



HUNGER REPORT 2014

GOING HUNGRY TO PAY THE BILLS: THE ROOT CAUSES
BEHIND THE PERVASIVE CYCLE OF HUNGER IN ONTARIO



Photo credit: Wasaga Beach Ministerial Food Bank

WHAT WE DO

The Ontario Association of Food Banks (OAFB) is a network of 125 direct member food banks and over 1,100 affiliate hunger-relief programs and agencies across the province, including: breakfast clubs, school meal programs, community food centres, community kitchens, food pantries, emergency shelters, and seniors centres.

Our food bank network provides food assistance to approximately 375,000 adults and children in need every single month.

Every year, the OAFB secures and distributes more than 8 million pounds of fresh and non-perishable food and grocery products, including 1 million litres of fresh milk, and 144,000 dozen eggs. Our food bank network provides food assistance to approximately 375,000 adults and children in need every single month.

Our organization’s strength lies in its membership, which serves all regions of the province, reaching nearly all rural and urban communities in Ontario. Throughout our network, food banks across the province are working hard to address both emergency food needs and long-term food insecurity through a wide variety of innovative programs.

From cooking classes and skill-building workshops to child care and public health, Ontario’s food banks are centres for support, innovation, and community.

The OAFB, alongside the food banks within its network, is working very hard to develop long-term solutions that address the root-causes of hunger and develop sustainable solutions that ultimately make food bank use history.

The following report details the Ontario findings of Food Banks Canada’s Annual Hunger Count survey. This year’s report also includes a special feature on the ‘working poor’, which discusses some of the underlying issues that contribute to the cycle of poverty and hunger in our province.

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Children are one of the largest groups in need; 35% of food bank users in Ontario are children.

BY THE NUMBERS

In March of 2014, Ontario's food banks were visited by 374,698 adults and children from all corners of the province. This is oftentimes hard to imagine, simply because hunger in Ontario does not look the way one might think it should. It is impossible to look at children in a classroom and determine who has not had breakfast that morning, or at a colleague or a neighbour and know that their cupboards are empty or that they are skipping meals because they cannot afford food to eat.

At first glance, this year's March Hunger Count numbers appear very similar to the last (375,814 individuals in March 2013). There is, however, one important exception: the number of households accessing food banks for the very first time has increased by 20%, from 14,206 in 2013 to 17,182 households in March 2014. This dramatic increase clearly shows that more and more new families are turning to food banks to help off-set the rising cost of living just to make ends meet each month.

WHO USES FOOD BANKS?

DEMOGRAPHICS

	Ontario (total)	Rural Ontario
Women 18+	45%	45%
Post Secondary Students	4%	1%
Senior Citizens	4%	5%
First Nations Persons	6%	15%
New Canadians	10%	6%

FAMILY COMPOSITION

	Ontario (total)	Rural Ontario
Single Parent Families	24%	21%
Two Parent Families	19%	22%
Couples with No Children	11%	15%
Single People	46%	42%

INCOME SOURCE

	Ontario (total)	Rural Ontario
Job Income	9%	9%
Federal Employment Insurance	3%	3%
Social Assistance	40%	32%
Provincial or Private Disability Support	30%	38%
Pension Income	7%	9%
Student Loans or Scholarships	1%	1%
No Income	5%	3%

HOUSING TYPE

	Ontario (total)	Rural Ontario
Homeowners	5.7%	15.9%
Rental Market Tenants	64%	63.4%
Social Housing Tenants	22.3%	14.3%
Band-Owned Housing	0.4%	1.9%
Emergency Shelter	0.7%	0.2%
Youth Shelter	0.3%	0.5%
Living on the Street	0.8%	0.3%
Living with Family or Friends	5.7%	3.7%

There are many misconceptions regarding hunger and the families who use food banks. Many assume that because the percentage of Ontarians turning to food banks has remained consistent since the beginning of the recession that hunger is an isolated problem affecting very specific people. This is simply untrue.

Hunger does not discriminate. It affects all different groups of the population, including senior citizens, students and recent graduates, and the employed. The next logical question is, why in a province with so much food, with new jobs being created all the time, and a growing economy, are so many people having to turn to food banks?

Fundamentally, the answer is not a simple one. There are many contributing factors as to why so many Ontarians are having trouble making ends meet each month. Average rental prices, for example, have increased over 15% in the last seven years ¹, alongside mortgage rates, which increased 17% between 2008 and 2012.²

This past year, inflation hit a two year high in Ontario. In June 2014, the price of food purchased in stores increased an overall 3.2% from the year before. Perhaps even more shocking is the dramatic increase in fresh meat prices, which rose 9.4% in one year, as well as a 9.5% increase for fresh vegetables.³ It has become very expensive to afford basic living costs, such as safe and appropriate housing and healthy food to eat.

Living expenses are especially challenging for those who receive social assistance through Ontario Works or the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

Ontario Works, for example, provides single recipients with only \$656 per month, or an annual salary of \$7,872 per year. Since 2007, ODSP has only increased 8% in seven years, and provides a mere \$13,000 annually to those in need.⁴ The poverty line is defined as \$23,000 per year for a single person, so it is understandable that individuals receiving support through these two programs would have no other choice but to reach out for additional support to make ends meet.

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The poverty line is defined as
\$23,000 PER YEAR

The minimum wage in Ontario provides full-time employees with an annual salary of approximately \$20,000 per year. This too falls below the poverty line and exemplifies why additional services, such as hunger-relief programs and food banks, are needed to help off-set the costs of day-to-day living.

A particular area of concern for the OAFB is the rising number of students, especially in rural communities, that are accessing food banks. Today, there is not one college or university campus that does not have a food bank or hunger-relief program onsite. This is perhaps unsurprising given that tuition fees in Ontario have increased an astounding 39.9% in the last seven years.⁵

With rising rental prices, tuition fees, food prices, and a limited income, it is no wonder that students have to make compromises when it comes to food in order to have a place to live.

Ontarians should not have to choose between: rent or food; transportation or food; heat and hydro or food, and so on.

Change is needed now more than ever in order to stop families and individuals across the province from having to make choices between basic necessities. Ontarians should not have to choose between: rent or food; transportation or food; heat and hydro or food; and so on. Hunger is a problem that can no longer afford to be bandaged.

