

**HUNGER**

**COUNT**

**2022**

**Policy  
Recommendations**

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## INTRODUCTION

### A DUAL PATH TOWARD A BETTER ROAD AHEAD

In last year's HungerCount report, we raised alarms about the post-pandemic recovery and what it could mean for Canada's economy and people. There were clear signs that the road to recovery would be bumpy, but few could have expected just how dire things would get for so many individuals and families.



As our current report points out, the past year has seen historic inflation for basic necessities like food, fuel and housing, while the invasion of Ukraine has led to massive disruptions in supply chains, the global food supply, and global economics.

What does this all mean for people living in Canada? Groceries are more expensive, gas is more costly, basic necessities are taking more of our incomes, housing is harder to afford, and governments are reluctant to offer the assistance that was rightfully available at the height of the pandemic.

While all people in Canada have felt the pinch in one way or another, it is clear that some groups are being particularly affected more than others. As the data plainly shows, longstanding fissures in our social safety net are being exposed in the midst of this economic turmoil.

Food banks are seeing an increasing number of seniors and people living on fixed incomes walk through their doors. People who are employed (or who were recently employed) are turning to food banks more often because their incomes are still too low, even with a job. Students who may have had enough budgeted for their previous academic years are now being forced to turn to their local food banks as well.

What the number of food bank visits showed us this year is that no one is safe from these economic challenges.

What the data also shows us is that while food insecurity can affect anyone, this past year's economic climate has exposed and further entrenched the deep poverty that existed before the current economic downturn.

While inflation continues to be unbiased in its wrath, many people in Canada have the incomes and savings needed to weather the storm. Others aren't so lucky – already having been living in deep poverty prior to the current inflationary crisis, being able to 'scrape by' has gone from dire to impossible for far too many. As governments at all levels in Canada look to the road ahead in building a more resilient Canada, it is crucial that attention not only be put on temporary solutions to address recent inflationary issues, but also toward the long-term solutions needed to reduce the systemic poverty that has existed for decades.

This means developing a much stronger social safety net through a dual focus – one that balances the need to reduce the cost of living (increase affordability) while also striving to increase people's incomes (reduce poverty).

A dual approach of addressing the root causes of food bank use, which are low incomes and poverty, while also targeting the more recent acute causes, which relate to the skyrocketing costs of living, can pave the way for a more resilient Canada where no one is left behind, and no one goes hungry.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## A MINIMUM INCOME FLOOR

### PLANKS ARE IN PLACE, BUT LARGE CRACKS REMAIN

While far from perfect, it can be said that there are currently two existing pillars to Canada's income floor – seniors, who have an income floor through the Canada Pension Plan (CPP), Old Age Security (OAS) and Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS), and families with children, who have an income floor through the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) that will soon be bolstered by a national affordable childcare program.

These two foundational pillars are important, yet imperfect advancements in Canada's social safety net. Currently, seniors and families with children represent only two of the four necessary pillars that could help lead us toward a Canada-wide minimum income floor.

In addition, Canada's income floor must include a pillar for those living with a disability and for single unattached working-age adults (singles). All together, these four pillars must be developed and improved to bring us closer to a minimum income floor for all people in Canada.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## A MINIMUM INCOME FLOOR

### THE EXISTING PILLARS: SENIORS AND FAMILIES

While seniors and families with children represent the two existing pillars of Canada's income floor, many individuals in these groups still struggle with food insecurity. In fact, families with children (both lone parents and couples) represent 26 per cent of all food-insecure households, and still 17 per cent of seniors are living with food insecurity.<sup>83</sup>

At food banks this year, seniors were one of the more alarming upwards shifts in visitor trends. Up by 2 per cent, those with pensions as their main income source now represent 11 per cent of food bank visitors. As for families with children, while food banks have seen a hopeful decrease in the number of children visiting a food bank since the introduction of the Canada Child Benefit (CCB), still one in three served are children. This representation of children in food banks remains disproportionate as children represent only 20 per cent of the general population.

