



community food centres
CANADA good food is just the beginning



BEYOND HUNGER

THE HIDDEN
IMPACTS OF
FOOD INSECURITY
IN CANADA

Every day in Canada, one of the wealthiest countries in the world,

4.4 MILLION PEOPLE

struggle to put good food on the table for themselves and their families.

A PICTURE OF FOOD INSECURITY IN CANADA

Even before COVID-19, food insecurity—defined as inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints—affected nearly 4.5 million Canadians. In the first 2 months of the pandemic, that number grew by 39%, affecting 1 in 7 people.

Children, Indigenous people, racialized people, single parents, newcomers and people in Northern communities all disproportionately experience food insecurity. This takes a toll on physical and mental health, and can lead to numerous other problems, such as social isolation.

This report seeks to paint a more complete picture of the problem, including the dramatic but somewhat less visible ways in which it affects people's lives and the strategies they use to deal with it.

For this report, we surveyed 561 individuals across the country who experience food insecurity to find out how it impacts them. **The impact they describe goes far beyond what we traditionally think of as hunger and permeates all aspects of their lives.**

81%
said food insecurity had a negative impact on their **physical health**

79%
said it had a negative impact on their **mental health**

64%
said it affected their **relationships** with loved ones

59%
said it had a negative impact on their **children**

58%
said it **isolated** them socially

57%
said it was a barrier to finding and maintaining **employment**

53%
said it impeded their ability to find **meaning and purpose in life**

46%
said it impeded their ability to express and share their **culture**

WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?

Why are so many people struggling to make ends meet? The answer is complex, but it is ultimately linked to an economy that creates too much vulnerability and government supports that don't measure up.

Many Canadians are forced to rely on precarious labour markets and low-wage jobs. Unacceptably low social-assistance rates are trapping people in poverty. The cost of housing, child care, prescriptions and food is increasing sharply. More and more people are living alone and shouldering these costs on one income. Racism and the lasting effects of colonialism are leaving racialized and Indigenous people to deal with deep societal inequities. And Canadians in Northern communities are spending more than twice as much for groceries as those in the South.

People are food insecure because they lack the money to buy food. We need government policies, legislation and programs that will increase incomes and improve affordability for the Canadians at the lowest end of the income spectrum.

We understand the problem and how it can be solved.

CHANGE IS POSSIBLE.

Now we need the political and social will to make it happen.



JUNIE AND BRAD'S STORY
NorWest Co-op Community Food Centre

THE SOLUTION

This report lays out policy recommendations that can reduce poverty and food insecurity, grouped under four main themes:

INVEST IN INCOME SUPPORTS FOR LOW-INCOME CANADIANS

- Ensure low-wage workers have **equal access to Employment Insurance.**
- **Improve existing tax benefits** so they provide more income, by making them refundable.
- **Create a tax credit** specifically for working-age adults.
- Ensure low-income Canadians have **better access to tax-filing supports and benefit services.**

MAKE LIFE MORE AFFORDABLE FOR CANADIANS

- **Speed up the implementation of the Canada Housing Benefit,** which supports people who can't afford their housing.
- Increase federal funding for **early learning and child care.**
- Move forward with a **universal public pharmacare program.**

ENSURE EQUITABLE PROGRESS

- **Continue to reform Nutrition North Canada.**
- **Create an Indigenous food sovereignty fund.**
- **Create a fund to decrease food insecurity for Black Canadians.**
- **Apply a racial-equity lens** to all poverty and food-security policies.

SET TARGETS AND IMPROVE REPORTING ON FOOD INSECURITY

- **Set the target to reduce food insecurity by 50% by 2030.**
- Ensure Statistics Canada **reports on progress made to reduce food insecurity every year** and **collects better race-based data.**

Packing lunch for picky kids is nobody's favourite morning activity. But for Junie Omand-Penner and Brad Penner, Winnipeg parents to two teenage girls, it's especially challenging. "The girls say so-and-so is having this special thing for lunch—like Japanese noodles or something—can we get it, too?" Brad explains. "We have to tell them, no, we can't afford it."

Living on disability and social assistance with Brad back at school working on his mature Grade 12 and Junie at Red River College studying community development, there's nothing in the family budget for extras. They watch for sales, use emergency food programs and frequent the NorWest Co-op Community Food Centre's fruit and veggie market, but it's stressful to juggle everyone's different needs.

"The girls have been bullied and have a lot of anxiety around food issues," Junie says. "Not having food causes stress in our relationship, too. Arguments. Should we borrow money? Where will we get food? There's a lot of negotiation."

It can be isolating, as well. Brad can't remember the last time they went to someone else's place for dinner or invited friends over to share a meal. Even sleepovers can be tricky, he says: "You worry that you can't provide what other kids' families might—like pizza or ingredients for making muffins."

ABOUT COMMUNITY FOOD CENTRES CANADA

Community Food Centres Canada builds dynamic and responsive Community Food Centres and food programs that support people to eat well, connect with their neighbours and contribute, through advocacy and mutual support, to a more just and inclusive Canada. With our partners, we work to eradicate poverty and food insecurity, and improve the health and well-being of low-income Canadians.

To find out more about
Community Food Centres Canada,
please visit cfccanada.ca



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