

Food Insecurity in a Broken System



Ottawa Food Bank



LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge that the Ottawa Food Bank operates on the traditional, unceded, and unsundered territory of the Algonquin Anishinaabe Nation. This land has served as a gathering place and source of sustenance for the Algonquin people for countless generations.

In recognizing this land, we also recognize the deep relationships Indigenous communities hold with food, land, and water. Indigenous food systems encompass more than nourishment; they embody culture, identity, and a profound interconnectedness with the natural world. Colonization has disrupted these systems, impacting Indigenous food sovereignty through land displacement and the degradation of traditional resources. Colonial forces have created and continue to uphold broken systems—in food, housing, education, healthcare, justice, and social services—all of which intersect with food insecurity today.

As we address food insecurity today, we are reminded of the ongoing need to support and empower Indigenous communities to reclaim their rights to govern their own food systems. We commit to building respectful relationships and supporting pathways toward equitable access to food, land, and resources.

Stopgaps in a Systemic Crisis

This year, Ottawa's food insecurity emergency made one thing impossible to ignore: multiple systems are broken.

Emergency food banks were never meant to be the backbone of a city's social safety net. Yet the network of 71 member agencies has become just that—an essential service for thousands, without stable funding or recognition. Visits to food banks have reached levels we once couldn't have imagined. More than one in four households in our city are now food insecure, and for the first time in our history, we had to make hard choices about how to share what little we had across the network.

In the middle of this crisis, we saw extraordinary resolve. Agencies collaborated, shared food and knowledge, and found ways to stretch every dollar. Volunteers packed, sorted, and delivered with care. Donors and local businesses stepped up in record numbers. Together, we provided food and refused to look away from the deeper issue: hunger isn't inevitable, it's a policy failure.

That's why we continue to use our voice to call for what's really needed: higher social assistance rates, deeply affordable housing, enhanced mental health supports, and income supports that lift people out of poverty rather than trap them in it.

Our mission isn't only to respond to hunger—it's to end food insecurity. We envision a future where our network's emergency food shelves are not a regular necessity.

When we share the Ottawa Food Bank's goal of ending food insecurity in our city by 2050, many say it's not realistic—that hunger will always exist here and across the country. We challenge that assumption. Why would we settle for anything less than a city where everyone thrives? Our community deserves better than settling for the "inevitable". Hunger is not fated.

The Ottawa Food Bank's new strategic plan reaffirms our commitment to a city without food insecurity. It challenges the assumption that food insecurity is just part of our community and affirms that together, we can—and must—do better.

If you are reading this, you are part of that future. Together, we can meet today's urgent needs while building the systems that make food insecurity rare, short-lived, and solvable.



Rachael Wilson
Chief Executive Officer
Ottawa Food Bank



More than 1 in 4 (25.7%) households experienced food insecurity in 2024^[1]

What We Do

The Ottawa Food Bank supports a network of 71 member agencies operating 98 food programs.

Together, we are united by a mission to end chronic food insecurity in Ottawa. The network provides emergency food support including culturally appropriate groceries, meals, and snacks to families, children, seniors, and individuals in our community.

Food banks were created as a temporary response to crisis and have since become a permanent part of the social safety net. For more than 40 years, food banks in Ottawa and across Canada have provided emergency support while food insecurity rates continue to rise. While we can't replace livable wages, strong income supports, deeply affordable housing, and decent work, the network works every day to fill the gaps left by broken systems and advocate for lasting policy solutions that will end food insecurity.

FIGHTING THE SYMPTOMS OF BROKEN SYSTEMS

Food insecurity is not inevitable. Broken systems create it, strong systems end it.

Food banks can:

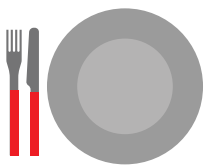
- Provide emergency food
- Connect people to supports
- Collaborate closely with their community members
- Spot system failures
- Advocate for change

Food banks can't:

- Set wages
- Build housing
- End discrimination

2025 BY THE NUMBERS

Food insecurity is not improving—it's holding steady at emergency levels.