1. www.landlordselfhelp.com/rentincreaseguideline.htm
2. <http://www.withgia.com/average-ontario-home-prices-have-risen-17-over-the-past-four-years/>
3. http://www.thestar.com/business/2014/07/18/inflation_in_canada_hits_two-year_high_as_cost_of_meat_vegetables_rise
4. www.incomesecurity.org
5. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/81-582-x/2012002/tbl/tblb2.9-eng.htm>

Since 2009, food bank use has not dipped below 370,000 individuals each month (pre-recession numbers were 314,000 in March 2008 and 318,000 in March 2007). It is estimated that approximately 770,000 unique Ontarians access food banks annually. Of these clients:



35%
are children
under 18
years of age



46%
are single-
person
households



8%
are students or
senior citizens



30%
have a
disability



Hunger does not discriminate. It affects all different groups of the population, including children, senior citizens, students and recent graduates, and the employed.

2014 HUNGER COUNT:



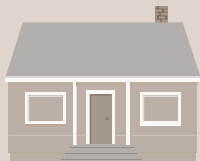
374,698

Individuals access food banks every month



131,144

Are children



17,182

Households helped for the first time in their lives. Over 20% increase from 2013



739,256

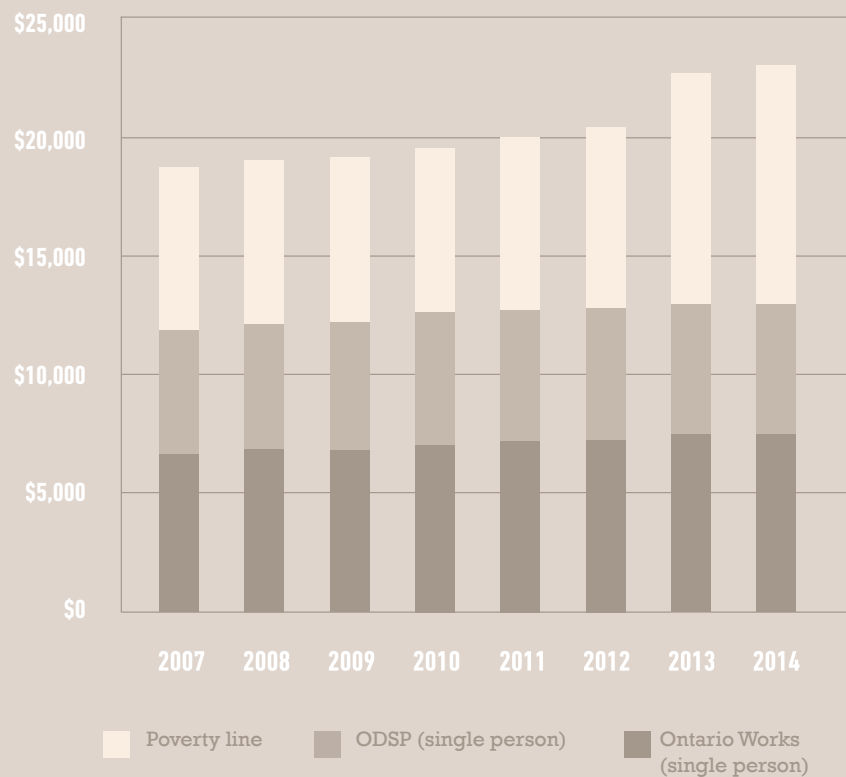
Prepared meals provided to Ontario's hungry in March 2014 alone

WHAT CONTRIBUTES TO FOOD INSECURITY?

Since the recession in 2009, food bank use has not dipped below 370,000 individuals each month. More and more Ontarians are being forced to choose between putting food on the table and other essential living costs, such as: rent, transportation, heat and hydro, or tuition.

1. POVERTY LINE IN COMPARISON TO SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

The gap between the poverty line and the income provided by social assistance continues to grow. Income provided by social assistance no longer reflects the increasing cost of living.



MONTHLY ALLOWANCE FOR A SINGLE ADULT

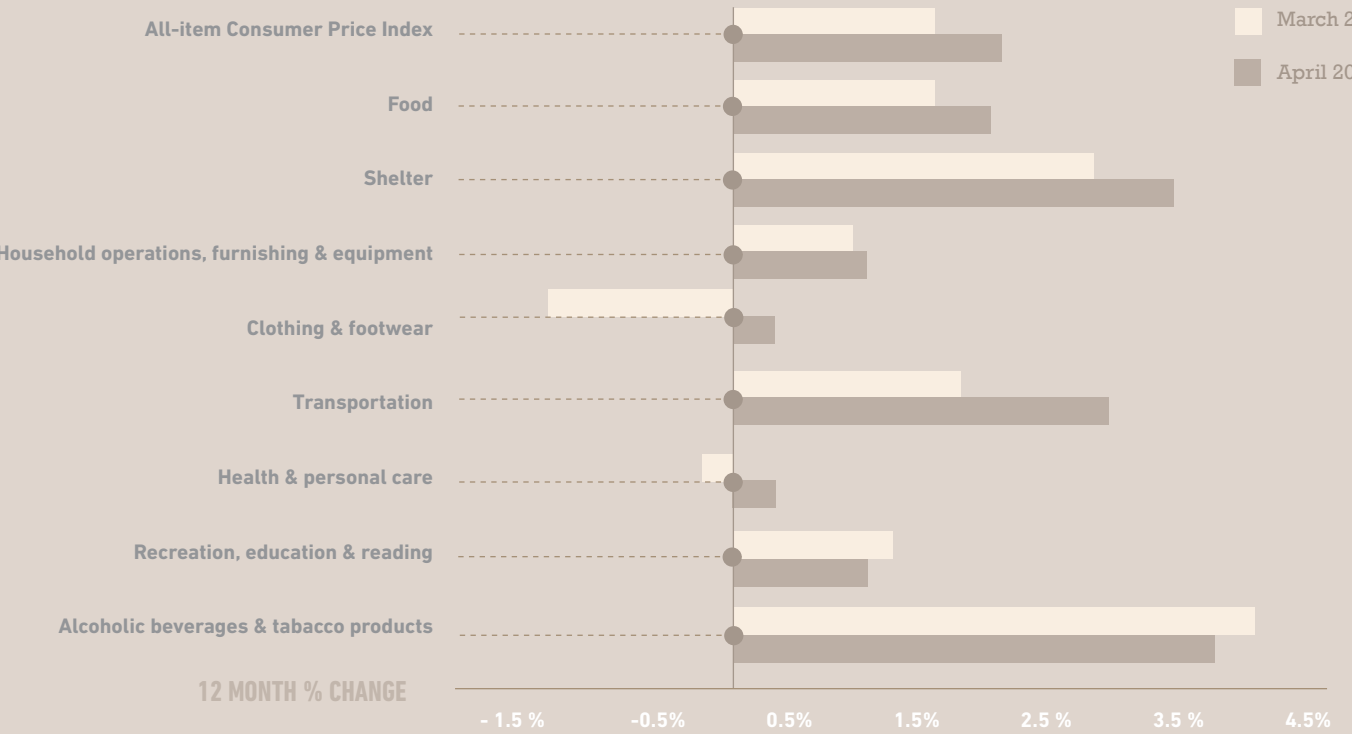
	Ontario Works	ODSP
2007	\$560	\$999
2008	\$572	\$1020
2009	\$572	\$1020
2010	\$592	\$1053
2011	\$599	\$1064
2012	\$606	\$1075
2013	\$626	\$1086
2014	\$656	\$1089

