

FIGHTING HUNGER

**NOT JUST FOR THE
NEXT MEAL, BUT FOR
THE NEXT TEN YEARS.**



Ottawa Food Bank

OTTAWA HUNGER REPORT 2017

LETTER FROM MICHAEL MAIDMENT

The 2017 Ottawa Hunger Report reflects the startling facts behind hunger and food bank use. National and provincial statistics show that more people are obtaining food from food banks in Canada today than were during the recession of 2008.ⁱ

Hunger and food bank use are not about a lack of food in our communities. They are about a lack of income. Recovery from the 2008 recession continues 10 years later, and those most affected are still struggling to regain the financial stability of enough predictable income to cover expenses. For too many people, this means making hard choices between food and other necessities like rent, utilities, or transportation.

We do see small but important signs every day that keep us optimistic. This year we had the lowest number of single-parent families using the Ottawa Food Bank since 2010. In the same period, we also saw the lowest number of people living in social rental housing. Progress is happening.

Much more needs to be done. One of the four main pillars in our 2020 Strategic Plan is “Participate in Advocacy and Systems Change” to address the root causes of hunger. We must work closely with our community partners and member agencies to make the changes needed to improve lives and fight poverty if we hope to make real and lasting progress.

Join us. Together, we can make change happen.



Michael Maidment, Executive Director

ⁱFood Banks Canada Hunger Report 2016

5.6% ↑

**NUMBER OF OTTAWA COMMUNITY
FOOD BANK CLIENTS IN 2017 WAS
5.6% HIGHER THAN IN 2016.**

16 OUT OF OUR 28

**COMMUNITY FOOD BANK
MEMBERS**

SAW AN INCREASE

**IN PEOPLE RECEIVING FOOD
IN 2017 COMPARED TO 2016.**

HUNGER: THE CANARY IN THE COAL MINE

Although Canada's economy is in better shape today than during the recession of 2008, food bank use is up by 28% since 2008 across Canada. In Ontario, the statistics show a somewhat better picture, with food bank use up by just 7% since 2008.

The continuous rise in food bank use even as the economy improves is a clear sign that we have not moved the needle enough on addressing poverty. Like a canary in a coal mine, an increase in food bank use is an early signal that all is not well.

In Ottawa, the number of people turning to community food banks rose by 5.6% in 2017 compared to 2016, reflecting an overall upward trend that represents a very real struggle for too many people. The cost of everything is rising — food, housing, utilities, transportation — but wages and salaries are not keeping up. **Since 2009, the cost of the Nutritious Food Basket for a family of four for one month in Ottawa has risen 18.6% while household incomes in Ontario have risen only 10% on average.**ⁱⁱ

In Ottawa, 33% of people who turn to emergency food services are on social assistance and 28% receive disability benefits. Also, 1 in 10 households who are employed still need food banks or community food programs to make it to the end of the month.

Poverty has no single cause. Its roots are many, including insufficient income sources, the lack of affordable housing, the rise in precarious employment, and increasing utility costs.

ⁱⁱ Statistics Canada. Median Household Income from 2011 to 2015 has risen by 10.9%

HUNGRY FOR CHANGE:

We will only be able to reduce poverty and decrease reliance on food banks if we all work together – social agencies, municipalities, provincial and federal governments, opinion leaders, and ordinary Canadians concerned about the future. The Ottawa Food Bank is working with the national and provincial food bank communities to make the case for action and advocate for government commitments to more affordable housing, guaranteed basic incomes, and promoting secure employment.

NUTRITIOUS FOOD BASKET STATS

(Ottawa Public Health 2017):

- A. For a family of four with one minimum wage earner**
Monthly Income \$3,268
Rent \$1,457
Food Basket \$873

Remainder \$938
- B. For a senior on OAP/ Guaranteed Income Supplement**
Monthly Income \$1,663
Rent \$982
Food Basket \$214

Remainder \$467
- C. For a single adult on Disability**
Monthly Income \$1,226
Rent \$982
Food Basket \$294

Remainder \$-50



THE “GIG” ECONOMY

I’M JUGGLING THREE LOW-PAYING PART-TIME JOBS EVEN THOUGH I HAVE A UNIVERSITY DEGREE. BEING EDUCATED ISN’T ANY GUARANTEE OF A GOOD WELL-PAYING JOB. I’VE BEEN OUT OF SCHOOL FOR SIX YEARS AND WITHOUT EXPERIENCE I CAN’T FIND A FULL-TIME JOB.

My part-time jobs could disappear tomorrow, and that’s always a worry. I share a small apartment with three roommates and the rent eats up most of my pay. Add in repaying student loans, phone, heat, power, and bus pass, I’m broke.

If it weren’t for the food bank, I just don’t know what would happen to me. The street maybe. The food bank keeps me going and takes away some of my worry. Thanks to them, I have hope that someday my life will change for the better.

SINGLE ADULTS AND THE “GIG” ECONOMY

In May 2017, the Ontario government released its report on precarious employment, *The Changing Workplaces Review: An Agenda for Workplace Rights*, in recognition of the challenges imposed by the growth in this sector.

Called the ‘gig’ economy, the steady increase in temporary, part-time, and contract work is particularly affecting young adults and risking a future of job instability and low wages. These young adults also tend to be single and living alone, a reflection of the difficulty of starting a family in the face of insecure incomes.

In Ontario, an immediate outcome of precarious employment can be seen in food bank use: young single adults saw the second highest growth rate in food bank use since 2008. In absolute numbers, they represent the majority of adults turning to food banks.

IN OTTAWA, 50% OF THOSE ACCESSING EMERGENCY FOOD SERVICES ARE SINGLE ADULTS LIVING ALONE.