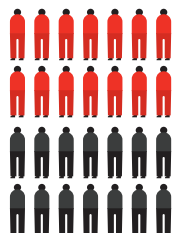
2.1M
meals served



588,866
visits to member agencies
within the network



37%
of network visitors
are children



101%
increase in visits
since 2019



21,300+
volunteer hours

2,670+
volunteers

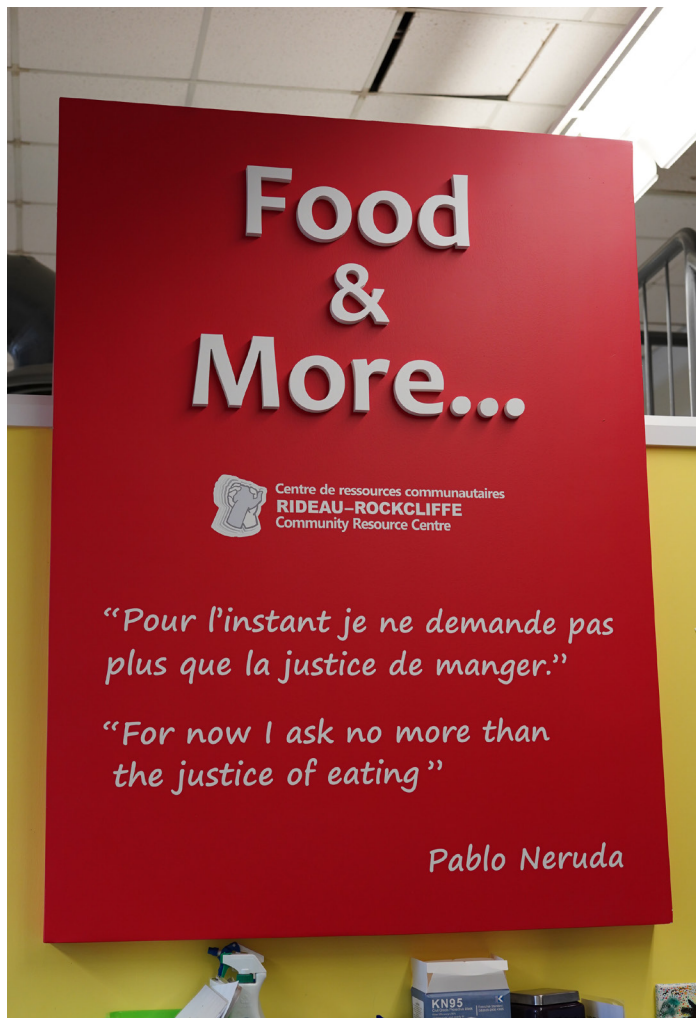
Beyond Food: Wrap-Around Supports

When someone is struggling to afford food, it's often part of a bigger picture—job loss, high rent, health emergencies, or gaps in public supports. That's why member agencies play a broader role in their communities, helping people access a range of supports beyond food.

In 2025, the top three non-food needs identified by people accessing food banks were housing, health and mental health supports, and financial and employment assistance. Member agencies spent an average of 21 hours per week meeting those non-food needs over the last year, adding up to more than 2,300 hours every week across the network.

“The first conversation might be about what’s missing from the pantry. But once people feel safe, they start to share everything else—rent pressures, language barriers, health worries, job losses. That’s when wrap-around supports come in.”

– ALINE ABDULNOUR, RIDEAU-ROCKCLIFFE COMMUNITY RESOURCE CENTRE



STORIES FROM THE NETWORK

Rideau-Rockcliffe Community Resource Centre (RRCRC)

RRCRC has supported residents in one of Ottawa’s most diverse and economically pressured areas for over 40 years.

Food brings people through the door, but the need rarely ends there. Through the Wrap-Around Support Initiative (WASI), workers help visitors access housing and mental health services, navigate benefits, and connect with employment and newcomer supports—a practical and dignified model that meets people where they are. In a 2024 evaluation across WASI participating member agencies, 93% of people said their stress levels were lower after meeting a wrap-around worker, 88% felt better able to face daily challenges, and nearly 70% felt more connected to their community. “People turn to food banks not only for food, but for stability, dignity, belonging, and guidance through complex systems,” says Sebastian Gaissert, Executive Director at RRCRC. “Food banks can open the door, but people need a whole community behind that door to help them move forward.”

Who's Experiencing Food Insecurity in Ottawa?

