



HungerCount 2006



cafb  acba

Canadian Association of Food Banks | Association canadienne des banques alimentaires

HUNGER FACTS 2006

MORE DEMAND NATIONALLY

Number of people using a food bank in *one month* of 2006: 753,458
Food Bank use since 2005: -8.5%; since 1997: +13.4%; since 1989: +99.3 %
Number of food banks in Canada: 649 (638 participated)
Number of meal programs surveyed: 155 food banks (150 provided statistics)
Number of provinces & territories *without* a food bank: 0
Years since Canada's first food bank opened in Edmonton: 25

MORE DEMAND REGIONALLY

Highest provincial per capita food bank use: Newfoundland (5.6%)
Province assisting largest share of food bank recipients: Ontario (330,491)

CHALLENGES MEETING DEMAND

Percentage of food banks with difficulty meeting demand: 34.5%
Number of meals served in one month: 2, 9 million
Full-time equivalent jobs provided by volunteers in one month: 1,635

INSUFFICIENT INCOME

Percentage of food bank clients whose primary source of income is from employment: 13.4%
Percentage of food bank clients whose primary source of income is from social assistance: 53.5%

MORE HUNGRY CHILDREN

Percentage of food bank clients who are children: 41.0%
Years since the federal government promised to eliminate child poverty: 17
Change in the number of hungry children since then (1989): +157,917

*Canadians who believe that hunger is a problem in Canada: 73%**

Percentage of donations to CAFB spent on charitable work: +90

Amount of government funding for CAFB core operations: \$0

* These data are taken from a national poll with a sample size of 808 randomly selected eligible Canadian voters, fielded by Strategic Communications, December 27-30, 2005 and January 2-3, 2006. Margin of error is +/-3.4%, 19-times-out-of-20.

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A Word from the Executive Director

“I would like to thank everyone for their significant contribution to producing this meaningful report about hunger in Canada. The CAFB is committed to fulfilling its mission: feeding people who are hungry and educating Canadians of this sad, silent tragedy. Most importantly, we would like to make it clear that there are solutions but that they require the participation and commitment of everyone: governments and decision-makers, communities, companies and individuals. This is the only way that we can ensure that all Canadians can truly and fully benefit from our nation’s wealth.”

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Charles Seiden". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Charles Seiden

CAFB: Who We Are and What We Do

Founded in 1985, the Canadian Association of Food Banks (CAFB) is an umbrella organization representing a national network of regional and community food banks, including provincial associations and food distribution centers. CAFB is the voice of food banks in Canada, with members and their respective agencies serving approximately 90 % of people accessing emergency food programs nation-wide. In 2005, the CAFB moved over 10 million pounds of food industry donations to its members through the National Food Sharing System, the dollar value equivalent of \$20 million. In addition to food received from the CAFB, community-run food banks rely primarily on volunteers to collect and distribute an estimated 150 million pounds of food per year. CAFB conducts research, engages in public education and advocates for public policy change to eliminate the causes of hunger and food insecurity in Canada.

While CAFB provides food daily for people in need, its ultimate goal is a hunger-free Canada.

***HungerCount* Background**

HungerCount is a national survey of food bank use in Canada. Initiated in 1989, *HungerCount* has been conducted on an annual basis since 1997. Each year, we invite every food bank in Canada to participate in order to provide an up-to-date national portrait of food bank use and hunger. As the only study of its kind in Canada, *HungerCount* is a unique measure of assessing hunger in the country. It is important to note that many individuals and families who are food insecure do not use food banks or other charitable food programs. As such, food bank use alone underestimates the extent of the problem nationwide.

Method

The primary purpose of this survey, which is conducted annually, is to measure food bank use. This is done by counting the total number of individuals who received groceries from food banks and their affiliated agencies during the month of March 2006. Each person is counted only once regardless of the number of times that they received assistance from the food bank during the study period. March is chosen as the study period because it is considered an unexceptional month, that is without predictable high or low use patterns. Since March is used consistently as the study period, we are able to make relevant comparisons in use patterns over time.

HungerCount also seeks to measure worker and volunteer hours contributed during the study period, year that the food bank opened, frequency of food bank use allowed, days worth of food provided, total number of prepared meals served, coping strategies used when food banks run out or were running out of food during the study period. It also collects demographic information of the food bank recipients in terms of income source and family composition, and local trends in food bank use. Although we measure the total number of prepared meals served during the study period, the *HungerCount* study is not a census of all meal programs in Canada and therefore greatly underestimates meal program activities on a national level.¹

This is the first year that CAFB and CSPC-T volunteers contacted food banks prior to the submission deadline to clarify survey questions where needed. This activity was carried out in March 2006.

Throughout the summer, the Community Social Planning Council – Toronto (CSPC-T) worked primarily with the respective provincial coordinators and, where pertinent, CAFB, to get food banks to submit their completed surveys and to resolve any inconsistencies with the data. During this period and into the fall, CSPC-T carried out data entry, data cleaning and analysis. This involved making contact with non-responding food banks if the provincial coordinators were unable to do so, investigating the reasons for any significant changes (increases or decreases) in emergency grocery program and meal program compared to 2005 and identifying the emerging trends in the use of those food banks. In a small number of cases where actual grocery program figures were not available, provincial coordinators provided conservative estimates, where possible, based on newspaper reports, previous food bank use and population statistics

Food bank executive directors and food bank staff act as provincial coordinators for *HungerCount*. They are mostly employed by large food banks or food bank networks in their respective provinces and have long histories within the sector. Their expertise helps to ensure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the survey data. Provincial coordinators forward completed surveys to CSPC-T for data entry and analysis.

¹ However, the totals reported provide some measure of the extent of meal program use as operated by food banks and their agencies.

Charity and Justice and Hunger in Canada²

There is a famous quote from the late Brazilian Bishop, Dom Helder Camara: “When I feed the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why they are poor, they call me a communist.”

That quote captures a common perception that charity and justice are fundamentally different. Charity is a voluntary response to an immediate need. Justice challenges the status quo and addresses root causes.

Giving donations to the food bank would appear as a pretty good example of charity. Asking why there is hunger in Canada would appear as a first step toward justice. Every day, food banks are collecting food and distributing it to people across Canada who are in need. When they do that, when we make a donation to our local food bank or volunteer our time, we should not mistake that for a work of mercy. We are giving only what is a debt of justice.

Every year, when the Canadian Association of Food Banks produces its *HungerCount*, it takes the next step and asks the question, “Why do so many people in Canada have to turn to food banks to put food on the table?” That analysis is followed by recommendations to strengthen food security, income security and housing security.

The work of justice does not fall to government alone – although public justice places upon governments specific responsibilities to achieve food security in Canada. Consider the growing number of food bank users who have paid work as their main source of income. Much of government social policy in recent years has been premised on the notion that work is the best route out of poverty. Yet, the rise in precarious work, of jobs that are part-time, temporary or contract positions means people struggle to earn enough for basics like paying the rent and putting food on the table.

Many businesses make important contributions of food and other resources to food banks and to the CAFB. That is one response of business to the demands of justice. Another step is for employers to examine their own business practices. How much do we rely on part-time casual or contract workers? Are we diligent in assuring that those companies with whom we contract meet basic labor standards? Do they provide live-able incomes and employment security?

That does not leave us off the hook as citizens. Nor does it excuse governments from fulfilling their task of public justice. Talks about the fiscal balance, for example, cannot be reduced to the question of whether oil revenue is included in the equalization formula or not. We must also refocus programs like the Canada Social Transfer, Employment Insurance, affordable housing and child care to assure that everyone in Canada has what they need to live a decent life and participate fully in society.

- Greg deGroot-Maggetti, Socio-economic Policy Analyst for Citizens for Public Justice

² Excerpts from presentation by Greg deGroot-Maggetti, Citizens for Public Justice, at the eve of the Canadian Association of Food Banks’ National Hunger Awareness Day, Inaugural Launch, June 5, 2006 Ottawa. For the full speech, visit www.cpj.ca

Executive Summary

The 2006 *HungerCount* findings show a decline in food bank use over the previous year. 70,398 fewer people visited a food bank in March 2006 compared to the same month in 2005. However, the number of prepared meals served by food banks offering a meal program in March 2006 has increased over the previous year. Those on social assistance and the working poor continue to make up the largest groups of food bank recipients, respectively. The data also show that 268,774 children needed emergency food assistance in March, 2006.³

Although food bank use has declined over the past year, the long term pattern in use reveals a different picture. Food bank use has actually increased by 13% since 1997 – the year when *HungerCount* was first begun annually. Children and families continue to make up a significant proportion of the clientele. It is still primarily welfare recipients who are turning to food banks, suggesting that welfare rates in Canada are still failing to ensure that basic needs are met. And, people with jobs continue to comprise the second largest group of food bank clients, indicating that forces in the broader labour market are not enabling workers to be self-sufficient.

The reasons accounting for the decline in food bank use over the previous year are manifold, as reports from the various provinces and Territories in this study attest to. In certain communities, as in Alberta for example, more jobs with better wages have driven down the demand for food bank assistance; while this is good news, it also underscores the argument that economic well-being can influence the demand for emergency food assistance and the degree of hunger, as a social problem. In other regions, such as in Quebec, however, the decline in the number of food bank recipients does not necessarily suggest less need but a more limited capacity on the part of emergency food providers to assist the hungry in their communities as a result of such factors as food bank closures. Although fewer people visited a food bank this year, the number of food banks in Canada has held relatively steady. There are currently 649 food banks operating in the country, compared to 650 last year.

Charitable Institutions: the third pillar of Canadian society and economy

“Must the hunger become anger and the anger fury before anything will be done?”

- John Steinbeck

These are truly halcyon days for the Canadian economy: a thriving economy, the lowest unemployment rate in more than 30 years and hefty budget surpluses. This prosperous fiscal situation means that Canada can afford to fund a number of initiatives that would help to improve the quality of life and security of vulnerable Canadians. Instead, the recent federal budget revealed regressive measures, making cuts in program spending to help fund the much-touted tax cuts.

