

FOOD BANKS DO MORE AS GOVERNMENTS DO LESS



Ottawa Food Bank

Ottawa Hunger Report 2018

LETTER FROM MICHAEL MAIDMENT

My regular nightmare is the growing use of emergency food banks in Ottawa and across Canada. It wakes me and fills me with worry for the future.

Food banks were created in the early 1980s as a temporary solution until governments could improve supports to people affected by a severe downturn in the economy. Now, almost 40 years later, food banks have become a permanent part of our communities, supporting people trying to survive in Canada's inadequate social safety net.

Governments, although unlikely to acknowledge it, are not doing enough to prevent and alleviate poverty, instead leaving communities like Ottawa to turn to charities to fill the gap. Over the past decade, the cost of living has increased dramatically while the incomes of the poorest among us have not kept pace.

Affordable housing, one of the most important factors in reducing poverty and reliance on food banks, is not being built fast enough. In Ottawa, more than 10,000 families are waiting for a limited amount of affordable housing, sometimes as long as 5 years.

Ontario's Basic Income Pilot, one of the most significant projects to address poverty in a generation, was cancelled in 2018 before the pilot was complete and the benefits clear. Promised increases to Ontario social assistance programs to help address the rising cost of living were chopped in half, putting more pressure on organizations like the Ottawa Food Bank to step in.

The Ottawa Food Bank's *Hunger Report 2018* calls on all levels of government to take action on poverty, eliminate food insecurity, and to take on the responsibility of protecting our community's most vulnerable. We cannot and should not rely on charity to do the government's work.

We're looking beyond hunger to consider the long-term need to create food security. By investing more time on advocacy and creating better outcomes for the people we help, the Ottawa Food Bank is working with our partners to ensure that all people always have access to enough affordable nutritious food – true food security.

If my nightmare is more food banks and more poverty, my daydream is to come to a silent office one morning. No ringing phones. No volunteers sorting canned goods. No trucks in the loading bay. No demand for our services. Nothing left for my team to do. I gather them together and say "we're out of work, out of a job!" And it's the happiest day of our lives.



MICHAEL MAIDMENT,
Chief Executive Officer

NUTRITIOUS FOOD BASKET 2018

(Ottawa Public Health 2018)

For a family of four with one minimum wage earner

MONTHLY INCOME	\$3,603
RENT	\$1,568
FOOD BASKET	\$868
REMAINDER*	\$1,167

For a senior on Old Age Security / Guaranteed Income Supplement

MONTHLY INCOME	\$1,694
RENT	\$1,023
FOOD BASKET	\$176
REMAINDER*	\$495

For a single adult on Disability Support Program

MONTHLY INCOME	\$1,251
RENT	\$1,023
FOOD BASKET	\$244
REMAINDER*	\$-16

Monthly Income includes additional benefits and credits.
*Remainder must cover ALL other expenses.



HAVING FOOD MEANS WE CAN FOCUS ON OTHER THINGS.

My husband and I are retired and came to Ottawa from our First Nations community to be nearer family. We don't have much. I get disability and my husband has his old age pension. By the time we pay our rent, utilities, phone – well, there's just not enough left for food by the end of the month.

We come to Tungasuvvingat Inuit every chance we can. The fresh fruit and vegetables are making us healthier. I'm even off my high blood pressure meds. But we also come for the community, for the family feeling here. The staff are always smiling and even the clients give us a big hug and give up their chairs to us old people. Everybody's laughing.

Knowing that we can get food means we can focus on other things. When you're hungry it's hard to concentrate on finding an affordable place to live or getting a doctor. Not having decent food to eat takes your mind off all the other things you need to do to make it and survive.

– Client at **Tungasuvvingat Inuit**,
an Ottawa Food Bank member agency.

FOOD BANKS: NOT JUST FOR EMERGENCIES ANYMORE

37,524

**NUMBER OF CLIENTS SERVED
EACH MONTH IN 2018**

2.4%

**INCREASE IN NUMBER OF MEALS SERVED
FROM 2017 TO 2018**

34%

**PERCENTAGE OF FOOD BANK CLIENTS
THAT VISIT AT LEAST ONCE EVERY MONTH**

**“People need more than what
they’re getting. There’s just
not enough to go around.”**

— Client at **Caldwell Family Centre**,
an Ottawa Food Bank member agency.

While the concept of emergency food is rooted in the soup kitchens of the 1930s Great Depression, it was not until 1981 that the first food bank opened in Canada. For the next 27 years, the number of food banks in Canada grew steadily until 2008. In that year, the number of food banks and clients exploded as the 2008 recession struck the economy, forcing people into poverty as they lost money, jobs, and homes.

