

NEWS RELEASE

Food Banks Canada's *HungerCount* study shows largest year-over-year increase in food bank use on record

HungerCount 2009 provides essential information on levels of food bank use in Canada, profiles people in need of food assistance

Ottawa, November 17, 2009 – The results of the *HungerCount 2009* survey released today show food banks across Canada helped 794,738 separate individuals in March 2009, an increase of 17.6%, or almost 120,000 people, compared to March 2008. This represents the largest year-over-year increase since 1997.

Of the 794,738 people helped in March this year, 72,321 – 9.1% of the total – stepped through the front door of a food bank for the first time.

“Food banks have unfortunately seen first-hand the effects of three recessions in three decades,” said Katharine Schmidt, Executive Director of Food Banks Canada, which coordinated the annual national study.

“It is crucially important that, as we rebuild the economy, we begin to better address the barriers that prevent too many Canadians from sharing in the national prosperity,” Ms. Schmidt said. “It is unacceptable that, for most of the past decade, more than 700,000 people every month have needed help from food banks just to get by.”

The need for food banks increased in every region – the Western and Prairie provinces, the North, Central and Eastern Canada. Alberta (+61%), Nova Scotia (+20%), Ontario (+19%), and Manitoba (+18%) experienced the largest increases.

The profile of those assisted is as varied as in past years:

- 37% of those assisted by food banks are children and youth under 18 years old.
- Nearly half of assisted households are families with children.
- 19% of households that turn to food banks for help each month are living on income from current or recent employment.
- 6.3% of assisted households report some type of pension as their primary source of income.

“It is likely that hunger in Canada is even more widespread than *HungerCount* findings suggest,” Ms. Schmidt said. “For every person who turns to a food bank for help, several others in need of assistance do not ask for it. Canadians need to focus on long-term, policy-based solutions to resolve the problem of hunger.”

The *HungerCount* provides recommendations on how individuals, business, and provincial and federal governments can improve the situation for Canadians trying to cope with not being able to provide enough food for themselves and their families. For the federal government specifically, recommendations include the following:

1. Maintain planned levels of federal transfers, including the Canadian Social Transfer, to provincial, territorial, and First Nations governments.
2. Implement a national poverty prevention and reduction strategy, with measurable targets and timelines.
3. Continue to increase uptake of the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) among low income seniors.
4. Ensure that post-recession economic development and rebuilding takes account of the needs of low income Canadians. Only by accounting for those most vulnerable to hunger and poverty from the beginning can we arrive at an improved, inclusive social and economic reality.

- 30 -

About the *HungerCount* Survey

HungerCount was initiated in 1989 and is the only national survey of emergency food programs in Canada. Since 1997, data for the study have been collected every March. The information provided by the survey is invaluable, forming the basis of many Food Banks Canada activities throughout the year. For a full copy of the *HungerCount 2009* report, and for more information, please visit www.foodbankscanada.ca.

About Food Banks Canada

Food Banks Canada is the national charitable organization representing the food bank community across Canada. Our Members, Affiliate Member food banks, 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.

Media contact: Marzena Gersho, Food Banks Canada, 647-242-5919 (mobile) or (416) 203-9241, ext. 28 (office)