



Ottawa Food Bank

# BECOMING A CITY FOR EVERYONE

*Because a city without hunger benefits us all*

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OTTAWA HUNGER REPORT 2019



# 75

A minimum wage worker in Ottawa would have to work 75 hours a week to afford a two-bedroom apartment.

# 33%

From 2014–2017, there were 33% more Ottawa families staying in homeless shelters.

# 37%

of clients who visit an Ottawa Food Bank member agency are children under the age of 18.

# OUR STORY

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**In response to a bust in the oil industry and the mass unemployment that followed, Edmonton opened the first Canadian food bank in 1981. What was originally created to meet a temporary, emergency need for food spread across the country and continues to feed hundreds of thousands of people each year. In Ottawa alone, more than 39,000 people visit an emergency food bank program every month.**

For many, the costs of basic needs are high and difficult choices have to be made. Which bills get paid and which do not? Childcare? Rent? Groceries? A minimum wage worker in Ottawa would have to work 75 hours a week to afford a two-bedroom apartment. From 2014 – 2017, there were 33% more Ottawa families staying in homeless shelters. In response to accompanying food insecurity, the Ottawa Food Bank network tries to fill the gaps. Member agencies distribute nearly 2.5 million pounds of fresh food and more than three million pounds of non-perishable goods each year.

As the only front-line response to hunger in Ottawa, the Ottawa Food Bank and their member agencies have become more innovative. The addition of community kitchens and a large scale farm brings a sense of community and dignity and ensure that food is nutritious and fresh. In the summer of 2018, our Community Harvest Farm grew 136,135 pounds of fresh fruit and vegetables. Our ability to provide high quality food can have a big impact on health. This benefits our clients both physically and economically, which can scale up to broader social and economic benefits – for everyone.

We know there are many reasons why people visit a food bank. We are committed to a “good food first” philosophy with an increased focus on supporting wrap around services that connect clients to resources that address the root cause of food insecurity – namely, low income.

Many of our member agency food programs are connected to community health centers and resources like language training and mental health supports. Community kitchens provide a social connection – an important function in an increasingly isolated population. Isolation is especially high among Canadian seniors and is becoming more common with youth.

For many, food banks and community food programs are valuable community assets that fill a crucial need. But while innovation in food banks can make great strides to decrease poor health outcomes and isolation, food insecurity still needs to be addressed systematically. The Ottawa Food Bank is committed to working with governments at all levels to ensure policy changes are made that lift Ottawa families out of poverty long term and protect our communities from hunger. 🍷



## A NEIGHBOUR'S STORY

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I got laid off four years ago from the federal government. It was a very disappointing and depressing time. I remember one week I found it difficult to buy food. Fortunately, I met a friend who was nice enough to tell me about the food bank.

I have applied and applied and applied for positions. I've applied for probably over four hundred positions over the last four years, and I've received just one callback in all that time. Now, it could be because I'm overqualified. With two master's degrees, all of it in science and business, most people don't want to look at me. But it's difficult to survive. Food can be so expensive.

“Beyond the food itself, there's such a friendly atmosphere at the food bank. You get to keep your dignity.”

Everything the food bank offers is so helpful. Everything they provide is appreciated. The canned stew and sauces are great. They also provide fresh fruits and vegetables.

Beyond the food itself, there's such a friendly atmosphere. You get to keep your dignity. At my community food program, there's even a place where you can come in and sit down for coffee and a chat. I don't chat with a lot of people, but I like having that place to go where I can sit down and listen to people talk and listen about all the news that they're talking about and things like that, because I don't have a lot of that at home. That, for me, is kind of like a day out. It really is a fantastic community of support. 🍷

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

# MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

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**The Ottawa Food Bank opened in 1984 in response to the growing crisis of hunger following a market crash and record unemployment. Thirty-five years later, more than 39,000 people go to the Ottawa Food Bank every month to meet one of life's most basic needs: food. While food is our core mission, we have a vision of doing more to put an end to hunger in our city.**

There is dignity in choosing where and when to buy food that is right for you and your family. When social supports cannot ensure that every pantry in Ottawa is full, food banks step up to fill the gaps. Each year, we provide over two million pounds of fresh food and three million pounds of non-perishable goods, baby items, and other household goods. When people have consistent access to nutritious food, not only do they benefit individually, we benefit collectively with lower healthcare costs and better mental health outcomes.

As front-line responders to hunger in our city, the Ottawa Food Bank looks to poverty as the root cause of food insecurity and asks: What has to be done so that every citizen can stock their pantry and fill their fridge?