³ Based on those reporting age; not all respondents were able to provide age. The number of child food bank clients based on total assisted is estimated to be higher.

In the absence of substantial, systemic action on addressing hunger, food banks have become the predominant institutionalized response to the problem. Food bank workers are increasingly responding to the impacts of poverty rather than government workers. In March 2006, 349,615 hours of labour were spent operating food banks in Canada. The continued demands placed on food banks compromise their ability to meet the need. This year, 34.5% of food banks reported having to resort to one or more measures to serve their clients because of a lack of food supplies. Although food banks provide an essential community support, they are not a long-term solution.

“Food banks neither accept that hunger is inevitable in society nor sit back and allow governments to shirk their responsibility to end the hunger crisis...More than any other frontline anti-poverty organization, food banks speak to the public, and can move them to action.”
- Daily Bread Food Bank, “*whoshungry: 2006 Profile of Hunger in the GTA*”, Toronto.

Hunger has many faces but its root cause is poverty. While feeding hungry people is an important part of the work that food bankers do, they also recognize the importance of meeting the long-term needs of their clients. In addition to providing direct emergency food assistance to their clients, food banks are actively involved in contributing to long term changes that they believe will reduce hunger and consequently food bank use in their communities. In the Policy Priorities section of this report, food bank workers from the provinces and Territories address the salient link between structural conditions and hunger. These experienced staff and volunteers working daily in the frontlines share their views on what broader changes in areas such as housing, income security, income supplements and child care, are needed to help reduce the need for emergency food assistance.

Most Canadians are aware of the problem of hunger in Canada. According to the results of a 2005 national omnibus poll, 73% of Canadians consider hunger in Canada a serious problem and 57% believe that government is largely responsible for solving the problem.⁴ These results are supported by previous survey findings and indicate that public concern about this important issue is still very strong.⁵

Canada’s first food bank, Edmonton Gleaners’, marked its 25th anniversary this year. 2006 is also the tenth consecutive year of *HungerCount*. These milestones, however, are no cause for celebration for in one sense they signify that Canada’s seniors, the unemployed, the working poor, students, newcomers, single moms and children continue to find themselves in a food bank line. It is for this reason that food bank workers continue to contribute thousands of days’ worth of their time and energy at their local food banks to make sure that the doors are open to serve those in need. Above all they symbolize a decade of failed government legislation in bringing about the conditions necessary to drive down the need for food banks in our communities.

Depending on how you measure it, ten years can be merely a drop in the bucket of time or the entire lifetime of a child who is being raised on donated food. *HungerCount* is meant to spread awareness, generate informed debate and elicit change. Use it to help us encourage our leaders to make ending hunger a priority. *Another decade must not pass in silence.*

⁴ These data are taken from a national poll with a sample size of 808 randomly selected eligible Canadian voters, fielded by Strategic Communications, December 27 – 30, 2005 and January 2 -3, 2006. Margin of error is +/- 3.4%, 19-times-out-of-20.

⁵ Totum Research Inc. (2004) *Perceptions of a Problem*. Toronto.

HungerCount Results

Food Bank Use

In Canada today, an estimated 649 food banks and 2,761 affiliated agencies are in operation (Table 1). In 2006, 638 food banks took part in the *HungerCount* survey, resulting in a national participation rate of 98.3%.

Table 1. Food Banks in Canada

Province/Territory	Total # of Food Banks (excluding agencies)	Total # of Food Banks Participating	% of Food Banks Participating	# of Agencies of Participating Food Banks (included in survey)
British Columbia	97	92	94.9	180
Alberta	101	97	96.0	249
Saskatchewan	22	22	100.0	152
Manitoba	47	45	95.7	346
*Ontario	258	258	100.0	664
Quebec	17	17	100.0	971
New Brunswick	62	62	100.0	0
Nova Scotia	1	1	100.0	148
Prince Edward Island	6	6	100.0	0
Newfoundland & Labrador	31	31	100.0	51
Yukon	2	2	100.0	0
Northwest Territories	3	3	100.0	0
Nunavut	2	2	100.0	0
Canada Total	649	638	98.3	2761

*Where no information was available for Ontario food banks, provincial food bank use statistics were gathered from newspaper and other print sources. As well, conservative estimates were included for areas in the remote North.

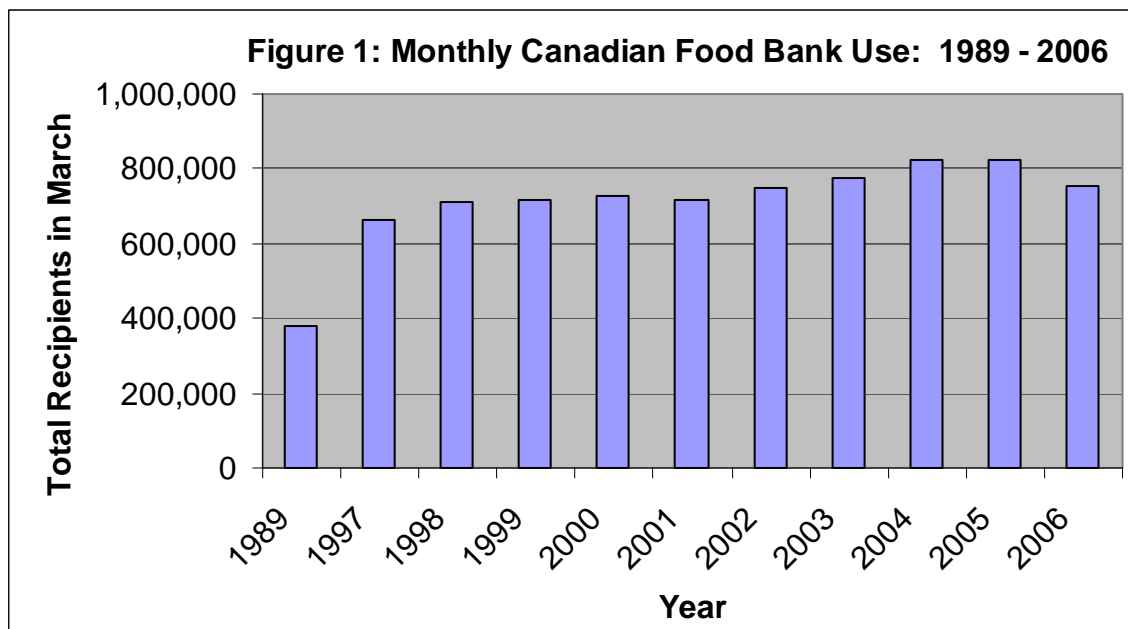
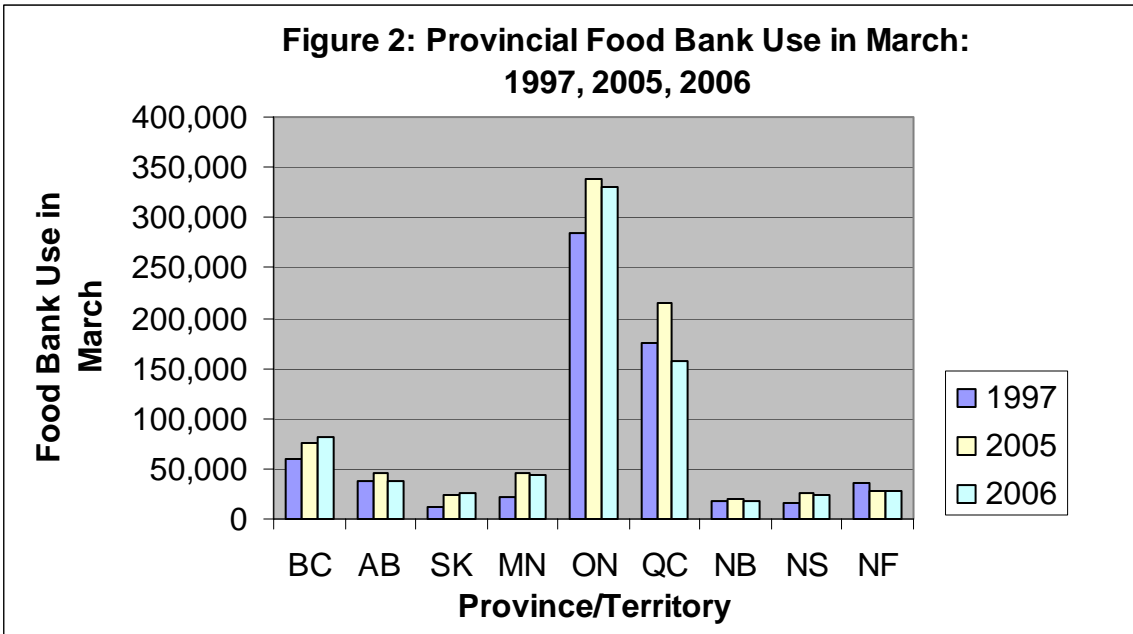


Figure 1 illustrates the trend in food bank use over time. In 2006, 753,458 people used a food bank in a typical month, which was a decrease of 8.5%, compared to last year.

Food Bank Use by Province

Figure 2 illustrates the number of people using food banks by province in March 2006, 2005 and 1997. In March 2006, food bank use dropped most significantly in Quebec and Alberta by 26.7% and 15.1%, respectively, over the previous year. They are followed by Nova Scotia (8.4%), New Brunswick (6.7%), Manitoba (3.7%) and with the smallest decline in Ontario (2.4%). Although the overall number of food bank recipients in Quebec was significantly lower this year, 41.2% of food banks in the province reported increases in the number of people they served. British Columbia reported the highest increase of 7.7% compared to last year, followed by Saskatchewan, at 3.7%. Small increases in food bank visits were reported by Prince Edward Island (1.62%) and Newfoundland and Labrador (1.60%).