Food insecurity is impacting more households than ever before. What was once concentrated among people living on social assistance or single adults is now a reality for newcomers to Canada, seniors, and working families who still can't make ends meet. Food insecurity arises when the cost of living—housing, food, and other essentials—outpaces income. These pressures are often beyond the control of individuals or families: they are systemic.

Seniors on fixed incomes face greater food insecurity as costs rise

By 2030, one in five Ottawa residents will be a senior^[2]—the fastest-growing age group in Ontario, with millions entering retirement in the coming decades^[3]. For many, these years bring growing food insecurity. Since 2019, food bank visits by seniors in Ottawa have risen 90%. Ensuring older adults can age with security, community, and dignity will require continued attention, commitment, and systems change.

Two-parent families excluded from income supports face deepening food insecurity

In 2025, two-parent families represented nearly a third of food bank visitors, up from 20% in 2019. Many of these households are working, renting, and raising children, but cannot keep up with the rising costs of housing, childcare, and daily essentials.

The sharp rise among two-parent families reveals a deeper issue: many earn just above the threshold for income-based assistance, but far below the real cost of raising children in Ottawa.

Meanwhile, single-parent families and single adults remain a large proportion of visitors. Compared with Ottawa's household composition^[4], single-parent families and single adults are using food banks at much higher rates than their share of the population.

Rising food bank visits by newcomers reveal gaps in settlement, employment, and social supports

Food insecurity among newcomers is not a reflection of their ability to contribute or their right to receive

supports, but of barriers and inequities built into Canada's settlement, employment, and social support systems. From 2019 to 2025^[5], food bank visits by newcomers nearly doubled, and national research shows nearly 80% of newcomers who turn to food banks have been in Canada two years or less^[6].

Behind these numbers are refugees rebuilding their lives, international students balancing studies and precarious work, migrant workers sustaining essential sectors, and new immigrant families who contribute enormously to Ottawa's cultural and economic vitality. Too often, they face unstable employment, unaffordable housing, gaps in health and social benefits, and challenges having skills and credentials recognized. Racism and discrimination also play a significant role as social determinants of health for newcomers^[7], shaping access to health care, employment, and community life, and deepening the inequities that drive food insecurity. As Ottawa's newcomer population grows, so does the urgency to ensure food banks remain welcoming, inclusive spaces of support.

WHO'S SUPPORTED BY THE OTTAWA FOOD BANK NETWORK

40%
are single adults

9%
are seniors

29%
are two-parent families

16%
are single-parent families

11%
report their primary source of income as employment

50%
live in private housing (rent or own)

32%
are newcomers to Canada

35%
report primary source of income as social assistance or disability-related benefits

Food insecurity is a symptom of broken systems. To understand the rise in visits, we must look beyond *who* is coming through the doors and focus on the *why*—the wider social and economic trends that shape daily life in our city.

STORIES FROM THE NETWORK

Gloucester Emergency Food Cupboard (GEFC)

Since 1989, the GEFC has operated in east Ottawa, providing over 2,000 residents a month with emergency food support. Staff and volunteers have noticed a shift: more visitors are newcomers to Canada. These are families and individuals contributing through work, study, and community life, but struggling to keep pace with the rising cost of living.



“We have had waves of newcomers in the past who were refugees from war torn countries—Syria, Afghanistan, Congo and Ukraine. Now, we’re seeing more people coming here to study or to work. We need their skills, and lure them here with the promise of a fulfilling life. They’re working hard to stabilize and adapt, but the cost of rent and food keeps rising faster than incomes.”

– ERIN O'MANIQUE, GLOUCESTER EMERGENCY FOOD CUPBOARD

SUPPORTING NEWCOMERS IN OUR COMMUNITY

Newcomer food bank visits are up 98% since 2019.

16.3%
of food bank visitors
were newcomers in 2019

32.2%
of food bank visitors
are newcomers in 2025



The Broken Systems Behind Rising Food Insecurity

Food insecurity occurs when the cost of living—housing, food, childcare, healthcare, and other essentials—exceeds the income people have to cover it. Individuals and families often have little control over these costs, which are shaped by market forces and government policies. Unexpected expenses—like medical bills, car repairs, or home maintenance—can further push people into food insecurity. Here’s a closer look at how this can play out in everyday life.