What has become clearer over the past months is that no household is unaffected by increases in inflation and the cost of living. Those with fixed incomes, like seniors, struggle to stretch their dollars to accommodate higher grocery and utility bills. Families' grocery bills and housing costs are increasing, too. It is important that the government does not forget about these groups, despite the strong systems supporting them. In the long term, the federal government must continue to improve and increase the benefits being offered for seniors and families with children.

<sup>83</sup>Tarasuk et al. *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021*.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## A MINIMUM INCOME FLOOR

### PILLAR 3: PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

In March of this year, 17 per cent of food bank users stated that disability support was their main source of income. This number is increasing and has reached alarming heights in Ontario and B.C., where 30 and 24 per cent of food bank users stated that disability support was their main source of income, respectively.

Not a single province (with federal benefits included) provides single people who live with a disability with a sufficient income. This discrepancy can be as much as \$13,578 per year, where Albertans on the Barriers to Full Employment (BFE) program subsist on \$11,430 annually.<sup>84</sup>

The result of this inadequate system is a disproportionate number of people on disability support seeking outside help. When the benefits offered don't go far enough to provide basic necessities, those receiving disability support find themselves heading to the food bank. The proportion of food bank visitors who rely on disability support compared to the general population level is shocking. For example, in Ontario only 4.3 per cent of the population is receiving provincial disability support,<sup>85</sup> meanwhile 30 per cent of food bank users indicate disability support as their main income source. The numbers peak in Alberta, where those receiving disability supports are 840 per cent more represented in food banks.

There is hope in the much-anticipated Canada Disability Benefit. Said to be modelled after the GIS program,<sup>86</sup> this benefit will result in the first substantial income floor for persons with a disability. The questions that remain unclear are how restrictive the benefit will be and how much it will offer. On average, provincial social assistance rates fall below Canada's official poverty line, the Market Basket Measure (MBM), by an average of \$9,390 a year.

Many advocates fear that this new federal benefit could lead to cutbacks on provincial supports. Historically, when new federal programs are put in place, provinces often cut provincial programs. In this case, it is very clear that this cannot happen.

This is a moment for provinces and the federal government to work together and close the gap. However far the new Canada benefit goes, provincial legislatures must go the rest of the way. Canada needs to get to the point where assistance rates don't mean an automatic trip to the food bank. As it stands, many people receiving disability support cannot afford to feed and house themselves properly, and as a result, they are prevented from moving to a life beyond poverty.

<sup>84</sup> Tarasuk et al. *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021*.

<sup>85</sup> Laidley, J., & Tabbara, M. (2021). *Welfare in Canada, 2020*. Maytree. [https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/Welfare\\_in\\_Canada\\_2020.pdf](https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/Welfare_in_Canada_2020.pdf)

<sup>86</sup> Inclusion Canada. (2021). *Canada Disability Benefit: A vision and design outline*. <https://inclusioncanada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Canada-Disability-Benefit-Vision-and-Design-July-2021-FINAL.pdf>

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## A MINIMUM INCOME FLOOR

### PILLAR 4: UNATTACHED SINGLES

For many years now, Food Banks Canada's annual HungerCount report has highlighted that single working-age adults account for a consistently increasing percentage of the people who need help from a food bank.

Over the last decade, the percentage of single people using food banks has increased significantly, having grown from 38 per cent of households helped by a food bank in 2010 to almost half of all households helped (45 per cent) in 2022.

Looking at the staggering economic statistics for this group, it doesn't take long to determine why food banks have seen this jump. Using Canada's Official Poverty Measure (the Market Basket Measure), just under one in 10 Canadians live below the poverty line. If we look at only unattached (i.e., single) working-age people, that figure jumps to 33 per cent: one in every three single adults lives in poverty.<sup>87</sup>

Of the nearly 2 million people living in deep poverty in Canada, 50 per cent of them are singles.<sup>88</sup> These individuals are living with incomes that are below 75 per cent of the already inadequate poverty line and on average, they're earning \$6,700 a year.<sup>89</sup>

Given these statistics, it is hardly surprising that close to one in five single adults experience food insecurity and that so many need support from a food bank to make ends meet.<sup>90</sup>

This is a population that, from a government program perspective, has few places to turn and seems to have been largely forgotten by federal and provincial governments. Many members of this group have mental health issues that are exacerbated by poverty and low incomes.

