



VOICES OF THE NETWORK AND THEIR NEIGHBOURS:

A COMPREHENSIVE LOOK AT FOOD INSECURITY IN OTTAWA

2024



Ottawa Food Bank

Introduction

Food insecurity is a growing crisis in Ottawa.

For many, access to food is not limited by availability, but by a lack of adequate income to afford even the most basic necessities.

The Ottawa Food Bank was founded 40 years ago as a temporary response to this gap, but four decades later, the gap has only grown.

This report represents the voices and experiences of our network of member agencies and their neighbours. By focusing on their insights, this report offers a clear understanding of what food insecurity looks like today, and how it impacts those living in neighbourhoods across the city. We hope to provide a comprehensive overview of food insecurity in Ottawa, offering insights that can inform future discussions and actions.



Food Insecurity Status

(Statistics Canada)

Marginal Food Insecurity

- Worry about running out of food
- Limited food choices because there isn't enough money to buy more

Moderate Food Insecurity

- Reduced quality or smaller portions of meals
- Caused by not having enough money for food

Severe Food Insecurity

- Skipping meals or eating much less
- In the worst cases, not eating for a full day (or more)



The Ottawa Food Bank works with a network of nearly 100 member agencies and food programs across the city to respond to food insecurity.

Food banks are typically the largest of all agencies, offering larger quantities and variety of food and serving more people than most other agencies. As a central hub, the Ottawa Food Bank plays a support role in addition to its logistical role, collecting, storing, and distributing food to these front-line programs.

Each member agency — from community food banks and meal programs to multi-service programs and kids' programs — brings a deep understanding of the unique needs of their neighbourhoods.

While the Ottawa Food Bank supports the network with resources and coordination, it is the member agencies of our network that offer direct support in an effort to meet the specific and often complex needs of their neighbours.

Together, this network strives to ensure that neighbours in need have some access to emergency food and essential services.



The collective impact of this network is a lifeline for many of those affected by food insecurity in Ottawa, while also underscoring the larger, systemic issues that have sustained this crisis for decades.



The individuals and families who turn to these agencies for support are **our neighbours**. Their interactions with these organizations are central to a better understanding of food insecurity. This report will also highlight their experiences, offering a window into the day-to-day realities faced by those seeking emergency food support.

Food insecurity is shaped by many complex factors.

To better understand these dynamics in Ottawa, the Ottawa Food Bank and its network of food programs conducted two key surveys in Spring 2024:

1

The Member Asset Inventory

This survey focused on assessing the capacities and status of the member agencies within the Ottawa Food Bank network. First introduced in 2021, this inventory allows us to gauge the strengths and challenges within the network.

Both the Neighbour Survey and the Member Asset Inventory will continue to be conducted every three years, informing the Ottawa Food Bank's future strategies to better meet the needs of our community.

2

The Ottawa Neighbour Survey

This survey gathered insights from those visiting food programs, whom we refer to as neighbours, to explore who is accessing these services and the underlying reasons driving their use of food banks. This survey was inspired by the *"Knowing Our Neighbours"* survey conducted by the Parkdale Food Centre over the past three years.

We deeply appreciate Parkdale Food Centre's leadership and guidance in shaping this initiative.



Understanding these lived experiences is essential for grasping the true depth of the crisis and building empathy and support within our community.

Findings from the Network

Food banks and community agencies in Ottawa are taking on more than ever.

While their primary focus is distributing food, they are increasingly stepping up to meet other essential needs in their communities.

To understand these challenges better, we conducted a Member Asset Inventory survey to gain a more complete understanding of the strengths, challenges, capacities, and needs of food banks in our network.

How Busy are Food Banks?

Food banks are busier than ever. Here's a snapshot of how many visitors they serve during their hours of operation:

- **Low Traffic:** Many food banks (42% of community and emergency food banks (CEFBs) and 36% of all agencies) serve between 1-10 visitors per hour.
- **Moderate Traffic:** An equal 42% of CEFBs and 28% of all agencies serve between 11-25 visitors per hour, showing how many food banks are dealing with a steady stream of clients.
- **High Traffic:** A smaller number handle 26-50 visitors per hour, with only a few managing upwards of 51-100 or even 500 visitors in that same timeframe. The diversity in visitor traffic reflects the varying capacities and demand across food banks.



Food Provision and Distribution

Food banks strive to provide enough food for people in need, but their capacity is changing.

"Our client list is growing and our resources are not. We are expected to do more with less."

– Member Agency



3 Days of Food

In 2021, 36% of food banks could provide enough food for three days. By 2024, that number fell to just 17%.

4–5 Days of Food

The number of food banks providing 4–5 days' worth of food has remained stable. Despite new challenges, many are managing to maintain this level of support.

5+ Days of Food

There has been a notable increase in food banks offering more than 5 days of food, rising from 8% to 25%. This suggests that a growing number of food banks have expanded their capacity to provide extended support. It is also consistent with the increased support available to member agencies and the Ottawa Food Bank during the pandemic. However, this support is drying up and in addition, food distribution will decrease shortly, when new sustainability measures are implemented at the Ottawa Food Bank which will reduce the amount of food distributed to member agencies. This will add pressure to an already strained community.

How Food Gets Distributed



Food banks use different methods to distribute food, and we're seeing shifts in how they operate:

Window Model	Once used by 19% of food banks, this approach — where clients selected items using a pre-completed card — has been completely phased out. It seems food banks are moving toward more personalized ways of serving their clients.
Free Style Shopping	5% of food banks enable clients to shop freely without assistance, compared to none in 2021. This gives people more control over what they take home, reflecting a more dignified approach to food distribution.
Swap Tables	The use of swap tables, typically at food banks that do not offer choice, where clients can trade items, has tripled from 3% to 9%. This model offers flexibility and encourages a sense of community among clients.
Hamper Style	The use of pre-packed hampers — where clients receive a fixed selection without choice — has increased from 0% to 11%. This shift suggests that some food banks are adopting less flexible methods, likely due to capacity constraints.
Shopping Model	The most significant growth occurred here. Now, 38% of food banks use the shopping model, where clients can browse with carts with volunteer assistance — up from 30%. This approach allows clients to select items that best suit their needs, offering a more dignified experience.