Income, Employment and Social Supports

In Ottawa, having a job or stable housing doesn’t guarantee food security. Precarious, part-time, and low-wage work leave many households unable to keep up with the rising cost of living. The minimum wage is well below Ottawa’s living wage, and for families receiving social assistance, the gap is even wider: Ontario Works (OW) and the Ontario Disability Support Program have long kept recipients below the poverty line, forcing many to choose between rent and food.

Seniors and people with disabilities face added costs for mobility devices, home care, and specialized diets—all while living on fixed incomes. The monthly cost of nutritious food in 2025 for a family of four is \$1,180. A family of four receiving OW, after paying average rent and the cost of healthy food, faces a monthly *deficit*. These pressures make food insecurity an inevitable outcome of incomes and supports that don’t match the true cost of living.

In Ottawa, a family of four receiving Ontario Works faces a monthly deficit of \$1,017 after paying average new-tenant rent (\$2,831) and the cost of a basic nutritious diet (\$1,180)^[8].

\$17.60

hourly minimum wage^[9]

\$23.40

Ottawa’s 2025 hourly living wage^[10]

Defining a living wage

The hourly income a person requires to afford basic expenses like groceries, housing, transportation, childcare, healthcare, and savings for emergencies.



Everyday Expenses

The costs of everyday items surged over the last several years, and while the rate of growth has stabilized, incomes never kept pace. Ottawa residents today are still paying much more relative to their incomes than they were 5 years ago^[11].

73%

of Ottawa residents reduced purchases because of inflation^[12]

23%

of Ottawa households reported their household financial situation as poor or very poor^[13]

27%

increase in food prices July 2020–July 2025^[14]

\$22

per day median fee for infant daycare—down from \$86 per day in 2024^[15]

A family of four receiving Ontario Works spends^[16]

67%

of income on rent

48%

of income on food



Housing Costs

Housing costs in Ottawa are one of the largest drivers of food insecurity. When most of the income is spent on rent, food is often the first expense to be cut. Recent research from Alberta shows this relationship clearly: more than 60% of families entering shelters in Calgary had relied on food banks beforehand, and their food bank use rose sharply in the year immediately before homelessness.^[17] By strengthening food security, we also reduce the risk of eviction and homelessness. Ottawa has made progress on building affordable and supportive housing, but like many Canadian cities struggling to keep up, it has yet to meet its annual targets—while the need keeps growing.

HOUSING CRISIS

61.3%

increase in median monthly rents since 2006, far outpacing wages^[18]

3,000

people experiencing homelessness in 2024 (a 78% increase since 2018)^[19]

81%

of shelters operating over capacity in 2024^[20]

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

1,000+

households were housed from the City's centralized waitlist for affordable housing in 2024^[21]

15,000+

households on the waitlist for affordable housing in 2024^[22]

8 years

average wait time to access affordable housing^[23]

Food banks help prevent homelessness.



Municipal Infrastructure

Food security depends not just on income, but on being able to build an affordable lifestyle—one that includes accessible housing, transportation, food, childcare, recreation, and more. City planning and zoning decisions shape whether affordable housing, grocery stores, and community resources will be available and accessible. When transit is unaffordable or unreliable, or when essential amenities are too far away, families spend more time and money just to meet basic needs. These daily barriers make it harder to sustain work, care for children, or maintain health—and they deepen food insecurity across the city.

55%

of Ottawa Food Bank network member agencies cited transportation as the top barrier preventing community members from accessing food support in 2025

“Food banks shouldn’t be the ones holding up the gaps in our broken social systems—but here we are, seeing those gaps play out every day. When someone can’t afford groceries because their rent takes most of their paycheck, or their credentials aren’t recognized yet, it’s not just a food issue—it’s a housing, employment, and equity issue.”

– ERIN O'MANIQUE, GLOUCESTER EMERGENCY FOOD CUPBOARD

Poverty Trends

The pressures of low wages, unaffordable housing, and gaps in social supports show up in the data: poverty rates have risen over the last several years, and certain groups bear the brunt more heavily than others.

Gains made through the Canada and Ontario Child Benefits (starting in 2016), and emergency pandemic supports like Canadian Emergency Relief Benefit (CERB), are being lost. Female lone-parent families remain among the most affected—and in Ontario, their poverty rates rose sharply over the last two years of data (2022–23)^[26]. Newcomers, Indigenous peoples, people of colour, and people with disabilities experience poverty and food insecurity at significantly higher rates—reflecting deeper systemic inequities^[27].