HungerCount also compares food bank use to population by province to determine per capita use (Figure 3). Although Newfoundland & Labrador experienced the largest decrease in food bank visits over ten years, the province continues to have the highest number of food bank recipients as a percentage of the population at 5.59%. This was followed by Manitoba at 3.78%, Ontario at 2.64% and Saskatchewan at 2.57%.

Table 2 provides the total number of people assisted by food banks by province or territory, including data on households and individuals. Ontario, Quebec and British Columbia assisted the greatest number of recipients.

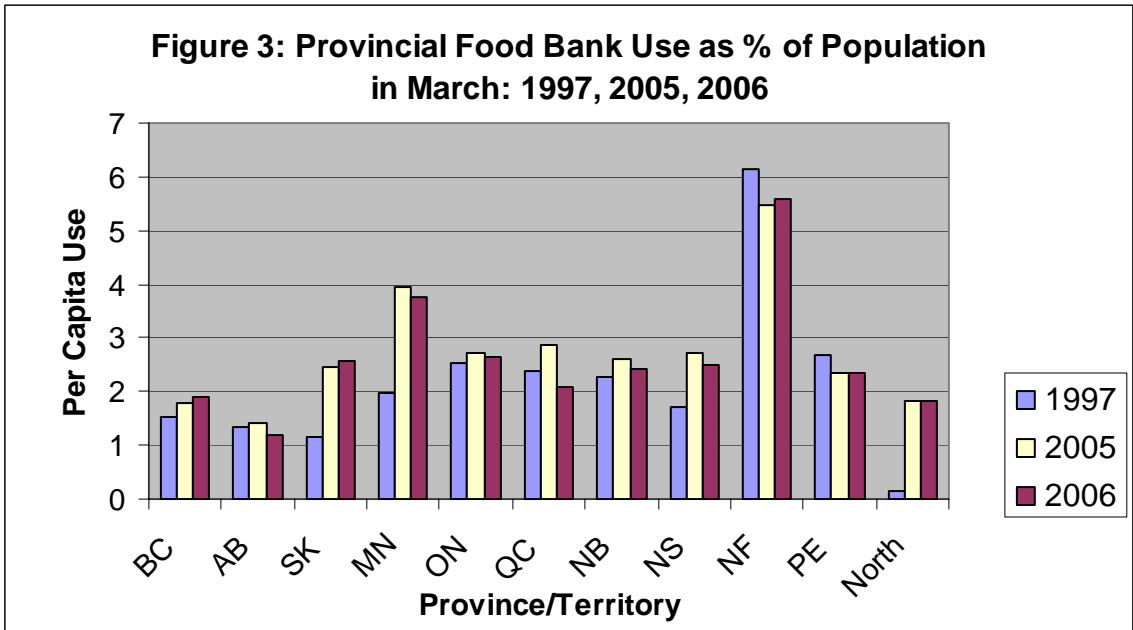


Table 2. Total Number of People Assisted by Food Banks in March 2006

	All Food Banks			Food Banks Reporting by Age			
	Total Assisted	Share (%)	Total Households ¹	Adults	Children	Total Assisted	Total Respondents
British Columbia	81248	10.8	27227	42316	25891	68207	88
Alberta	38598	5.1	14663	21489	16343	37832	92
Saskatchewan	25512	3.4	10018	13983	11529	25512	22
Manitoba	44461	5.9	15017	23731	20503	44234	41
Ontario	330491	43.9	85760	150266	100255	250521	226
Quebec	157696	20.9	66089	90031	67665	157696	17
New Brunswick	18140	2.4	8059	11790	6350	18140	55
Nova Scotia	23311	3.1	7940	11602	7264	18866	1 ²
Prince Edward Island	3260	.4	1279	2098	1162	3260	6
Newfoundland & Labrador	28840	3.8	8440	17750	11075	28825	30
Yukon	795	.1	210	601	194	795	2
Northwest Territories	457	.1	143	231	226	457	3
Nunavut	649	.1	121	332	317	649	2
Canada	753458	100.0	244966	386220	268774	654994	585

1 Not all respondents were able to provide household statistics. 2 Nova Scotia's adult and children figures are based on 72 agencies.

Who is Visiting Food Banks?

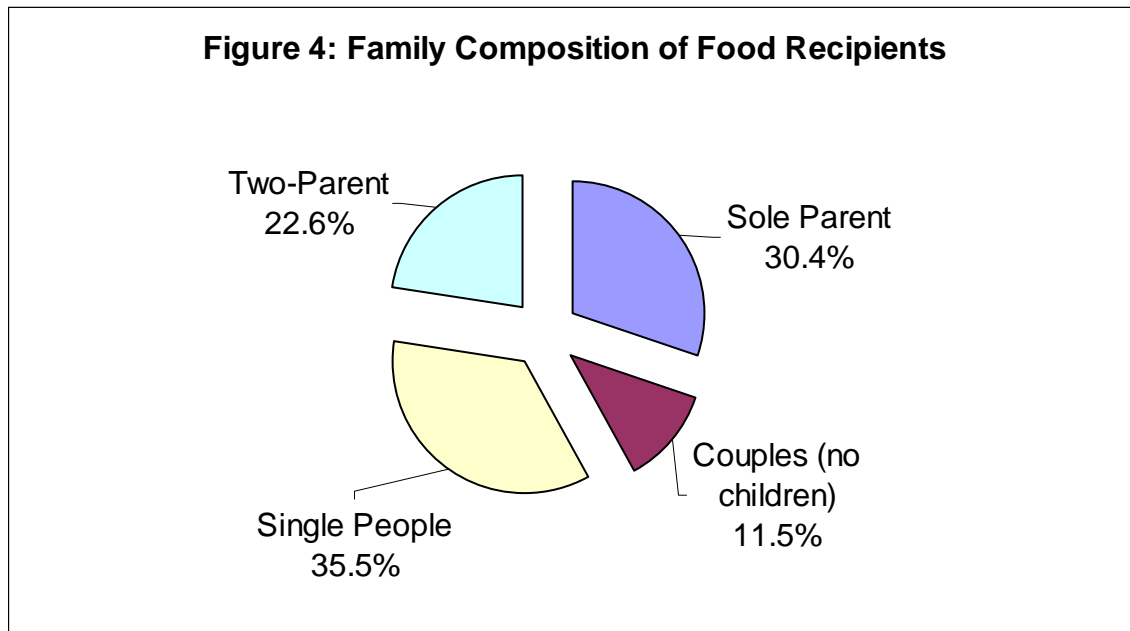
Age

For those food banks that are able to give an age breakdown of their clients, they reported serving a total of 654, 994 adults and children (under 18) in 2006 (Table 2). Of this amount, 268,774 were children. Children accounted for 41.0% of food bank clients although they make up only about a quarter of Canada's population.⁶

Children continue to make up a significant proportion of the food bank clients in a number of provinces. The province with the highest proportion of their clients being children was Manitoba, with 46.4% of child food bank recipients. Children made up 43.2% and 45.2% of the clients served by Saskatchewan and Alberta, respectively. In the Northwest Territories, 49.5% of food bank clients were children and in Nunavut children comprised 48.8% of total people assisted.

Family Composition

HungerCount also examines family composition: singles, couples without children, sole-parent families and two-parent families (Figure 4). 53% of all households visiting a food bank are families with children.⁷ As in previous years, the majority (30.4%) of food bank clients with children are sole-parents. Single people make up just over one third of all the households assisted.

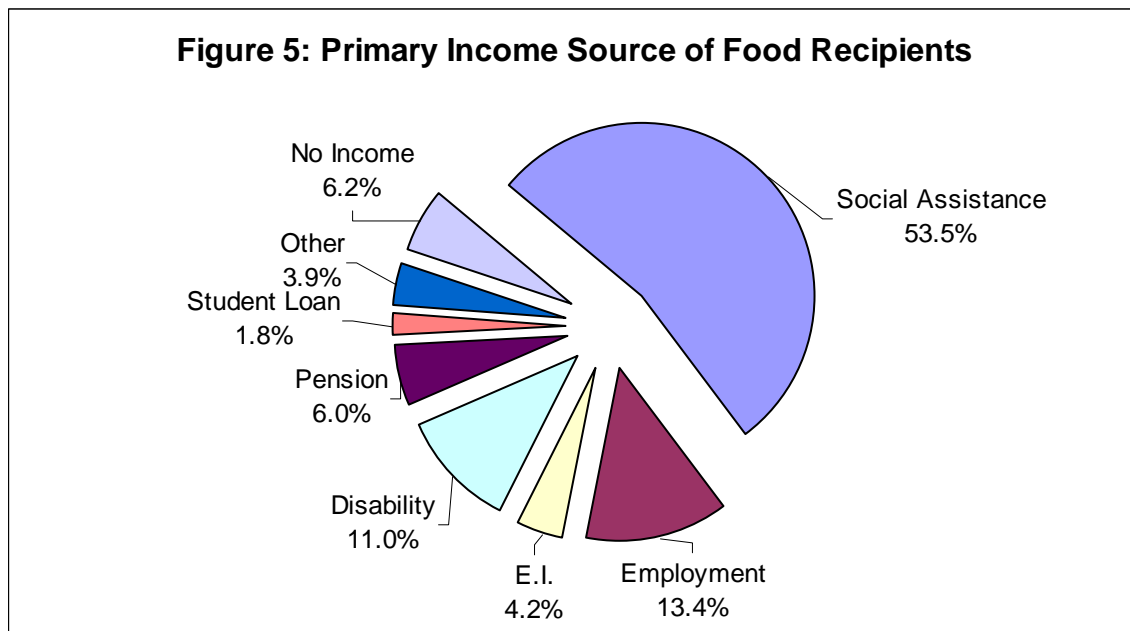


⁶ Based on an age distribution of 0-19. Source: Statistics Canada (July, 2006). *Canada's Population by Age and Sex*. The Daily <http://www.statcan.ca/Daily/English/061026/d061026b.htm>

