

WHO'S HUNGRY 2020

About

In partnership, Daily Bread Food Bank and North York Harvest have released *Who's Hungry 2020* – a report profiling hunger in the city of Toronto.

The report reveals that there was a growing trend in the food insecurity crisis even before COVID-19. In the year leading up to the pandemic, food banks in Toronto saw close to one million visits – a 5% increase from the previous year. In fact, pre-pandemic, food bank visits in Toronto had climbed back to the same level as the peak following the 2008-09 financial crisis.

With the arrival of COVID-19, food bank visits in Toronto skyrocketed. By June, food bank visits had increased by 22% compared to the same period last year, and by August, that number grown to a staggering 51%.

Based on client intake data and food bank client surveys conducted before and during the pandemic, the report sheds light on the past, present, and future of food insecurity in Toronto and provides concrete recommendations to reduce poverty and food insecurity as part of the COVID-19 response and recovery.

Key Findings

Precarious employment, insufficient income, and unaffordable housing are driving food insecurity in Toronto:

- 62% of employed survey respondents were working in precarious temporary, part-time or contract jobs, which have been hardest hit by job losses during COVID-19.
- 43% of employed survey respondents earned minimum wage (\$15/hour) or less.
- 73% of survey respondents did not receive medical, dental or retirement benefits from their employer.
- Almost 50% of survey respondents who are looking for work experience disability or illness as a barrier to employment.
- Survey respondents reported a median income of \$892, less than half of the monthly income required to have a basic standard of living, based on official poverty line for Toronto (\$1,804).
- 65% of survey respondents received social assistance as their primary income source, where rates fall below both Canada's official poverty line *and* deep poverty line.
- 83% 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.
- Despite the high cost of rent, 29% of survey respondents lived in inadequate housing requiring major repairs, 50% have pest programs, 19% lacked proper food storage/appliances and 13% were living in overcrowded conditions.

Pre-pandemic, food insecurity crisis in Toronto was already on the rise:

- There were close to 1 million food bank client visits in the Toronto region the year leading up to the pandemic—a 5% increase compared to the previous year.

- Food bank use peaked in 2010 in the aftermath of the 2008-09 recession. Despite a strong economy in the year leading up to the pandemic, food bank visits in Toronto climbed back to 2010 levels.
- 85% of survey respondents reported that they did not always have enough food to eat even after accessing food banks.
- 43% of survey respondents went hungry at least once per week, and this was the case for 22% of children.
- 67% of survey respondents skipped a meal to pay for another expense (e.g., rent, transportation, internet).

The pandemic has severely intensified food insecurity in Toronto:

- By June, four months into the pandemic, food bank in Toronto saw a 22% increase in client visits. By August, that number had grown to a staggering 51%.
- Phone surveys with food bank clients in Toronto conducted at the height of the first wave of COVID-19 revealed that stress/anxiety about having enough to eat tripled during the pandemic.
- Three quarters of survey respondents who had never accessed a food bank before reported that they began using food banks because of the pandemic.
- 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.

Beyond COVID-19: Building a Future without Poverty

All levels of government are in the process of developing plans and strategies for economic recovery. This is an opportunity to listen to the voices of those experiencing food insecurity and put poverty reduction at the core of recovery efforts.

To prevent another long-term crisis, Daily Bread Food Bank and North York Harvest recommend the following immediate actions:

- **Eliminate deep poverty:** by increasing social assistance rates, centering community-based responses in poverty reduction, and increasing refundable tax benefits for vulnerable populations.
- **Make employment a pathway out of poverty:** by implementing national, universal childcare, raising the minimum wage, enhancing employment standards and implementing a national pharmacare program.
- **Achieve affordable housing for all:** by providing immediate and long-term rent relief, increasing the supply of affordable housing, and ensuring that housing and development policies meet the needs of those with low incomes.

To review the full report, visit [dailybread.ca](https://dailybread.ca/dailybread.ca/whoshungry) [dailybread.ca/whoshungry](https://dailybread.ca/dailybread.ca/whoshungry)