Overall poverty rates stabilized somewhat in 2023 compared with 2022—but that doesn't tell the full story. Official data may also underestimate the true depth of need. The government standard Market Basket Measure found only 4% of Canadian seniors are living in poverty.

However, the Material Deprivation Index found that 14% of seniors in Canada are living in poverty^[28]. This discrepancy is important to resolve to truly understand community need and create effective solutions.

Food banks are a frontline response to systemic failures. Reducing poverty and food insecurity in Ottawa means building better systems that keep life affordable for all Ottawa citizens. Policy changes—from social assistance reform to affordable housing expansion and transit improvements to a living wage—are essential to creating a food secure city.

Poverty is being deprived of the power, resources, means, and choices that are necessary for a person to have a basic standard of living.

14%

of seniors living in poverty according to the Material Deprivation Index; 4% according to the Market Basket Measure

Figure 1: Poverty rates over time, Ontario^[24]

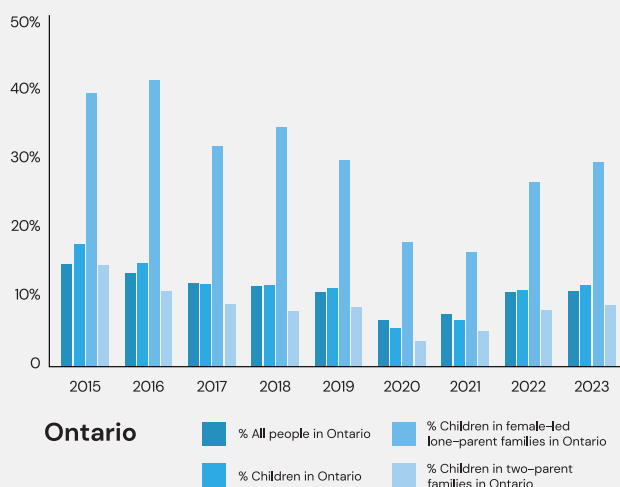
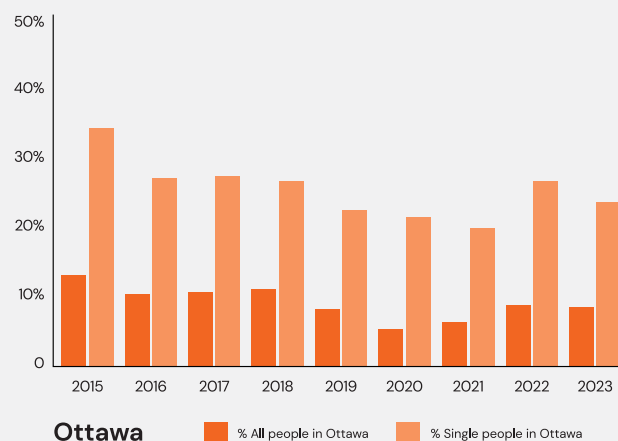


Figure 2: Poverty rates over time, Ottawa^[25]



Spread Thin, Dedicated to Advocacy

As frontline responders to food insecurity, the Ottawa Food Bank network of member agencies are stretched to their limits. Record demand collided with fewer resources, forcing impossible choices: reduced food hamper sizes, spending more on emergency food, or having to turn people away.

Challenges reported by members reflect national trends^[29]. The majority of member agencies said their fundraising efforts weren't enough to meet rising needs. Many pointed to a mismatch between available funding opportunities and the on-the-ground realities they face. Together, these pressures are taking a toll, and staff wellness is becoming an increasing concern.

Food banks are on the front lines of broken systems, but the network refuses to simply accept the status quo. Nearly half of Ottawa Food Bank member agencies are engaged in policy advocacy and are motivated to do more. This growing movement reflects a deeper truth: **together, we know that food insecurity will not be solved by charity alone.** It will be solved by policy. The next step is not to amplify our strain, but to amplify our voices—to City Hall, Queen's Park, and Parliament Hill.



