

WHO'S HUNGRY 2021

About

In partnership, Daily Bread Food Bank and North York Harvest have released *Who's Hungry 2021* – a report profiling hunger in Toronto and exploring the concept of resiliency.

This year, there were close to 1.45 million food bank visits in Toronto, the highest number of visits ever recorded in the city's history. For the first time, new clients accessing Toronto food banks outnumbered existing clients.

Prior to COVID-19, communities were already facing deep inequalities and chronic stressors including systemic racism and discrimination, a lack of affordable housing, the erosion of decent work, and an insufficient and incomplete social safety net. These factors created an unstable foundation that compromised the ability of communities to adapt to the realities of the pandemic. COVID-19 has made it clear that our systems and structures were not, and are not, creating the conditions where communities can be resilient.

Based on the client intake data and food bank client surveys conducted in the past year, the *Who's Hungry 2021* report sheds light on the experiences of food insecurity and poverty and provides concrete recommendations for how we can build a more resilient Toronto.

Key Findings

Toronto food banks see highest number of food bank visits ever recorded in city's history.

- There was an alarming rise in food bank visits, with 1.45 million visits to the food bank in the past year. This is a 47% increase in visits compared to the year prior. This level of growth is unprecedented; food bank visits in Toronto rarely increase by more than 5-10% year over year.
- Food bank visits this year are 1.5 times greater than previous record set in 2010 in the aftermath of the 2008 recession.
- 36% of food bank clients reported having visited the food bank because their income was too low, 20% because they had lost their job, and 10% because they were unable to find work and were ineligible for benefits.

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- There was a 61% increase in new clients compared to the year prior.
- 56% of food bank clients surveyed reported getting food regularly from their food bank for one year or less, while 10% had been relying on food banks for over five years.
- Longer-term food bank clients reported a greater degree of food insecurity than new clients. Of clients accessing the food bank for more than one year, 58% did not eat for a whole day almost every month. For those accessing less than one year, it was 44%.
- Newer clients were more likely to receive income from employment and pandemic benefits such as EI and CRB, while the majority of existing clients (55%) reported social assistance as their primary income source.

Food bank clients experience severe food insecurity, and hunger is not equally distributed in all communities.

- 85% of survey respondents reported that they did not always have enough food to eat.
- 1 in 3 respondents did not eat for a whole day. For 52% of those respondents, this occurred almost every month.
- 51% of respondents missed a meal to pay for something else.

- 31% of adults reported going hungry at least once per week or more, and this was the case of 16% of children.
- 51% of clients surveyed reported having a disability or health condition that is expected to last a year or more. 41% went a whole day without eating food, compared to 20% who did not have a disability.
- Respondents disproportionately identified as Black (14%) or Indigenous (4%) compared to the general population (8% of the Toronto population identifies as Black, while 1% identify as Indigenous).

Even before the pandemic, food bank clients have been chronically impacted by the drivers of food insecurity such as income inequality, precarious employment, and unaffordable housing in Toronto. This compromises the ability of individuals, communities, and systems to be resilient.

- Respondents had a median income of \$1,106 per month. For racialized respondents, it was \$1,061, demonstrating the economic inequities faced in these communities. This falls well below Toronto's poverty line of \$2,060 per month.
- Food bank clients had a median of \$9.17 left per person per day after rent and utilities were paid; for racialized respondents it was \$6.67. If a food bank client takes two TTC trips, traveling to work and returning home, they would be left with only \$2.77 at the end of the day. This is not enough for food and other necessities.
- Among food bank client respondents that had a household member employed, the median wage reported was \$16 per hour with a median of 30 hours worked per week.
- Food bank clients continue to struggle with employment uncertainty. 1 in 5 respondents reported that their employment will not last more than a year. Close to half of employed food bank client respondents did not have any employer-provided benefits.
- 80% of our survey respondents living in private market rentals (i.e., not subsidized housing) were paying more than half of their income on housing, putting them at high risk of homelessness.
- 75% of respondents could only pay their rent or mortgage for less than one month if they lost their primary income.

Building resiliency:

Until we address the chronic stressors that are producing and reproducing vast inequalities in our communities, we will never be resilient to future emergencies. Likewise, unless we are quick to respond to the hardships like COVID-19, we will only further entrench inequality into our communities.

To build a more resilient Toronto, we recommend the following actions:

- Respond to urgent community needs created by COVID-19:
 - Support renters who have accrued rental arrears during the pandemic,
 - Continue to protect the financial security of low-income households hardest hit by the pandemic,
 - Put equity at the centre of the ongoing pandemic response and recovery.
- Build greater resiliency through:
 - Decent work: addressing growing precarious employment and update Canada's EI to reflect modern realities of work, make childcare a reality in Ontario.
 - Affordable housing: rapidly expand access to genuinely affordable housing.
 - A strong social safety net: raise social assistance rates to eliminate deep poverty, ensure low-income households can afford digital access.
 - Make poverty reduction and food insecurity a top policy priority.

To review the full report, visit dailybread.ca/whoshungry