Ensuring every Ottawa family has sufficient income and support is key. Currently, provincial income supports leave recipients at a deficit when trying to cover their basic needs. The provincial government is committed to investing in affordable housing and job creation, but it also prioritizes reducing Ontario's deficit by cutting back on social spending. While it has committed to increase income supports in line with inflation, it will also increase clawbacks. Perpetuating poverty is expensive:

in 2019, poverty was conservatively estimated to cost the province of Ontario \$33 billion. So why is social spending so often first on the chopping block? Creating a balanced budget is part of any government's job, but disinvesting in those in need is ineffective – and can even work against this goal.

To develop a thoughtful and comprehensive approach to eliminating hunger in Ottawa, the Ottawa Food Bank is calling for a Municipal Poverty Reduction Strategy, to determine what actions we can take to coordinate and concentrate the efforts of local non-profit organizations working hard to reduce poverty. In order to make that long-term change, we need your continued support. At the Ottawa Food Bank, we know that eliminating hunger is possible and that doing so benefits us all.

With your help, we can become a city for everyone. 🍷

Sincerely,



**Michael Maidment, CEO**

## A HUNGRY CITY

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# Poverty leads to food insecurity.

The most vulnerable to poverty include people with disabilities, newcomers to Canada, female lone parents, unattached individuals 45-65, and indigenous people living off reserve, who are more likely to face additional barriers to earning income, have fewer opportunities for advancement, and experience systemic prejudices. 🍴

# 60%

of our clients state social assistance as their primary source of income

# 47%

are single

# 52%

of our clients are women

# 33%

live in social rental housing

# 37%

are children under 18





**“ The kids need the food more because they are still growing. I tell myself, ok, I don’t eat for today, the kids eat. The kids come first. ”**

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

**Food bank use continues to be well above pre-2008 recession levels. The majority of our clients receive financial assistance such as Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program – a staggering 60%. Every month, their expenses outweigh the support they get and they turn to us and their community food programs to fill the gap.**

**The percentage of clients with children is almost twice as high as the child poverty rate in Ottawa: people who struggle to put food on the table seek our help when their children are hungry.**

**Let’s make Ottawa a city where hunger doesn’t have to be a regular emergency.**



**147,430**

people in Ottawa experience poverty

**37,130**

are children.

**Poverty rates among families with kids are at an 8-year low. The same trends are not observed among couples without children and single people, and depth of poverty is on the rise.**



# BECOMING A THRIVING CITY

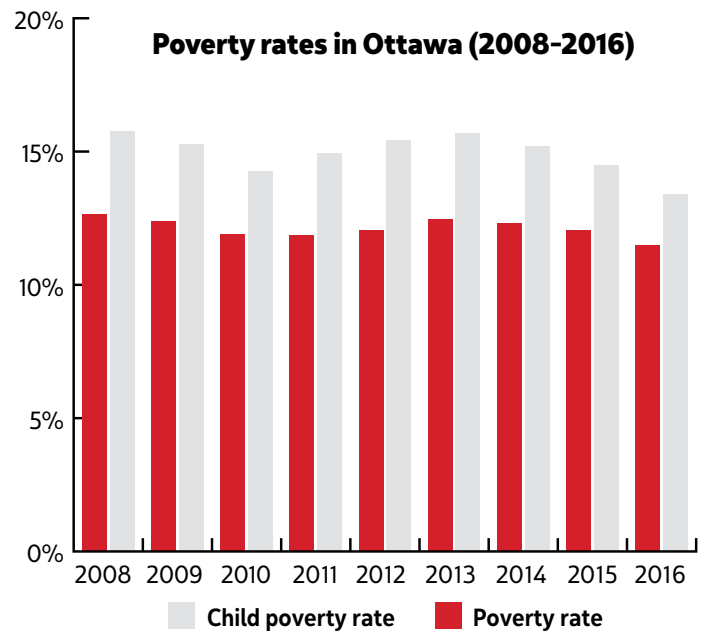
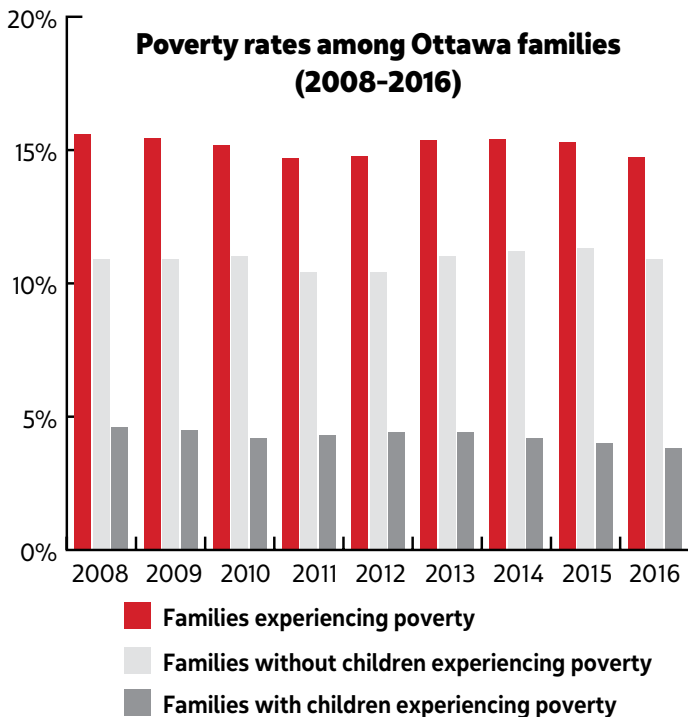
Families with kids are faring better in Ottawa since the Canada Child Benefit was introduced, with poverty rates at an 8-year low. For single parents, the decrease is so significant that despite a growing population, the number of families experiencing poverty has decreased.