⁷ Based on a weighted estimate provided with information from 589 surveys,

Income Sources

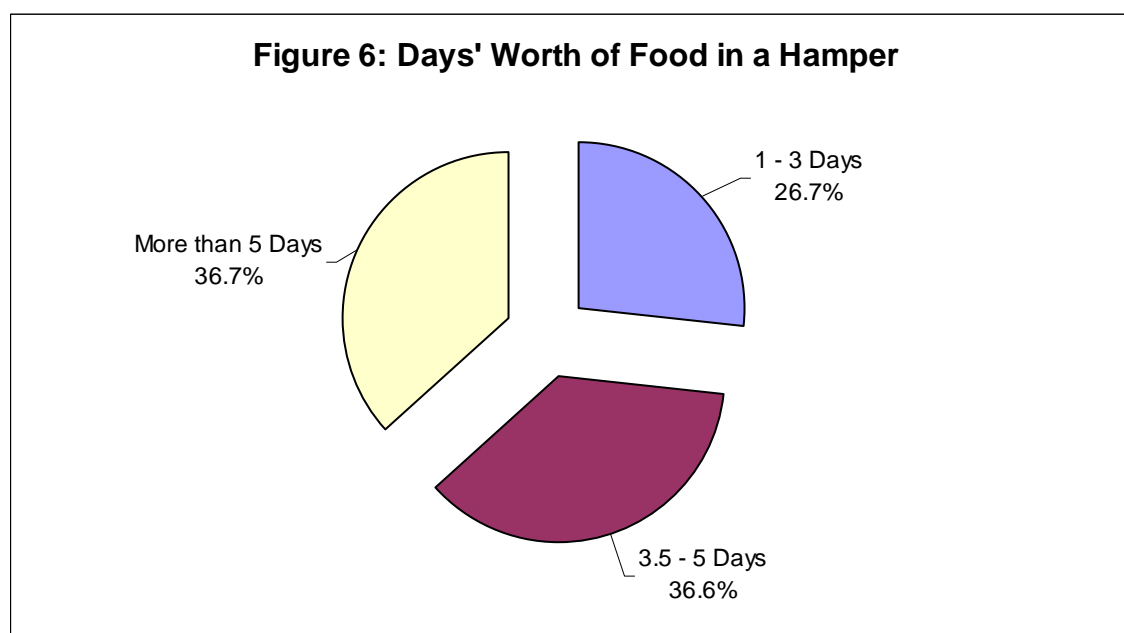
Figure 5 shows the sources of income of food bank clients.⁸ The data show that most of the food bank clients have an income source, which is indicative that the income from these sources is not enough to meet living expenses. More than half (53.5%) of the food bank recipients' primary source of income is from social assistance. The second most common source of income among food bank clients is employment income at 13.4% while 11% are on disability income and 6% are on pension.



⁸ Using estimates provided by 541 food banks, weighted by total number of people receiving groceries.

Food Bank Operations

Contrary to popular assumption, many food banks can only provide a few days worth of food in a typical food hamper (Figure 6).⁹ While most food banks (62.4%) limit the frequency of use by the same client to once per month, there are a few food banks that allow use at least once a week as well as on an as-needed basis. Food banks' ability to serve their clients is often limited by insufficient donations.



Food banks are constantly challenged to keep up with the demand for food. Figure 8 shows the various actions that food banks have taken in response to food shortages. One third of the food banks, (34.5%) reported having to take one or more measures to meet the demand for food.¹⁰ 25% bought more food and 13.2% gave less than usual. Very few food banks turned people away (3.3%) or closed early or did not open (2.5%).

Volunteers are an important resource for food banks. In March 2006, 349, 615 hours of labour were used to operate food banks in the country. The majority of this labour, 70 per cent or 245,344 hours were provided by volunteers.¹¹ Food banks were never intended as a permanent solution to poverty and hunger in the country. Tremendous efforts on the part of staff and volunteers go into running food banks across Canada.

⁹ Based on 580 surveys

¹⁰ Based on 725 surveys, not weighted

¹¹ In the 2005 report, the total number of volunteer and staff hours was misreported. Annual, rather than March 2005, figures were included, also affecting the Canadian totals. The corrected March 2005 figures are:

March 2005 volunteer hours for Canada: 464, 848

March 2005 staff hours for Canada: 87, 728

March 2005 volunteer hours for Quebec: 24, 857

March 2005 staff hours for Quebec: 16, 825

Figure 7: Frequency of Food Bank Use Permitted

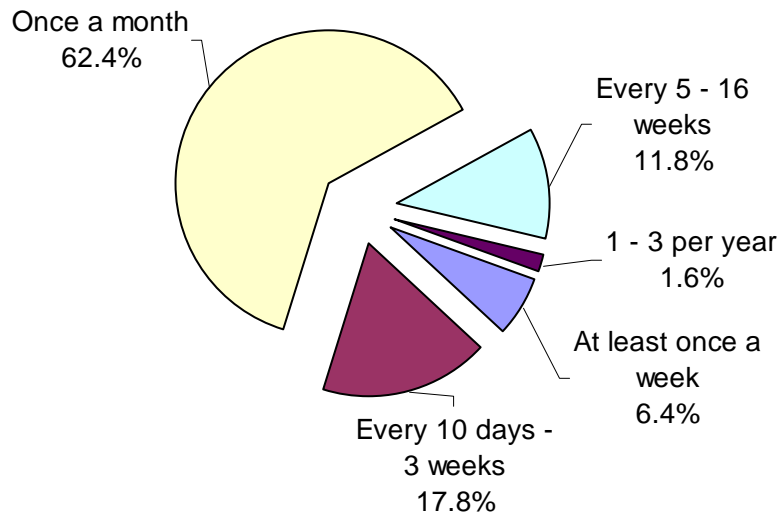
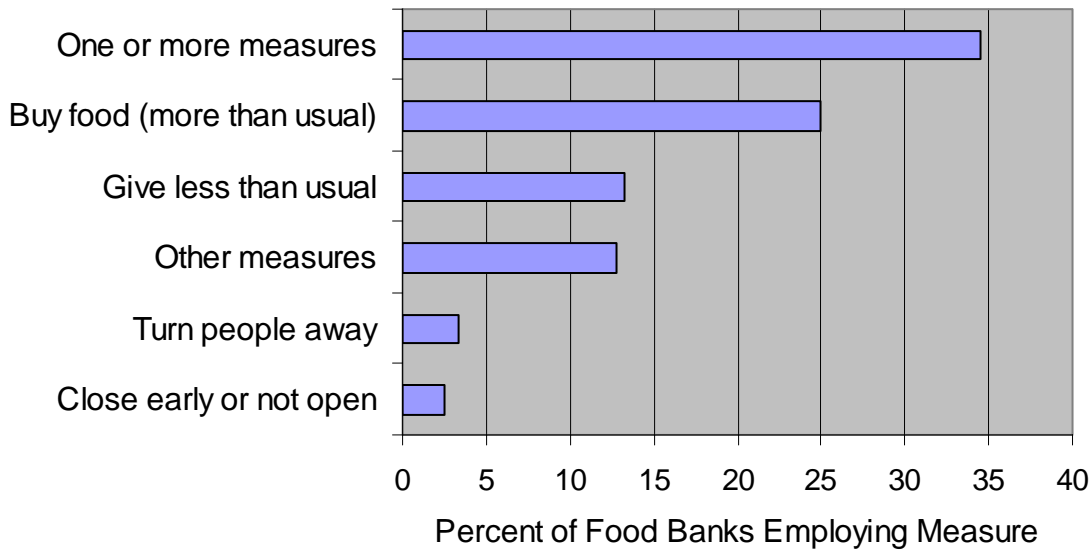


Figure 8: Food Bank Responses to Food Shortages



Meal Program Use

Many food banks administer meal programs in addition to managing an emergency grocery distribution program. *HungerCount* asks food banks to report whether they or their agencies provide this additional service. In 2006, 154 food banks and 61 Nova Scotia agencies reported offering a meal program which resulted in 2, 969, 970 meals being served in March 2006, an increase of 9% over March 2005.

Provincial and Territorial Perspectives

To provide a picture of regional circumstances with respect to food bank use, provincial *HungerCount* coordinators and food bank staff provided a report on the local and provincial trends. Their reports demonstrate the complex and diverse factors related to food bank use and in so doing they provide a richer illustration of hunger in the country. These are presented below.

British Columbia

Food banks in British Columbia assisted 7.7% more people in March, 2006 than last year. More children are also turning to food banks, having increased by 10.0% over last year. The findings show that the majority of clients are single people.

Dave Murray, Provincial *HungerCount* Coordinator and President, Abbotsford Community Services, summarizes the economic conditions in British Columbia in the following way:

British Columbia's economy remains strong, supported by a low unemployment rate, robust domestic demand and strong business investment. Following estimated real gross domestic product growth of 3.6 per cent in 2005, the Ministry of Finance forecasts economic growth of 3.3 per cent for 2006. *Balanced Budget 2006* reconfirms the government's commitment to strengthening B.C. communities by investing an additional \$191 million over three years to improve housing, safety and supports to vulnerable individuals.

It is true that the labour market in British Columbia is steaming and unemployment is in the 4 to 5 percent range. There are building cranes everywhere and housing prices are outrageous.

HungerCount reinforces the evidence that all is not well in this booming economy. According to the most recent LICO data, B.C. had the highest overall poverty and child poverty rates in Canada in 2004. While some are getting rich, median incomes are stagnating after accounting for the rapidly increasing cost of living.

A count of homeless in greater Vancouver in 2005 turned up 2,174 homeless people. Up double from 2002. For every homeless person there are many more who are in inadequate housing or who are but a paycheck away from the street.

The 2006 *HungerCount* figures are a mirror of the dark side of B.C.'s booming economy, reflecting a growth in food bank usage in B.C. The fact that 81,248 people need to use food bank services in British Columbia is a sad testimony to the reality of deep poverty in this province of plenty.