Low income cut-off based on single person in population 100,000 – 500,000¹

Information provided by Income Security Advocacy Centre²

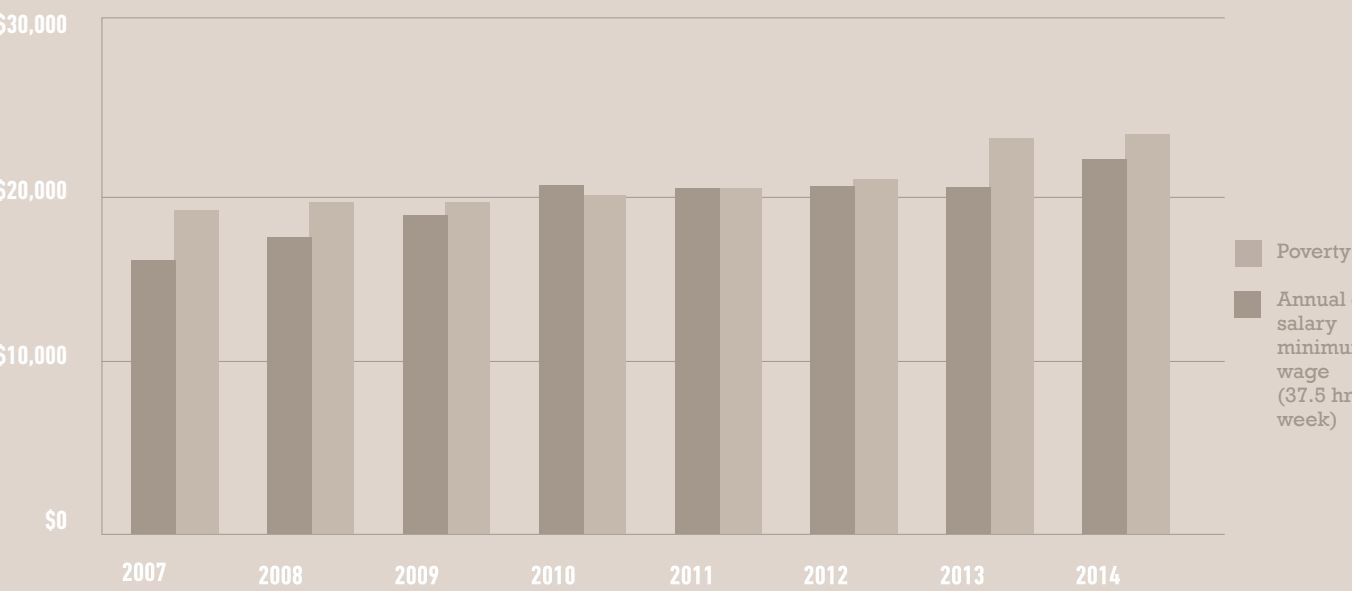
2. INCREASED COST OF LIVING

Prices rose in all major components in the 12 months leading up to April 2014. The increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI) was led by higher prices for shelter, transportation and food.³



3. POVERTY LINE IN COMPARISON TO MINIMUM WAGE

Despite increases, Ontarians earning minimum wage continue to fall below the poverty line. Without enough income to cover essential costs, thousands are going without meals.



1. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75f0002m/2013002/tbl/tbl02-eng.htm>
2. www.incomesecurity.org
3. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/140523/dq140523a-eng.htm>
4. <http://srv116.services.gc.ca/dimt-wid/sm-mw/rpt2.aspx?lang=eng>

JESSICA MANUEL'S STORY

As a 26 year old business professional I face very typical problems on a day to day basis, ones that many of you may face. I have to deal with traffic, I have to find parking in downtown Toronto, I have to deal with deadlines, restless nights or finding a healthy balance between my personal and professional life. But it wasn't that long ago that any of these trivial issues were a concern to me as my only burden was finding my next meal.

As a young child my life was marked by instability. My family was broken, my mother was struggling to raise twin girls and the odds of having a strong self-esteem was quickly diminishing. As a result of poor communication in our home, it became a place of uncertainty and hardship; a place where it was easier to accept the hardship and not solve the problems. This started with the simple things, like understanding homework, then it quickly progressed into insecurities at school and a poor choice of friends. The cycle was leading towards a path of self destruction with limited guidance and emotional support.

Despite all the trials and tribulations, poor nutrition was the leading cause of my mental, emotional and physical health suffering in my first year of high school. Not long after, at the age of 14, I found myself in a youth detention centre as I was arrested for stealing food.

I was surrounded by children who were crying to go home to their families while I was crying to stay. I ate three meals a day. I was safe. This was home.



Jessica Manuel, 2013

For two years I battled homelessness and my hope was dependant on youth homes and the kindness of strangers. At 16 it was time to find an apartment. Even though I was determined, the feelings of insecurity and doubt was overwhelming. I knew that I could not do it on my own, so I sought out resources throughout the Niagara Region, starting with Community Care, a member of the Ontario Association of Food Banks.

It gives me shivers thinking back about how scared, vulnerable and alone I felt walking into the food bank for the first time. Other people were waiting for food, men, young children and mothers. I quickly accepted that my future was nothing to look forward to. I cried when I had a moment with one of the volunteers at Community Care. "This isn't fair!", I shouted. "I am scared, hungry and alone!"

I was in there for hours it seemed. The staff and volunteers explained what resources were available to me and indicated that I did the right thing, asking for help. She reassured me that I not only had help, but I wouldn't be alone. The simple act of listening and caring allowed me to continue asking for help.

At the age of 16, I was enrolling into my fifth high school. And even though I was able to land a job at the local coffee shop, I was still trapped in poverty. At 17, I was pregnant. Desperately in need of finding a new apartment, clothing and food, I turned back to Community Care. Not only did the staff provide me with a list of places for rent at Housing Help, but they provided me with clothing, food, and furniture.

Not only did the staff provide me with a list of places for rent at Housing Help, but they provided me with clothing, food, and furniture.

