About Food Banks Canada

Food Banks Canada is a national charitable organization dedicated to helping Canadians living with food insecurity. We support a network of Provincial Associations, Affiliate food banks, and food agencies that work at the community level to relieve hunger. Our work is focused on three core areas: raising food and funds to share with our network; delivering programs and services to food banks to support their work; and influencing policy through research, awareness raising, and advocacy to find long term solutions to hunger.

Food Banks Canada provides national leadership to relieve hunger today and prevent hunger tomorrow in collaboration with the food bank network in Canada.

Our vision: a Canada where no one goes hungry.
As is demonstrated in our HungerCount 2018 report, food bank use remains at historical levels. While food banks are doing everything that they can to help those in need, they are not able to address the root causes of why people need their support.

This is because the root cause of food bank use is, and always has been, related to poverty and low income – and these root causes can be most directly addressed through government policies.

Over the last year, the federal government has taken important steps towards reducing poverty and the need for food banks in Canada.

The federal government’s long-awaited release of Opportunity for All: Canada’s First Poverty Reduction Strategy was welcomed by Food Banks Canada as a sign that the federal government is serious in its intent to significantly reduce poverty over the next decade. The strategy lays a good foundation upon which to build with the creation of a new official poverty line and sets out clear targets and measurements to monitor poverty reduction over the coming years.

These are positive and important steps, but it is clear that much more still needs to be done if we are to reach the intended goals of significantly reducing poverty, and food bank use, in Canada.

Good intentions and well laid out strategies alone will not be enough to meet Food Banks Canada’s vision of a Canada where no one goes hungry.

To that end, implementing the following policy recommendations are essential if the federal government wants to meet the targets set forth in its poverty reduction strategy and ultimately reduce the need for food banks.
Year over year, one of the most shocking statistics to emerge from our HungerCount report is just how deeply children are affected by low incomes and poverty in a country as rich as ours.

In 2018, and over the last decade, children have made up just over 20 percent of the country’s general population – yet they represent more than 35 percent of those seeking help from a food bank. This means that hundreds of thousands of children rely on food banks each month in Canada. These numbers are not only staggering – they are unacceptable.

Childcare has become so expensive across Canada that many families with moderate to low incomes are struggling. In Toronto in 2018, the average childcare costs per child was well above $21,000 per year.\(^1\)

The federal government has made some significant investments in supporting families with the Canada Child Benefit, yet it is clear that more needs to be done to truly reduce the need for food banks for so many children.

In order to make a substantial impact for families living with low incomes, an increased and sustained federal investment in early learning and child care is essential. The links between social and economic policy in this area are clear: every $1 invested in early learning and care will boost the economy in the long run by $2.40.\(^{11}\)

Early learning and childcare, like affordable housing, is an investment in the well-being of Canadians that has real benefits for the country as a whole. Funding and supporting the creation of affordable early learning and childcare has multiple benefits – it supports parents to enter or remain in the workforce and increase their incomes, or to upgrade their education and skills; and it decreases school dropout rates among children and youth and improves post-secondary educational participation.\(^{11}\)

While wide availability of affordable childcare is particularly beneficial for parents facing financial hardships, it is a boon to parents at all income levels. This is especially true for single-parent households who are consistently over-represented in food banks across the country.

In an era when the majority of parents work, with a rapidly changing labour market and a shrinking labour force, it is simply good economics to invest in early learning and childcare.\(^{11}\)

We recommend that the federal government commit to the following to finally reduce the number of children needing food banks in Canada:

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**WE RECOMMEND**

**To develop a National Strategy on Early Learning and Childcare with tangible targets and goals.**

- The strategy should include a significant increase in federal investment towards the goals set out in the strategy and directly fund and lead the development of accessible, affordable and publicly-funded quality childcare in every province and territory in Canada.

- A central focus of federal investment should be on building the necessary infrastructure needed to physically create more childcare spaces.

- The strategy should outline affordability benchmarks that each province must respect to qualify for federal support and funding to effectively create national standards of quality and affordability for early learning and childcare in every part of the country.
One of the most striking trends in the food bank network is the growth of single unattached individuals walking through our doors across the country and asking for help. The percent of single people using food banks has doubled since 2001, having grown from 30% of households helped to 45% in 2018.