But the same trends are not observed for couples without children and single people. Poverty among single people is particularly high compared with the provincial average, and people living alone account for nearly half of the Ottawa Food Bank network's clients.

# 65%

of people living in poverty in Ottawa are unattached individuals (57% in Ontario)

While overall poverty rates are decreasing, the incomes of those remaining in poverty have also decreased from 2008 to 2016 – even before accounting for inflation. 🍷



# AN EXCLUSIVE CITY

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One of the most expensive cities for housing in Canada – placing 5<sup>th</sup> in the country – Ottawa is largely unaffordable: not a single community in Ottawa offers affordable rental units for workers making a minimum wage.

Housing is not the only factor that shapes affordable lifestyles. Proximity to work and amenities can affect the amount of time and money that households spend on daily needs. Major Canadian cities are seeing poverty move to the suburbs, placing people with fewer resources further away from where they need to go. To make cities more affordable, we need to think about more than just providing affordable housing – we need to prioritize affordable places with accessible food, transportation options, childcare, and services. 🍷

**Current ODSP and OW support payments leave recipients at a deficit when compared with expenses.**

## NUTRITIOUS FOOD BASKET 2018

**For a family of four with one minimum wage earner:**

Monthly Income:	\$3,603
Rent:	\$1,568
Food Basket:	\$868
<b>Remainder*:</b>	<b>\$1,167</b>

**For a senior on Old Age Security/ Guaranteed Income Supplement:**

Monthly Income:	\$1,694
Rent:	\$1,023
Food Basket:	\$176
<b>Remainder:</b>	<b>\$495</b>

**For single adult on Ontario Disability Support Program:**

Monthly Income:	\$1,251
Rent:	\$1,023
Food Basket:	\$244
<b>Remainder:</b>	<b>\$-16</b>

Monthly Income includes additional benefits and credits.

\*Remainder must cover ALL other expenses.

# BECOMING A HEALTHY CITY

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Good mental and physical health is difficult to maintain without consistent access to nutritious food. Households who struggle to put food on the table have worse health, a harder time managing existing chronic health conditions, and often go without necessary medication because of the cost. Children who grow up severely food insecure are more likely to develop mental health conditions later in life. Because of these health outcomes, severely food insecure households have health care costs more than double that of food secure homes. 🍷

“**I’m a lot healthier. I’m off my blood pressure medication. This happened by eating [well] and learning to cook. I worked with a dietician.**”

*Client from Tungasuvvingat Inuit, an Ottawa Food Bank member agency*

Number of clients served each month:

**39,078**

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Number of agencies we worked with across the city in 2019:

**112**

**29** of our member agencies have a community kitchen

**20** of our member agencies have a community garden

**25** of our member agencies offer budgeting and financial literacy assistance

**33** of our member agencies have cooking programs specifically for children and youth

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## FROM OUR WAREHOUSE, WE DELIVERED:

**2.5 million**  
pounds of fresh food

**3 million**  
More than 3 million pounds of canned goods, baby food, and household items each year

**136,135 lbs**  
In the summer of 2018, our eight acre Community Harvest Farm grew 136,135 pounds of fresh fruit and vegetables

# BECOMING A COST-EFFECTIVE CITY

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Long-term poverty costs. It costs the health care and justice system, and results in lost tax revenue. Evaluations across Canada show that when we invest in poverty reduction we save money. On-the-ground experiments confirm it. A study in the US showed that savings in social spending were higher than the cost of raising a community out of poverty. Why? Fewer repeated grades, fewer hospitalizations, and less use of the justice system. Other studies show these benefits - along with better educational achievement, job prospects, and wages - resonating across generations.

