

Submission to City Budget 2020

Founded in 1983, Daily Bread Food Bank has grown to supply food to nearly 200 food programs across Toronto. Our 135 member agencies operate food banks and meal programs across the city, spanning from Etobicoke to Scarborough. **Over the past year, there were 936,807 food bank visits in Toronto.**

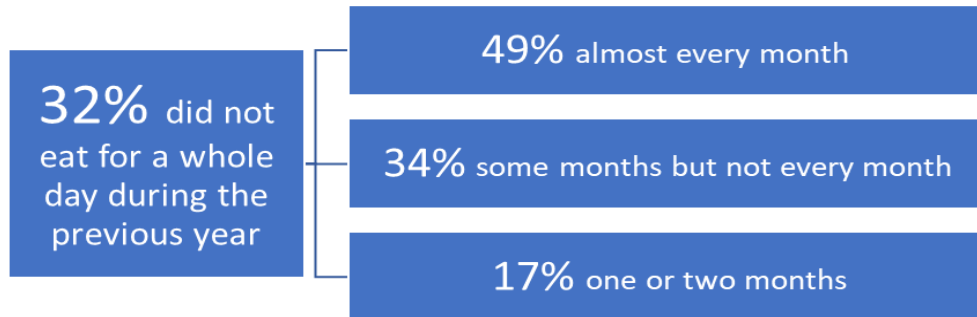
We welcome the opportunity to provide recommendations to City Council in order to enhance efforts to reduce poverty and food insecurity in Toronto. A summary of recommendations is provided below, followed by a more detailed description and rationale.

Summary of Recommendations

- 1. Implement new revenue tools and earmark the revenue for affordable housing.** We applaud City Council's adoption of an increased City Building Levy in December. Both a vacant home tax and a new Municipal Land Transfer Tax tier for properties greater than \$3 million are currently under consideration. The City cannot afford to leave cash on the table during this housing crisis. Continuing to delay action on these potential revenue sources defeats their advantage of being tools immediately available to the City.
- 2. Expedite the development and implementation of a new definition of affordable housing tied to household income.** The City has already committed to revising its definition of affordable to one that is income-based, but this is a crucial first step, not an administrative detail. Each unit built under the current definition is a missed opportunity to make a more meaningful difference in the affordable housing crisis.
- 3. Expand the Fair Pass program to all lower-income users this year.** We urge the City to expedite the planning process as much as possible to roll out the program to those in need.
- 4. Enhance the Fair Pass through steeper discounts and/or a longer transfer window.** Make transit a key component of service access and social inclusion by providing a steeper discount for monthly passes and/or by lengthening the two-hour transfer for low-income users.
- 5. Revert the 2021 budget cycle to 2019 timelines.** Recommit to a budget process built on transparency, citizen engagement, and collective goal setting by reverting the 2021 budget process to align with the process and timelines used in 2019.

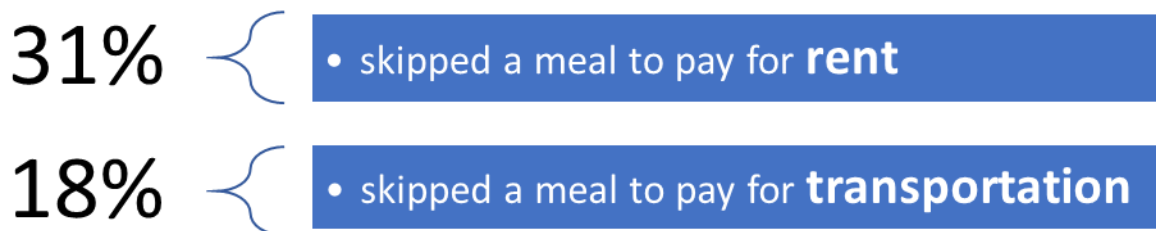
Food Insecurity and Poverty in Toronto

Approximately 100,000 people make use of food banks in Toronto each year. In the past year, food bank use increased by 4% in the Toronto region. Our annual survey of food bank clients in Toronto reveals that one in three did not eat for a whole day because there wasn't enough money for food. Of these respondents, approximately half went full days without a meal almost every month.