More telling is the fact that the number of food banks and clients accessing them have increased by almost 30% since 2008. This post-recession growth signals a major shift in the role food banks play in our social safety net, a shift from emergency provider to a steady food source.

34% of food bank clients required assistance at least once every month, a further sign that food banks are becoming part of everyday survival strategies.

Food bank numbers only reveal part of poverty’s extent. In Ottawa, 53,600 people are food insecure but only 37,524 access a food bank in any given month. Far too many people are not able to go to a food bank when they need food because of available resources, transportation problems, and even shame.

Designed and equipped to meet the need for emergency food, food banks are being forced to become long-term food providers while governments continue to stall on delivering real and long-term solutions to poverty. This growing reliance on food banks puts enormous pressure on food programs to address a new reality. No longer for emergencies, food banks are seen as a permanent and reliable part of the monthly food plan for so many.



OUR PAY JUST DOESN'T STRETCH FAR ENOUGH.

We left Gaza and came to Canada to have a safer life for our children. At home I was a lawyer, but I've had to take a part-time job at a coffee shop because I can't practice law here yet. I'm working on my Canadian degree now, and my wife works too.

We have three children and our youngest is four months old. Everything we do, we do for them. That includes going to the food bank. We need help for them – diapers, milk, vegetables. We take only what we need, and leave food for other people who might need it more.

Our pay just doesn't stretch far enough. It's hard for us. Electricity bills, water bills, rent, phone bills – sometimes we just can't manage it all. So, we come to Pinecrest Terrace Food Bank for help.

Standing on our own feet and paying our own way is important to us. We're working very hard to build a future for ourselves and for our children. Here it's a new life for us.

– Client at the **Pinecrest Terrace Family House**,
an Ottawa Food Bank member agency.

WE MUST STOP ACCEPTING FOOD BANKS AS THE ANSWER

36%

PERCENTAGE OF FOOD BANK CLIENTS THAT ARE CHILDREN

5%

PERCENTAGE OF FOOD BANK CLIENTS WHO ARE BABIES

1 in 7

NUMBER OF CANADIANS LIVING BELOW THE POVERTY LINE

(Canada Without Poverty 2018)

1 in 5

NUMBER OF CANADIAN CHILDREN LIVING BELOW THE POVERTY LINE

(Canada Without Poverty 2018)

\$2,300—\$2,895

COST OF POVERTY TO EVERY HOUSEHOLD IN ONTARIO AS A RESULT OF HEALTH CARE AND JUSTICE COSTS AS WELL AS LOST TAX REVENUE.

(Ontario Association of Food Banks via Income Security Advocacy Centre)

The shock value of seeing food banks in our communities has disappeared.

In the same way that the sight of people sleeping on sidewalks has made homelessness an accepted part of the urban landscape, nearly 40 years of food banks in our communities have made too many Canadians believe that charity is the acceptable way to address poverty.

We should be angry that food banks are the norm.

It is unacceptable that in a country like Canada people still need help with food and other basic items. Food banks are filling a need that governments should be eliminating through guaranteed income programs and poverty reduction initiatives.

Food banks must do more because government is not doing enough.

In 2018, Ontario's new government quickly signalled their intentions by cancelling the Guaranteed Basic Income initiative. This was bad news in the fight to give dignity and security to the many living on society's financial edges. With no effective poverty strategy in sight and cuts to social assistance increases in Ontario, more people are turning to food banks more often.

Normalizing food banks in turn leads to normalizing poverty.

If we have a national shame, it is that we view access to nutritious food as an act of charity rather than a basic human right. Governments are using food banks to fill the basic needs of people who are poor. If we continue to view food banks as the solution, we risk the danger of allowing governments to turn away from their responsibility.



WE'RE ALL ONE CRISIS AWAY FROM A FOOD BANK.

I've been coming to Britannia Woods Food Bank for the past four years and they have really helped me. I don't know where my life would be now if I didn't have the peace of mind knowing that I can have enough to eat.

My life has had its problems. Depression and an abusive father got me to the point where I just couldn't function. I ended up in a women's shelter, lost my job, quit school, and just stayed in bed. A really bad time.

It was the food bank and the people here that helped put me back on track. Because of them I have a bit more money to maybe see friends or go out once in a while, and that's helped my depression. I finished my degree two years ago and feel like I've got my independence and dignity back. I'm just way more stable, not bouncing around in a survival panic.