Many people in this situation have mental health issues that also go untreated because they have a lack of supports, are stuck in a cycle of inadequate social assistance or disability-related supports, or have lost a job and have nowhere to turn for new training and education programs to equip them to re-enter the workforce. All these issues have been exacerbated by the recent economic downturn and heightened cost of living.

For decades, governments have focused policies on specific subsets of the population, such as families and seniors, but have routinely overlooked single, working-age adults as a group that requires targeted action. Among those people who are unable to work, many are receiving social or disability assistance but cannot climb out of poverty because of the grossly inadequate supports and strict conditions that come with these programs. In other words, they are being held back by the system that is meant to help them.

<sup>87</sup> Food Banks Canada. (2017). *Nowhere to turn*. [https://foodbankscanada.ca/nowhere-to-turn\\_final\\_en/](https://foodbankscanada.ca/nowhere-to-turn_final_en/)

<sup>88</sup> Kapoor, G. T., Tabbara, M., Hanley, S., & McNicoll, S. (2022). *How to reduce the depth of single adult poverty in Canada: Proposal for a Canada working-age supplement*. Maytree. <https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/canada-working-age-supplement-report.pdf>

<sup>89</sup> Kapoor et al. *How to reduce the depth of single adult poverty in Canada*.

<sup>90</sup> Statistics Canada. *Household food security by living arrangement*.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## A MINIMUM INCOME FLOOR

We recommend that the government:

# 1

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Swiftly introduce the Canada Disability Benefit with assurance that no clawbacks will come from provincial governments and that harmony exists between provincial assistance levels and the federal program to bring all persons with a disability up to, or above the MBM.

**A)** Amend the MBM for persons with a disability to reflect the realities of a higher cost of living for those facing long-term disability.

# 2

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Fund and develop, in collaboration with the provinces and territories, multiple Minimum Income Floor pilot projects of various types across the country in various provinces and territories (in both rural and urban communities).

**A)** Within at least one pilot, consider a model based on the reformatting of the Canada Workers Benefit, where recipients do not need to have a base income to receive a minimum allotment.

**B)** Collect and analyze data from these pilot projects over multiple years to determine the type of Minimum Income Floor that is best suited to Canada's needs and accounts for Canada's regional differences.

# 3

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In the short term, allow all low-income households to have access to the non-cash benefits that are currently only available to those on social assistance (e.g., childcare subsidies, affordable housing supplements, drug and dental insurance).

# 4

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Make single, low-income adults a priority consideration in all future poverty reduction measures, including an expanded and modernized EI, to ensure that this vulnerable population is no longer left behind.

# 5

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Develop new mental health measures as part of future health accords with the provinces and territories that include a specific focus on the needs of single, working-age adults.

# 6

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Ensure all federal benefits are indexed to inflation and that agreements with provincial governments explicitly forbid clawbacks of provincial social supports for new federal benefit programs.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING

### A PERSISTENT PROBLEM THAT REQUIRES URGENT SOLUTIONS

While there are many factors that push Canadians into food banks, one of the most pressing is the increasingly high cost of housing. Put simply, shelter is a non-negotiable priority for any individual or family. As shelter costs rise, households are sacrificing everything they can to keep a roof over their heads. This struggle often leads to fewer or no meals, poor health, debt, increased stress and mental illness, and the inability to pay other bills.

This March, 13.4 per cent of food bank users stated that their main reason for visiting a food bank was due to high housing costs. In a separate poll, three out of every five people in Canada reported housing as the largest obstacle to affording food – up from only one in five in 2020.<sup>91</sup>

Affordability isn't the only concerning issue in Canadian housing. Nationally, 45 per cent of renters are living in a dwelling that is either inadequate, unsuitable or unaffordable, while 23 per cent of renters are in core housing need.

The most troubling area of the housing market is not with those who own their home, but for those who rent. Once again this year, as our data shows, a majority of food bank visitors (two in three) live in market rental housing. Many of these renters are living within the lowest income groups and can spend well over 30 or 50 per cent, or even more, of their income on shelter costs.<sup>92</sup> Spending this portion of income on housing is considered a "crisis" level, leaving little left over for other basic needs such as food and putting people at risk of homelessness.