It finally made sense when I thought of my daughter, Christine. I needed to 'break the chain' of instability so that she could experience a life of love, hope and stability. The same life I desired for myself. Through a miraculous chain of events, I was able to find a family for Christine, a family that became my own.

Where once it seemed that I was destined to repeat the cycle of poverty and hardship, I was the first from my family to complete a post-secondary education. I have found beauty and

strength in sharing my story; a story that is both relatable and effective to victims of poverty, not-for-profit agencies, volunteers, donors and leaders.

Without the services provided through Community Care and the lovely volunteers who helped rebuild my pride, this story would be drastically different. The services not only provided me with the basic necessities for survival, but it laid the foundation that enabled me to be grateful and passionate towards helping others.

I am honoured to be a walking testimony of the generosity and volunteerism of others. Outside of my new family, the NFP agencies gave me a second chance; a chance to fulfil my desires when it felt impossible. The system is not meant to change everyone because unfortunately, we do not control other people's choices.

My goal is to give a new face to poverty and a new voice to increase hope in the hopeless. Through my speaking engagements I wish to mitigate the risk of others falling into poverty while inspiring others towards change and representing a life of gratitude and success. So is the coffee stain on your shirt, the flat tire, or getting stuck in traffic ruining your day? It better not. Life could be much worse. Take a moment to help others, take a moment to listen; we all have 24 hours in a day to make a difference, so what are you going to do with it?

*For more information on how to meet Jessica Manuel, please contact the Ontario Association of Food Banks.



FEATURE: THE WORKING POOR

EMPLOYMENT IN ONTARIO

For generations, Canadians have been taught that with hard work and dedication you can get ahead financially, build a life for you and your family, and enjoy the basic necessities that we are fortunate enough to have here in Canada. Would it surprise you to learn that often this is no longer the case? As the nature of employment changes and a widening income gap emerges, there is a group of individuals whose daily challenges are now focused not on getting ahead, but rather staying afloat; they are what's commonly referred to as the working poor.

In the past, certain aspects of employment were common. Secure, full-time employment usually included good wages and benefits as part of the standard employment relationship. For many positions, this is no longer a common reality – Ontario's employment structure has seen a growth in part-time, casual, and/or temporary forms of work. This precarious employment is found to have lower wages, little job security, and no benefits. In Ontario, approximately 22% of jobs could be characterized as this and can include: service industry jobs, food service and accommodation jobs, and temporary agency work.¹ **There are currently 1.7 million jobs in Ontario that are considered insecure, and since 2008, of the jobs created in Canada, 80% have been temporary positions.**² These changes in employment are a cause for concern. While employment rates overall are increasing,³ is it the right kind of employment? Does it allow for greater upward mobility? Or are our employment opportunities leading vulnerable Ontarians into a continuous cycle of poverty?

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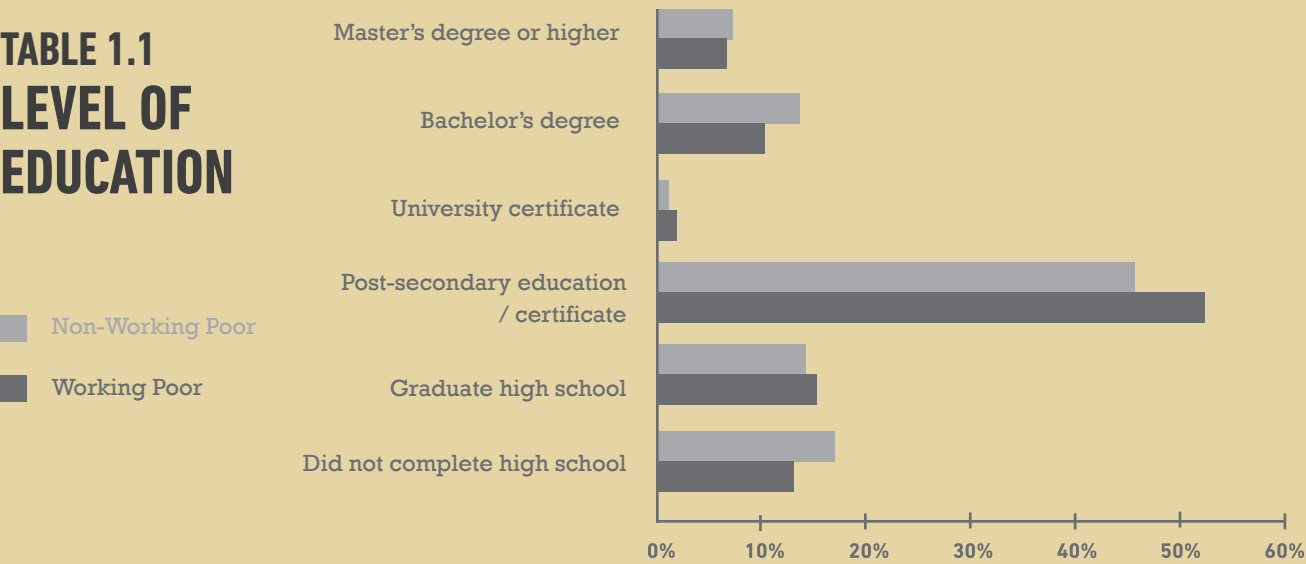
WHAT IS WORKING POVERTY?

There is currently no widely held definition of what constitutes working poverty, but for the purposes of this report we will utilize the term formulated by the Metcalf Foundation in their report *'The "Working Poor" in the Toronto Region: Who they are, where they live, and how trends are changing'*. As defined by this report, someone is considered part of the 'working poor' if he/she:

- Has an after tax income that falls below the Low Income Measure (LIM)
- Has earnings of at least \$3,000 per annum
- Is between the ages of 18 – 64
- Is not a student
- Lives independently⁴

Low Income Measure (LIM) is an established governmental indicator for tracking progress in poverty reduction and is used when determining if an individual is considered ‘low income’. This measure compares an individual’s annual income to the median income of the general working population in any given year.⁵ In 2010, the LIM line for a single adult in Ontario was \$22,160 before taxes (or \$1,847 per month before taxes)⁶ and for a single-parent, one-child household was \$27,550 before taxes (\$2,296 per month before taxes).⁷

TABLE 1.1
LEVEL OF
EDUCATION



Ontario has seen a rapid increase in the number of individuals classified as the ‘working poor’. Between 1996 and 2008, working poverty rates in Ontario increased 73% – from 2.7% of the working population to 4.7%.³ Many of those who fall below the LIM are considered the ‘working poor’, but they are not who you would expect. They bear many similarities to the rest of the working-age population but still find themselves struggling to make a living. **While they have comparable educational attainment (see Table 1.1), work a similar number of hours per week per year, their earnings are significantly lower when compared to the rest of the working-age population.** Most frequently they hold sales and service jobs (Table 1.2, pg. 17), tend to be younger as a group, and fewer of them own homes. In this group, new Canadians are highly over-represented³, they are likely to have multiple sources of income⁸, and are more likely to be living alone without an adult partner (Table 1.3, pg. 17). With comparable characteristics between these two groups, what is contributing to this imbalance between the working poor and non-working poor? What impact does this imbalance have on those working in poverty?