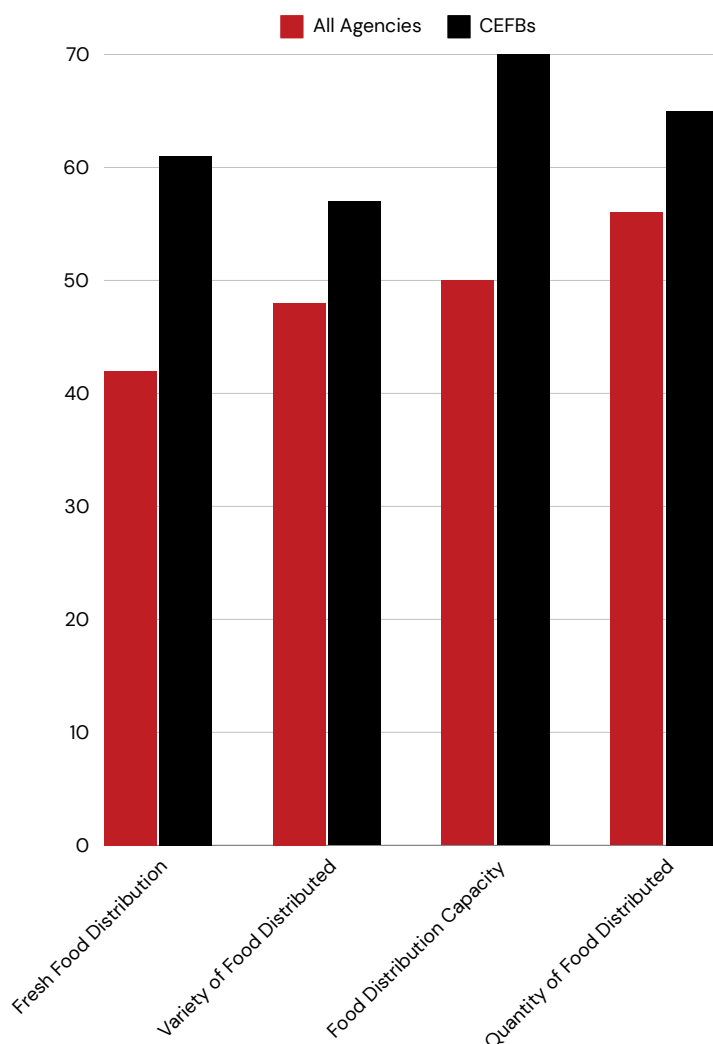


Top Priorities for Food Distribution



To better serve their communities, food banks have identified several key priorities for improvement:

Figure 1



These priorities are shared across all types of agencies in 2024, not just food banks, underscoring common challenges in food distribution.

Fresh Food Distribution: Fresh food matters from a nutrition standpoint and 61% of food banks have made this a priority, indicating a focus on providing nutritious options.

Variety of Food Distributed: 57% of food banks want to improve the types of food they offer, ensuring people get diverse, culturally appropriate, and balanced options.

Food Distribution Capacity: 70% of food banks say this is their top priority in 2024. They need the resources to distribute food efficiently to meet the rising demand.

Quantity of Food: 65% of food banks are concerned about the amount of food they distribute. This is an increase from 56% in 2021, highlighting growing pressures.



Meeting Non-Food Needs: Wrap Around Supports

In addition to food distribution, food banks and other member agencies dedicate significant time to meeting non-food needs of their neighbours.

Many member agencies offer wrap-around supports to address various aspects of their clients' well-being. The top six most frequently offered wrap-around supports include:

- 1-on-1 Service Navigation
- Mental Health Services
- Non-Food Supplies
- An Information/Resource area
- Housing Support
- Holiday Hampers

While these services are crucial, they represent just a fraction of the broader support network food banks provide. Seventeen other services are offered, ranging from education and employment support to health care services and financial literacy. The Neighbour Survey findings support the necessity of these wrap-around services, showing that neighbours most commonly used services like housing utilities support (19%), employment income support (17%), and childcare (12%).

Most Used Non-Food Services

SERVICE TYPE	% OF NEIGHBOURS REPORTING USAGE
Computers / Internet	21%
Housing Utilities Support	19%
Employment Income Support	17%
Education Services	13%
Income Tax Clinics / Financial Literacy Services	13%
Child Care	12%
Legal Services	10%
1-1 Service Navigation	9%
Other	2%



In 2024, **71%** of all member agencies, including **65%** of food banks, reported spending time each week addressing essential, non-food services.

1-15 hours/week:

26% of food banks and 15% of member agencies

16-30 hours/week:

17% of food banks and 15% of member agencies

31-45 hours/week:

9% of food banks and 15% of member agencies

70-100 hours/week:

4% of food banks and 12% of member agencies

100+ hours/week:

9% of food banks and 13% of member agencies



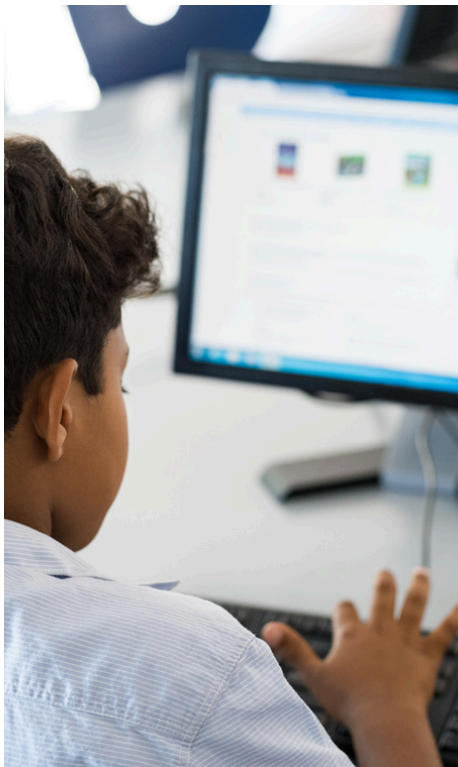
While many agencies spend hours meeting non-food needs, they also report needing significantly more hours to meet non-food needs.

This suggests that neighbours have many non-food needs and agencies, despite their limited resources, are already investing considerable effort into supporting their neighbours beyond food provision.

However, their efforts are not enough to meet the growing needs.

"Food programs are so limited in their resources, it can be difficult for us to go beyond the operational."