A slight glimmer of hope emerged with the federal government's introduction of the National Housing Strategy (NHS) in 2017, something that Food Banks Canada had advocated for over many years.

As part of the NHS strategy, the federal government committed to spending around \$20 billion (equally matched by the provinces and territories for a total of \$40 billion) over 12 years, with the ultimate goal of removing 530,000 (half of) households from core housing need and reducing the number of chronically homeless people by half by 2030.<sup>93</sup>

Those were positive developments backed by sound government policy, yet very little, if anything, has been done since the strategy was announced to help people who currently need the support of food banks because of their high housing costs.

Most of the NHS investments have been put toward loans for the development of market housing rather than directly addressing the needs of the people who most need help. A 2019 Parliamentary Budget Office report found that the NHS changed very little in terms of how much funding the government invested in affordable housing. In fact, it found that the NHS actually slightly reduced the funding targeted for those in core housing need.<sup>94</sup> Meanwhile, the erosion of affordable housing far outpaces its creation: for every affordable unit created, four are removed from the market.<sup>95</sup>

<sup>91</sup> Statistics in this section are derived from data collected from a national poll commissioned by Food Banks Canada and conducted by Mainstreet Research from February 25 to March 2, 2022, among a sample of 4,009 adults, 18 years of age or older, living in Canada. See Appendix A for more results from this poll.

<sup>92</sup> Canadian Rental Housing Index. (n.d.). *COST*.

<sup>93</sup> Government of Canada. (2017). *A place to call home: Canada's first National housing strategy*. <https://eppdscrmssa01.blob.core.windows.net/cmhcprodcontainer/sf/project/placetocallhome/pdfs/canada-national-housing-strategy.pdf>

<sup>94</sup> Segel-Brown, B. (2019, June 18). *Federal program spending on housing affordability*. Office of the Parliamentary Budget Officer. <https://www.pbo-dpb.gc.ca/en/blog/news/federal-program-spending-on-housing-affordability>

<sup>95</sup> Housing Policy and Research Exchange. (2021, July 30). *Getting to 2030 – Examining how Budget 2021 helps Canada achieve its housing goals, and what we need to do from here* [Submission to Canada's Minister of Families, Children and Social Development and Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation]. Maytree. <https://maytree.com/publications/getting-to-2030/>



# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING

### A PERSISTENT PROBLEM THAT REQUIRES URGENT SOLUTIONS

While units are being built and converted, there are still millions of Canadians looking for affordable housing. Right now, Canadians need more support to help cover the cost of housing. If the government is to find success in helping Canadians access affordable housing, they will need to focus both on (1) building and introducing new affordable units, and (2) helping make the existing market more affordable.

In Manitoba, the rent assist program aids 33,000 residents each year by providing funds that help bring rental costs closer to 30 per cent of income.<sup>96</sup> It was found that the added benefit allowed individuals to “focus on other aspects of their life such as furthering their education, raising and/or gaining custody of their children, and rebuilding their mental and physical health.”<sup>97</sup>

Further, 70 per cent of the tenants surveyed identified that the benefit allowed them to buy healthier groceries. With rents being a rather stable expense compared to others, the benefit allowed residents to make smart planning decisions with their funds.<sup>98</sup> Robust rent assist programs, like the program offered in Manitoba, can go a long way in reducing poverty and food insecurity among all renters.

Trends in food bank visits also point to another issue in the housing sector – students. Post-secondary students visiting food banks are up significantly from 2021, now representing 7.1 per cent of food bank visitors. It’s no surprise to find that post-secondary students are struggling so heavily when a large majority are allocating more than 30 per cent of their income to rents that have increased substantially over the past four years.<sup>99</sup>

This means that a vast majority of students are in core housing need in a market that is trending up. With students spending much of their time studying, there is little opportunity to earn additional income. On average, most student incomes are less than \$20,000 a year. Despite this, rents are 25 per cent higher for students than the rest of the population.<sup>100</sup> While housing is a nation-wide issue that impacts more than just students, there is a clear weakness in the student housing sector.

