

# OTTAWA AT A CROSSROADS

THE PATH TO PROSPERITY

FOR A CITY UNDER STRAIN



Ottawa Food Bank

**OTTAWA HUNGER  
REPORT 2022**

# OTTAWA IS A CITY AT A CROSSROADS

Ottawa is a city at a crossroads. Its community members are struggling, with trends that raise alarm bells. Left unchecked, the costs - economic, mental, emotional and physical - will be substantial. While the late 2010s saw trends going in the right direction - less poverty among children and families - new factors are at play: a pandemic, recession, housing bubble, inflation. The gap between income and cost of living continues to grow, and visits to our network of food banks are unprecedented. Local leaders should take note.

In this context, our network of food banks and programs are *essential* community assets. By providing quality, healthy, culturally appropriate food, we have a big impact on health and wellbeing. But these services are a stop-gap. Perpetuating poverty comes at an ever-increasing social and economic cost. Preventing poverty improves well-being for *all* citizens - and is better for the economy. While emergency access to nutritious food is essential, the best way to end food insecurity is to ensure community members have money in their pockets and a roof over their heads.

**While strategies to reduce poverty were proving effective, the past two years brought new challenges.**

## POSITIVE INDICATORS

↓ Poverty rates from 2015- 2020

↑ Investments in affordable housing

## NEGATIVE INDICATORS

↑ Food bank visits

↑ Need for social services

↑ Affordable housing need

↑ Mental health challenges

↑ Cost of housing

x End of emergency COVID-19 supports

↑ Cost of food and other basics

# EVERYONE AT THE TABLE



In 2022, the Ottawa Food Bank reported a record high of 400,000 visits to its member agencies—the highest number in the organization's 38-year history.

The Ottawa Food Bank distributes over three million pounds of fresh food and six million pounds of non-perishable goods, baby and household items, each year. When everyone has access to nutritious food, we all benefit.

We've learned a lot about ourselves and each other since 2019, the year of our last Hunger Report. As an organization, we have grown so much—not just in size, but also in our ability to understand how different parts of the city work together to create food insecurity for some people and not others.

Our vision is to end food insecurity in Ottawa by 2050. But we know that food banks alone can't do this — we need everyone at the table working together to make it happen.

This is an ambitious goal that will require everyone in our community to play a part, and we are committed to working together toward it. Food insecurity doesn't happen in a vacuum - low wages, precarious work, poor health, the high cost of food and housing, climate change and lack of social support combine to create an environment where food insecurity thrives. More food - while critical in an emergency - won't solve this problem.

In our strategic plan for 2022-2025, we outline four key areas where we would focus our efforts: reduce dependence on emergency services; increase access to healthy foods; strengthen community networks; and ensure the sustainability of our network.

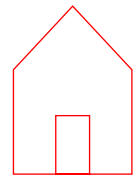
Food insecurity does not merely affect those who lack food. It affects us all – socially, economically, culturally, and environmentally. Every child that is food secure today is an adult that is happier and healthier in the future. That's why we're here at the Ottawa Food Bank: to ensure that every person has access to nutritious, affordable food no matter their situation. Our goal is to end food insecurity in Ottawa—and we can only do it with your help.

We warmly invite you to join us in this work. A city without food insecurity is possible and benefits us all.

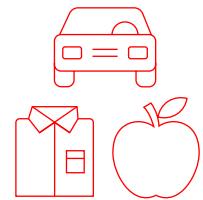
Sincerely,

Rachael Wilson, CEO

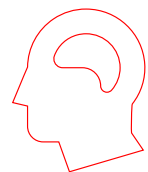
## AREAS OF INTERVENTION



Everyone has a home



Everyone can cover basic needs



Everyone can access mental health services

# WHAT WE DO

We are composed of 112 member agencies who provide food and services to people in Ottawa, including groceries, meals, afterschool snacks and programming, mental health support, employment support and childcare. We've adapted throughout the pandemic to maintain 17 Kickstart programs providing snacks for kids, and replaced our Summer Lunch Program with a Summer Nutrition Program to continue serving children and youth in 29 communities.