Compared to previous generations, young adults face a more uncertain future of temporary and part-time employment, which in turn leads to lower and more uncertain incomes. Accompanying low incomes are poorer social determinants of health, increased mental health problems, and more longer-term poverty.

HUNGRY FOR CHANGE:

The Ottawa Food Bank encourages employers to take responsibility, expand the Working Income Tax Benefit, and institute a Guaranteed Basic Income.

CANADIAN EMPLOYMENT IN 2014 (LAST CENSUS)

15.3%

ARE SELF-EMPLOYED

5.3%

ARE EMPLOYED PART-TIME

11.3%

ARE IN TEMPORARY JOBS

58.1%

OF SINGLE CANADIANS LIVING ALONE LIVE BELOW THE POVERTY LINE.



AFFORDABLE HOUSING

I'VE BEEN ON THE WAITING LIST FOR SOCIAL HOUSING FOR YEARS. I'VE TRIED TO FIND AN AFFORDABLE APARTMENT, BUT THEY'RE TOO FAR AWAY FROM THE BUS, THEY DON'T ALLOW PETS, OR THEY'RE FALLING APART.

All our lives my wife and I worked hard, raised four kids and kept food on the table. But that meant not saving much. Now my wife has died, my kids are struggling themselves, and I'm 73 trying to make it on CPP and old age pensions. So, my choice is food or high rent. Not both.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Housing is the single biggest expense for Canadians. In Ottawa, the Canadian Rental Housing Index showed that almost 40% of people in Ottawa are spending more than 30% of their gross income on rent and utilities.ⁱⁱⁱ Almost 20% are spending more than 50%. This leaves far less money available for food, the next biggest expense. The provincial average is 22%.^{iv}

For most people who turn to food banks, the biggest problem is access to decent affordable housing. In Ottawa and across Ontario, there is a compound problem: fewer rental units being built and skyrocketing rent rates. In Ottawa, the average cost of a one-bedroom apartment is \$982, the highest in Ontario after the Greater Toronto Area.^v

The result is that over 10,000 families in Ottawa are on the waiting list for 22,500 social housing units. Average time spent on the list is five years. Approximately 1,500 to 1,800 families are placed in housing each year, and for families still on the waiting list, the reality is high rents or substandard housing or, at worst, homelessness.

**20% OF CANADIANS
SPEND MORE THAN
50% OF THEIR GROSS
INCOME IN RENT.**

HUNGRY FOR CHANGE:

There is progress. The federal government just recently announced the \$4 billion Canada Housing Benefit. In Ottawa, the city's *Ten-Year Housing and Homelessness Plan (2014-2024)* has set targets to increase access to affordable housing by 2024. The Ottawa Food Banks and its members are advocating and sharing information with governments at all levels to help put affordable housing at the top of poverty reduction strategies.

**22,5000
SOCIAL HOUSING UNITS
IN OTTAWA.**

**10,000+
FAMILIES ON THE WAITING LIST
FOR THOSE UNITS.**

**5 YEARS
AVERAGE WAIT TIME FOR
SOCIAL HOUSING.**

ⁱⁱⁱ www.endhomelessnessottawa.ca Alliance to End Homelessness

^{iv} OAFB 2017 Hunger Count

^v OAFB 2017 Hunger Count

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a grey and navy blue long-sleeved shirt, is holding a large white plate in front of her. The plate is empty and takes up a significant portion of the lower half of the image. The background is a plain, light grey.

THE FACE OF HUNGER

I'VE BEEN POOR FOR AS LONG AS I CAN REMEMBER. WHEN I WAS YOUNG I WENT WITH MY MOTHER TO THE FOOD BANK, AND NOW I'M GOING WITH MY KIDS. I'M AFRAID THAT THIS WILL BE THEIR FUTURE TOO.

Social assistance just doesn't cover our bills, but it's still more than working for minimum wage. Paying for childcare after school would leave nothing. There certainly won't be money to send them to college.

Every month is a fight to make it to the end, and the food bank is always there for us. I struggle to help my kids understand that they can make a better life for themselves. Without the food bank's help, I don't think my children could see a different future for themselves.

KNOWING THE FACE OF HUNGER

In Ottawa, as in most communities, poverty and hunger can be difficult to see and even harder to solve. To be both effective providers of emergency food and advocates for change, we need to have a better understanding of the people for whom we provide.

The Ottawa Food Bank, along with others across Canada, has invested in Link2Feed, a data collection and analysis program that enables us to track important demographic information about the people who access food banks and other community food programs.

This is our second full year using Link2Feed. Early information is proving how widespread hunger really is, an even more chilling realization considering hunger's role as a symptom of poverty. While we continue to fine-tune data collection methods, we are encouraged by Link2Feed's ability to help the Ottawa Food Bank increase the impact of the work our members and partners do.



35%

ARE CHILDREN UNDER 18

35%

ARE FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN

31%

ARE LIVE IN SOCIAL HOUSING

CALLING FOR CHANGE

It takes us all to reduce hunger and poverty, and we urge our political and policy leaders to accelerate the implementation of important initiatives such as the Guaranteed Basic Income, Working Tax Benefits and the Canada Housing Benefit.

As individuals, each of us can help in four important ways:

1. **Donate money.** With your donation of money, we can get more food for every dollar and buy fresh food that simply can't be collected through food donations.
2. **Donate food.** If you donate food, please choose food that is healthy, will keep well and has not expired.
3. **Spread the word.** Tell your friends and family why you support the Ottawa Food Bank and why it's important.
4. **Contact your MP, MPP, Mayor or your City Councillor.** Tell them why a workable plan to reduce poverty is important. Every voice counts.

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