While the high cost of housing has been a root cause of food bank use for many years, the acute urgency of the matter and the need for government intervention has never been clearer.

<sup>96</sup> Cooper, S., Hajer, J., & Plaut, S. *Assisting renters: Manitoba’s Rent Assist in the context of Canada’s national housing strategy*. Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives Manitoba Office. <https://policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/assisting-renters>

<sup>97</sup> Cooper et al. *Assisting renters*.

<sup>98</sup> Cooper et al. *Assisting renters*.

<sup>99</sup> Utile. (n.d.). *Data and research*. <https://www.utile.org/en/data-and-research>

<sup>100</sup> Utile. (2022). *On student housing in Canada – Research report*. [https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/604e1456a8cd2bab84c72bc8/6312321ae56ed92137241afb\\_FLASH\\_20220902\\_ENG\\_VF.pdf](https://uploads-ssl.webflow.com/604e1456a8cd2bab84c72bc8/6312321ae56ed92137241afb_FLASH_20220902_ENG_VF.pdf)

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## AFFORDABLE HOUSING

### A PERSISTENT PROBLEM THAT REQUIRES URGENT SOLUTIONS

We recommend that the government:

# 1

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Immediately implement a national rent assist program based on an expanded version of the Canada Housing Benefit and include the development of an on-reserve rent assist program.

# 2

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Explore community-targeted funding for the acquisition of affordable housing. In other words, providing capital funding (loans and grants) to non-profits so they may purchase and provide rental properties at or below the median market rent.<sup>101</sup>

# 3

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Introduce new investments and address an important omission of the National Housing Strategy, to build supportive housing for people with mental and physical health disabilities, particularly for low-income and marginalized populations.<sup>102</sup>

# 4

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Develop stronger regulations or taxations of financial entities (REITs, private equity funds, asset management companies, and pension funds) in the housing market.

<sup>101</sup> The Housing Policy and Research Exchange. 2021. *Getting to 2030*.

<sup>102</sup> Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives. (2018). *Alternative Budget 2019: No time to lose*. <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/afb2019>

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## LOW-INCOME WORKERS

### WHEN A JOB STILL ISN'T ENOUGH

In the peak of the pandemic, unemployment rates across Canada reached frightening heights, with 13 per cent of all Canadians being unemployed at the time.<sup>103</sup> As the economy began to recover, the unemployment rate decreased to record lows in June and July of 2022. On its way down, unemployment rates had already reached a healthy level of 5.3 per cent in March, at the time that Food Banks collected HungerCount data.<sup>104</sup>

Despite this strong recovery and increase in employment across Canada, the wages now flowing into the pockets of workers are clearly not going far enough. As our report data shows, 14 per cent of people seeking help from food banks indicated that their main source of income came from a job.

Worse yet, when including those who are currently collecting EI, Canada's labour force represents 20 per cent of food bank visitors. These people are Canada's working poor. Individuals who, despite their best efforts to work, still come home with too little money to feed themselves and their families.

And while one in five is a striking number, the working poor actually account for 40 per cent of those living in poverty in most parts of the country.<sup>105</sup> More shocking, 52 per cent of food-insecure households report jobs as their main income source.<sup>106</sup>

This large number of struggling workers is due, by and large, to the increase in precarious and unreliable work. People in temporary and term-based work "are more likely to report fewer hours of work, experience more frequent periods of unemployment, and earn less money than those who have secure, full-time work".<sup>107</sup>

There are many factors that lead to working people in Canada visiting food banks. Individuals with lower wages are often more likely to struggle with the increasing costs of living and are seen regularly in food banks. However, the most significant challenges come for those who work temporary, casual or part-time work, and for racialized Canadians (+7 per cent compared to non-racialized).

In a country where working hard no longer means that you're guaranteed an adequate income, people need a social safety system that guarantees their peace of mind. In the 2018–2019 fiscal year, EI covered only 39 per cent of Canada's unemployed workers, compared to over 80 per cent in the early 1990s.<sup>108</sup> Now, almost 40 per cent of households whose main source of income is EI are reporting some level of food insecurity.<sup>109</sup>

While the federal government has made commitments to review the current inadequate EI program, there has been no headway and the process is rolling into a slow stop. As conditions in Canada's economy worsen, there is no time for slow and drawn-out processes. Action is needed today.