*"Care Center Ottawa is about more than providing food for our neighbours. While the need for food support in our city is unprecedented, our guests frequently share that the need for connection and community are equally important."*

— LISA FABIAN, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF CARE CENTRE OTTAWA,  
AN OTTAWA FOOD BANK MEMBER AGENCY

## BY THE NUMBERS

26

Community Food Banks

403,467

Visits in 2022

28

Food Cupboards

7,279

Deliveries to people's homes

17

Kickstart After 4 Club Programs

17,486

Volunteer hours

24

Meal Programs

2100+

Volunteers per year

13

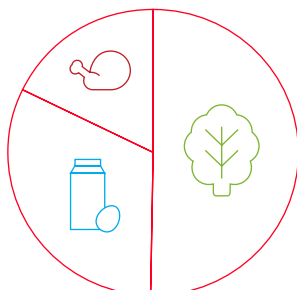
Multi Service Programs

29

Summer Nutrition Programs

**\$3,573,116**

Spent on food annually to keep up with demand and provide nutritious options



**8,806,715 lbs**

Yearly food distribution

1.9M lbs Fresh produce

1.2M lbs Dairy & eggs

665.5K lbs Fresh meat & poultry





# 1 in 7

households in Ottawa self-reported  
experiencing food-insecurity in 2022,  
compared to **1 in 15** in 2017

## DEFINITION

**Food insecurity** means not having enough money to buy food or enough food. It ranges in severity from being worried about running out of food to not being able to afford a balanced diet to going hungry. Food Insecurity disproportionately affects lone-parents, single people, people with disabilities and BIPOC, (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour.)

Among employed people, those most likely to report being food insecure are those who provide for several people on a single income, have multiple jobs, and/or have low-wage, short term, or precarious work.

# A SNAPSHOT OF POVERTY IN OTTAWA



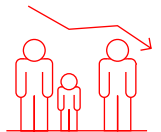
At the root of food insecurity is insufficient income. But Statistics Canada data on poverty is two years behind, and a lot has changed in the meantime. While we can rely on older data to analyze the effects of past poverty reduction strategies, we will have to look to other sources to understand how people in our city are faring, and what they need, *right now*.

*"Month over month, we are reporting increases to food bank visits across our network."*

— RACHAEL WILSON, CEO OF OTTAWA FOOD BANK

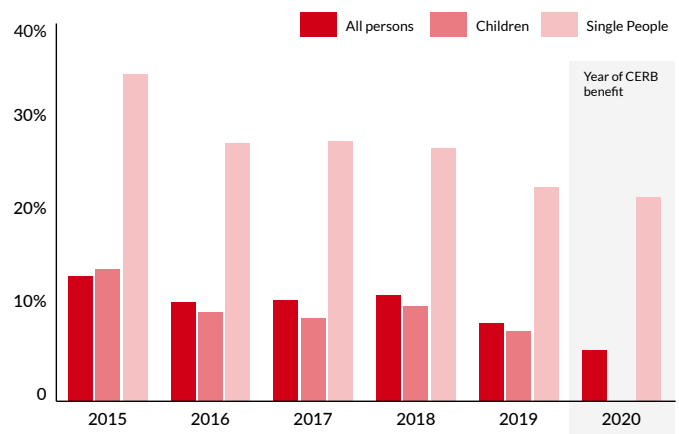
## POVERTY TRENDS

### POVERTY WAS TRENDING IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION, BUT NEW FACTORS AT PLAY IN 2021



Trends from 2015-2020 were encouraging. Rates of poverty in Ottawa decreased, particularly among families with children, though poverty among single people persevered. This was likely the impact of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). It was also likely temporary, pending data for the years 2021 and 2022. Food banks in Ottawa, in Ontario and across the country report higher rates of food bank use following the end of CERB, and alongside the rising costs of basic needs such as housing and food. Social support organizations similarly report increased need, and increased complexity of need, among their clients.

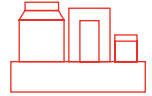
Figure 1: Poverty rates in Ottawa (Census Metropolitan Area) 2015-2020.



Source: Statistics Canada, 2022.

Data for child poverty in 2020 too unreliable to be published

# OTTAWA FOOD BANKS ADAPT TO GROWING COMMUNITY NEEDS



Demand for the Ottawa Food Bank network continues to increase. This year, we are doubling our food warehouse space just to keep up. The number of member agencies providing mental health support is also increasing - up to nearly 50% of our network - to meet the rising need of Ottawans at all income levels. A recent survey of our member agencies identified mental health support as one of our client's top three priorities.

