

Hunger Lives Here: Risks and Challenges Faced by Food Bank Clients During COVID-19

What

Daily Bread Food Bank is releasing a comprehensive report detailing the impact of COVID-19 on food insecurity and food bank use in Toronto. The research was based on phone surveys with over 220 food bank clients in May and June 2020. The report illustrates the heightened health risks faced by food bank clients during COVID-19 and the extensive risks and challenges they experienced accessing adequate food during the pandemic. The report is also a predictor of a new wave of issues that will be faced by individuals living in poverty, such as the risk of mass evictions, if Canada's social safety net does not keep pace with the rise in need.

The only report of its kind in Canada, *Hunger Lives Here: Risks and Challenges Faced by Food Bank Clients During COVID-19* demonstrates that that even with government relief efforts, there has been a 200% increase in new clients accessing food banks in Toronto during the pandemic. With 34% of food bank clients reporting being unable to continue to pay rent four to six months from now, further immediate action is required to prevent the looming crises facing low-income families.

Key Findings

- **Visits to food banks in Toronto have increased 25% during COVID-19.**
 - Daily Bread member food banks are now serving close to 20,000 individuals each week, compared to 15,000 before COVID-19.
 - The rate of new clients has increased by over 200% during COVID-19 (6,100 new clients began accessing food banks in June, compared to 2,000 in February).
 - 76% of new client surveyed began accessing food banks due to COVID-19.
- **The severity of food insecurity has increased during COVID-19.**
 - Prior to COVID-19, one in four survey respondents reported not eating for an entire day because they did not have enough money for food. During COVID-19, the frequency of going a full day without eating almost every month increased from 56% to 67%.
 - Before COVID-19, one in four children accessing food banks went hungry according to their guardian, and during the pandemic this increased to one in three.
 - The number of respondents moderately or severely stressed or anxious about having enough food to feed their household has tripled during COVID-19.
- **COVID-19 has transformed the way low-income households access food.**
 - 91% of respondents identified at least one restriction to grocery shopping during the pandemic, with the most common challenges being:
 - Inability to shop around due to public health guidance to limit trips (33%)

- Food products being limited or unavailable (over 25%), and
 - Reduced of access to discounted items due to lack of flyers (15%)
- **Food bank clients are at greater risk for exposure to COVID-19 and for severe illness/complications from the virus.**
 - 51% of food bank respondents are high-risk for severe illness from COVID-19 due to being over the age of 60 or having an underlying health condition, close to double the rate of the Canadian population as a whole.
 - One quarter of respondents continued to work during the pandemic, and the majority (58.9%) were in occupations facing highest COVID-19 cases (e.g., sales, trades and transport, manufacturing and utilities).
- **While government income supports have helped many households make ends meet, many are still unable to afford food.**
 - 32% of respondents had at least one member of the household working prior to COVID-19, and 76% of these households reported job loss.
 - 28% of households accessing food banks who lost their employment received the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), but they will still be unable to afford their basic necessities.
 - For the two in three respondents on social assistance who received emergency benefits, the extra \$100 - \$200 was not enough to prevent them from relying on food banks during COVID-19.
- **34% of food bank clients will be unable to continue to pay rent four to six months from now.**
 - Due to income losses, the proportion of respondents paying 50% or more of their income on housing rose from 67% pre-COVID-19 to 81% during the pandemic.

Considerations and Recommendations

The economic impacts of COVID-19 will be experienced for years to come. As the government's state of emergency ends, many of our residents will remain in emergency situations and will continue to require supports.

We are calling on all levels of government to make poverty reduction a priority in economic recovery and ongoing COVID-19 response by:

- 1) Prioritizing and enhancing income supports including the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and social assistance;
- 2) Building and protecting affordable housing; and
- 3) Improving health benefits for people living and working in Ontario.

Visit dailybread.ca/hungerliveshere to review the full report.