SNAPSHOT OF ONTARIO'S WORKING POOR

TABLE 1.2
TYPE OF
EMPLOYMENT
WORKING POOR

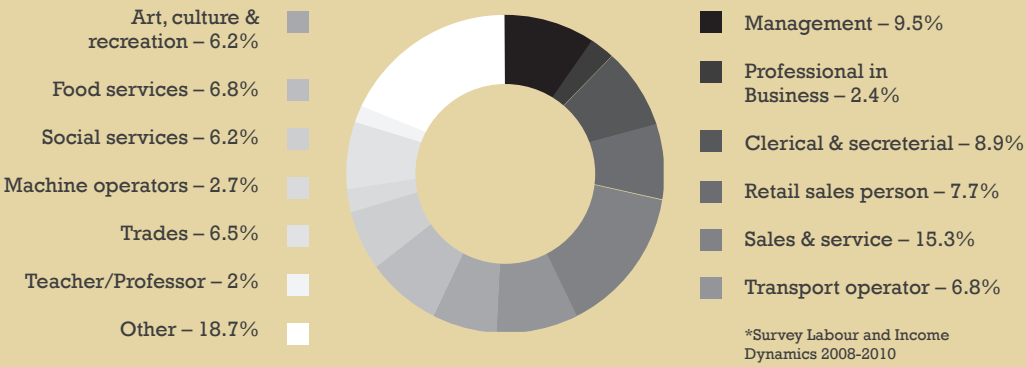
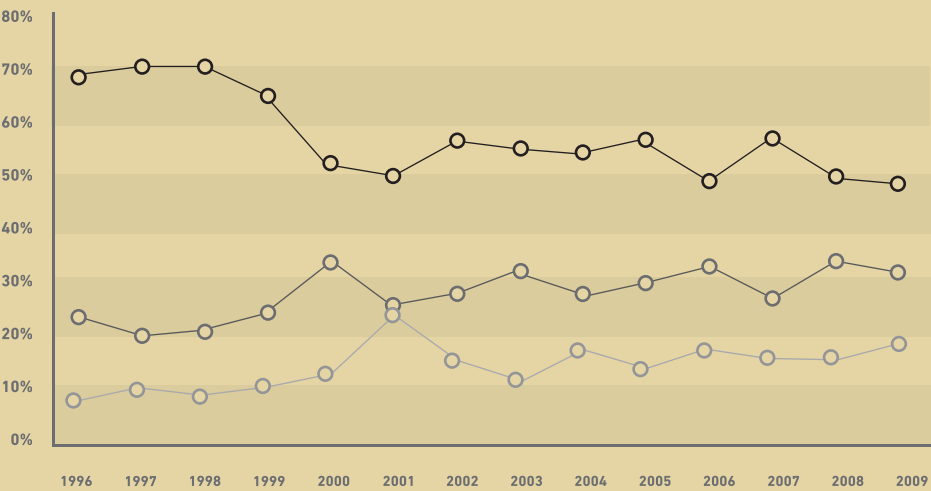


TABLE 1.3
HOUSEHOLD
COMPOSITION



TABLE 1.4
CHANGES IN
REPORTED
HEALTH WORKING
POOR
1996 - 2009

Excellent, very good
Good
Fair, poor

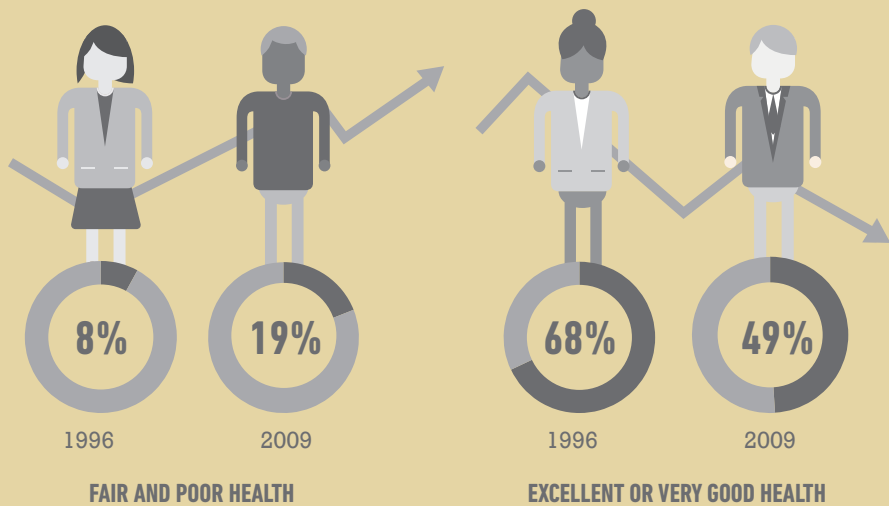


WORKING IN POVERTY, HEALTH, AND FOOD BANK USE

“Employment and working conditions have powerful effects on health and health equity. When these are good they can provide financial security, social status, personal development, social relations and self-esteem, and protection from physical and psychological hazards – each important for health”.⁹ It is widely understood that a large determinant of good health is being food secure, which is defined as having access to sufficient, affordable, and nutritious food.¹⁰ Being food insecure, resulting from economic and social factors, such as working in poverty, has significant implications on the health of Ontarians.

From 1996 to 2009, the self-reported health of Ontarians working in poverty has declined significantly, with fewer individuals reporting good health (68% to 49%) and a larger number of individuals reporting poor health (8% to 19%) (Table 1.4).¹¹

DETERIORATING HEALTH OF WORKING POOR ONTARIO 1996 – 2009



This period of decline in health parallels both the increase in precarious employment and the increase in food insecurity and food bank use. Between 1997 and 2012, there was a 45% increase in the use of food banks in Ontario (285,000 individuals to 412,998 individuals), 59% of which occurred during the peak of the recession between 2008 and 2009.¹² While this demand has decreased slightly since 2013, the post-recession demand remains at 2.7% of the Ontario population. There are still 374,698 individuals who visit food banks each month in Ontario, 35% of which are children.