– Member Agency



1-15 additional hours/week:

22% of food banks and 17% of member agencies

16-30 additional hours/week:

13% of food banks and 6% of member agencies

31-45 additional hours/week:

9% of food banks and 15% of member agencies

70-100 additional hours/week:

4% of food banks and 12% of member agencies

100+ additional hours/week:

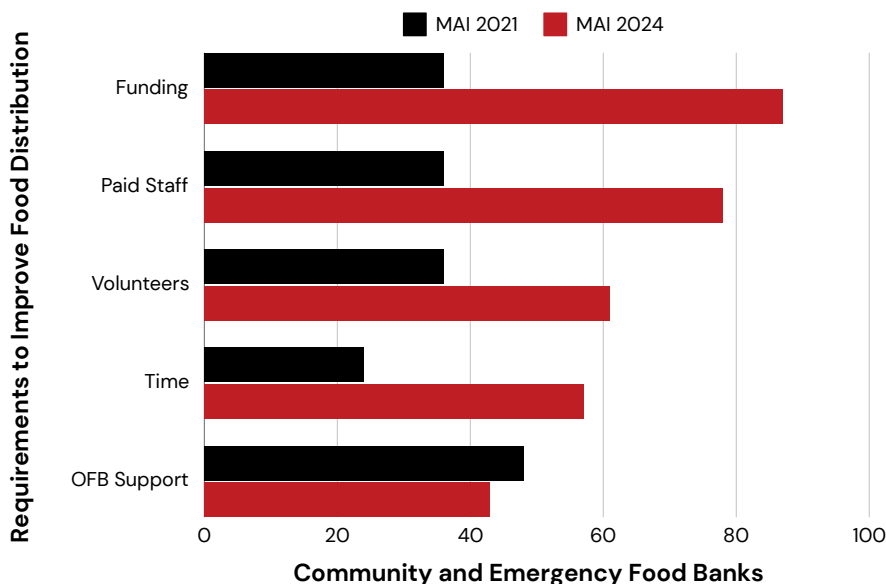
9% of food banks and 13% of member agencies

Challenges in Meeting Food Distribution Demands

The growing number of people that agencies are unable to serve reflects the challenges food banks are facing in their operations. Food banks have identified several key gaps in their capabilities that are hindering their ability to serve their communities effectively:

- **Funding:** The most urgent need is funding. In 2024, a striking 87% of food banks reported needing more funding — a significant increase from 36% in 2021. This reflects the financial strain that these food banks are experiencing as they try to keep up with the increasing need. Without sufficient funding, food banks struggle to purchase food, pay staff, and maintain their facilities.
- **Staff and Volunteers:** Closely linked to funding is the need for more paid staff. Currently, 78% of food banks say they need more paid staff, up from 36% in 2021. This shift suggests that the volunteer-based model, which many food banks rely on, may no longer be sufficient to handle the growing workload. Additionally, the need for volunteers has surged from 36% in 2021 to 61% in 2024, emphasizing that both paid staff and volunteers are essential to food bank operations.
- **Time and Training:** Beyond financial and staffing challenges, food banks need more time and training to manage their increasing responsibilities. The proportion of food banks citing this need has grown from 24% in 2021 to 57% in 2024, indicating a pressing requirement for hands-on support to address community needs effectively.
- **Ottawa Food Bank Support:** Interestingly, the need for support from the Ottawa Food Bank itself has slightly decreased, from 48% to 43%. This might reflect a growing need for more localized resources or direct community support. However, it underscores that food banks are looking for solutions that go beyond centralized assistance.

Figure 2



These findings highlight a significant gap between the support that agencies are currently providing and what they need to effectively meet the demands of their communities.

Turning People Away: A Stark Reality

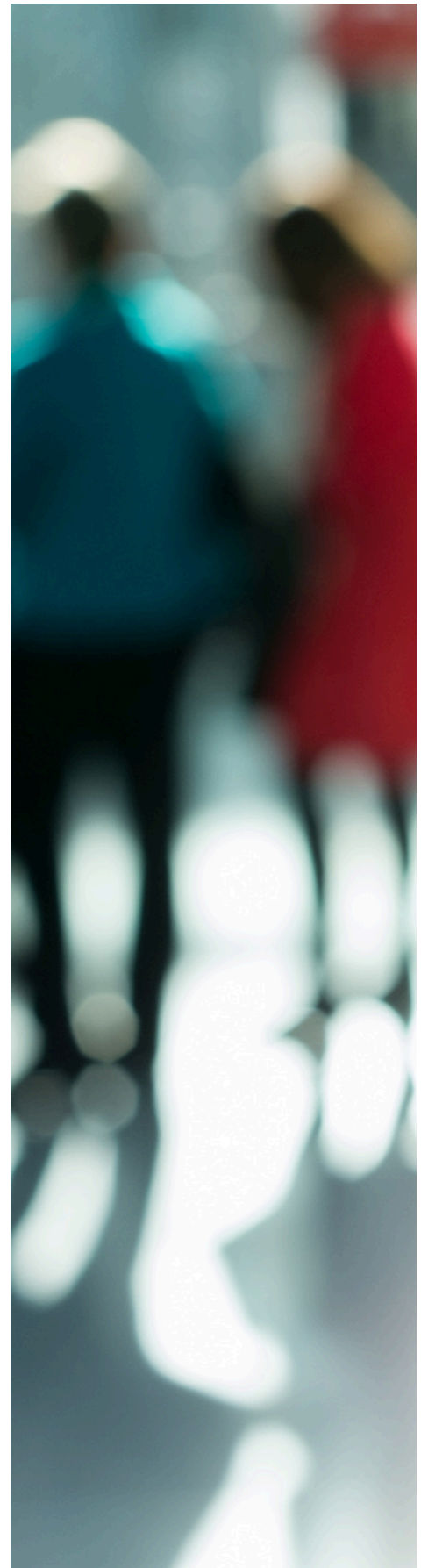
In 2024, food banks and other member agencies in Ottawa faced a stark reality: they had to turn people away, primarily due to capacity issues.

39% of food banks and 10% of all member agencies reported having to turn individuals and families away on a weekly basis.

Most commonly, these organizations turned away fewer than ten people or families per week (63% of all member agencies and 65% of food banks), but for some, the numbers were much higher. 6% of agencies turned away 11–20 individuals weekly, while 4% had to refuse 31–40 people.

For those agencies who had to turn people away, the most common reasons were capacity issues, including limited food and appointments. The second most common reason was to refer to a more appropriate service.

These findings highlight that despite the network's best efforts, food banks are struggling to meet the community's increasing need for food support.