Poverty rates were going in the right direction from 2015-2020, but the experience of member agencies since 2020 shows a changing landscape, with similar trends observed nation-wide. November 2022 revealed the highest number of visits to our member agencies in our 38-year history, with more employed people and people on old age pensions accessing our services. We are projected to spend three times more on food in 2022 than we did pre-pandemic.

**November 2022 saw the highest number of visits to member agencies in our 38-year history.**

## Nearly 50%

of member agencies within the Ottawa Food Bank networks now provide mental health support to clients

## 37.5%

Increase in food bank visits (2021-2022)

## 22%

of Canadians expect to access charities for their basic needs in the next 6 months

## FOOD BANK CLIENTS IN OTTAWA

## 36%

are children and youth

## 7%

are seniors

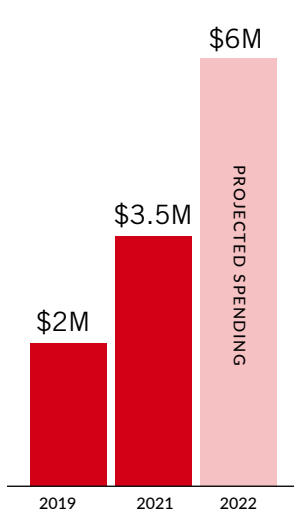
## 5%

are babies

*"I'm not healthy enough to work, but visiting all these agencies every month is like a full-time job. I have no choice, I need to eat."*

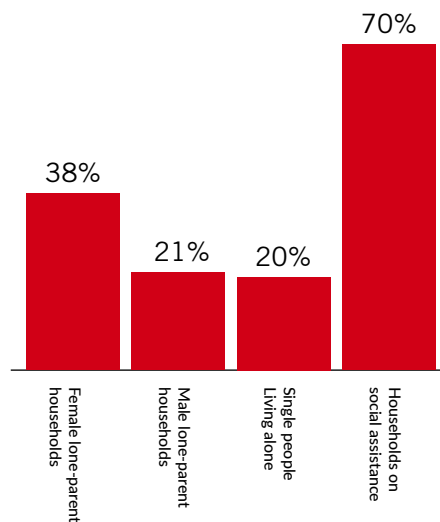
- CLIENT OF **BRUCE HOUSE**, AN OTTAWA FOOD BANK MEMBER AGENCY

Figure 2: Ottawa Food Bank food spending



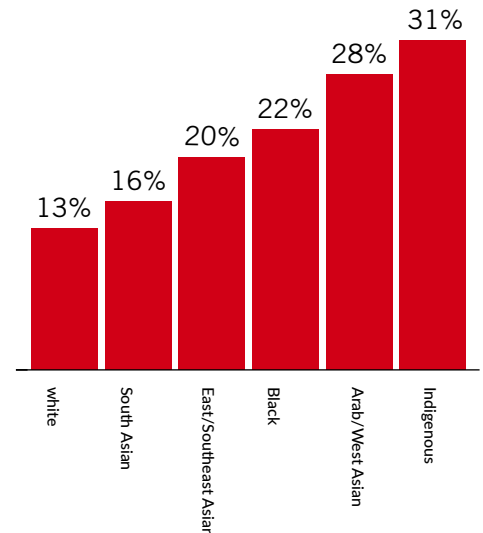
Source: Ottawa Food Bank

Figure 3: Incidence of food insecurity self-reported among sub-groups in Ottawa, 2021.



Source: Ottawa Public Health (survey)

Figure 4: Racialization of food insecurity (self-reported) in Ottawa, 2021.



Source: Ottawa Public Health (survey)



## THE COST OF LIVING

# A GROWING GAP BETWEEN INCOME AND EXPENSES



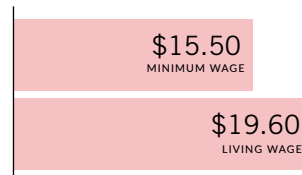
The 2022 Nutritious Food Basket survey shows a concerning contrast between the rising cost of living and income in Ottawa. **After paying for shelter and groceries, families on Ontario Works had a deficit of \$209 - and that was before paying for necessary items like soap and diapers and major expenses like childcare.** Childcare costs an average of \$48 per day and more than \$1,000 per month for full-time care. The province has signed on to the federal \$10 per day daycare plan and fees are expected to drop this year, but won't reach the average of \$10 per day until 2025.