There are many misconceptions around who utilizes food banks in Ontario. However, based on the 2014 March Hunger Count, we know that: the largest group of food bank users are children under the age of 18 (131,243 children). There

are 175,954 households served by food banks every single month. Of these households, 43% are either single or two-parent families that are trying to make ends meet. Rental and social housing tenants make up 86% of those who visit food banks and only 0.8% are homeless. The majority of food bank clients are either employed (9.3%) or have some form of social assistance (72%) as their primary source of income (ex. Federal Employment Insurance, Provincial Disability Support, Social Assistance). It is no surprise that the demographics of food bank users mirror the above outlined definition of ‘working poor’.¹³

LOOKING AHEAD

With the majority of adult food bank clients falling into the category of ‘working poor’, Ontario has reached an impasse. The rise in precarious employment, declining health levels, and the increase in food insecurity are all interconnected and confirm that there are Ontarians who need help. **The demand at food banks is no longer just for food support; food banks are trying to meet the social needs of their communities by providing a myriad of comprehensive services and programs to not only combat hunger, but address poverty.** Through nutrition education, clothing and thrift stores, low-cost/free furniture, budgeting workshops, community service information and referrals, child care and youth programs, employment search assistance, and training and education, food banks are doing their very best to meet these urgent demands, yet they should not be doing it alone.

1. Law Commission of Ontario, Vulnerable Workers and Precarious Work, (Toronto: December 2012)

2. “Infographic: The Working Poor.” TVO. The Ontario Educational Communications Authority (TVO), 1 Jan. 2014. Web. 25 Apr. 2014. <<http://tvo.org/whypoverty/info/working-poor>>

3. “Labour Force Survey, September 2014”. Statistics Canada, Government of Canada, 10 October 2014. Web. 16 Oct. 2014. <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/141010/dq141010a-eng.htm>

4. Stapleton, John, Murphy, Brian, and Xing, Yue. “The ‘Working Poor’ in the Toronto Region: Who they are, where they live, and how trends are changing.” Metcalf Foundation. 2012

5. “Low income measures.” Low Income Measures. Statistics Canada, Government of Canada, 27 June 2013. Web. 8 Apr. 2014. <<http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75f0002m/2013002/liim-mfr-eng.htm>>

6. “Table 3.2 Low-income measures thresholds (LIM-AT, LIM-BT and LIM-MI) for households of Canada, 2010”. Low Income Measures. Statistics Canada, 5 September 2013. Web. 16 October 2014. <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/ref/dict/table-tableau/t-3-2-eng.cfm>

7. “Additional 2011 Milestones.” Breaking the Cycle: Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Strategy (2011 Annual Report). Government of Ontario, 6 Aug. 2014. Web. 8 Sep. 2014. <http://www.ontario.ca/home-and-community/poverty-reduction-strategy-2011-annual-report>

8. Paperny , Anna Mehler. “The poor in Toronto: They’re working but not getting any richer.” The Globe and Mail 11 Feb. 2012, sec. Toronto News: n. pag. Print

9. Closing the gap in a generation: health equity through action on the social determinants of health : Commission on Social Determinants of Health final report.. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization, Commission on Social Determinants of Health, 2008. Print

10. “The determinants of health.” Health Impact Assessment (HIA) . World Health Organization (WHO), 1 Jan. 2014. Web. 8 Apr. 2014. <<http://www.who.int/hia/evidence/doh/en/index3.html>>

11. Block, Sheila. “Rising Inequality, Declining Health: Health Outcomes And The Working Poor.” Rising Inequality, Declining Health. Wellesley Institute, 1 July 2013. Web. 8 Apr. 2014. <<http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/publication/rising-inequality-declining-health/>>

12. Food Banks Canada, 1997-2012. Hunger Count Data


13. Food Banks Canada, 2013. Hunger Report 2013

HUNGER ACROSS ONTARIO

The OAFB distributes fresh and frozen food direct to all 125 member food banks. Dry product is distributed in partnership with the OAFB through 15 food banks that serve as direct delivery points, which are indicated on the map to the right.


This map shows how widespread our network spans across the province. Throughout Ontario, hundreds of dedicated staff and volunteers work tirelessly to provide nutritious foods and balanced meals to those who are hungry, while providing additional social services designed to support and empower clients.

Our network of food banks is across the province. Hundreds of dedicated staff and volunteers work tirelessly to provide nutritious foods and balanced meals to those who are hungry.




The OAFB distributes fresh and frozen food direct to all

125 MEMBER FOOD BANKS




Dry product is distributed through

15 FOOD BANKS



Cost of sending 1 truckload of dry food

TO SUDBURY \$1,800
TO COCHRANE \$2,000
TO THUNDER BAY \$4,615



The RFDA in Thunder Bay serves an area in Northwestern Ontario that is

526,371.87 SQUARE KILOMETRES





Photo credit: Regional Food Distribution Association, Thunder Bay

NORTHERN ONTARIO HIGHLIGHT

Each community in Ontario has its own unique challenges when it comes to tackling hunger, but for Northern Ontario food banks, the challenges are unprecedented.

Astronomical food prices, rising heating bills, lack of affordable housing (or any housing), and the high cost of transporting food and goods has residents of the north scrambling, trying to make ends meet. Food banks in the most northern towns and cities of Ontario are responding to these challenges by creating and implementing programs and initiatives that are making great impacts on the communities they serve.

One such example is the Regional Food Distribution Association of Thunder Bay who is a committed member of the Ontario Association of Food Banks, and a proud affiliate of Food Banks Canada. The RFDA attempts to service an area slightly smaller than France, with a distributed population of approximately 275,000. The majority reside in a few larger urban centres, with numerous small rural or remote settlements; 31 of which are only accessible by air or winter ice roads. The region has the fastest growing First Nations population in Canada, which is actively engaged in food security issues.

The RFDA is working on an innovative strategic business plan to access more healthy food for distribution, which includes: regional satellite storage sites across the region, food reclamation and salvage operations, commercial organic composting, joint green-housing operations, and local crop agreements.

The association currently serves 45 autonomous member organizations; distributing to food banks, feeding programs, shelters, counselling, training centres, and a host of other specialized services. The RFDA is committed to changing lives through a hands-up approach. The current demand of 14,000 monthly asks for help does not yet include an estimated 35,000 individuals living in under-served fringe or isolated

communities. They have never been included in a hunger count survey.

Our work in Northern Ontario is focused on building capacity through synergistic partnerships and collaborative programs that share a common vision to improve the quality of life. An example is our involvement with the school nutrition program; assisting the Red Cross’ bulk purchasing program. The RFDA is also breaking ground on new regional community gardens; working with local farmer alliances; initiating social enterprise projects; launching a mobile produce market for distant communities; and building a network of information sharing and technology transfer around food sovereignty. The organization is advocating for change and to stimulate economic development across the region by increasing local food content or value-added processing at the consumer level and within the broader public sector.