Building Network Resiliency: Addressing Key Challenges and Needs

Although food banks and member agencies were created as a temporary measure, they are now at the forefront of addressing food insecurity in Ottawa. However, increasing demand and limited resources have pushed their capacities to the brink. To address food insecurity and to build a more resilient food bank network, it's crucial to understand the challenges these agencies face and what they need to continue improving client services.

Top Needs for Improving Client Service

In 2024, food banks and member agencies identified their top four needs: funding, staffing, volunteers, and time. Comparing the results from 2021 to 2024 reveals a significant uptick in these needs, underscoring the growing pressure on the network.

- **Funds:** The most critical need for food banks in 2024 was funding, with 91% of agencies citing this as their top priority — an increase from 56% in 2021.
- **Staff:** The need for paid staff rose dramatically, from 48% in 2021 to 87% in 2024. This reflects the increased workload and demand for food programs.
- **Volunteers:** The third-highest need was for volunteers, with 65% of food banks indicating this in 2024, up from 32% in 2021.
- **Time:** 57% of food banks reported needing more time to serve their clients effectively, compared to 32% in 2021. This need likely stems from the strain on both staff and volunteers.
- **OFB Support:** Fewer food banks reported the need for OFB support to improve client service in 2024 (30%) compared to 2021 (40%). It is likely that the need for concrete resources is taking precedence given the growing demands on the agencies.

The surge in these needs aligns with the rising demand for food distribution services, highlighting the challenges agencies face in meeting the diverse needs of their communities.

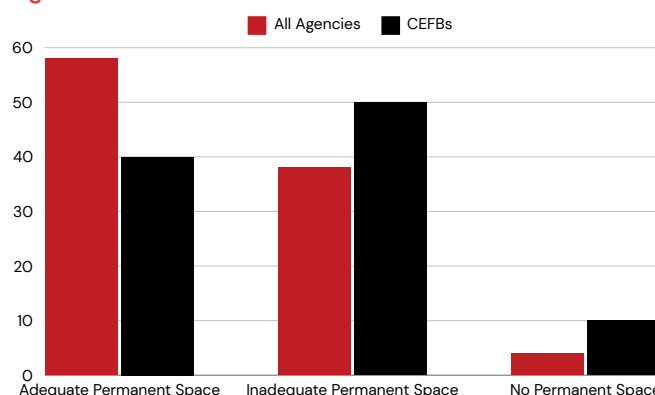


In addition to human resources, physical space and storage limitations present significant obstacles:

Inadequate Space

In 2024, 50% of food banks and 38% of all member agencies reported having inadequate but permanent space. Adequate permanent facilities were reported by 40% of food banks and 58% of all member agencies. Only 10% of food banks and 4% of all member agencies did not have any permanent space.

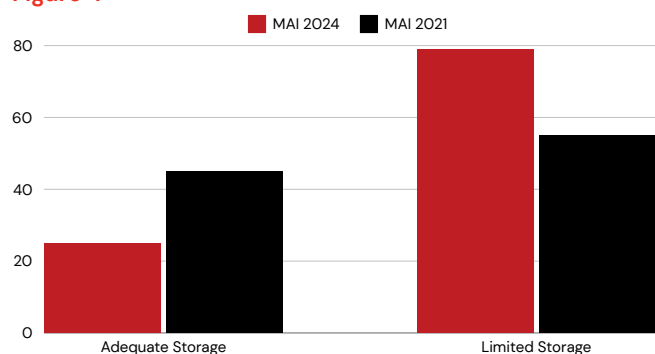
Figure 3



Storage Constraints

A staggering 79% of member agencies faced limited storage capacity, restricting their ability to stock enough food. For food banks, this limitation increased from 56% in 2021 to 75% in 2024.

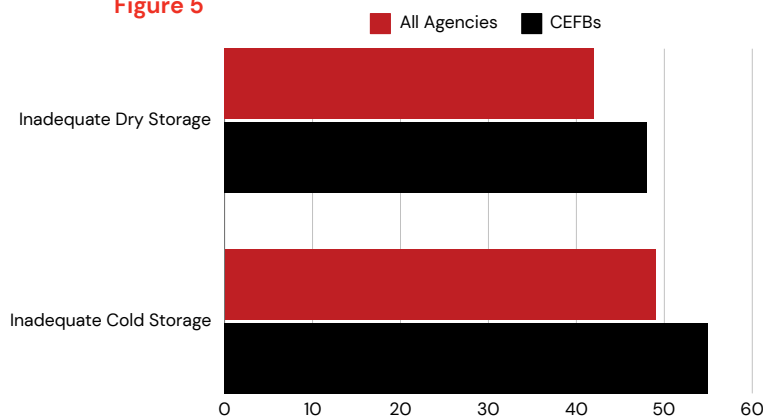
Figure 4



Cold and Dry Storage

Adequate storage conditions are essential for preserving food quality. However, 55% of food banks and 49% of member agencies reported insufficient cold storage, while 48% of food banks and 42% of member agencies lacked adequate dry storage.

Figure 5



These space and storage challenges directly impact the amount of food that can be distributed, further limiting support to those in need.

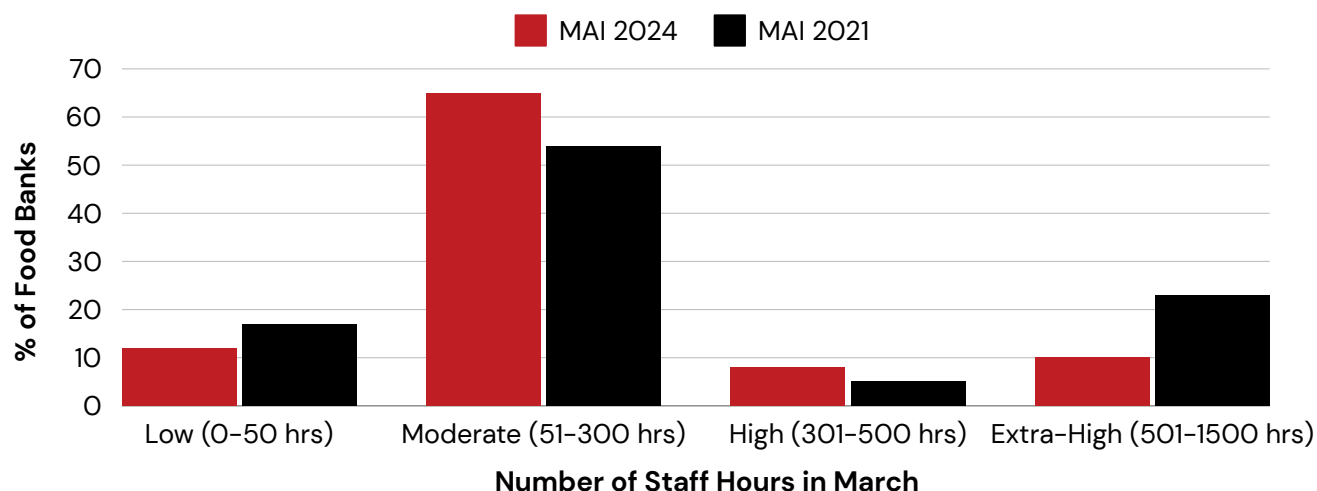
Given the high numbers of agencies who have to turn people away weekly, addressing these issues is crucial for building a more resilient network.

