



BOARD REPORT #COORD-2026-003

FOR INFORMATION or **FOR APPROVAL**

Date: February 25, 2026

Purpose: **Hunger Count 2025 Summary**

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RELATIONSHIP TO STRATEGIC PLAN

Alignment with Strategic Plan 2022-2042: Healthy, Sustainable Communities

Maximize Impact **Remove Barriers** **Seamless Access** **Learn & Grow**

The Food Banks Canada *HungerCount 2025* report provides critical, data-driven insights into the state of food insecurity in Canada, highlighting the strong correlation between poverty, reliance on social assistance, and increased use of food banks. By sharing this report with the Board, DNSSAB supports its strategic priority to learn and grow, ensuring DNSSAB decisions are informed by current evidence and attuned to the systemic factors that shape local need. This understanding also reinforces DNSSAB's commitment to maximize impact by helping to target resources, including funding, staffing, and program supports, where they will drive the most meaningful outcomes for the vulnerable populations it serves.

BACKGROUND

Briefing Note 2024-005, submitted to the Board in June 2024, presented the third report in a poverty series, focusing on food insecurity in the Nipissing District. The report drew on data from Food Banks Canada, a national charitable organization with a mission to maximize collective impact and reduce reliance on food banks. It incorporated findings from Food Banks Canada *HungerCount 2023*, one of the organization's key publications, which recorded over 1.9 million food bank visits in March 2023 alone. The report also highlighted how quickly individuals, regardless of income level, can become food insecure due to factors like precarious employment, inflation, low wages, inadequate social assistance, and unaffordable housing. While Food Banks Canada plays a central role in national food insecurity reporting, not all food banks contribute data, meaning the reported number of users is likely underrepresented and the true extent of food insecurity across communities may be

significantly higher than the data suggests.

Building on the foundation of past HungerCount research, this report highlights the 2025 edition, which examines current food insecurity in Canada. The report reveals that food banks are no longer functioning as emergency supports and have become essential lifelines for many. There has been a surge in demand that reflects a broader affordability crisis, driven by the rising cost of living and insufficient wages and income supports. The current level of sustained need has placed unprecedented strain on food bank systems, which were never designed to operate at this scale.

The following section outlines key findings from *HungerCount 2025*:

Key Highlights

- 1. Record-Breaking Food Bank Usage:** Since 2019, monthly food bank visits in Canada have increased by over 1 million. In March 2025 alone, Canadian food banks recorded nearly 2.2 million visits, the highest monthly total ever documented. This unprecedented surge underscores the growing number of individuals and families who are turning to food banks.
- 2. Food Insecurity is Rising:** Statistics Canada defines food insecurity as inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints and the latest data shows that the problem is escalating. In 2025, a record 10 million Canadians live in food-insecure households, an increase of 4 million from 2019. Even more alarming is that severe food insecurity has doubled, with 2.6 million people regularly forced to skip meals or go entire days without eating.
- 3. Food Insecurity Among the Employed:** Employment is no longer a reliable safeguard against food insecurity in Canada. In 2025, 19.4% of people who accessed a food bank reported employment as their primary source of income, up from 12% in 2019. Food insecurity is an escalating concern among the working poor.
- 4. Housing Affordability and Food Insecurity:** Housing affordability has emerged as a critical factor driving food insecurity in Canada. In 2025, the lowest-income households were spending an average of 66% of their disposable income on shelter, an alarming increase from 49% in 2021. This leaves little room for other essentials such as food, transportation, and utilities. Market rental housing, which is often unaffordable, is the predominant housing type among food bank users, representing 70.4% of clients. Reflecting this trend, 83% of food banks identified affordable housing as the most urgent policy intervention to address hunger, up from 61% in 2019, signaling that access to affordable housing is an important policy solution to reduce hunger.