There are solutions, but these solutions require the political will to be bold. We need to double the supply of affordable housing. In the Fraser Valley, for example, they need to begin building affordable housing. We need to stop moralizing about the poorest and whether they are sufficiently deserving of help. The economics of doing what is needed for the children is favorable. B.C. just finished the fiscal year with a record \$3.1 billion surplus. We can brighten the dark side of B.C.'s economy by taking the necessary steps to do what it takes to reduce poverty as we head towards the bright lights of 2010.

Alberta

“Google the words Maverick and Alberta and you will come up with an endless list of stories, books and people in Alberta ... The mosaic and colorful culture and economy of Alberta are also reflected in this year's *HungerCount* findings.¹²”

- Marjorie Bencz, Edmonton Gleaners & *HungerCount* 2006 Provincial Coordinator

In Alberta, 15.1% fewer people visited a food bank in March, 2006 when compared to the previous year. The majority are single individuals with no children (29.6%) and sole-parents (29.6%). One third (33.7%) of food bank recipients are receiving social assistance, and just over one quarter (27.7%) are those with a job income. It is interesting to note that in spite of the economic boom and lower food bank use in Alberta, it is the province with the highest percentage of employed clients visiting a food bank.

A common reason for the decrease in food bank visits given by food bank workers is the government cheques that were issued to individuals, including children, in early 2006. The Alberta Resource Rebate was part of the Government of Alberta's plan to manage this year's unanticipated resource revenue.¹³ The extra dollars are believed to have helped drive down the number of visits in the early part of the year, including March; however, some food bank workers have indicated that the numbers have since gone back up.

“In January/February, 2006, the government mailed \$400 rebate cheques to every man, woman and child,” reports Marjorie Bencz, Executive Director of Edmonton Gleaners' Association and Provincial *HungerCount* Coordinator for Alberta. “As debated as these rebate cheques were, direct dollars were given to all Albertans including low-income people. Some used these new dollars to get their eyes tested or to buy food or to even make a donation to their local food bank.”

Unemployment in the province is at a 31-year low.¹⁴ A number of food bank workers report increased job openings in their communities. Many of these jobs are in the service sector and some offer competitive wages. One food bank respondent indicated that the local Tim Horton's offered a starting hourly wage of \$14; another stated that employees at a nearby MacDonald's work for \$12 per hour. But Bencz warns that with the vibrant economy comes a trend that poses a challenge for new low-income migrants who are lured by the province's economic boom.

“A thriving economy has increased rents and other basic services while vacancy rates have decreased, making it difficult for marginalized groups of people to afford and find accommodation. These groups include those on fixed incomes - some seniors and people with multiple barriers to employment – as well as low-wage earners in the service sector.”

As one food bank worker in Fort McMurray - whose food bank actually experienced a 100% increase in the number of recipients - puts it, “People are arriving in the area for work as business is booming, but they are not prepared for the high cost of housing and rent: a bachelor apartment is currently going for \$1,000/month. The situation is so bad that many people are living in tents or sharing accommodation; for example, two people are sharing one room in a house, with one doing day-shifts and the other doing night shifts, and each of them paying the home owner between \$650 and \$700/month for the room.”

¹² Government of Canada. *Mavericks: An incorrigible history of Alberta*. Canadian Heritage. Available at www.glenbow.org/mavericks/

¹³ Government of Alberta (January 31, 2006) *Millions of Albertans Receive Resource Rebate*. Alberta: Information Bulletin <http://www.gov.ab.ca/acn/200601/193632238D60B-FC05-9920-55BFA6CD36252CC7.html>

¹⁴ CBC News (June 9, 2006) *Unemployment rate falls to 31-year low*. Available at www.cbc.ca/story/business/national/2006/06/09/jobless.html

The intensifying housing crisis in the province is one of the consequences of an “overheated economy” presenting a particular problem for new residents who are desperately searching for housing before the first snowfall.¹⁵ Small rural communities are particularly hard hit since many communities lack the infrastructure or bureaucracy to handle what is generally an urban problem.¹⁶ Homelessness in many cities is growing, such as in Calgary where the number jumped from 447 in 1992 to 3,436 in the spring of 2006.¹⁷ According to the Calgary Homelessness Foundation, half of those who are homeless have jobs but cannot find affordable accommodation.¹⁸

Saskatchewan

Food bank clients have increased by 3.7% in Saskatchewan from last year. Compared to the other provinces, Saskatchewan recorded the second highest percentage of children (45.2%) as clients. It is also the province with the highest number of clients (76%) whose primary source of income is social assistance.

It is therefore timely that recent government investments include increased support to help people who are receiving social assistance make the transition to employment. Provincial *HungerCount* Coordinator for Saskatchewan and CEO of the Regina & District Food Bank, Wayne Hellquist, welcomes these measures and hopes that this support will continue:

The provincial budget in Saskatchewan this year included significant investments aimed at improving programs and services for low-income Saskatchewan residents. These investments included income support enhancements targeted at improving the quality of life for low-income people and families and helping people move from social assistance to jobs, wherever possible. These measures are most welcome and it is hoped that this trend to provide increased support to low-income individuals and families will be reflected in provincial budgets in ensuing years.

Despite the increased supports from the province, demand for services from food banks across Saskatchewan remains high. Some of this demand is driven by the rural agricultural economy which has seen farm incomes at extremely low levels for several years. This has resulted in new food banks being established in rural areas and a migration of low-income earners to the larger urban centers which places increased pressure on food banks in those communities.

Several food banks in Saskatchewan have invested significant resources in the development of education programs and other related services to better meet the needs of food bank users. These programs and services are aimed at addressing some of the underlying social issues that are prevalent amongst food bank users. Because food banks typically serve a large and diverse population, they are uniquely positioned to be able to provide other supports and services to their clientele but will require ongoing and sustainable funding support to be able to adequately provide these services on a continued basis.

¹⁵ Globe and Mail (October 7, 2006) *There's no place like homelessness*. Katherine Harding, Edmonton and Dawn Walton, Calgary. Page A7.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Food banks in Saskatchewan will continue to do their part to meet the immediate needs of hungry people in communities of all sizes across the province. However, without policy changes that address economic and income security on an ongoing and sustained basis, individuals and families in Saskatchewan will continue to rely on food banks in ever greater numbers. Governments at all levels need to work at harmonizing programs, providing enhanced financial supports and collaborating with each other and with community-based organizations like food banks to address the pervasive problem of hunger in this country.

Manitoba

“Hospitality and listening ears feed the spirits of folks all too often alienated by family, neighbours and society beyond the food bank door.”

- Heidi Magnuson-Ford, Winnipeg Harvest Food Bank

Manitoba reports a reduction in food bank clients by 3.7%. The reported economic growth in the province may have contributed to the drop in food bank use in the province. Additionally, the end of the claw backs of child benefits and the introduction of special programs aimed at improving conditions for children in families on welfare have brought about some improvement in the situation of individuals and families on social assistance. Interestingly, however, 46.4% of food bank recipients were children – the highest among the provinces.

Community-based organizations have identified housing as one of the most critical issues facing low-income residents in Winnipeg.¹⁹ The 2006 provincial budget provides \$7.8 million to assist low-income Manitobans with rising shelter costs.²⁰ The combination of rising rents and frozen shelter allowances for social assistance recipients are forcing many to cut back on vital necessities, such as food.

In her provincial report, Heidi Magnuson-Ford, Agency Relations Coordinator at Winnipeg Harvest Food Bank and Provincial *HungerCount* Coordinator for Manitoba, notes that food banks in the province have observed that farm labourers and those in related industries have been hard hit by dwindling farming incomes and rising unemployment. The province is witnessing one of its worst crop production figures and the agricultural sector is experiencing its lowest share of GDP in more than twenty years.²¹

There has not been any dramatic change in the use of food banks in Manitoba. Food bank workers across the province are most consistently commenting on the high number of single parent families and young people accessing their food banks. Many of them are on social assistance. Welfare offices do not hesitate to send clients to the food bank - evidence of a failing government social support system. Some rural communities experience declining numbers only because their clients are going to the larger centers in hope of finding employment.

The second largest number of people at food banks consists of those who do have job income but earn too little to make ends meet. Additionally, First Nations and Aboriginal Communities are turning to Winnipeg Harvest for food assistance.

¹⁹ Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives (2006) *Manitoba Alternative Provincial Budget: Investing in Tomorrow, Today*.

²⁰ Government of Manitoba. *The 2006 Manitoba Budget: Budget in Brief*. Manitoba finance.

²¹ Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives (2006) *Manitoba Alternative Provincial Budget: Investing in Tomorrow, Today*.

The issues of poverty are complex and deep rooted. In addition, solutions are equally complex. Food support only serves to alleviate immediate hunger for a short time. Food bank after food bank across the province makes an effort to care for their clients beyond providing a hamper of food. Many of them provide coffee and snacks and some provide a full meal for "their people." Clothing depots run alongside food banks. They contribute to school lunch programs and community kitchens. Some nutrition knowledge and food preparation skills are passed on through example and casual conversation. Referrals to other services and programming in their communities are often part of food banks' mandate to help people in a holistic manner.

Food banks are largely run by volunteers in their communities. The majority of them report that they feel valued and appreciated by the community and clients. There are times and circumstances, however, that are difficult and demanding. Food bank work is heavy, hard work. Circumstances and stories of clients can be heart-wrenching and discouraging.

Providing emergency food to people in need is important work. But ultimately, we all must grapple with the existence of a growing and entrenched network of food banks across each province and across Canada.

Ontario

In March 2006, 330,491 people visited a food bank in Ontario, down by 2.4% from the same month in 2005. 40% of the food bank clients were children. According to Adam Spence, Executive Director of the Ontario Association of Food Banks, children, people with disabilities and the working poor constitute the majority of persons served by food banks in Ontario. *HungerCount* findings reveal that more than half - 52.5% - of food bank clients in the province are families with children and a higher percentage of food bank clients had a job this year compared to the previous year, up by 2.4 percentage points. The percentage of people with jobs reported by food banks in the province was the third highest compared to the rest of the provinces, at 16.9%.