Staff Turnover and Capacity: A Critical Challenge

High staff turnover and insufficient capacity have compounded the strain on food banks:

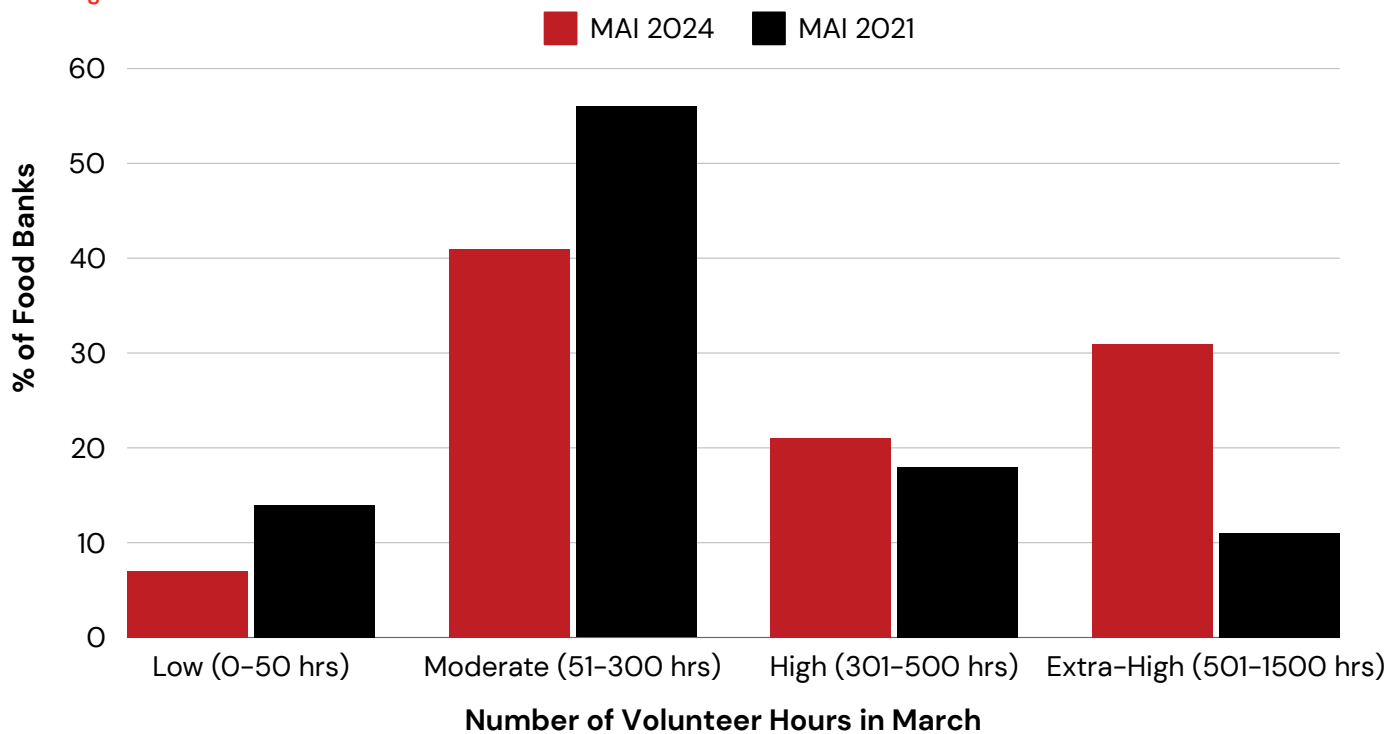
- **Turnover Rates:** In 2024, 36% of food banks and 32% of all member agencies reported no staff turnover. However, the remaining agencies faced considerable churn:
 - 24% of food banks experienced less than 25% turnover.
 - 20% reported 51–75% turnover, indicating significant staffing volatility.
- **Staff Capacity:** Only 22% of food banks and 29% of all member agencies reported having adequate staffing. Some agencies had enough staff but lacked volunteers (13% of all member agencies), while others had enough volunteers but not enough staff (9% of food banks).
- **Paid Staff and Volunteers:** The staff capacity findings are reflected in paid staff and volunteer hours. Most food banks reported between 51–300 staff hours in March during 2024 and 2021. While staffing appears reasonably stable, more food banks reported no staff hours in March 2024 (17%) compared to March 2021 (12%). Across all agencies (11%) reported no paid staff hours compared to food banks (17%). The increase in the number of food banks with no staff hours over time suggests decreasing resources.

Figure 6



Low and moderate numbers of volunteer hours reduced over time, although food banks reporting no volunteer hours in March dropped to 0% in 2024 compared to 7% in 2021. These results suggest a trend towards overall decrease in number of volunteer hours at food banks, straining their capacity to function.

Figure 7



These findings suggest that agencies are stretched thin. The shortage of staff and volunteers affects the ability for agencies to meet the rising demand, further emphasizing the need for more funding, space, and human resources.

"We serve the invisible population with good food, dignity, and respect."

– Member Agency

Foodraising and Fundraising

Foodraising Activities

Food banks in 2024 were less likely to have staff devoted to food raising or to solicit and collect food themselves compared to 2021. This may be due to increased demand for services, leaving less time for food raising, and to a shift from food to fundraising in 2024. All member agencies had similar proportions for food raising activities as food banks in 2024 with the exception that “we have a person whose role is to manage foodraising” was least mentioned.

Foodraising

Collecting food donations from individuals, businesses, or community events to support member agencies. Examples include food drives, grocery store partnerships, and community collection events.