<sup>103</sup> Statistics Canada. (2022). *Chart 2 Unemployment rate up in August*. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/220909/cg-a002-eng.htm>

<sup>104</sup> Statistics Canada. (2022). *Chart 2 Unemployment rate up in August*.

<sup>105</sup> Stapleton. *The working poor in the Toronto region*.

<sup>106</sup> Tarasuk et al, V., Li, T., & Fafard St-Germain, A. A. (2022). *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021*.

<sup>107</sup> Stapleton. *The working poor in the Toronto region*.

<sup>108</sup> Busby, C., & Gray, D. (2021, March 10). *A new voluntary EI program would bring more workers under safety net*. Policy Options Politiques. <https://policyoptions.irpp.org/magazines/march-2021/a-new-voluntary-ei-program-would-bring-more-workers-under-safety-net/>

<sup>109</sup> Tarasuk et al. (2022). *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021*.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS LOW-INCOME WORKERS WHEN A JOB STILL ISN'T ENOUGH

We recommend that the government:

1

Develop a new program within EI that specifically supports older workers (aged 45–65) who lose employment at a later age and who may need specific training and education programs catered to their needs to help them re-enter the modern workforce.

2

Permanently broaden the EI qualifying definition of “employment” to include self-employed and precarious work.

3

Review and reduce the number of qualifying “hours of employment” needed (currently between 420 and 700 hours of insurable employment) to better reflect the nature of modern jobs and working situations.

A) Include a specific stream for seasonal workers who may work as few as 12 to 16 weeks a year.

4

Immediately expand the Working-While-on-Claim (WWC) provisions in EI to allow workers to retain more of their income from temporary/part-time work while on EI without losing benefits or having their income clawed back.

5

Extend the maximum duration of EI benefits beyond 45 weeks, to 52 weeks, followed by a staggered reduction in cash benefits while retaining access to non-cash EI supports (such as training and education) so that people are not forced into our broken and grossly inadequate provincial social assistance system once their EI benefits run out.

6

Work with provinces to reduce the clawbacks and improve harmony between social assistance and EI.

7

Expand EI sickness benefits beyond 15 weeks to keep people off provincial disability programs, which provide meagre supports and are very difficult to climb out of.

8

To better support low-wage workers currently employed:

A) Improve the Canada Workers Benefit (CWB) by increasing the maximum payout, especially for those earning below the poverty line.

B) Introduce government incentives to encourage businesses to pay living wages to all employees.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## NORTHERN AND REMOTE FOOD INSECURITY

### FORGING A PATH TOWARD BRIGHTER DAYS

Northern food insecurity remains a significant concern for Food Banks Canada. Due to the increased cost of housing and food, along with the ongoing impacts of climate change, the issue of northern food insecurity will likely worsen over the coming months and years. Already, food banks are seeing highly concerning increases in the number of Indigenous people visiting food banks – making up 15.3 per cent of visitors compared to 8 per cent last year. With a majority of northern and remote communities being home to largely Indigenous peoples, this increase is indicative of a growing issue in the remote North. While consecutive federal governments have attempted to address this problem with various targeted programs and initiatives, it is clear that the current approach is failing.

Food Banks Canada has worked over the last few years to suggest ways to improve the Nutrition North program and northern food insecurity in general. However, we remain concerned that food costs in the North have remained largely unchanged since the beginning of the Nutrition North program in 2011. For example, in Iqaluit, Nunavut, the cost of a nutritious food basket to feed a family of four in March 2018 was approximately \$1,721.56. The same basket of food would cost about \$868 in Ottawa.<sup>110</sup>

Recent data released by Statistics Canada shows that the Nutrition North subsidy has not had the impact on food costs that many hoped for when the program was first introduced almost a decade ago. As shown in the most recent numbers released by Nutrition North Canada, the average cost of the Revised Northern Food Basket in March 2018 was actually over 2 per cent higher than it was in March of the previous year, and only 1 per cent lower than in March 2011, prior to the launch of the Nutrition North program.<sup>111</sup>

Measures announced by the program in 2018, such as new supports for traditional hunting and gathering programs (a measure that Food Banks Canada has advocated for), and a new Inuit-Crown working group to address future challenges, are welcomed, but they are unlikely to be adequate to address the multiple challenges facing the North. This is all made worse by the recent surge in food inflation and the cost of living.