The RFDA is working on an innovative strategic business plan to access more healthy food for distribution, which includes: regional satellite storage sites across the region, food reclamation and salvage operations, commercial organic composting, joint green-housing operations, and local crop agreements. The RFDA has already developed strong linkages with several First Nation associations with the goal of incorporating culturally appropriate indigenous food for consumption or revenue generation. What the north lacks in terms of access to metropolitan centres is made up by a vibrant pioneering attitude.



Photo credit: The Sharing Place, Orillia, ON

SERVICES BEYOND THE TABLE

A food bank is an organization that provides emergency food support to those in need, through a dignified, safe space. Food banks take on many different shapes and sizes. Throughout the OAFB network, there are food banks that are: food distribution hubs, community food centres, food pantries, emergency shelters, and special programs like breakfast clubs. In Ontario, food banks provide nourishment to 374,698 individuals each and every month.

Throughout the provincial food bank network, hundreds of dedicated staff and volunteers work tirelessly to provide nutritious foods and balanced meals to those who are hungry, while offering additional services designed to support and empower clients.

The provincial food bank network recognizes that hunger is a symptom of poverty, and that in order to address hunger, we need to first answer why people are hungry.

Food bank staff and volunteers lend their ears, and their hearts, each and every single day to those dealing with poverty and hunger. The provincial food bank network recognizes that hunger is a symptom of poverty, and that in order to address hunger, we need to first answer why people are hungry.

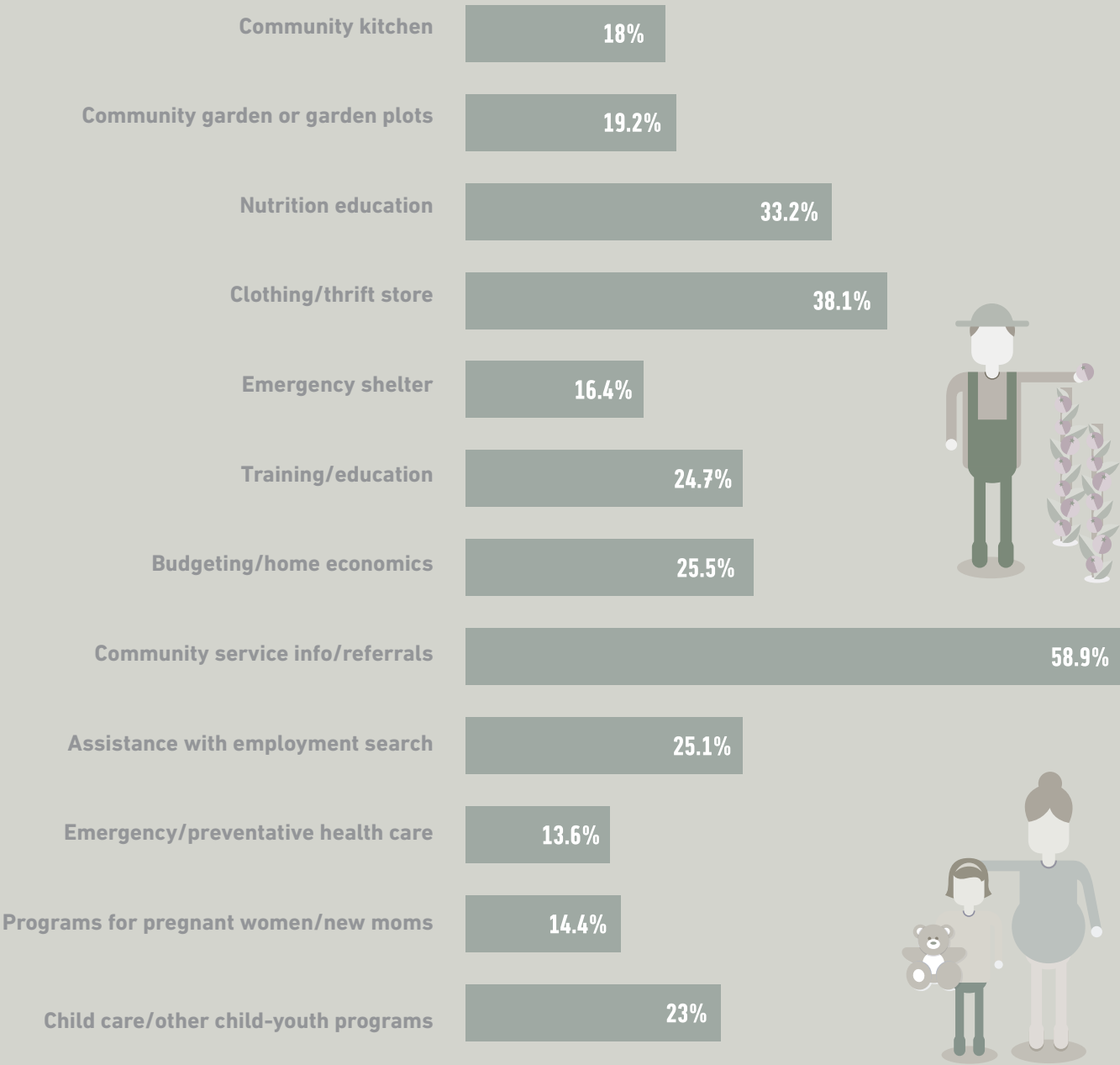
This is why food banks have grown beyond the traditional notion of the non-perishable food pantry. By addressing income inequality, nutrition education, and the integration of social services through innovative programming, Ontario’s food banks are host to a variety of initiatives, such as:

- Community gardens and community kitchens that keep food bank shelves and walk-in fridges stocked with the freshest and healthiest local food staples
- Job fairs and resume writing workshops that provide information and tips to those seeking employment
- Registered nurses and dental hygienists with drop-in hours on site to assist with health care needs
- Thrift stores and emergency shelters that offer the basics of clothing and protection
- Referrals and partnerships with other agencies that provide a comprehensive and collaborative approach to poverty reduction

ADDITIONAL SERVICES PROVIDED BY ONTARIO FOOD BANKS

Our 125 Ontario food bank members are working to support each of their clients’ local needs by offering social services addressing the root causes of poverty and hunger. The following services are offered at a growing number of our food banks:

% OF FOOD BANKS OFFERING EACH SERVICE



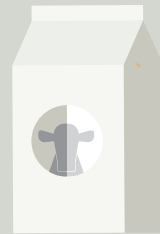
ACCESS TO HEALTHY AND LOCAL FOODS

While programming at food banks is continuously changing and adapting to provide clients with comprehensive support, at the core, our number one priority as a network is to provide those who are hungry with foods that will help them survive and thrive in their daily lives.