Foodraising Activities	2024	2021
We do not do any foodraising	13%	4%
We have a person whose role it is to manage foodraising (at least in part)	17%	32%
We solicit and collect food ourselves	35%	48%
We provide a list of accepted foods	43%	76%
We accept anything offered to us	57%	56%
We accept foods collected by others	87%	92%



Foodraising and Fundraising

Fundraising Activities

Fundraising activities seem to have decreased at food banks from 2021 to 2024. As with food raising, this is possibly due to the increased demand for services that leaves less time for fundraising in 2024. All member agencies had similar proportions for fundraising activities as food banks in 2024.

Fundraising

Gathering monetary donations to support member agencies. This includes soliciting contributions from individuals, businesses, or government grants to purchase food, operate facilities, and provide additional services.

Fundraising Activities	2024	2021
We offer monthly donation options to potential donors	52%	20%
We run food/fund raising events	52%	40%
We partner with other organizations/businesses to food/fund raise	61%	60%
We use online fundraising strategies (ex: online auctions, Canada Helps, Benevity, crowd funding, etc.)	57%	40%
We use our social media to connect with donors	70%	64%
We use our website to connect with donors	65%	52%
We identify and apply for grants	91%	72%

Food and fundraising priorities at food banks across Ottawa changed slightly from 2021 to 2024:

- **Fundraising ability:** Food banks reported an increase in the desire to improve their fundraising ability from 32% in 2021 to 65% in 2024
- **Food raising ability:** Improving food raising was the top priority for food banks in 2021 (44%) and this decreased to 35% in 2024

Comparing all member agencies to food banks in 2024, the priorities were the same although proportions differed slightly.

This shift in the top priority from food raising to fundraising at food banks could be a result of the greater need for staffing coupled with the residual pandemic-related increase in food distribution from the Ottawa Food Bank that have not yet been reduced by the upcoming sustainability measures.



What is Needed to Improve Food and Fundraising?

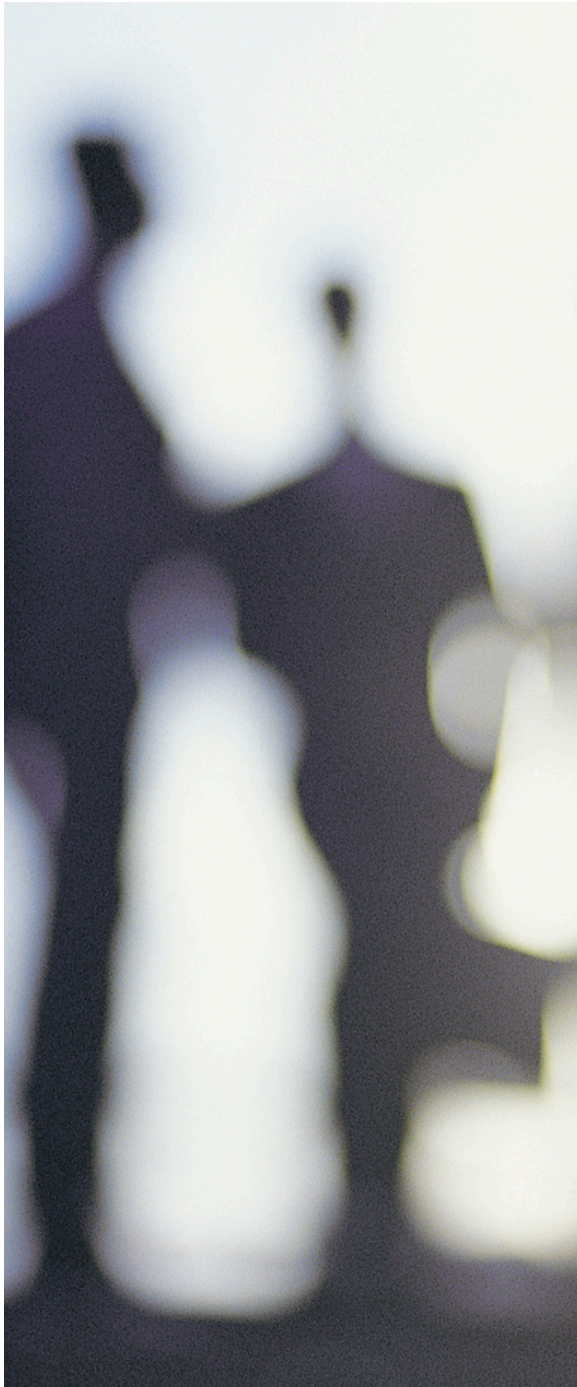
To expand their food and fundraising activities, food banks have identified several key needs, including paid staff, time, funds, volunteers, community support, Ottawa Food Bank support, and training. The top four are:

- **Paid Staff:** There is a notable demand for more paid staff, rising to 78% from 48% in 2021.
- **Time:** Needs for time and training increased from 48% to 78%
- **Funds:** The need for funds to improve food/fundraising increased from 36% in 2021 to 65% in 2024
- **Volunteers:** The need for volunteers increased from 44% to 61%.

In 2024, all member agencies had the same top four priorities as food banks; however, funds were the top priority for all member agencies (52%), followed by paid time (48%), staff (48%), and volunteers (35%).

Overall, the Member Asset Inventory reveals that while many food banks continue making efforts to enhance their capacity to provide support and adopted new distribution methods, there are ongoing and critical needs for financial resources, adequate space, staff, and volunteers to sustain and grow their services effectively.

Findings from the Ottawa Neighbour Survey



To truly understand food insecurity in Ottawa, we must look closely at the experiences of our neighbours who face it every day. This section presents the key findings from the **4054** neighbours who participated in the Ottawa Neighbour Survey, focusing on what the results tell us about food insecurity in our community. The survey results are organized into three primary categories:

- **Demographic Factors:** How different demographic characteristics — such as age, gender, race, and newcomer status — affect experiences of food insecurity.
- **Socioeconomic Factors:** How the link between income levels, housing stability, and access to food affects food insecurity.
- **Geographic Factors:** Here, we look at how geographic location affects access to food.

This focused look into the findings offers clarity about the current realities faced by our community, based directly on what our neighbours have shared.

Food Insecurity Status

One of the most concerning findings is the increase in severe food insecurity since the previous surveys, conducted in 11 Ottawa food banks in 2018–2019.

In 2024, the percentage of severely food-insecure neighbours nearly doubled. While some of this change may be due to different survey sample compositions, it's more likely a reflection of the ongoing rise in the pressures that lead to food bank visits.