Beyond Nutrition North, household food insecurity in the North has grown rampant. In the Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut, food insecurity rates reach 17, 22 and 57 per cent, respectively.<sup>112</sup> In 2020, the federal government recognized this challenge in a report on northern food insecurity by saying that “due to several factors, Northerners – in particular, women, children and Indigenous peoples – are more at risk of experiencing food insecurity than other Canadians.”<sup>113</sup>

These high food insecurity rates can be explained by consistently lower wages among those living in the North, high housing and energy costs, and devastating impacts from colonialism, systemic racism and climate change that are preventing the gathering of traditional and reliable food sources.<sup>114</sup>

With household food insecurity levels still unacceptably high in the territories and social assistance income that has decreased in real terms, it is time for the federal government, in collaboration with the territories, to review their food security strategies in the North.

Food Banks Canada, along with many food banks in the food banking network, are doing what they can to support struggling northern communities, but high shipping costs are stretching already limited funding to its limit, especially with recent inflationary pressures.

Addressing food prices and implementing food-driven solutions can only do so much. The federal government must also review its entire approach to the long-term root causes of food insecurity in the North if significant progress is to be achieved.

<sup>110</sup> Ottawa Public Health. (2018). *Nutritious food basket: The price of eating well in Ottawa*. [https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/resources/Documents/2018\\_NFB-Report\\_EN.pdf](https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/resources/Documents/2018_NFB-Report_EN.pdf)

<sup>111</sup> Government of Canada. (2019). *Cost of the revised Northern food basket*. <https://www.nutritionnorthcanada.gc.ca/eng/1548078467819/1548078497301>

<sup>112</sup> Leblanc-Laurendeau, O. (2020, March 01). *Food insecurity in Northern Canada: An overview. Library of Parliament*. [https://lop.parl.ca/sites/PublicWebsite/default/en\\_CA/ResearchPublications/202047E](https://lop.parl.ca/sites/PublicWebsite/default/en_CA/ResearchPublications/202047E)

<sup>113</sup> Leblanc-Laurendeau, O. *Food insecurity in Northern Canada*.

<sup>114</sup> Bratina, B. *Food security in northern and isolated communities: Ensuring equitable access to adequate and healthy food for all report of the Standing Committee on Indigenous and Northern Affairs*. House of Commons. <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/432/INAN/Reports/RP11420916/inanrp10/inanrp10-e.pdf>

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

## NORTHERN AND REMOTE FOOD INSECURITY

### FORGING A PATH TOWARD BRIGHTER DAYS

We recommend that the government:

# 1

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Immediately start working toward a Minimum Income Floor (see recommendation #2 in the Minimum Income Floor section above) and away from the current broken social assistance system that keeps far too many northern Canadians in a cycle of poverty and food insecurity.

# 2

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In collaboration with Indigenous communities and organizations, initiate a comprehensive review of Nutrition North Canada to determine why the program is only minimally achieving its objectives of reducing the cost of food in the North.

# 3

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Working in partnership with local groups, create a Canada-wide Northern Development and Revitalization Plan that is focused on the research and development of regional programs that aim to train workers and grow commerce in strategic economic sectors like tourism, natural resources, and local/regional business.

# 4

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Develop funding for a national program of community-based representatives whose focus is on connecting their communities to funds and resources that are available to northern communities, yet too often go unused for lack of awareness. These representatives will provide an opportunity for knowledge sharing across communities from coast to coast to coast.

# 5

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Develop incentives and strategies to keep capital in the North and work to reduce temporary workers coming into communities for work and leaving without contributing to the local economies.

# 6

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Expand access to Internet for all communities above the 50th parallel so that communities may capitalize on the growing remote workforce.

A) Offer additional training for remote work skills and funding for the procurement of work-from-home supplies.



[hungercount.foodbankscanada.ca](https://hungercount.foodbankscanada.ca)