The people here are wonderful, and they never judge. The whole atmosphere is kind, friendly, accepting. They know that we're all one crisis away from a food bank.

— Client at the **Britannia Woods Food Bank**,
an Ottawa Food Bank member agency.

MAKING FOOD SECURITY A CITY OF OTTAWA PRIORITY

55,000

**NUMBER OF HOUSEHOLDS IN
OTTAWA CONSIDERED LOW-INCOME**

(Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa 2018)

2nd

**OTTAWA HAS THE SECOND HIGHEST
COST OF LIVING IN ONTARIO**

(Mercer 2018)

33%

**PERCENTAGE INCREASE IN
THE NUMBER OF HOMELESS
FAMILIES IN OTTAWA ACCESSING
SHELTERS FROM 2014 TO 2017**

(Alliance to End Homelessness Ottawa 2018)

\$1,430.50

**AVERAGE MONTHLY COST OF
A LICENSED CHILD CARE SPACE
FOR A CHILD 0 TO 2.5 YEARS OLD
IN OTTAWA**

(*People Living in Poverty: Equity & Inclusion Lens Snapshot*,
City of Ottawa, 2017)

Eliminating food insecurity needs to start at the city level. We know that if every city made food security a strategic priority, then we would see change start to happen across the province, one city at a time.

In our own city, our Chief Executive Officer, Michael Maidment, is advocating with the City of Ottawa to make food security an explicit strategic priority in the City's upcoming *Strategic Plan*. Ottawa Public Health and Ottawa Community and Social Services are working with us to make the case with the Mayor and Ottawa's Head of Policy.

We strongly believe that food security must be a specific and explicit strategic focus for the City's *Strategic Plan*. Without that focus, City departments such as Ottawa Public Health and others will not have a mandate to work with the Ottawa Food Bank to do what is needed. We will continue to work with the City and our partners to ensure that poverty and food insecurity are on Ottawa's strategic agenda.

You can help by telling your councillor that it is time for the City of Ottawa to make food insecurity a specific priority and part of the City's new *Strategic Plan*. Only then will there be the will and resources to change the face of poverty in Ottawa.

“When I was young, we used to be very tight for money. We’re still in the same neighbourhood, and every day reminds me that other people are still tight for money too.”

— Volunteer at **Heron Emergency Food Centre**,
an Ottawa Food Bank member agency.

COMMUNITY FOOD PROGRAMS: GIVING MORE THAN FOOD

The Ottawa Food Bank supports diverse programs delivered by 114 local agencies that make up the Ottawa Food Bank Member Agency Network. Of these agencies:

10%

**PROVIDE EMERGENCY HOUSING
AND SHELTER**

33%

PROVIDE MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

13%

PROVIDE CHILD CARE

29%

PROVIDE A COMMUNITY KITCHEN

27%

**PROVIDE HELP WITH BUDGETING
AND FINANCIAL LITERACY**

59%

**PROVIDE COMMUNITY SERVICE
INFORMATION AND REFERRALS**

As Ottawa's food banks are being asked to step up and do more, our member agencies are responding with programs and services that aid clients in many different ways beyond providing food.

As the heart of communities in need, our member agencies are in a perfect position to connect clients with supports such as affordable daycare, budgeting advice, mental health services, and community kitchens. We are very proud of our member agencies and their incredible response to the pressure to be more and do more for the many clients who have come to rely on the Ottawa Food Bank network.

"We have the clothing depot here as well so it's easier to find clothes for my kids. I can get pants for a dollar or two. When they outgrow them, I don't feel so bad."

— Client at **Caldwell Family Centre**,
an Ottawa Food Bank member agency.

BE VOCAL.

Changing the future for those living with food insecurity and poverty will take the voices of all us. Here is what you can do to help:

Urge governments to:

- Build more affordable housing
- Develop specific strategies for food security
- Increase social assistance programs by using the Market Basket Measure to align benefits to the cost of living in each community.

Contact your City Councillor. Tell them why addressing food insecurity and poverty must be a specific strategic priority of the City of Ottawa.

Get involved. Volunteer with the Ottawa Food Bank to help us provide food to people in need while we work towards creating systemic change.

Spread the word. Tell your friends and family why you support the Ottawa Food Bank and why it is so important.

Contact your MP and MPP. Tell them why a workable plan to reduce poverty is important. Every voice counts.

Please give money generously. As we advocate for change, the hungry keep coming. Dollar for dollar, we can get more and better food from money donations than we can from food donations.



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