Beyond social assistance, more employed people are accessing food banks. **The Ontario Living Wage Network just released its 2022 living wage of \$19.60 per hour - more than four dollars higher than Ontario's \$15.50 minimum wage.** The cost of living is rising and continuously breaking records, but wages and social assistance are not keeping up.

**10.8%**

increase in food prices, 2021-2022 - the biggest leap recorded since 1981.

### OTTAWA'S GAP BETWEEN MINIMUM AND LIVING WAGE



### DEFINITIONS

The **Nutritious Food Basket** measures the minimum cost of eating healthy.

A **Living Wage** means two working adults working full time can meet the basic needs of a family of four.

**Before paying for necessities like toilet paper, transit, clothes, heat, and electricity:**

**-\$209**

Monthly deficit of family of four on Ontario Works

**-\$45**

Monthly deficit of one-person household on Ontario Disability Support Program

**-\$588**

Monthly deficit of one-person household on Ontario Works

**\$312**

Monthly surplus of one-person household on Old Age Security

Source: Nutritious Food Basket, 2022

## HOUSING TRENDS

# AFFORDABLE HOUSING INVESTMENTS CAN'T KEEP UP WITH DEMAND



Alongside food, the cost of housing continues to rise and has become unaffordable for many. The City of Ottawa is increasing the stock and quality of affordable housing through its 10-year Housing and Homelessness Strategy. Nonetheless, affordable housing (and housing affordability) is not keeping up with demand. The reasons are many: population growth, decreasing affordable rental stock, low vacancy rates, increasing rental prices, increasing land and housing stock value due to redevelopment, inflation. This indicates the need to maintain funding for affordable housing, and expand the toolkit for addressing the problem.

**In 2019, The Centralized Wait List for affordable housing counted 12,577 people (up approximately 18% from 2018) and has likely grown since, with wait times averaging 5 years, or 7 years for larger families.** In response to housing scarcity, the Government of Ontario mandated in 2020 that social housing tenants accept their first choice of housing, down from the previous 3 choices. This means tenants could be pressured to accept unsuitable housing or risk losing their place in line.

**40%**

of Ottawa renters are living in unaffordable housing (>30% of their income)

**18%**

increase in rent over one year, one-bedroom (September 2021-2022), \$1,623/month

**21%**

increase in rent over one year two-bedroom (September 2021-2022), \$2,468/month

**14,835**

net increase of people in Ottawa in 2021

**3.4%**

Ottawa's vacancy rate

**0.2%**

Ottawa's vacancy rate for people living on a low income

*"Approximately 90% of our clients are living on the insufficient support of ODSP, paying market rent while on subsidized housing waitlists, and accessing one or more food programs every month. This is the cruel reality of living with disabilities and chronic illness."*

— BRUCE HOUSE, AN OTTAWA FOOD BANK MEMBER AGENCY



# AN INVESTMENT IN COMMUNITY AND ECONOMIC HEALTH

Food insecurity comes at a big cost to children, families, communities, work places, and our health care system. People feel the effects on a daily basis: food insecure mothers are more likely to experience postpartum depression, people struggle to manage health conditions when they have to choose between food and medication. Adults who experienced food insecurity as kids are more likely to have asthma, heart disease, arthritis, chronic pain, depression, and suicidal ideation than their food-secure peers.

The harm experienced when people go hungry shows up in our balance sheet - increasing costs to healthcare and the justice system, lowering productivity, increasing absenteeism, and depressing economic development. Case studies around the world show us eliminating poverty actually *pays for itself*.

Not only that, we see exciting co-benefits. Increasing the incomes of low-income earners reduces health care use and cost at all income levels. Affordable transit helps people with low incomes and mitigates the effects of climate change, encourages active lifestyles, and improves air quality. Building complete communities - with access to affordable housing, transit, public spaces, and jobs - means a decrease in the cost of living for people who need it the most and improves convenience for all. Providing quality public services and amenities like libraries and literacy programs is linked to poverty reduction and means that everyone in Ottawa has the opportunity for education and enrichment.