Looking at the staggering economic statistics for this group, it doesn’t take long to figure out why the food bank network has seen this jump. Depending on which measure one looks at, between 9% and 13% of Canadians can be defined as having low incomes. Using the Market Basket Measure (which the government has declared will become the new official poverty measure), the figure is just over 1 in 10. If we look only at unattached (i.e. single) working-age people, the figure jumps to 33%: one in every three single adults lives in poverty.

This group alone represents a low income population of 1.3 million people. This group lives in deep poverty, with average incomes that are 50% below the poverty line. This means these individuals are often struggling to survive on about $10,000 per year.

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

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. For decades, governments have focused policies on specific subsets of the populations such as families and seniors, yet have routinely overlooked working-age single adults as a group that requires targeted action.

A large number are receiving social assistance but can’t climb out of poverty due to the grossly inadequate supports and strict conditions that come with these programs. Overall, government supports for this group of vulnerable people have declined by half since the mid 1990’s.

The federal government has recently increased their supports for low income Canadians who are working with the expansion of the Canada Workers Benefit. Food Banks Canada had called on the government to enact these changes and we applaud this step in the right direction – but more help is required for this segment of the population that has been ignored for far too long.

We recommend that the federal government commit to the following to finally reduce the number of single adults needing food banks in Canada:

**WE RECOMMEND**

- **To create a new program to support ill and unemployed Canadians whose temporary Employment Insurance (EI) or disability benefits are about to run out.**

  This new program would close a major gap in our social safety net that leaves many people with no choice but to enter a cycle of poverty perpetuated by our broken social assistance systems across the country.

- **To make single, low-income adults a priority consideration in all future poverty reduction policy measures to ensure that this vulnerable population is no longer left behind.**

- **To implement our Basic Income recommendation (see Basic Income in this report) to address the high levels of poverty amongst singles with no attachment to the labour force.**
For decades, consecutive federal governments have shrugged off the idea of moving forward on a Basic Income because it is considered a provincial matter. The fact that the Ontario government initiated a Basic Income pilot project in 2016 seemed to reinforce this notion that progress on this front could be achieved without the federal government’s leadership or support. Unfortunately, recent developments have shown just how fragile such a stance can be. With the new Ontario government’s immediate cancellation of the Ontario Basic Income pilot projects that were in progress in 2018, crucial data and analyses will never be compiled. A significant opportunity to make progress towards the creation of a Basic Income for all Canadians was squandered with little explanation.

The fact that a new provincial government could so easily discard such an important pilot project is alarming. The Ontario pilot project would have provided valuable data for the development of a Basic Income across all provinces and territories in Canada, not only for Ontario.

Given the importance of the data and potential analysis that has been lost, and the fragility of counting on individual provinces to lead the way on this important issue, the federal government has a responsibility to show leadership in forging a new path forward for Canada’s most vulnerable citizens, because it is clear that the current approach is broken.

Under our current system of social assistance, one must be virtually penniless before being able to apply for support. If one tries to work their way out of welfare, their benefits (cash and non-cash) are clawed back with punitive rates that disincentivize work.

This is a system that has not evolved since the 1990s and one that keeps people mired in a cycle of poverty that is extremely difficult to escape – as is demonstrated by the fact that 60% of those currently helped by food banks are either on social assistance or disability supports.

Waiting on the provinces themselves to forge a new path forward towards a Basic Income is no longer an option, as we have seen most recently in Ontario.

We are asking that the federal government show leadership on this front and work directly with all provinces and territories to help us move towards a Basic Income for all in Canada.

WE RECOMMEND

• To fund and develop, in coordination with the provinces and territories, multiple Basic Income pilot projects of various types across the country in every province and territory to help minimize the risk of fluctuating provincial governments shutting projects down.

• To accumulate and analyze the data from these pilot projects over multiple years to determine the type of Basic Income that is best suited for Canada.

In the short-term to immediately boost the incomes of those living in poverty

• To allow all low-income households to have access to the non-cash benefits that are currently only available to those on social assistance (such as child care subsidies, affordable housing supplements, drug and dental insurance).

• To convert all federal non-refundable tax credits into refundable tax credits, where appropriate. These include (but are not limited to) the Disability Tax Credit, credits for family caregivers, and the credit for public transit users.

ii Centre for Spatial Economics [2010]. *Early learning and care impact analysis*. Toronto: Centre for Spatial Economics.

iii Ibid.

iv Food Banks Canada [2011]. *Nowhere to Turn*, Toronto: Food Banks Canada.

v Food Banks Canada [2016]. *Nowhere to Turn*, Toronto: Food Banks Canada.


