

Recommendations on Bill C-22, the *Canada Disability Benefit Act* to the Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology (SOCI)

Daily Bread Food Bank is pleased to express our strong support for the *Canada Disability Benefit Act*. When enacted, this Bill has the potential to eliminate poverty among people with disabilities, thereby creating a standard of living that promotes dignity and inclusion. As members of Defend Disability, a coalition of people with lived experience, researchers, non-profit organizations, and service providers, we put forward the following recommendations to strengthen Bill C-22. While we see the recommendations below as important for creating a strong and robust legislative framework, we also recognize the urgency resulting from high rates of poverty among people with disabilities that is exacerbated even further by the high rate of inflation. As such, we hope that the Committee will consider how to best move Bill C-22 forward as swiftly as possible.

Recommendations

Proposed amendments to Bill C-22, the *Canada Disability Benefit Act*:

- **Recommendation 1:** Ensure a statutory minimum amount for the Canada Disability Benefit in Bill C-22, to ensure it will raise people with disabilities at least thirty percent above the Market Basket Measure, Canada's poverty line¹. This will account for the extra costs of living with a disability and raise people with disabilities out of deep poverty.
- **Recommendation 2:** Ensure the *Canada Disability Benefit Act* includes a legislated appeals mechanism, to guarantee access to justice for vulnerable applicants.
- **Recommendation 3:** Require government to enact regulations within 12 months of passing the Bill.

Design considerations for future regulations:

- **Recommendation 3:** To ease access, individuals receiving provincial and federal disability supports should automatically qualify for the Canada Disability Benefit.
- **Recommendation 4:** Ensure that the Canada Disability Benefit supplements provincial and territorial income support programs and that provinces and territories are prohibited from clawing back of provincial and territorial income supports.

About Daily Bread Food Bank

Daily Bread Food Bank is a member-based organization whose mission is to collaborate with all to eliminate food insecurity and advocate for solutions to end poverty. As Canada's largest food bank, Daily Bread runs innovative programs to support individuals living on low incomes and experiencing food insecurity by distributing fresh and shelf-stable food and fresh-cooked meals to 126 member agencies and 189 meal programs across Toronto.

"I eat 1 or 2 meals a day. I can't afford 3 meals a day because of the cost. If it were not [for the] food bank, I would not be able to make it, it would be 8-10 days without food per month. Groceries are expensive and because I'm visually and physically impaired; I have no choice but to come by taxi from grocery stores. It costs me 20 bucks every time I go shopping."

- Respondent to our Click/Hear survey of Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) recipients who access food banks



Poverty and Food Insecurity Among People with Disabilities

Over the past twelve months, there have been 2.07 million visits to food banks in Toronto. **This is the highest number ever reported in our city's history.** With record increases in the cost of living, combined with low incomes and soaring housing rents, demand will continue to grow.

Food bank use, and food insecurity more broadly, is driven by poverty and income insecurity. According to our annual survey of food bank clients, 44% of respondents reported a disability or health condition that limits their ability to perform daily tasks and is expected to last a year or more. Nearly 1 in 5 food bank clients (22%) reported their primary income source as Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

“I don’t remember the last time I ate an apple or salad. 15-20 years I haven’t bought anything new, and I can’t afford it. I’m not mobile, I don’t move, only go to doctors’ appointments. I’m kind of a prisoner in my own apartment. Can’t afford to go anywhere.”

– Respondent to our Click/Hear survey of Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) recipients who access food banks

ODSP provides a maximum of \$1,227 per month for single individuals. These rates fall below Toronto’s deep poverty line, which is defined as having an income at or below 75% of the official poverty line, which is \$1,545 per month for single individuals. Almost half (47%) of food bank clients whose primary income source was ODSP reported that they sometimes or often did not have enough food to eat in the past twelve months and 38% were hungry at least one day a week in the past three months.

In an analysis of 12 years of our food bank client survey data, we identified that those living with a disability comprised the majority of food bank clients living in deep poverty.

Conclusion

Food insecurity increases health care costs, worsens mental health, increases the risk of injuries and illnesses, and causes premature death. People with disabilities in Canada should be able to live a life of dignity where they can afford their most basic of human needs, as set out in the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*.

The *Canada Disability Benefit Act* is a critical piece of legislation that sets the foundation for one of the most important income support programs in Canada. When implemented, the Canada Disability Benefit will have an immense impact on reducing poverty and food insecurity in Canada, and in relieving pressure on local food banks who are reaching their breaking points.

We encourage the Committee to act with urgency in moving Bill C-22 forward to improve the wellbeing and financial security of people with disabilities in Canada.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide input. For more information, please contact:

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ⁱ Cattari, L. (2021). *Beyond Basic Need: The Financial Cost of Disability*. Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction. <https://hamiltonpoverty.ca/preview/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/HRPR-Policy-Brief-The-Financial-Cost-of-Disability.pdf>.