*“During the 7 months CERB was available, the Ottawa Food Bank and its network of member agencies reported a stabilization in visits to food banks.”*

- RACHAEL WILSON

## WHAT WAS THE IMPACT OF THE COVID-19 EMERGENCY RESPONSE BENEFIT?

Early analysis shows the Canada Emergency Relief Benefit (CERB) mimicked basic income in some ways. Because of the speed with which it was introduced, it was not sensitive to different life circumstances - it was a blunt tool created to respond to an emergency. It also was not targeted at poverty reduction, but at replacing lost income. Early analysis shows low-income earners were in fact less likely to qualify for emergency supports but when they did qualify, they received more money. The OFB experienced less use of its food banks while it was distributed, and other studies in Canada showed positive effects to mental health among low-income earners within the first two months of its launch.

**Eliminating poverty pays for itself and benefits people at all income levels.**



**\$33 Billion**

Cost of poverty in Ontario in health care, use of justice system and opportunity cost

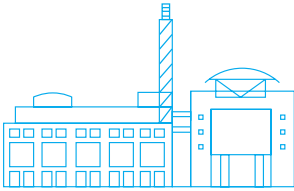
**2X**

Health care costs double for a food insecure person



# CULTIVATING CHANGE AND A PATH TO PROSPERITY

We know that the cost of basic needs are increasingly unaffordable. Wages and social assistance rates haven't kept up, and people increasingly rely on our network of food banks to make ends meet. Emergency food provision is essential - but we should aim for fewer emergencies. Sufficient income, affordable housing, and mental health supports go a long way to providing much-needed stability. Tools and tactics to get there are varied, and include all people in Ottawa, from volunteers to civil servants, social service providers and elected officials. What can we each do to help?



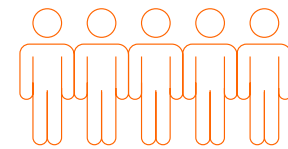
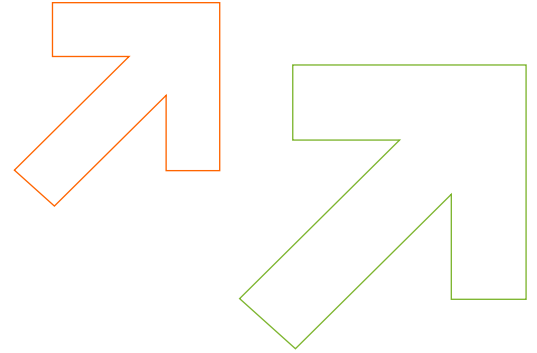
## AS A CITY

- Recognize the Ottawa Food Bank network of member agencies as a critical resource and ensure appropriate funding and support to the emergency food sector
- Honour the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan's call to develop a municipal poverty reduction and food security strategy for Ottawa
- Review regulations to mitigate rising housing costs
- Reduce travel costs by committing to affordable and accessible public transit
- Invest in child literacy, which is linked to higher incomes later in life
- Become a living wage employer
- Provide free tax-filing support
- Be an advocate to the Province



## AS A PROVINCE

- Increase social assistance rates to a minimum of \$2000 per month and ensure that they keep pace with inflation
- Make the minimum wage a living wage and improve the Employment Standards Act to better protect workers
- Increase affordable housing stock and operating funds
- Increase access to mental health supports



## AS COMMUNITY MEMBERS

- **Donate.**
- **Volunteer.** Sort, deliver, plant, grow and harvest food. Or help us out at events!
- **Write.** Contact your elected officials about affordable housing, social assistance and mental health supports
- **Talk.** Connect with neighbours, coworkers, and community members to chat about this report and how we can continue to support one another

### REMEMBER

- Poverty is at the root of food insecurity.
- Adequate and nutritious food that is accessible in a dignified manner is a human right.
- Perpetuating poverty has high downstream costs.
- We are *all* better off when no-one goes hungry.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Authors: Katie J. Lore and Celia Lee

Contributors: Alexandra Noreau, Rachael Wilson

Report design: Fran Motta



# EVERY \$1 DONATED EQUALS ABOUT \$5 OF FOOD DELIVERED TO THE COMMUNITY

**Please give generously.** As we advocate for change, people are in need. We can do so much more with cash donations. Your monetary support helps us purchase fresh and high quality food. Thank you for your donations.



**Ottawa Food Bank**

1317 Michael Street,  
Ottawa, ON K1B 3M9

[ottawafoodbank.ca](http://ottawafoodbank.ca)  
[foodbank@ottawafoodbank.ca](mailto:foodbank@ottawafoodbank.ca)  
[@ottawafoodbank](https://www.instagram.com/ottawafoodbank)

613-745-7001