



NEWS RELEASE

Food Banks Canada Responds to Federal Budget

If programs are successfully implemented, federal budget can deliver important help for Canadians experiencing hunger.

Toronto, January 28 2009 – Yesterday’s federal budget outlines a number of policy and program changes that will aid the more than 700,000 Canadians who are assisted by food banks each month. Improvements to the Working Income Tax Benefit, investments in the repair of social housing, and increased funding for training through Employment Insurance signify much-needed progress.

“This budget partially meets several recommendations outlined in our *HungerCount* report in November 2008,” said Katharine Schmidt, Executive Director of Food Banks Canada. “For example, we called for increases to the Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB), and the government’s proposed improvement to the WITB is a welcome development.”

Other recommendations made by the national representative of food banks went unfulfilled.

“The *HungerCount* also called for investments in the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB), and in housing rehabilitation in rural areas,” continued Schmidt. “Unfortunately, families earning less than \$20,000 will see no benefit from the budget’s proposed changes to the CCTB, and people who do not have access to social housing are unlikely to be helped by the housing-related measures.”

Food banks Canada also welcomed increased funding for training through Employment Insurance, and the five-week extension of EI benefits, which may help to keep many Canadians out of food bank lines.

“One-fifth of those we help are working or on EI, and these households are facing a very precarious year,” said Schmidt. “While we are glad to see the five-week extension of EI

benefits, we are disappointed that there are no structural changes to EI contained in the budget. Less than half of the unemployed in the country actually qualify for EI benefits, and there are few alternatives for those who can't find work. This means that many more will be forced to look to their families for help in rough times, and to charities like food banks to make ends meet. Many will struggle without support."

Food Banks Canada will continue to press for policy change that will lead to a decrease in food bank use in Canada. "There is a lot of work to be done to make sure the commitments contained in the budget are carried out, and we look forward to working with the federal government to make sure that they benefit those most in need during this difficult time," said Schmidt.

About Food Banks Canada

Food Banks Canada is a national charitable organization representing the food bank community across Canada. Our members and their respective agencies serve approximately 85% of people accessing emergency food programs nationwide. Our mission is to meet the short-term need for food and find long-term solutions to reduce hunger. Please visit www.foodbankscanada.ca for more information.

- 30 -

Media contact: Marzena Gersho, Food Banks Canada, (416) 203-9241, ext. 28