This happened even while they frequented food banks, shopped at discount grocery stores, bought lower-quality items, and otherwise adjusted to the rising cost of living in our city.

Food bank clients also reported skipping meals in order to pay for other necessities. Among respondents,



With some of our most vulnerable residents regularly sacrificing meals to pay for rent and transportation, it is clear that affordable housing and transit equity must be priorities for the City if we are to achieve the goals of the Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Affordable housing

The waitlist for subsidized housing in Toronto above 100,000—and growing. Two-thirds of food bank clients live in private market rental units where finding affordable housing is extremely rare: 86% of food bank clients are spending more than 30% of their income on housing. In fact, **the median percentage of income spent on rent and utilities among food bank clients is a staggering 74%**. This leaves little income available to purchase basic necessities, including food, and also puts the household at high risk for homelessness.

In the face of such widespread poverty, the City's response to the housing crisis is insufficient. **The City must increase the supply of affordable housing and should be prioritizing the further development of deeply affordable housing on surplus city-owned lands, wherever possible.** We urge the City to increase its capacity to act by moving quickly on items currently before them:

- 1. Implement new revenue tools and earmark the revenue for affordable housing.** We applaud City Council's adoption of an increased City Building Levy in December. Both a vacant home tax and a new Municipal Land Transfer Tax (MLTT) tier for properties greater than \$3 million are currently under consideration. The City cannot afford to leave cash on the table during this housing crisis. Continuing to delay action on these potential revenue sources defeats their advantage of being tools immediately available to the City. One consideration for the proposed change the MLTT is that the \$3 million home threshold should reflect market growth in future years.
- 2. Expedite the development and implementation of a new definition of affordable housing tied to household income.** The City has already committed to revising its definition of affordable to one that is income-based, but this is a crucial first step, not an administrative detail. Each unit built under the current definition is a missed opportunity to make a more meaningful difference in the affordable housing crisis.

Transit Equity

Food bank use has been growing most rapidly in under-served communities, with use in the inner suburbs having grown by more than 60% over the past decade. We continue to serve disproportionate numbers of people with serious health conditions and others who require social services and supports.

The expansion of the Fair Pass program is certainly welcome to ease access to crucial social services, but its scheduled implementation is far slower than originally hoped while the discount is simply not enough for many of our clients.

The implementation of a two-hour transfer to make transit more affordable and convenient is unfortunately not meeting its goals with many of our clients. Long commutes, limited mobility, and wait times at medical appointments and food bank visits—where a client may wait up to two hours to access food as a result of the growing need in our communities—can mean that a round-trip on transit is actually more expensive for residents facing inequities.

We therefore recommend:

- 3. Expand the Fair Pass program to all lower-income users this year.** We urge the City to expedite the planning process as much as possible to roll out the program to those in need.
- 4. Enhance the Fair Pass through steeper discounts and/or a longer transfer window.** Make transit a key component of service access and social inclusion by providing a steeper discount for Fair Pass monthly passes and/or by lengthening the two-hour transfer for low-income users.

Budgeting Process

The vision of Toronto's Poverty Reduction Strategy is "a city with opportunities for all." We are concerned that the 2020 budget process has excluded vulnerable populations from participating. Budget notes were shared on January 10th, with public deputations taking place on January 20th and 21st. This left only a week to review the budget notes and prepare a deputation. This timeline is unacceptably short for meaningful engagement.

- 5. Revert the 2021 budget cycle to 2019 timelines.** Recommit to a budget process built on transparency, citizen engagement, and collective goal setting by reverting the 2021 budget process to align with the process and timelines used in 2019.

For more information, please contact:

Talia Bronstein, VP Research & Advocacy

Daily Bread Food Bank

416-203-0050 x 233

tbronstein@dailybread.ca