Despite good economic conditions for the province and the country as a whole, many families face tough times because of inadequate government support, insufficient wages or temporary job losses. Assistance programs targeting children in need and persons with disabilities are failing to ensure the future success of those who depend on our collective help. At a provincial level, we continue to cut into the assistance that should be provided to our neediest children from the National Child Benefit program. Support programs for Ontarians with disabilities are also falling short. The application and appeals process is problematic, and the level of assistance provided does not meet their needs.

Food banks in Ontario are also continuing to see an increase in the number of working poor. More and more Ontarians have to take part-time or contract work and have limited employment security. They may have to take two or three jobs to try to get 30 hours a week at minimum wage, with uncertain shifts week to week or unpaid hours to try to hold on to jobs that offer them little reward, respect or opportunity to move upward. Without significant taxation reform for these low-income Ontarians, they may fall from work into social assistance and struggle to maintain the ability to provide themselves or their families with the basics to survive.

Many have also been left vulnerable from significant job cuts in the manufacturing sector over the past few years. Most of the losses in manufacturing jobs in Canada are in Ontario, and many are in small towns with one major employer. Imagine living in a town of 2,000 people that loses 300 jobs when the local food manufacturer closes. The spiraling effects can hit the entire community, including local families and local small businesses dependent on the prosperity of the town.

Quebec

Food bank use in Quebec for March 2006 has dropped by 26.7% over last year. However, as much as 41.2% of food banks in the province actually reported increases this year. The number of people whose primary source of income is social assistance and who are accessing food banks in Quebec increased by 10 percentage points and 43% of food bank clients are children.

Most of the decrease is attributable to one particular food bank that reported that a number of its agencies were not included in the 2006 survey and an additional eight had closed their doors as a result of insufficient donations and resources. The cumulative effect of the reduced activity by this food bank was the driver for the overall decline experienced by the province compared to 2005.

The closure of food banks contributing to the decline in the total number of people assisted suggests that the drop in numbers does not necessarily reflect less hunger in the province but a truncated reach into those communities that were previously being assisted by a food bank through their agencies. To underscore the significance of agencies for the numbers being reported by a food bank in Quebec, it must be noted that when compared to the other provinces, food banks in Quebec serve large regions with a large number of agencies: while there are 17 food banks in the entire province, they assist 971 agencies, the largest number reported by a province in the country.

The closure of food banks is also an example of the strain food banks are experiencing in continuing to provide a vital service to their communities. Denis Ladouceur, Executive Director of Moisson Sud-Ouest in Salaberry-de-Valleyfield, comments:

“Food banks always struggle with insufficient funds. We are spending way too much time trying to find enough money to enable us to continue offering our services to our clientele. From the federal transfers to the province, a small portion should be exclusively earmarked for financing regional food banks. The provincial system puts us in the same category as any local non-profit organizations, making competition for government funding harder.”

Some of the gains made in the economy over the past year may have also played a role in bringing down the provincial numbers. In 2005, Québec's economic performance was strong, with consumer spending at its highest in eight years.²² Continuing job growth has led to the lowest unemployment rate in the province since 1975.²³

But not all food bank clients were able to reap the windfalls. Ladouceur describes the situation at his food bank, which, contrary to the general provincial trend, reported a 40 per cent increase in the number of clients this year.

“There are two relatively new phenomena contributing to the growing need for food bank assistance in our region. One is the closure of many factories in the secondary sector of industry. The other is the rise in the number of people working at low wages who are unable to pay for their monthly expenses. It is hard enough for them to pay for shelter and clothing and as a result, the ability to meet their food needs is compromised. A lack of affordable and adequate housing for low-income people is also a significant factor; literacy is another.”

²² Government of Quebec (2006) *Economic and Financial Profile of Quebec, 2006 Edition*.

²³ Ibid.

Newfoundland and Labrador

In 2006, Newfoundland and Labrador show a marginal increase in the number of food bank clients compared to last year (1.6%). Child food bank recipients consist of 38.4 % and the province has the highest percentage of families with children visiting food banks among all the provinces, at 65.1%. Newfoundland and Labrador assist the greatest proportion of welfare recipients in the country at 78.4%.

With one of the highest levels of poverty in the country, Newfoundland is only the second province in Canada to actively implement a poverty-reduction strategy.²⁴ In its recent budget, the province announced significant investments in its social safety net, moving forward on its ten-year commitment to become the province with the lowest rate of poverty.²⁵

It is hoped that the goals outlined in the province's poverty reduction strategy will eventually bring about a notable drop in the number of people needing emergency food assistance. The province still has a long road ahead regarding the latter as it continues to have the highest per capita food bank use for the ninth consecutive year.

Eg Walters, Executive Director of the Community Food Sharing Association in St. John's and Provincial *HungerCount* Coordinator, reports on various circumstances in the region affecting food bank use:

"Many challenges continue to face food banks throughout our province as they try to meet the ever constant demands placed upon them. The economic climate of the Eastern Avalon Peninsula continues to be driven by the offshore Oil and Gas Industry. Some uncertainty, however, has developed in recent months due to an impasse between the provincial government and the consortium developing the Hebron Field. Stalled negotiations have resulted in layoffs in this sector combined with business expansion being placed in a holding pattern.

"Rural sectors of our province continue to be impacted by uncertain fish stocks and fish plant closures. Last year's flooding on the west coast, combined with the closure of the Abitibi Paper Mill, have placed some strain on the ability of food banks to keep up with the demand."

New Brunswick

There were 6.7% fewer people visiting a food bank in New Brunswick in 2006 than last year. The province reports one of the highest percentages of food bank clients receiving social assistance at 66.3%. According to the latest national welfare statistics, New Brunswick had one of the lowest welfare incomes in the country in 2005.²⁶ Child food bank clients make up 35% of food bank recipients.

George Piers, President of the Fredericton Community Kitchen Inc. in Fredericton and Provincial *HungerCount* Coordinator, along with Valerie Carmichael, President of the New Brunswick Association of Food Banks, account for the drop in food bank visits:

[The decrease in food bank use] may have been the result of a marked increase in employment opportunities, particularly in the fields of construction, call centers and the service industries. In 2006, minimum wage was increased by 40 cents to \$6.70 per hour.

Despite the decrease in client numbers, in general, New Brunswick food banks had to struggle to maintain a flow of food to meet the demand.

²⁴ Government of Newfoundland (June 23, 2006) *New strategy to reduce poverty in the province*. NLIS 1, Human Resources, Labor and Employment, News Releases. Available at www.releases.gov.nl.ca/releases/2006/hrle/0623n01.htm

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ National Council of Welfare (Summer 2006). *Welfare Incomes 2005*. Volume 125.

Community funding was down province wide, due to the outpouring support for international disasters.

Fortunately, through the Community Volunteer Action Program the New Brunswick provincial government has increased their funding to New Brunswick food banks by \$1.248 million.

Prince Edward Island

This year, the number of food bank recipients has increased slightly by 1.6%, over 2005. According to food banks in the province, 35.6% of clients are children and the province has the second highest percentage of families with children at 58.6% of food bank clients. Although the majority of clients receive social assistance, 17.1% have jobs, the second highest when compared to the rest of the provinces. The majority of clients – about a third of the people being assisted - come from single parent families. The province also has a high number of seniors visiting food banks, at 15%, the second highest when compared with all the provinces.

Mike MacDonald, Manager at the Upper Room Food Bank and Soup Kitchen in Charlottetown and Provincial *HungerCount* Coordinator, paints the picture of hunger in the province and identifies the economic factors affecting food bank use:

Food Bank usage on Prince Edward Island continues to increase. We continue to see high levels of single parent families and seniors using food banks. The economy on Prince Edward Island continues to struggle, in particular our key industries: the tourism industry continues to welcome fewer tourists and our fishing industry is experiencing lower numbers of catches each year.

Tourism, farming, and fishing will always be a big part of our economy. However, we must work towards an economy that is less dependent on seasonal industries. With our main industries being seasonal, many Islanders are forced to rely on Employment Insurance and social assistance to get them through the winter months. Quite a few of our clients work in these seasonal industries because they are unable to secure year-round employment. We must expand the PEI economy so that we are not so reliant on one particular sector. We must be willing to pay higher wages. Government must make it easier for people to come off of social assistance and join the labour market. The provincial government must improve low-income housing and increase minimum wage.

I believe that it is time for all levels of government to make hunger a priority. All levels of government, as well as all Canadians, must work together to develop solutions. We cannot continue to allow children to go to school hungry or for parents to go without food so their children can eat.

Nova Scotia

Food bank use in Nova Scotia has decreased over 2005 by 8.4%. Food banks in the province report the second highest percentage of sole-parents being assisted among the provinces. The percentage of seniors visiting a food bank is the highest among all the provinces.

The province is experiencing an overall, positive economic climate. Unemployment is at an unprecedented low and economic growth is steady. Additionally, Nova Scotia has recently produced its first balanced budget in 30 years.²⁷ Nonetheless, investments in social and economic supports by the provincial government over the past decade have been well below the national average.²⁸

Dianne Swinemar, Executive Director of FEED NOVA SCOTIA and provincial *HungerCount* coordinator explains that the reasons accounting for the decline in food bank recipients are varied:

The number of individual families using the front-line food banks in Nova Scotia has dropped slightly this past year. The reason for this is varied. For example, in Amherst and Sydney there has been a decline because of the opening of call centers. In Glace Bay there has been a decrease because a number of families have moved west for employment. In that same community, however, soup kitchen numbers have increased and the clients are mainly senior citizens, those too old to seek employment. In some communities, both rural and urban areas of Nova Scotia, agencies have closed since last year, mainly because of volunteer burnout and no one in the community being prepared to take over leadership. Two towns have had considerable increases in the number of families using their food banks. In Antigonish the increase has happened due to higher unemployment in the area, and in Digby it is due to a reduction in the fisheries business.