- 5. Rising Cost of Living:** Canada is in the grip of a deepening cost-of-living crisis, where inflation has outpaced wages and income supports. Since 2021, prices for essential goods and services have soared. Shelter costs are up 26%, food costs have increased by 25%, and transportation costs have risen nearly 20%. These cumulative increases have pushed basic necessities out of reach for many, especially low-income households. In this economic storm, food has become a “crumple zone,” the first expense to cut when budgets are constrained by the rising cost of living.¹ With few options left, growing numbers are turning to food banks just to get by. As inflation continues to erode purchasing power, the affordability gap is widening, leaving more Canadians vulnerable to hunger and hardship.
- 6. Social Assistance Predominant Income Source of Food Bank Users:** Provincial social assistance is the main source of income for a minimum of 40% of food bank clients, yet benefit levels remain far below the poverty line in nearly every province and territory. All household types that rely on these supports face deep financial hardship. As a result, food insecurity among social assistance recipients is nearly four times higher than the general population, with half experiencing severe food insecurity. The rising cost of living, especially for food, housing, and utilities, has not been matched by increases to social assistance, leaving many unable to afford even the most basic necessities.
- 7. Single Adults are the Largest Household Group:** Single-person households continue to be the most common users of food banks in Canada, accounting for 42% of clients in 2025. While this is a slight decline from 48% in 2019, the shift reflects rising need among other household types, particularly families with children, rather than improved circumstances for single individuals. Their over-representation is closely tied to the fact that single adults make up the majority of provincial social assistance cases nationwide and rely on incomes that fall well below the poverty line in most provinces and territories.
- 8. Food Insecurity Impacts on Health:** Food insecurity has far-reaching consequences that extend beyond burdening the charitable sector. The correlation between food insecurity and chronic physical and mental health conditions leads to higher rates of hospital admissions and increased health care costs that are more than double those of food-secure individuals. Health challenges can also diminish economic productivity through increased absenteeism and reduced workplace performance. Moreover, the long-term cognitive impacts of childhood food insecurity can impair cognitive

¹ The HungerCount 2025 report references a study by the Maple Leaf Centre for Food Security that uses the term “crumple zone” to describe how food spending acts as a household buffer during financial strain. Just as a car’s crumple zone absorbs impact in a collision, flexible food expenses absorb economic shocks like job loss, illness, or rising costs, because they are among the few costs families can reduce when fixed expenses like rent cannot be adjusted.

functioning, making it difficult for affected individuals to secure and retain employment, thereby keeping them trapped in a cycle of poverty.

- 9. Indigenous Populations and Food Insecurity:** Indigenous people continue to face disproportionately high rates of food insecurity in Canada. In 2025, 8.8% of food bank users identified as Indigenous, despite representing only about 5% of the population. It is also worth noting that the overall percentage of Indigenous food bank users declined slightly in recent years. This trend is driven by shifting demographics and temporary fluctuations in service access, often linked to the timing of government transfers such as band distributions or federal benefits.
- 10. Food Insecurity and Racialized Groups:** In 2025, nearly half (46.2%) of individuals accessing food banks in Canada identified as members of racialized communities. There has been a steady increase from 45.5% in 2024 and 39.3% in 2023. This upward trend highlights the persistent and disproportionate burden of food insecurity faced by racialized populations, who are more likely to be among the working poor despite being employed.
- 11. Intensifying Strain on Food Banks:** In 2025, funding reductions and limited food supplies forced many food banks to scale back distribution efforts compared with 2021, despite continued support from their networks and communities. Over half (52%) of food banks reported distributing less food than usual and nearly a quarter (23%) ran out of food before meeting demand. These figures mark a significant increase from 2021, when 20% reported distributing less food and 10% experienced complete shortages. It should also be noted that in some cases operational limitations stemmed from insufficient storage space or a shortage of volunteers rather than from a lack of food.
- 12. Marginalized Groups and the Poverty Cycle:** Poverty affects people in different ways, and some groups face far greater challenges than others. Indigenous peoples, new Canadians, racialized Canadians, unhoused individuals, single-parent families, youth, and those who identify as 2SLGBTQIA+ experience higher rates of poverty and are more likely to live in unstable housing. These populations also face more barriers to accessing support and escaping poverty, making their experiences especially complex and urgent.

FINANCIAL AND RISK CONSIDERATIONS

The rising cost of living, particularly for food and shelter, is intensifying food insecurity for both Ontario Works (OW) recipients and the working poor who are struggling to make ends meet. Food insecurity is not only a symptom of economic strain but also a driver of poor health outcomes, contributing to both physical and mental health deterioration. As food banks and soup kitchens grapple with strained resources and increased demand, the reduced availability

of food per client places further pressure on the human service network. These systemic strains may lead to increased demand for OW discretionary benefits and housing stabilization funds through DNSSAB.

OPTIONS AND/OR RECOMMENDATIONS

N/A

NEXT STEPS

Staff will continue to leverage insights from the *HungerCount* report to inform service planning, budget decisions, and poverty reduction strategies that directly address food insecurity and its root causes. In parallel, the DNSSAB will continue to advocate for OW rate increases that align with the actual cost of living, ensuring income supports are adequate to promote food security and household stability.

RESOURCES CITED

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