

Ontario Association of Food Banks

From the 2012 survey results, the following has been determined:

- **412,998 individuals** accessed Ontario food banks in March 2012
- 38.7% of food bank users, or **159,918** individuals, were **children (11,737 more children** than in March 2011)
- 44.6 % of all food bank users were women over 18 years of age
- **174,618 households** were served by food banks (9.8% of which were first time users)
- 42.8% of food bank users were on social assistance
- 27.3% of food bank users were on disability support
- 64.5% of food bank users were low-income, rental market tenants
- 19.2% of food banks ran out of nutritious food during the month

What do these figures mean?

These figures tell us that an undeniably high number of people in Ontario live each and every day chronically hungry. What's more, these numbers tell us that **food bank use, in Ontario, is at an all time high.**

Far surpassing the statistical count of 2011, and even that of the 2008 recession (with 374,000 users), more individuals are seeking assistance from food banks **than ever before.** In the month of March alone, no less than **412,998 individuals** accessed food banks, including over 17,190 households that accessed food banks for the first time in their lives.

There are a number of key factors that have contributed to this increase in need. Unemployment rates, rising food and housing costs, and cuts to government expenditures left many Ontarians falling short financially. Environmental anomalies have impacted jobs, and food supply, which will increase demand on food banks throughout the year. The spring's warm weather and the frost that followed, coupled with the harsh, dry summer, left many rural communities and farmers' fields empty or filled with ruined crops.

Flooding in the north uprooted entire communities, forcing some to leave their homes and others to have to pay for extensive damages with little means to do so.

All told, access to healthy foods—such as fruit, vegetables, lean meats, and dairy—has become increasingly difficult and more expensive.

Urban Areas

Urban Areas across the province have, without a doubt, experienced a greater demand for their services:

This year alone, GTA food banks saw more than 1,123,500 people come through their doors, with 32%

of these visitors being children. In 2012 it has been reported in *Who's Hungry* that 25% of children and 45% of adults, who access food banks, are going hungry at least once a week.

The Ottawa Food Bank served over 48,000 individuals in March alone through their 140 food assistance programs.

In Waterloo, 1 out of 20 individuals is considered hungry, with food banks in this region distributing more than three million pounds of emergency food every year.

In Windsor, a city with the highest unemployment rate in Canada (9.5%), food banks have become a means of survival.

Northern Ontario

This year, and perhaps more so than ever before, our Northern communities are suffering from a staggering lack of sustainable nutrition. With over 19,900 individuals accessing hunger relief programs every month, the need for assistance is substantial.

Once thought to be healthy and active because of their presumed access to natural resources, the reality is much different. Our already isolated Northern communities have some of the highest rates of malnutrition in Ontario with little, and in some cases no access, to affordable, sustainable, and nutritious foods.

Northern Ontario communities also face challenging and unpredictable weather conditions that can dramatically impact hunger in particular areas. The flooding that took place in Thunder Bay this past summer, for example, left the community in a state of emergency, and resulted in a dramatic increase in the need for food and housing assistance throughout the city and surrounding areas.

Rural Ontario

In rural communities across Ontario, nearly 40% of food bank users are children. With limited access to community support, the needs of our rural communities are becoming an increasing concern.

Similar to the urban centers, there was a 4.8 point change (34.9% to 39.7%), or a 13.9% increase in the number of actual single people served. Many of these residents are senior citizens who find themselves living alone and struggling, emotionally and physically.

With ever increasing housing and food costs, and the continuous tightening of federal and provincial budgets, food banks in these areas work to relieve some of the stresses that can accompany rural poverty, such as unemployment, dwindling social services, and isolation.

The Faces of Hunger

We consistently find that the stereotypical image many people hold of what a typical food bank user looks like is very ill-informed. The truth is that those accessing our food banks are most often hard

working people, young families, or those who have encountered unforeseeable situations that require a helping hand to get them back on their feet.

Our everyday food banks clients include recent university graduates, loving parents, seniors, children, and youth who have been met with unfortunate circumstances. Some might have lost a job, some might be wage workers who are struggling to make ends meet, and some might have suffered a financial, physical, or emotional crisis. It goes without saying, but chronic hunger is not something we can identify simply by looking at someone.

About the OAFB

The Ontario Association of Food Banks works throughout the year to address chronic hunger in communities across the province and to provide food banks and their hunger relief programs with food, assistance, and support.

Through programs such as Community Harvest Ontario, the Milk Program, and the Rural Kids Program, the OAFB is working hard to bring healthy, nutritious, locally grown food to the tables of many this year. The OAFB is dedicated to increasing awareness of hunger in our province and to encouraging the Ontario government to take an active role in addressing the root causes of hunger, through long-term sustainable solutions that will ultimately make food banks unnecessary.

The Ontario Association of Food Banks is a network of **120 food banks** and over **1,100 hunger-relief programs**, including: breakfast clubs, school meal programs, community kitchens, emergency shelters, and seniors' centers. Together, we serve more than **412,000 individuals every single month**.

To learn more about the OAFB and hunger in Ontario, please visit: www.oafb.ca