What [*HungerCount*] does not reveal, but which our monthly distribution does reflect, is the number of actual visits to a food bank by individual families.²⁹ While the cost of living has continued to rise in Nova Scotia - particularly in housing and energy prices - those on a fixed income have not received increases to adapt to this. So, in fact, many of our client families are now utilizing their local food banks a minimum of twice a month, rather than the "once a month" that is stated as the normal policy for food bank use. So, the challenge continues to keep up with the resources necessary to feed those who are economically challenged, as their level of poverty deepens.

The Territories

"It's a striking scene, one that has received scant national coverage: Inuit hunters who can expertly navigate pack ice and polar bears now jockey for bunk beds at an over-booked homeless shelter."

- Gordon Laird, *This Magazine*, March-April, 2002

Although economic prospects have reportedly improved in some cases, Northern communities continue to face unique poverty-related challenges compared to their southern counterparts. Economic disadvantage and inhibitive social conditions are particularly acute among the Aboriginal communities, who consequently face higher health risks.

²⁷ Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives (May 3, 2006) *Nova Scotians need relief from under-funding not tax cuts: Alternative NS Budget*. Press Release.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ The *HungerCount* survey asks that clients visiting a food bank in the month of March be counted only once. See 'Method' for details.

Seven food banks in the North participated in *HungerCount* 2006. The total number of people being assisted by food banks in the North (i.e. Yukon, the Northwest Territories and Nunavut) has remained relatively steady at 1901. Nunavut and the Northwest Territories assist the highest proportions of children, at 48.8 per cent and 49.5% respectively.

Generally speaking, rates of food bank use are expected to be relatively low in the North due to the region's comparatively lesser degree of urbanization and low population density.³⁰ Because communities in the North are more highly dispersed, they face more challenges in sustaining a highly organized food bank infrastructure.³¹

The Nunavut food bank in Iqaluit, Nunavut's capital, has experienced a decline in the number of food bank clients in 2006. This may be attributable to the much-needed additional government investments in income support as part of its commitment to building healthy communities through education and housing.

However, homelessness and overcrowding have intensified in Iqaluit. The influx of people – those who have been imported from the south and migrating northerners in search of traditional hunting opportunities - has entailed a growth rate three times the national average.³² According to local estimates, up to one thousand residents are without adequate shelter of their own. Lack of education remains a significant obstacle to employment.³³

This is also apparent in the Northwest Territories where limited educational opportunities and high unemployment go hand in hand. The Northwest Territories Housing Corporation estimates that about 20% of all households are in "core need." This is estimated to be twice the national average and beyond the regional centers, this number rises to 44%.³⁴

The Yukon economy continues to be heavily dependent on federal transfer payments for its economy, which account for about 70% of the territory's budget.³⁵ In his 2006-2007 budget address earlier this year, Premier Fentie expressed Yukon's continued commitment to "taking care of the most vulnerable."³⁶

There are a myriad of issues that have a direct impact on hunger in the territories. According to Captain Robert Sessford of the Salvation Army, Whitehorse, Yukon, the problems stem from geographical bottlenecks as well as the socio-cultural tension that arises from the demands of modern survival.

We are concerned with food bank clients who lack a formal education as well as those who demonstrate little or no knowledge about food types, nutrition or preparation. They don't know how to cook rolled oats, rice or how to combine foods to make their own stews or other simple dishes. They have been brought up to eat out of cans and other prepared foods which are more expensive and have less nutritional value. There are some government programs, such as "Healthy Moms", that attempt to address basic living and home economics, but for the most part, training programs are focused on employment skills and trades.

³⁰ Canadian Association of Food Banks. (1998). *HungerCount 1998*.

³¹ Ibid., 1998.

³² THIS Magazine (March – April, 2002) *Homeless in Iqaluit*. Gordon Laird.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Government of Canada (2005) *Creating a Framework for the Wisdom of the Community: Review of Victim Services in Nunavut, Northwest and Yukon Territories*. Department of Justice Canada.

³⁵ CBC News (Thursday, March 30, 2006) *Yukon budget peppered with political points*. Canada North.

³⁶ Government of Yukon (March 30, 2006) *Budget Address 2006 – 2007*. Presented by Premier Dennis Fentie, First session of the Thirty-First, Yukon Legislative Assembly, Whitehorse, Yukon.

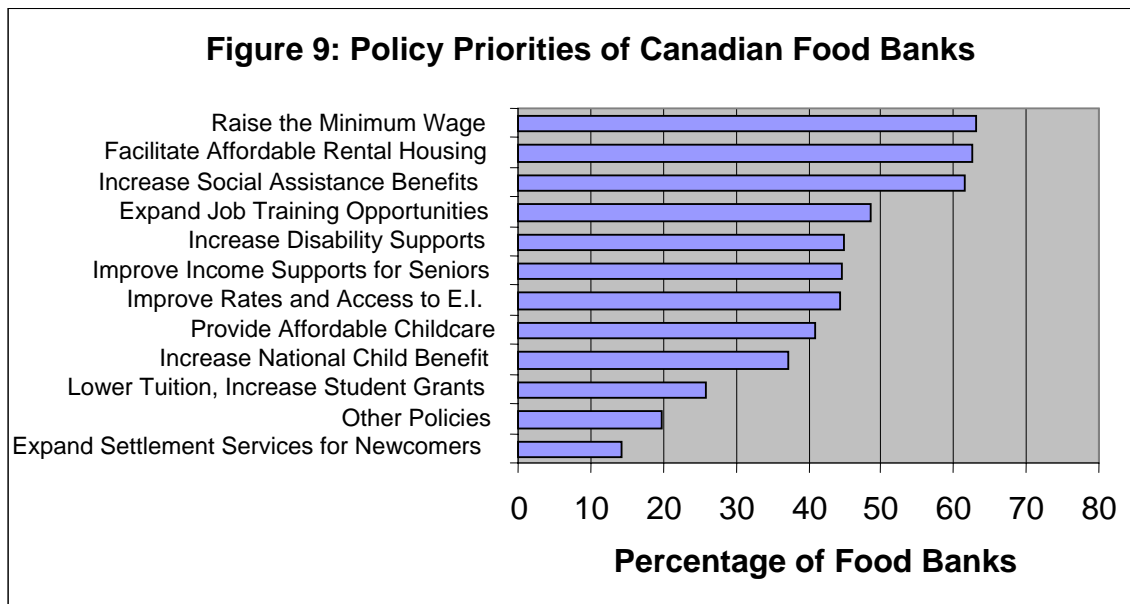
The people who tend to do best live in family or extended family settings - sharing resources so they can obtain employment, food, etc. Our clients who fare the least well are singles who are trapped in hotel-type accommodations, who do not have employment, a vehicle or the resources to go out in search of food or a job.

The provision of educational opportunities, and bonuses to those who obtain food by traditional methods - hunting, fishing, gathering, farming - would do much for the self-sufficiency of the people. Fuel is very expensive and because government policy has encouraged people to come in off the land and live in the city, transportation is required to get out to where the food is. Just filling up a truck with gas to go fishing or hunting can be prohibitive.”

“This government inherits an unrivalled opportunity to make a difference in the lives of Canadians at home and to build our reputation abroad.”

-Alternative Federal Budget 2006, Canadian Center for Policy Alternatives

It is hard for food bank workers to ignore what goes on beyond their doors, as the ebb and flow of systemic currents determine how high the tides of hungry people will rise at their doorsteps from one year to the next. As the reports from the provinces and Territories reveal, food bank workers are acutely aware of the broader political and economic factors that affect hungry Canadians every year. Of the food banks who responded to the question, approximately 20% reported being involved in efforts to bring about structural changes with a particular focus on poverty reduction. Many food banks reported maintaining active relationships with decision-makers from the municipal level to Members of Parliament.



HungerCount asks food bank respondents to identify what government policy measures would make the most difference in driving down food bank use in their communities. Based on 742 surveys, the majority believed that raising minimum wages was the most important (63.1%). Facilitating affordable housing was the second most important policy priority (62.7%), followed by increasing social assistance benefits (61.6%). Among those located in communities of 500,000 or more, 58.8% identified settlement services for newcomers as a policy priority.

Putting Ottawa to the Test: An evaluation of Government's performance on hunger-related policies

Hunger as a social problem exists because public policies fail to ensure an adequate standard of living that meets basic needs. In spite of the unique circumstances and challenges particular groups face, very few, if any, are spared from hunger. Every year, *HungerCount* lists a number of policy areas with specific recommendations to government as a legislative road map to eliminating the need for food banks. The recommendations listed below point our leaders in the general direction of developing sustainable solutions.

CAFB's **Empty Bowl Rating** evaluates governments' performance to date regarding these vital policy areas. We believe they make up the recipe for filling the empty bowls of the 753,458 Canadians every month.

EMPTY BOWL RATING

WELFARE: THE CANADA SOCIAL TRANSFER (CST)

Problem:

The majority of food bank clients continue to be those receiving social assistance as their primary source of income. At the federal level, social assistance funding to the provinces comes in the form of the Canada Social Transfer (CST) - a block fund to provinces and territories in support of post-secondary education, social assistance and social services, including early childhood development and early learning and child care.

There are currently no standards attached to how this money is dispensed nor is there a monitoring mechanism in place to measure its effectiveness.

Position:

CAFB strongly recommends a renewed Social Transfer* which would include splitting the block fund into separate Post-Secondary and Social Transfer envelopes to ensure greater transparency, a new funding formula for social assistance and social services, and enforceable standards that would ensure adequate access and assistance. CAFB also recommends a re-examination of the place of welfare in Canada's current income security system.**

Performance:

An NDP motion to review the CST was rejected by the Human Resources and Social Development Committee in 2006. *empty bowl*

Total federal dollars for the CST remain well-below the pre-1995-1998 levels and comparatively lower than funding for the Canada Health Transfer (CHT).
empty bowl

*Details on recommendations for renewing the CST can be found in the Canadian Council of Social Development Report, *What Kind of Canada? A Call for a National Debate on the Canada Social Transfer*, April 8, 2004 http://www.ccsd.ca/pr/2004/social_transfer/st.htm

** As announced by the National Council of Welfare in Welfare Incomes 2005 Press Release, August 24, 2006. Available at <http://www.ncwcnbes.net/>

WORK INCOME SUPPLEMENT & LIVABLE WAGES

Problem:

Those who have jobs make up the second largest group of food bank clients at 13.4%. The increase in casual, part-time, contract and temporary jobs has led to more “working poor”.