144,000 DOZEN

eggs delivered to our members this year by Egg Farmers of Ontario



1,000,000 LITRES

of fresh milk donated yearly by Dairy Farmers of Ontario, Ontario Dairy Council and Ontario Milk Transport Association



33,500 SERVINGS

of lean ground turkey to be delivered to our food banks this year funded by Turkey Farmers of Ontario



30,100 SERVINGS

of pork provided to our members this year funded by Ontario Pork

The Ontario Association of Food Banks strongly believes that all individuals deserve the right to eat healthy foods. This year, for the first time ever, over 50% of all food acquired and distributed by the OAFB to our member food banks was either fresh or frozen. Truckloads of potatoes, green beans, turkey sausages, ground pork and more were shipped across this vast province by the OAFB direct to those who need it most.

Consistently, food banks in Ontario rank protein as their most needed item, which is why the OAFB has launched programs with Ontario's agricultural community to meet the needs of its member food banks.



Photo credit: Direct Energy Cleaning Event, OAFB



Photo credit: Philip Walker, Waterloo Region Record and the Food Bank of Waterloo Region

ADVOCATING FOR CHANGE

There is not a single community in Ontario free of hunger. While it may seem hidden at times, in every office building, on every city bus, and in every classroom, there is an Ontarian struggling with hunger and poverty.

When 374,698 individuals rely on food banks each month, it is essential that we ask the important questions of how and why people are hungry in this province.

Individuals turn to food banks for a myriad of reasons, but fundamentally, they seek assistance because they do not have the necessary means available to purchase food for themselves and their families. Through poverty, hunger grows.

In order to alleviate hunger, the Government of Ontario must step up and implement good public policy that addresses the needs of its most vulnerable citizens. There is no better way to stand up for each Ontarian than by speaking out and taking action against poverty.

In order to alleviate hunger, the Government of Ontario must step up and implement good public policy that addresses the needs of its most vulnerable citizens. In Premier Wynne’s mandate letters to the 2014 Cabinet Ministers, she states that the Government of Ontario is “a force for good”, that is to work “in the best interests of every person in this province”.¹ There is no better way to stand up for each Ontarian than by speaking out and taking action against poverty.

While we commend Premier Wynne and her colleagues at Queen’s Park for the many initiatives and promises laid out in Budget 2014, there is more that can, and must, be done by the provincial government. The Ontario Association of Food Banks suggests that the first steps the Government of Ontario should take in alleviating poverty and fighting hunger are:

1. IMPLEMENTING A MONTHLY ONTARIO HOUSING BENEFIT FOR LOW INCOME TENANTS, BASED ON THEIR RENT AND INCOME

When families are struggling to make ends meet, and they are forced to make difficult choices like paying the rent or putting food on

the table, it is usually food that is sacrificed. The average food bank client spends 71% of their income on housing, while one in five Ontarians spends over 50%, putting both groups at an incredibly high risk of homelessness.² An Ontario Housing Benefit would support the goals of a long-term, affordable housing and poverty reduction strategy by closing the gap between rent and income.

2. INCREASE PAYMENTS AND UPDATES TO ONTARIO’S SOCIAL ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

When it comes to inflation-adjusted dollar terms, Ontario Works and ODSP rates are lower now than they were in the 1970s.³ Today, a single person on OW only receives \$656 per month, while a single person on ODSP receives \$1098 per month.⁴ This is hardly enough money to cover rent and utilities, let alone food, transportation, and other basic needs. In Ontario, 70% of food bank clients list social assistance as their main or only source of income. By increasing rates to liveable levels, individuals will be better prepared to lift themselves out of poverty and free of hunger.

3. PROVIDE FUNDING FOR THE TRANSPORTATION OF FRESH, HEALTHY FOODS FOR ONTARIO’S MOST VULNERABLE COMMUNITIES

Low income and poor health continue to be closely intertwined, affecting lower productivity, lower educational attainment, and a child’s future income.^{5,6} For too many Ontarians, poor health is a major barrier to earning enough income to provide life’s basics for themselves and their families. Without a liveable income, it is impossible to afford safe housing and nutritious food. Food banks and the OAFB do not receive government funding. It is time for the provincial government to recognize food banks as an essential service and commit to supporting the work that they are doing across the province.

These recommendations are the building blocks for a more equitable Ontario, and by implementing them, the Government of Ontario can dramatically reduce the number of those living in poverty in this province. These policy

changes will not take place overnight, and as such, Ontarians must continue to support local food banks.

Food banks are providing a necessary service to 374,698 Ontarians, 131,243 of which are children, by providing them with food and hope each month. It is the responsibility of all of us to ensure a child, a grandparent, a university student, or a neighbour does not go hungry one more day in this province.

1. <http://www.ontario.ca/government/2014-mandate-letter-agriculture-food-and-rural-affairs>
2. <http://www.dailybread.ca/learning-centre/housing-benefit/>
3. <http://www.weareontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/OCF-RPT-FallingBehind-20120829.pdf>
4. <http://www.incomesecurity.org/documents/OWandODSPratesandOCBasofSeptOct2014.pdf>
5. <http://www.socialjustice.org/uploads/pubs/PovertyIncomeInequalityandHealthinCanada.pdf>
6. <http://www.wellesleyinstitute.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/povertyismakingussick.pdf>

MOVING FORWARD

Through local partnerships, advocacy efforts and hard work, food banks have become the voice of the thousands of people that they serve. As a province with so much, there is no reason that any child should have to go to bed hungry, or that any adult or senior should have to skip meals simply because they cannot afford it.

As the inequality gap continues to widen, and the availability of secure quality employment continues to diminish, poverty remains a pervasive issue in this province. Ontario has a decision to make: do we continue to let thousands of Ontarians be caught in the never ending cycle of poverty or do we work together to create solutions for the health and longevity of the province?

The OAFB believes that, together, we can end hunger.

Visit our website www.oafb.ca to find out how you can:

- **Donate** – support our efforts. Every \$1 donated can provide the equivalent of three meals for someone in need
- **Volunteer** – join our team
- **Advocate** – write to your local MP and MPP



Photo credit: Daily Bread Food Bank, Toronto, ON



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The 2014 Hunger Report was written by Carolyn Stewart, Amanda King, and Erin Fotheringham. Special thanks to Miana Plesca, Associate Professor, College of Business and Economics at the University of Guelph who generously contributed her time and expertise. And a big thank you to Pilot PMR for very generously designing this year's report.