Wanting to balance a budget is a key consideration for any government, but not investing in our most vulnerable is simply not effective. Perpetuating poverty is expensive. Lifting families out of poverty not only reduces costs, it keeps dollars flowing through the economy and contributes to our GDP. 🍷

## 33 billion

Cost of Poverty in Ontario (2019):

“ I just moved here. We’re trying to get on our feet. At some point I want to be in a place where I can give to a food bank. Myself and my husband, it’s top on our priority list. ”

*Client from Britannia Woods Food Centre, an Ottawa Food Bank member agency*

Initiatives that reduced poverty in communities in the United States and Canada reveal outcomes such as:

# 8.5%

reduction in city-wide hospitalizations, over four years

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# 22%

reduction in likelihood of having a criminal record by age 16, over ten years

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Reductions in domestic violence

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Improved health and economic outcomes for the next generation

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# 30%

increase in high school graduation rates

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more enrollment in training and education, leading to more and better paid employment, with lasting economic impacts

# BECOMING A COMMITTED CITY

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## Reducing poverty is possible, and it benefits us all.

Provinces have the power to make the biggest contributions to reducing poverty through income supports and setting the minimum wage. Cities have limited impact on income, but can reduce expenses, like lowering the cost of transit and offering free or discounted recreation programs. They can invest in literacy by contributing to local libraries and early child development programs – which decreases affects children’s likelihood of experiencing poverty as adults. Cities also have substantial power as advocates to provincial governments, representing hundreds of thousands of citizens – who vote.

The best poverty reduction strategies don’t just solve one problem – they add value. Low-income transit passes help those with low incomes *and* encourage transit usage, which responds to the challenges of climate change, sedentary lifestyles, and traffic congestion. Pairing affordable housing strategies with transit-oriented development has a similar effect: greater access to amenities and a decrease in the cost of living for those who need it most, as well as more climate-friendly city design and less traffic congestion. Investing in libraries and literacy programs provides affordable enrichment opportunities, valuable public spaces, and educational opportunities for all. 🍌

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## WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY:

Federal, provincial, and municipal governments create strategies, policies, and programs

The private sector can support key programs and adopt exemplary employee practices

The public can support programs with their time and money, while advocating for policy that reduces poverty

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**We are calling for a Municipal Poverty Reduction Strategy in Ottawa – because investing in our most vulnerable benefits us all.**

# BECOMING A CITY FOR EVERYONE

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**Where to start? The best strategies bring experts and community leaders together to develop a locally-made approach. But we don't have to start from scratch!**

A great municipal strategy builds on its local wealth of knowledge. It leverages its jurisdiction, capacity, partnerships, and influence. It targets multiple co-benefits – because the best strategies add value for *everyone*.

Targeted areas of municipal jurisdiction include:

- Affordable Housing: Stock, quality, and location
- Literacy: Investments in libraries and early childhood development
- Recreation: Making affordable recreation available
- Transportation Infrastructure: Investments in transit and active transportation, including transit-oriented development (TOD)

Key opportunities as an advocate to provincial and federal governments include:

- **Convene a coalition of cities** advocating for food security and poverty reduction
- **Develop an effective affordable housing strategy** in collaboration with other cities, benefiting those in need while making regulatory frameworks predictable for future development
- **Address the suburbanization of poverty** across Canada
- **Celebrate and build on successes**, such as the Ontario and Canada Child Benefit
- **Ensure adequate income supports** to address growing inequality and depth of poverty in Ontario, including for those without children
- **Maintain the current definition of disability** so that people facing barriers to adequate income do not fall further behind 🍷



**Because investing in our most vulnerable benefits us all.**

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# BE VOCAL.

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

**Please give generously.** As we advocate for change, people are still in need. Dollar for dollar, we can get more and better food from monetary donations than we can from food donations.

**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.

**Support a Municipal Poverty Reduction Strategy.**

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