OF THE 71 MEMBER AGENCIES (2025)

72%

increased food purchasing this year due to insufficient food donations

72%

reduced the amount of food in hampers and baskets to serve more households

58%

said staff workloads are unsustainable

29%

had to turn people away because of a lack of food

RESOURCES IN DEMAND

When asked what member agencies of the Ottawa Food Bank network need to meet rising demand for food support, the answer was clear: **everything.**

More food – 62 agencies
More funds – 53 agencies
More volunteers – 41 agencies
More staff – 35 agencies
More time – 33 agencies
More space – 7 agencies

Where Ottawa Stands

Ottawa is at a crossroads. Food insecurity has never been higher, and food banks are stretched beyond their limits. While food insecurity has finally entered the political conversation, the need on the ground continues to grow. City Hall has taken meaningful steps to address the growing food insecurity emergency. In 2024, City Council adopted the [2025–2029 Poverty Reduction Strategy](#), built around five pillars: food security, employment, financial security, economic inclusion, and housing stability. The creation of a Food Security Working Group, co-led by the Community Safety and Well-Being Office, marked a milestone in coordinating community-wide efforts and embedding a food security lens into city-wide policy decisions.

This progress was driven by community advocacy. In late 2024, the Ottawa Food Bank network launched a campaign to declare food insecurity an emergency in Ottawa. By September 2025, more than 700 residents had contacted their city councillors and the Mayor. In response, council passed a motion committing the City to [address food insecurity’s root causes](#) through stronger action and collaboration with provincial and federal governments. The motion directs City staff to:

- Advocate to provincial and federal governments for higher, indexed social assistance rates and improved employment supports.
- Align efforts with Ottawa’s 10-Year *Housing and Homelessness Plan* to increase deeply affordable and supportive housing.
- Support equitable hiring, decent work, and anti-racism policies in City departments.
- Partner with community organizations, including the Ottawa Food Bank network, using a collective impact approach, amplifying the voices of those with lived experience.

Even with these advances, the gap between policy and lived reality remains wide. In 2025, the network of member agencies reported a combined operating budget of \$158.4 million. Of this, \$36.9 million—about 23%—came from the City of Ottawa. While this support is vital, it still leaves most costs to be covered by other, unsustainable sources. Nearly half of agencies receive no funding from any level of government, relying instead on private donations to stay operational.

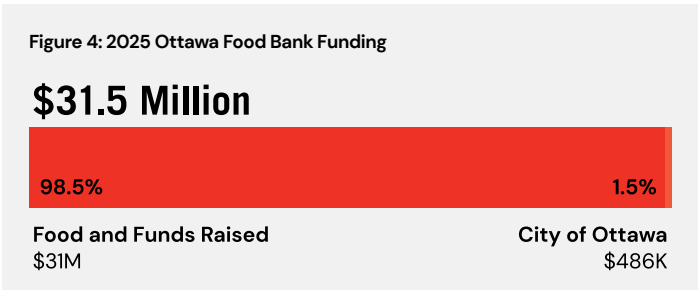
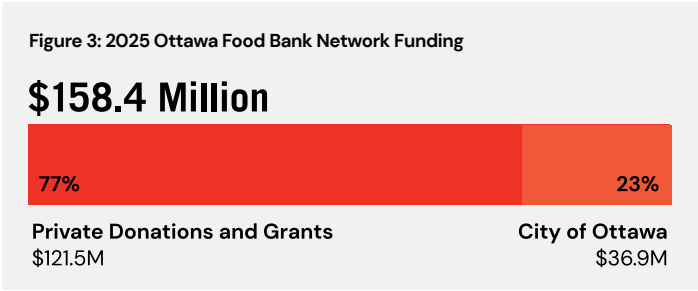
A Critical Year Ahead

City Hall is making encouraging progress, meaning now is a critical time to keep up the pressure.

The October 2026 municipal election is a chance to inform what happens next. It’s an opportunity to ask candidates where they stand on food insecurity, and how they will achieve the goals set out in the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

- Will we invest in housing?
- Will we provide stable funding for community organizations?
- Will we move from charity-based responses to systemic solutions?

The upcoming election is an opportunity to push for a city where good policy is brought to life and no one goes hungry.



\$0
Provincial Government Contributions

\$0
Federal Government Contributions

Food Insecurity is a Policy Choice

Food insecurity is a symptom of systems that aren't working.

It is the result of insufficient income and rising cost of basic needs—like housing, transportation, and food. Life circumstances that limit earning capacity or access to affordable services—like single parenthood, illness, or disability—can make things harder.

Strong policies and programs have the power to help.

