders are feeling the benefits of economic growth. Many of the available jobs are seasonal, temporary, or do not offer enough hours to provide the income necessary to make ends meet.**

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# Newfoundland & Labrador

# 30,800

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

Prepared by Eg Walters, Community Food Sharing Association



## Highlights

**30,800** individuals were assisted, March 2010

**+3%** change since March 2009

**37%** are children

**10%** report employment income

**14%** receive Employment Insurance

**71%** receive social assistance

**68%** of food banks saw an increase

For the third year in a row, we have seen an increase in the demand for food bank services throughout Newfoundland & Labrador. While it may be argued that it is only a modest 3% increase, this, combined with previous years' figures, shows a continued upward trend on the demand for food aid.

The economy on the Eastern Avalon peninsula continues to be driven by the oil and gas industry, which is continuing to grow. Recent announcements of approvals by the Canada–Newfoundland Offshore Petroleum Board to permit expansion of the Hibernia Project are being well received by business and municipal leaders. With the province of Newfoundland & Labrador holding a 10% stake, this \$1.7 billion project will create much-needed employment and revenue. Provincial finances and fortunes are tied closely to the fluctuating price per barrel of oil.

The Lower Churchill power project is still being discussed. With a power corridor through Quebec not likely to happen, a subsea cable across the Strait of Belle Isle, through Newfoundland, and down to

the Maritimes seems inevitable. Projects like this and offshore oil will greatly enhance our financial future.

Issues within the fishing industry continue to place a strain on the economy of rural communities that have strong ties to this industry. While some groups are reporting a rebound of fish stocks, the overall science seems to indicate only slow and modest improvement.

In order to keep pace with the increased demand experienced by our provincial food banks, we have had to increase our warehouse capacity. This past year, we expanded our facility by some 25% and added handling equipment, thanks to grants from the Global FoodBanking Network through Food Banks Canada and the help of the local Knights of Columbus.

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Northern and rural food banks continue to struggle to adequately replenish their supplies at a local level. Thanks to Food Banks Canada and the Syngenta Rural FoodShare Initiative, we have been able to provide much-needed food supplies to these food banks. Spring and fall shipments to points in Labrador continue to be made as shipping lanes open up after the winter ice blockade abates.

Relief efforts continue to help with the recent devastation caused by Hurricane Igor. We were able to provide some 35,000 pounds of supplies to our food banks in the most severely affected areas, and we received additional help from Food Banks Canada.

Food banks throughout our province continue their hard work assisting those among us who have been marginalized by society.

**Northern and rural food banks continue to struggle to adequately replenish their supplies at a local level. Thanks to Food Banks Canada and the Syngenta Rural FoodShare Initiative, we have been able to provide much-needed food supplies to these food banks.**

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# Reducing hunger, reducing food bank use

**The persistent need for food banks over the last decade shows that the causes of hunger and low income in Canada run much deeper than the recent economic crisis.**

The current level of food bank use is not simply a latent effect of the 2008-09 recession; it is a long-term problem in Canada stemming from social issues that we are failing to adequately address – issues including a changing job market, a lack of affordable housing and child care, and a social safety net that waits too long to catch those who need help.

We believe that there are solutions to persistent hunger and low income in Canada. Some steps have been taken to identify these solutions and to start to address the problem: the implementation of poverty reduction strategies in six provinces, the creation of the Working Income Tax Benefit, changes to child benefit systems in several jurisdictions. However, more is needed. The status quo is not working. It is time to reevaluate our approach to the problems of hunger and low income, and to work toward real change.



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- 9 Based on surveys from 911 food banks and food programs. Weighted by total number of people assisted by grocery programs.
- 10 Based on surveys from 740 food banks and food programs. Weighted by total number of people assisted by grocery programs.
- 11 Based on surveys from 756 food banks and food programs. Weighted by total number of people assisted by grocery programs.
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- 13 Based on surveys from 913 food banks and food programs. Weighted by total number of people assisted by grocery programs.
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- 15 Based on surveys from 414 food banks and food programs. Weighted by total number of people assisted by grocery programs.
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**TABLE 4**

Measures taken to address food shortages (%)	March 2010, incl. QC	March 2010, not incl. QC	March 2009	March 2008
Closed early/did not open	5.5	5.7	3.3	1.6
Turned people away	11.5	7.3	4.6	2.1
Bought more food than usual	57.0	57.4	54.7	31.8
Cut back hamper size	50.2	41.5	35.6	14.8

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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 that person receives 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 2010.

Surveys were sent to all known Canadian food banks in February 2010. 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 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 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 2009 figures as a guide.

Province/Territory	Known Food Banks	Participating Food Banks	% of Food Banks Participating	Agencies Included
British Columbia	104	88	85%	230
Alberta	103	81	79%	300
Saskatchewan	35	29	83%	174
Manitoba	54	53	98%	250
Ontario	444	395	89%	739
Quebec	767	767	100%	193
New Brunswick	58	56	97%	40
Nova Scotia	152	142	93%	0
Prince Edward Island	6	6	100%	5
Newfoundland & Labrador	28	28	100%	47
Territories	7	4	57%	0
<b>Canada</b>	<b>1,758</b>	<b>1,649</b>	<b>94%</b>	<b>1,978</b>

\* The number of "participating food banks" is higher in 2010 than in previous years, and the number of "agencies included" is lower, due to the fact that a larger number of affiliated agencies provided completed surveys directly to Food Banks Canada in 2010. Whereas in the past many large regional food banks in Quebec and Ontario collated information from their affiliated agencies, this year all such organizations in Quebec, and several in Ontario, collected and provided separate surveys for each agency. This has not led to a greater number of organizations reporting, but to a slightly different reporting format.

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