Food Insecurity Status	2018-2019	2024
Severely Food Insecure	32%	61%
Moderately Food Insecure	35%	26%
Marginally Food Insecure	18%	5%
Food Secure	15%	5%

Demographic Insights

Different demographic characteristics — such as age, gender, race, and newcomer status — affect experiences of food insecurity.

The findings show how these factors influence who is most affected by food insecurity and in what ways.

Age	Gender
Younger people, particularly those aged 21–30 (69.7%), are facing the highest rates of severe food insecurity. On the other hand, older individuals, such as those over 70, experience somewhat lower levels (52.7%). Supports for older adults and pensions could be protective for this population. The results suggest a need for more targeted support for younger age groups.	Severe food insecurity affected men (61.5%), women (62.4%), trans men (60%), and trans women (59.3%) at similar rates. However, trans individuals reported higher rates of moderate food insecurity, with 40% of trans men and 33.3% of trans women affected, compared to 27.9% of men and 26.2% of women. Although the sample size for trans individuals was small, these findings point to potential gaps in support.

Ethnicity

When we look at food insecurity by ethnicity, we see that Indigenous people experience higher rates of severe food insecurity compared to other groups. For instance, 70.8% of Indigenous respondents experience severe food insecurity. This contrasts with lower rates among White populations, who experience severe food insecurity at a rate of 64%.

Although rates of severe food insecurity were high in Black respondents (50%), unlike other studies, the survey did not identify Black populations as experiencing the highest rates of food insecurity. It is unknown why this occurred, perhaps due to the nature of a voluntary sample. Neighbours identifying as Asian had the lowest levels of severe food insecurity (17–24% depending on region of Asia).

Comparing ethnicity and gender, Indigenous women (92%) experience higher rates of severe food insecurity relative to Indigenous men (81%), highlighting the vulnerabilities of not just of certain ethnic groups, but also the compounding effect of gender. These findings were not seen with other ethnicities and indicate a need for culturally sensitive, targeted interventions.

Status and Time in Canada

Canadian citizens (68.6%) had the highest rates of severe food insecurity. However, refugees, international students, migrant workers, and refugee applicants all faced significant levels (around 51–59%). Interestingly, those born in Canada (74.2%) and those who have lived in Canada for more than 10 years (57.4%) are among the most severely food insecure. This highlights the broad impact of systemic issues on diverse populations.



Socioeconomic Factors

This section examines the link between income levels, housing stability, and access to food.

The findings reveal how financial and housing challenges impact people's ability to secure enough food, highlighting the role these economic conditions play in food insecurity.

Income

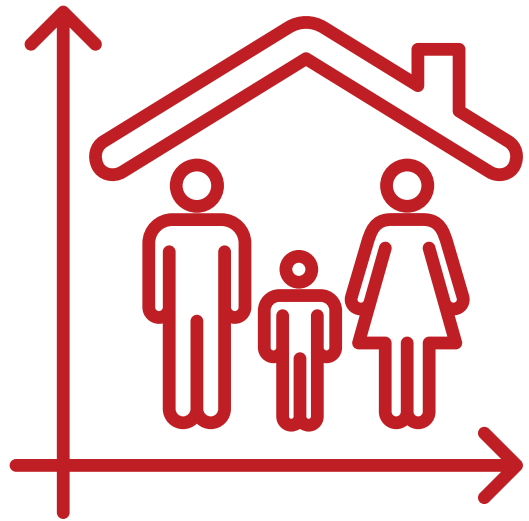
The results suggest that food insecurity is highly influenced by income sources. For those who rely on government programs like Ontario Works or Employment Insurance, severe food insecurity is a major issue, affecting between 65% and 76% of individuals in these categories. In contrast, those receiving family support or private pensions experience slightly lower rates of severe food insecurity (around 61%). This highlights a clear link between financial stability and food security.

Housing

Housing status is a key factor that can significantly impact one's access to food programs. People living in social rental housing or supportive housing face the highest rates of severe food insecurity (70.6% and 72.8%, respectively). In comparison, those who own or rent privately are somewhat less affected (both at 57.9%). This suggests that stable housing is crucial for food security, highlighting the importance of secure housing in preventing food insecurity.

Household Size and Composition

Single-person households face the highest rates of severe food insecurity (74.4%), followed by households of 2–4 (61.7%) and 5–7 (53.3%). However, the majority of households consisted of 2–4 persons, so the absolute number of households facing severe food security for this population is greater than for single-person households. A majority of households with children face severe food insecurity (58%), 28.4% face moderate food insecurity and very few experience marginal food insecurity (7%) or are food secure (5.7%)

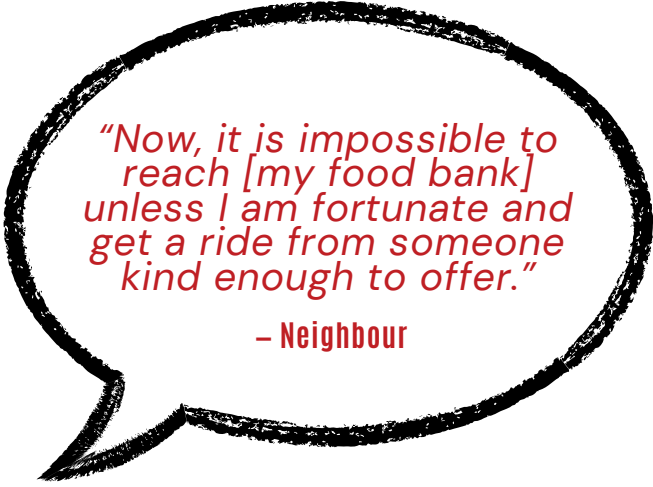


These findings suggest that single-person households and families with children require greater support to meet their basic needs and/or may have access to fewer adequate resources relative to other household types.

Geographic Factors

In this section, we look at how geographic location affects access to food.

The results provide insights into how food access differs by neighbourhood, showing that some areas may experience greater barriers to food access.



"Now, it is impossible to reach [my food bank] unless I am fortunate and get a ride from someone kind enough to offer."

– Neighbour

Travel

Most neighbours reported their travel time to a food program as less than 30 minutes (40.5%) and another 35.7% reported a travel time of 30–60 minutes. Only 13.4% reported a travel time of 60–90 minutes and 5.7% a travel time of more than 90 minutes. This is consistent with a previous study carried out by the Ottawa Neighbourhood Study (unpublished) that assessed travel burden to food banks and concluded that many people have to travel substantial distances to reach their food bank. Neighbours who had to travel 60–90 minutes to get to a food bank had the highest proportion of severe food insecurity (75%) compared to travel times of more than 90 minutes (65%), 30–60 minutes (65%) or less than 30 minutes (56%).