When our health systems and social supports step in to help those facing challenging life circumstances, they can prevent crises. When they don't, the consequences are felt not just by individuals, but across communities.

That's why advocacy matters.

We've seen income supports—like CERB or Old Age Security—significantly reduce food insecurity. For single adults who have a low income, the risk of food insecurity is cut in half when they become eligible for pension and retirement income^[30]. When people who face the most barriers are supported, everyone benefits. Social and economic costs drop. Health outcomes improve. Communities grow stronger.

Change is possible, and it starts with pushing for better policy at every level of government.

We Call on the Municipal Government

Municipal governments cannot solve food insecurity alone, but they have powerful levers. Municipal action can stabilize frontline supports, prevent displacement, and amplify pressure on higher levels of government by:



Protecting deeply affordable housing.

The City's housing waitlist now exceeds 15,000 households, with waits of nearly 8 years. Passing a renovation bylaw, proactively acquiring low-rent buildings at risk of speculation, and building deeply affordable housing on public land would prevent displacement and reduce food insecurity.



Making transit affordable and accessible.

Transportation is the top barrier community members face to access food support, cited by 55% of member agencies. Expanding the EquiPass program by simplifying enrolment and enhancing routes within priority neighbourhoods would ensure residents can reach food programs, healthcare, and work.



Being a strong ally.

Build on the September 2025 Council commitment to advocate for provincial and federal action on the root causes of food insecurity, including action on income, housing, and employment supports.



Setting a municipal target to end chronic food insecurity.

Commit to eliminating food insecurity in Ottawa by 2050 with the Ottawa Food Bank network.



Funding food security sustainably.

- Expand eligibility for the Sustainability Fund
- Increase the funding envelope of the Sustainability Fund
- Index available funding for sector-specific operating costs alongside inflation
- Ensure funding can be used for core operations and skilled staff

Current public funding reaches a fraction of Ottawa's food security network. Of 71 Ottawa Food Bank member agencies, 20 receive [sustainability funding](#) from the City to support food programming, covering 7% of the network's total operating budget. This often leaves smaller and equity-seeking organizations, that serve high-need populations, disproportionately underfunded. To ensure food programs can meet growing demand and deliver services equitably, the eligibility criteria and overall funding envelope must expand, and reflect the operational realities of food bank member agencies. This means having capacity to hire skilled staff, pay for operations, and keep pace with real costs. These steps would stabilize critical food and wrap-around services, making Ottawa's food security sector more inclusive and sustainable. These steps would stabilize critical food and wrap-around services, making Ottawa's food security sector more inclusive and sustainable.



We Call on the Provincial Government

Ontario holds the strongest levers over poverty, but its policies currently push people deeper into food insecurity. Provincial action is non-negotiable:



Raise and index social assistance rates.

- Double Ontario Works (OW) rates as a baseline, lift Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates above the poverty line, and index both to inflation.



Protect citizens from losing benefits too soon.

- Exempt federal supports like Employment Insurance, the Canada Pension Plan, and the Canada Child Benefit from being deducted dollar-for-dollar from OW and ODSP.
- Simplify eligibility and reduce “cliff effects” that cut off benefits abruptly when recipients take low-wage work, trapping people in poverty.



Invest in housing and rent supports.

- Expand the Canada–Ontario Housing Benefit to help more households afford market rent.
- Strengthen tenant protections, including limits on above-guideline rent increases and stronger enforcement against unlawful evictions to reduce displacement and food bank reliance.



Modernize Ontario’s poverty strategy.

- Use better indicators of progress on poverty reduction—like material well-being or reduced food bank visits—rather than employment status, which doesn’t guarantee food security.
- Expand access to supports that help with health, mobility, and digital inclusion (special diet allowances, transportation, internet access).



We Call on the Federal Government

Federal policy shapes the structural conditions that drive food insecurity nationwide. The federal government must act on its unique levers:



Strengthen the Canada Disability Benefit (CDB).

- Increase the value of the CDB beyond the current \$200/month for eligible recipients, and protect it from clawbacks.
- Reform the Disability Tax Credit application process to expand eligibility and reduce barriers.



Scale up deeply affordable housing.

- Federal transfers and capital funding determine the pace of housing supply. Double the federal target for social housing supply.
- Commit long-term funding for acquisitions and nonprofit-led housing preservation.



