



412,998

Ontario Association of Food Banks  
Hunger Report 2012

# About OAFB



ONTARIO  
ASSOCIATION OF  
FOOD BANKS

Founded in 1992, the **Ontario Association of Food Banks** (OAFB) is a network of 120 food banks and over 1,100 hunger-relief programs across Ontario.

Together, we are working hard to reduce hunger by providing emergency food support to individuals and families in need, and through a number of community projects that promote sustainable food growth, community engagement, and advocacy. The OAFB serves over 412,000 individuals every single month.

The OAFB believes that every Ontarian should have access to nutritious food, and that the provision of this necessity will ultimately lead to an increase in our citizens' and province's health and well-being.

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# Hunger in Ontario

## Hunger in Ontario Hits an All-Time High

This has been a challenging year for many Ontarians, with **412,998** individuals accessing food banks in March 2012 alone. Although food bank use declined by a small amount in 2011, this turned out to be short-lived. With ever increasing housing and food costs, and continuous cuts to social programming, many food bank users are finding themselves out of work and struggling to make ends meet.

The past 12 months of economic instability have left an astonishingly high number of people living their everyday lives in a state of hunger. What's even more surprising is that **17,190 households accessed food banks for the first time in their lives this year.**



**159,918 children per month use food banks**

# Hunger in Ontario



## What's going on?

Here is what we know:

**food bank use is at an all time high.**

Far surpassing the statistical count of 2011, and even that of the 2008 recession (with 374,000 users a month), more individuals are now seeking assistance from food banks than ever before. There are a number of reasons for the growing need for food assistance in our province, including federal and provincial cuts to social assistance programs, the rise in living costs, and unforeseeable natural disasters.

For example, there have been significant cuts to social funding in Ontario this year. With a 12% cut in funding for government assisted housing initiatives and over 150,000 people on waiting lists for homes, our province has the worst record in Canada for affordable housing.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, disability and social assistance funding is also lower today than it was in 1986,<sup>2</sup> and living expenses are on the rise with the cost of electricity up 3.4%; the cost of rent up 1.4%; and the cost of food up 2.2% overall (meat products are up 5.7% and cereal products, up 4.5%).<sup>3</sup> The result is that our most vulnerable are suffering.

In addition to these key circumstances that are impacting hunger and food bank use in Ontario, there are a number of additional challenges that are being faced by many communities across the province.

# Hunger in Ontario

## *Northern Ontario*

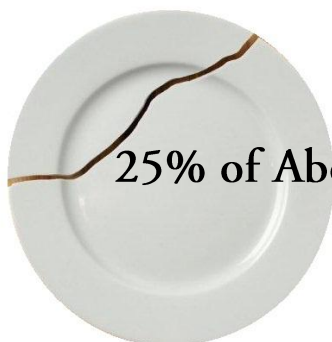
Northern Ontario is composed of a growing number of individuals, including various Aboriginal communities, with a collective population nearing 100,000 people.<sup>4</sup> Although Ontario has the largest number of Aboriginal people in Canada, unemployment, homelessness, and hunger are staggeringly high, as 25% of Aboriginal people earn less than \$25,000 per year,<sup>5</sup> and 17% of Aboriginal people require the use of food banks every day to survive.

Northern Ontario is also struggling through a particularly difficult situation. Once thought healthy and active because of their presumed access to natural resources, the reality is that our already isolated Northern communities are suffering from some of our highest rates of malnutrition with little, and in some cases no, access to affordable, sustainable, and nutritious foods.

Supplies to these areas must either be trucked or flown in, and these modes of transport are expensive and dependent upon, often, unpredictable weather conditions.

Furthermore, while our three largest Northern Ontario food bank members (located in Thunder Bay, Sudbury, and Cochrane) collectively serve over 19,000 people every single month, unforeseen tragedies during 2012 have left many of the Northern communities they serve in a greater state of crisis.

In March 2012, communities in Thunder Bay, Kashechewan, and Fort Albany declared a state of emergency when flooding tore through communities devastating much of the infrastructure in these areas.



**25% of Aboriginal adults earn less than \$25,000 per year**

# Hunger in Ontario



## *Northern Ontario Continued...*

It is estimated that the overall damage is in the millions. On October 26, 2012, Wawa also declared a state of emergency, and Michipicoten recently found itself facing evacuation (along with many other Northern communities) as Hurricane Sandy pushed through Ontario.<sup>6</sup>

These and other floods washed out roads and made the transportation of food and supplies to these areas impossible. The water levels damaged already vulnerable homes and put a large number of families in a position where they now require additional support.

Sudbury and its neighbouring communities also experienced devastation as the roof of the Algo Centre Mall — the major retail outlet in Elliot Lake — collapsed in October, killing two women and injuring many others.<sup>7</sup> As the mall was the retail hub of Elliot Lake, hundreds of people have been left unemployed, with no assurance that the mall will be reopened.

More and more adults, children, and families now require the services of food banks, while Sudbury and its surrounding area are now facing demands that far outweigh their capacities.

# Hunger in Ontario

## Urban Areas

Hunger is also increasing in our urban communities. Unemployment levels and cuts to government funded programs, such as Hamilton's Community Start-Up program<sup>8</sup> and Toronto's At Home/ Chez Soi program,<sup>9</sup> are taking their toll.