Cost of Healthy Food

Results from the 2022 Nutrition Environment Measures Survey (unpublished) revealed that purchasing healthy food costs more than unhealthy food, particularly in neighbourhoods that have high numbers of households with the lowest socioeconomic status (SES). More than half of Ottawa's low SES neighbourhoods were food deserts. The inaccessibility of affordable, healthy grocery options, combined with the travel burden to food banks and grocery stores, creates additional barriers for many community members.

Overall, the Neighbour Survey provides a clear picture of the growing challenges in our community.

Young people, those with unstable incomes, Indigenous people, especially Indigenous women, and individuals in less secure housing are particularly vulnerable.

These pressures are often compounded by geographic barriers that limit access to healthy food. The findings emphasize the importance of a multi-faceted approach to tackle food insecurity, including improved financial support, targeted programs for younger individuals, and efforts to ensure stable and deeply affordable housing.

By understanding these patterns, we can better tailor our services and advocacy to appropriately support those most in need.



The Member Asset Inventory and Ottawa Neighbour Survey offer a comprehensive overview of both the member agencies and the neighbours they serve in 2024.

They highlight the challenges faced by those experiencing food insecurity and the strengths of the agencies that support them. Despite being under-resourced, member agencies continue to offer a wide range of food and non-food supports to help alleviate these challenges. However, the ever-growing demand for these services has placed immense strain on their capacity.

This strain is not unexpected. For 40 years, food banks have been operating as a temporary measure to food insecurity.

Although the community increasingly uses them as a long-term strategy to meet their basic needs, they are not equipped or intended to do so. The need to address the challenges facing both member agencies and neighbours has never been more urgent.

With this new and deeper understanding of the issues confronting our community, we will continue advocating for the systemic changes needed to resolve this crisis and support the well-being of our community. While advocating for these changes, we must also continue to provide critical interim support for our neighbours.

These findings reveal a food bank network stretched to its limits, and a deep understanding of our community. Funding constraints, staffing shortages, and the increasing demand for wrap-around services have created a significant gap between current efforts and what is necessary to meet community needs effectively. Addressing these challenges will require a systemic approach and new strategies to build resilience among food banks.

This report serves as a crucial tool for informing the annual Ottawa Hunger Report and guiding community responses in the sector. Its insights will remain relevant until the release of the next comprehensive document in three years, shaping the ongoing efforts to address food insecurity in Ottawa.



Acknowledgments

We acknowledge that this work would not have been possible without the participation and commitment of the following:

- **Neighbours** – for taking the time to share about themselves and their experiences
- **Ottawa Food Bank member agencies** – for sharing their time and insights in the Member Asset Inventory
- **equiTable at the Ottawa Food Bank** for their support and feedback to ensure that lived experience and the interests and dignity of neighbours were central to the work
- **Expert Steering Team at the Alliance to End Homelessness** – for their valuable insights that further centred the lived experience perspective in this work
- **Parkdale Food Centre** – for their leadership and guidance, whose Knowing Our Neighbours survey served as inspiration for the Neighbour Survey
- **Data for Good–Ottawa** – for their enthusiastic and expert support analysing the data
- **Community partners** – for supporting this work with their knowledge and feedback



Methodology

1

The Member Asset Inventory

The Member Asset Inventory was completed over an eight-week period between March and May 2024. The survey was shaped by input from community partners, Ottawa Food Bank member agencies, people with lived experience of food insecurity, and Ottawa Food Bank staff. A staff member or volunteer from each member agency was invited to take part in the survey, which was available online through Survey Monkey. While participation was voluntary, most agencies in the network took part (63 in total). The data was partly analyzed by Data For Good – Ottawa, a group of volunteer data experts, and partly by Ottawa Food Bank staff.

The survey results were collected before the Ottawa Food Bank's scheduled implementation of sustainability measures. These measures will lead to reduced food distribution due to funding cuts. Because of this, some of the findings may not fully reflect the current impact of these changes.

2

The Ottawa Neighbour Survey

The Neighbour Survey was conducted over eight weeks, from March to May 2024. Its questions and design were developed with input from partners, the Ottawa Food Bank network, people with lived experience of food insecurity, and Ottawa Food Bank staff. The survey was made available online through Survey Monkey, with most member agencies assisting directly or indirectly in data collection. Ottawa Food Bank staff also supported the survey's promotion and administration. Participation was voluntary, and to acknowledge the value of each neighbour's time and insights, respondents received a \$10 gift card.

To measure the extent of food insecurity among neighbours, the survey included the 6-item Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM), which was scored separately. We compared the current results to those from an earlier study in 11 Ottawa food banks, which used the longer 18-item HFSSM. Both the 6-item and 18-item versions are validated tools, and while the 18-item version is more sensitive, they generally provide similar results. The scores categorize food security as food secure, marginally food insecure, moderately food insecure, or severely food insecure.

Data analysis was conducted by Data for Good – Ottawa over a two-month period, from June to August 2024. Ottawa Food Bank staff regularly consulted with Data for Good throughout the process to provide guidance and feedback.

A total of 4,054 individuals who visited food programs within the Ottawa Food Bank network participated in the survey. Most respondents identified Ottawa Food Bank member agencies as their primary food source, though a small number used non-member agencies in Ottawa.



Appendix

SAMPLE GENDER	% OF RESPONDENTS	SAMPLE ETHNICITY	% OF RESPONDENTS
Women	53%	White/European	40%
Men	42%	Black/African/Caribbean	22%
Trans women	0.7%	Indigenous	13%
Trans men	0.4%	Middle Eastern	13%
		Latin American	3%
		Asian	6%

Appendix

INCOME SOURCE	% OF RESPONDENTS	HOUSING	% OF RESPONDENTS
Full- or Part-time Employment	49%	Private rental housing	37%
Ontario Works (OW)	15%	Social rental or supportive housing	24%
Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)	11%	Own home (mortgaged or not)	15%
Canadian Pension Plan or Old Age Security	4%	With family/friends	7%
		Rooming house/shelter	8%
		On the street	< 1%
		HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION	% OF RESPONDENTS
		Single-person household	19%
		Household of 2-4 people	57%
		Household of 5-7 people	18%
		Household with more than 7 people	4%



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