Reform Employment Insurance (EI) and income supports.

- Expand EI access for precarious and gig workers by lowering contribution and duration thresholds.
- Improve the Canada Workers Benefit and increase and index the Canada Child Benefit.



Set a national target to reduce food insecurity.

- Commit to reducing household food insecurity by 50% by 2030, aligning with Food Banks Canada's proposed national target. Without federal leadership, food insecurity will remain Canada's quiet emergency.
- Create a cross-departmental plan with binding metrics and timelines to track progress.



Secure status and protection for new Canadians.

- Create inclusive pathways to permanent status for long-standing temporary residents—including migrant workers, international students, and undocumented individuals—so they can access healthcare, housing benefits, and social services.
- Invest in credential recognition and settlement –to–work supports to help reduce exploitation and improve income security.
- Maintain stable, multi-year funding for immigrant-serving organizations, with transitional support where cuts have occurred, to prevent disruptions in language, employment, settlement, and social integration supports.



How You Can Help

Be a Local Advocate

Share the facts.

More than 1 in 4 households in Ottawa are food insecure. Talk about it in your networks and social media. The more we name the emergency, the harder it is for decision-makers to ignore.

Challenge the myths.

Hunger is not caused by poor budgeting or individual choices—it is a systemic issue caused by inadequate income, unaffordable housing, and weak public supports.

Raise your voice.

Call, email, or meet with your city councillor, your Member of Provincial Parliament, and your Member of Parliament. Ask them: What are you doing to reduce food insecurity in Ottawa? Will you commit to policies that raise incomes, expand affordable housing, and protect tenants?

Vote with food security in mind.

The October 2026 municipal election is a chance to elect leaders who take food insecurity seriously. Ask candidates where they stand—and hold them accountable.

Support Community Solutions

Volunteer or donate.

Contribute resources to local food programs.

Back systemic change.

Support organizations working on the root causes of food insecurity: tenant advocacy, community health and resource centres, legal aid, anti-poverty coalitions, disability justice networks.

Check in with neighbours.

Consider seniors, newcomers, or single adults who may be silently struggling with food insecurity.



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METHODOLOGY

Every March, the Ottawa Food Bank network participates in the Hunger Count survey mandated and designed by Food Banks Canada. The data collected is generally demographic information, such as age, sex, and household make-up. It also includes some optional psychographic questions such as source of income, education, and housing type. March is chosen as the optimal survey time for food banks across the country because it is an unexceptional month, without predictable high or low use. Data is collected from our network of 71 member agencies and 98 food programs using a secure database managed by the Ottawa Food Bank called Link2Feed. Client data can only be accessed by trained and authorized agency staff and volunteers.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report reflects the shared commitment of many contributors working together to strengthen food security across our community. The Ottawa Food Bank network of member agencies generously shared their time, insights, and data, helping to build a clearer understanding of both the challenges we face and the opportunities ahead. The contributions of these agencies, along with the efforts of many partners, ensure that the findings in this report are grounded in real experiences and will inform practical, collaborative solutions. The insights gathered here are intended not only to inform today's decisions but also to guide future efforts toward a more equitable, coordinated, and food secure city.

Thank you to our municipal, provincial and federal partners, including the City of Ottawa, Ottawa Public Health, Feed Ontario, and Food Banks Canada for their contributions, collaboration and support.

WRITING

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DESIGN

Frances Motta

We need help. We need basic needs. How can someone have a good life when we are made to choose between housing or food? Please help.

Never having enough money
at the end of the month
for FOOD!

The cost of living is leaving myself + many others with massive credit card debt as that is the only way to pay rent, bills and still afford groceries.. The debt load + interest is crippling, and will only get worse.

After I pay for everything for the month I can only afford one meal a day. Unless I go to the food bank.

I am a single mom of 3 that struggles with finding consistent work due to lack of childcare. I frequent the food bank because I have limited income being on social assistance. Most of my income goes to bills & rent, which leaves very little money behind. I find that I am stuck in a cycle that is difficult to get out of.

I'm unable to provide the basic needs for my family even though I work full-time.
The cost of living for food/housing super expensive.

I can not afford to do anything but try to survive! It effects my mental health, my family, my soul, my will to live.



**There's no Ottawa
Food Bank without
Ottawa.**