Daily Bread's 2012 *Who's Hungry* report indicated that 25% of children and 45% of adults who access Greater Toronto Area food banks are going hungry at least once a week, which is consistent across all urban centres.

The Ottawa Food Bank served over 48,000 individuals through their 140 food assistance programs in March 2012 alone.<sup>10</sup> In Waterloo, it is estimated that 1 out of 20 individuals are hungry, with food banks in this region distributing more than three million pounds of emergency food every year.<sup>11</sup> In Windsor, a city with the highest unemployment rate in Canada (9.5%), food banks have become the means through which many people are able to sustain their basic nutritional needs.<sup>12</sup>

In addition, young women and new Canadians are among the largest growing groups of clientele in the Greater Toronto Area.

According to recent reports, women under 18 years of age represent 44.6% of food bank users in Toronto, while 51% of food bank users in the GTA are new residents who were born outside of Canada; 11% of all visitors to the urban centre food banks are recent immigrants or refugees. Many of these food bank clients are university educated, but find it very difficult to find employment, as their credentials remain unrecognized by key agencies.<sup>13</sup>

Urban Ontario hunger has become a major issue that cannot be ignored. With the continued increase in the cost of food and housing, and the loss of social assistance funding from federal and provincial governments, we all need to work together to ensure everyone has access to nutritious food.



**New Canadians and Women are among the largest growing groups of food bank users**

# Hunger in Ontario



## *Rural Ontario*

In our rural communities (such as Burk's Falls, Campbellford, Durham, Prescott, Cobourg, Stratford, and Perth etc.), the outlook is not much better. The devastating frost that followed spring's warm weather and the harsh, dry summer left many rural communities and farmers' fields empty or filled with ruined crops. Consequently, access to sustainable, healthy food has become incredibly limited.

As a result, this year saw a 13.9% increase in the number of single people served by our rural food banks, with many of these residents being senior citizens who found themselves living alone and struggling with either emotional or physical challenges.

Due to this rise in demand, many rural food banks across the province had one of the hardest summers on record. Donations across Ontario were at an all-time low, and demands for food assistance increased at sharp rates.

The Agapé Centre Food Bank in Cornwall, for example, announced in September 2012 that its shelves were bare and that despite purchasing more food than in previous years, they were still unable to keep up with the need in their community.<sup>14</sup> With 19% of food banks reporting their inability to take care of the growing hunger needs of the people they serve, the Agape Centre Food Bank's story is a familiar one.



# The Changing Face of Hunger

## The Face of Hunger is Changing

While there are many preconceived notions as to who uses food banks, the fact is that the majority of food bank users are educated and hard working individuals that have encountered unfortunate situations and now require a helping hand to get back on their feet. Food bank users are our family members, friends, colleagues, and neighbours. Some of the largest groups of food bank users include:

- children under 18 years of age
- the recently unemployed, primarily as a result of layoffs or factory closures
- recent university graduates who are having difficulty finding adequate employment to offset the cost of living
- single parent households
- senior citizens on a fixed income

The OAFB is working hard to provide hunger relief to children, adults, and families across the province.

Through Community Harvest Ontario, the Milk Program, and the Rural Kids Program, the OAFB is bringing healthy, nutritious, locally grown food to the tables of many throughout the year.

The OAFB will also continue to pursue its recommendations for change in its 2011 Hunger Report, including: the pursuit of increased healthy food donations, a housing benefit for low income individuals, a tax credit for farmers, and a push for the Ontario government to address the root causes of hunger and implement policy changes that will lead to long-term sustainable solutions, and ultimately make food banks unnecessary.

It is our hope that you will join us in these efforts by supporting your local food bank and speaking to your local MPPs about hunger in your community.

**Together, we can end hunger.**



**Only 0.4% of food bank users are homeless**

# End Notes



<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cbc.ca/toronto/news/pdf/falling-behind.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.tradingeconomics.com/canada/inflation-cpi>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.aboriginalaffairs.gov.on.ca/english/services/datasheets/northern.asp>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.aboriginalaffairs.gov.on.ca/english/services/datasheets/northern.asp>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/sandy-casts-uncertainty-on-wawa-ont-s-flood-relief-plans-1.1015243>

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/victims-families-in-elliott-lake-mall-collapse-allege-negligence-in-lawsuit/article4582458/>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.marketwire.com/press-release/community-rallies-to-raise-the-rates-and-stop-social-assistance-cuts-1713045.htm>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/news/housing-insecurity-and-homelessness-set-to-rise-in-toronto-as-funding-cut-for-homelessness-prevention-and-housing-programs/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://www2.canada.com/ottawacitizen/news/archives/story.html?id=38291e50-a1a0-425f-833c-444588462438>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.thefoodbank.ca/en/>

<sup>12</sup> [http://www.workforcewindsorsex.com/need\\_to\\_know/windsors-unemployment-rate-july-2012/](http://www.workforcewindsorsex.com/need_to_know/windsors-unemployment-rate-july-2012/)

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.dailybread.ca/learning-centre/hunger-statistics/>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.standard-freeholder.com/2012/09/18/crisis-at-agape>

Working towards a hunger-free Ontario.



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