Position:

The federal government should create a new national Refundable Tax Credit for the working poor and all low-income earners. This new credit would consist of a Working Income Benefit of up to \$2,400/year or \$200/month paid to the working poor and a Basic Refundable Tax Credit of \$1,800/year, or \$150/month, paid to all low-income earners including the working poor.*

Provincial governments must raise minimum wages to at least \$10 per hour - the estimated amount needed to enable an adequate standard of living for minimum wage earners working full-time.

Performance:

Minimum wage hikes continue throughout the provinces. *Half a bowl*
Minimum wage rates remain below the poverty level, whether using the Market Basket Measure, the Low Income Measure or Low-Income Cut-Off.
Empty bowl

**Time for a Fair Deal, Report of the Task Force on Modernizing Income Security for Working-Age Adults (MISWAA), May 2006 & “Blueprint to Fight Hunger” in Whoshungry: 2006 Profile of Hunger in the GTA, June, 2006. Available at http://www.dailybread.ca/get_informed/our-publications.cfm*

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE (EI)

Problem:

Employment Insurance is the primary income support program for unemployed workers. However, the current EI program provides insufficient or no support to many unemployed workers. Only about 40% of the unemployed qualify for benefits today compared with 80% in 1990. The numbers are even lower in major urban centers, like the Greater Toronto Area and the lower Mainland of B.C.

Position:

CAFB recommends that coverage of the EI program be strengthened to make it more accessible and that benefit rates and the maximum benefit period be significantly raised.*

Performance:

The 2006 Federal Budget does not include any measures towards extending coverage and benefits. *Empty bowl*

The government still has about \$45 billion in EI surplus. *Empty bowl*

*For details on recommendations on Employment Insurance, please see *Time for a Fair Deal, Report of the Task Force on Modernizing Income Security for Working-Age Adults*, May 2006.

THE NATIONAL CHILD BENEFIT SUPPLEMENT (NCBS)

Problem:

The NCBS is part of the Canada Child Tax Benefit (CCTB). It goes to the lowest-income families but it is taken back from those families who receive social assistance. Provinces and the Territories - with the exception of Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, Quebec, Manitoba and New Brunswick - "claw back" the Supplement in whole or in part from low-income families receiving social assistance. Low-income families with adults who are working do not have the Supplement clawed back.

The money that is clawed back from families on social assistance is supposed to be reinvested by the provinces/territories and municipalities in new social programs for low-income families. In fact, the money often goes to programs they cannot access.

Position:

The NCBS has the potential to help end child poverty in Canada. In order to realize this potential, the NCBS must be consolidated with the Canada Child Tax Benefit and increased to \$4,900 per child over a period of 4 years.

Performance:

Increases to CCTB are currently still set to continue. *Half bowl*

The increases, however, are set to a maximum of only \$3,243. *empty bowl*

There has been no recent federal commitment to the Canada Child Tax Benefit beyond 2007. *empty bowl*

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Problem:

Shelter allowances and social assistance rates continue to fall far below average rental costs; waiting lists for subsidized housing remain very long, as for example in Hamilton and Montreal.

Position:

CAFB recommends that a national housing strategy be implemented that meets the needs of Canadians and ensures the right to affordable housing. Government must continue investments in housing and rent supplement programs, where rent is geared to income or is capped at affordable rates.* Provinces and Territories should have more flexibility in how they can spend the funds allocated for affordable housing and the federal/provincial wrangling over housing must end.

Performance:

The 2006 Federal Budget confirms up to \$800 million to provinces and territories into a trust fund for affordable housing, \$300 million for off-reserve housing and \$300 million for northern housing, all to be allocated over three years. *Half bowl*

This \$1.4 billion total in funding for affordable housing is a cut from the \$1.6 billion provided for affordable housing under Bill C-48. *Empty Bowl*

*"Blueprint to Fight Hunger" in *Whoshungry: 2006 Profile of Hunger in the GTA*. Daily Bread Food Bank, June, 2006

CHILD CARE

Problem:

Currently, regulated child care meets the needs of only 15.5% of 0-12 year olds. The loss of affordable, quality child care will force many families, single parents in particular, into poverty.

Position:

Government must take immediate measures to provide a universally accessible, high quality, affordable and inclusive child care system in Canada. It must reverse its decision to end the national early learning and child care program.

Performance:

The new Conservative government has announced plans to cancel the federal-provincial child care agreements on March 31, 2007. *Empty bowl*
The agreements have been replaced with a universal, taxable allowance of \$1,200 per child, per year payable directly to families. *Half bowl*
The Young Child Supplement of the Canada Child Tax Benefit - worth \$243/year for children under 7 whose families do not claim the Child Care Expense Deduction has been eliminated. *Empty bowl*
The promised funding for early learning and child care on First Nations reserves and accountability has been terminated. *Empty bowl*

The RIGHT to FOOD

Problem:

In its May 2006 review of Canada's record in implementing the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, one of the key United Nations human rights treaties it has signed, the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights stated that Canadian governments have failed to make a concerted effort to eliminate hunger and the need for emergency food assistance since Canada's last review. The Committee urged Canada to address the issue of food insecurity and hunger, homelessness and inadequate housing as a national emergency.

Position:

All levels of government in Canada should accept their obligations to recognize and act in compliance with the right to adequate food and adopt concrete mechanisms of accountability to ensure that these obligations are met.*

Performance:

In 1998, as a response to the World Food Summit, the Federal Government introduced Canada's Action Plan for Food Security. Yet, Federal and provincial governments' continue to fail to comply with the right to adequate food in article 11 of the Covenant. *Empty bowl*

* Compilation of Summaries of Canadian NGO Submissions to the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in Connection with the Consideration of the Fourth and Fifth Periodic Reports of Canada, March 31, 2006

Food Bank Lines: the end of the line

Unlike the dangers implicit in conspicuous potholes on highways and streets, the links between the existing cracks in our income security system and the subsequent casualties they inflict in people's lives are not immediately apparent. Canada's severely frayed social safety net has entailed a one-way express route to poverty for many Canadians. Between the time when one experiences a sudden job loss in the event of a lay-off or a debilitating injury for example, to when one reaches the doorstep of the local food bank, an individual has typically gone through a number of dead-ends and closed doors that an effective social safety net would have prevented.

The findings of this report illustrate a tattered income security system and inadequate social services and programs that are driving people to the food bank doorsteps. Many factors contribute to hunger and poverty: a labour market that does not offer enough jobs with stable and sufficient hours and adequate wages, insufficient social assistance rates and restrictive accessibility, a lack of affordable housing and a lack of accessible, affordable and regulated child care. Although a number of different groups face distinct economic constraints and consequent threats to their ability to provide adequate and nutritious food for themselves, CAFB is particularly alarmed at the persistently high rate of food bank clients who have jobs.

Working Poor

“At the working man’s house, hunger looks in but dares not enter.”
- Benjamin Franklin

The assumption that those who are employed should be able to live outside of poverty is increasingly challenged as a significant portion of the labour force today has difficulty finding work that enables an adequate standard of living.³⁷ A growing number of Canadians with employment income are visiting food banks. This year, 13.4 per cent of food bank clients have jobs. This is the second largest group of food bank clients after social assistance recipients. Though they have jobs and may work hard to better their lot, vulnerable workers are still having difficulty feeding themselves and their families.

Today, a person working full-time for minimum wage is likely to either be living in or at risk of poverty. One in six full-time workers earned less than \$10/hour in 2000 and this proportion had not changed since 1980, adjusting for inflation.³⁸ In 2003, almost a million poor families and working-age singles earned at least half of their income from paid jobs.³⁹ Although low wages may be only one of several factors contributing to the working poor experience in Canada⁴⁰ the fact that real wages in the country have stagnated over the past several years is a telling example of Ottawa’s historical negligence concerning labour rights and standards in the country.⁴¹

Poverty for people with jobs is the result of such factors as insufficient wages, growth in the number of low-paying, precarious, temporary, and part-time jobs and gaps in wages between men and women. The working poor often do not qualify for employment insurance, have no access to union membership, disability insurance and additional health and dental coverage; furthermore, they lack the opportunity to upgrade professional skills, have little legal protection of their rights, and often do not have access to affordable housing or child care. The lack of additional health and dental benefit coverage among low-wage jobs in particular is a significant disincentive for those desiring to make the transition from welfare to work, particularly when one is supporting a family.⁴² As long as these barriers remain, a person’s efforts to work hard and climb out of poverty will continue to be thwarted.

³⁷ Canadian Policy Research Networks (January 2006) *Risk and Opportunity: Creating Opportunities for Vulnerable Workers*. Ron Saunders. Vulnerable Workers Series No. 7, Work Network.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ National Council of Welfare. (Summer 2006) *Poverty Profile 2002 – 2003*. Volume#124. Available at www.ncwcnbes.net/

⁴⁰ Government of Canada (August, 2006) *When Working is not enough to Escape Poverty: An Analysis of Canada’s Working Poor*. Dominique Fleury and Myriam Fortin. Policy Research Group. Human Resources and Social Development Canada.

⁴¹ Canadian Labour Congress (September 6, 2005) *Submission by the Canadian Labour Congress to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance Regarding the 2006 – 07 Federal Budget*.

⁴² Task Force on Modernizing Income Security for Working-Age Adults (May 2006) *Time For a Fair Deal*.

Health & Low-Income

“Our food bank has become increasingly aware of the quality of food that we distribute to our clients. Many of them face health problems that are directly connected to an unhealthy diet. We are working to increase awareness about the importance of choosing nutritious foods whenever possible.”

- Food bank in B.C., 2006

Good health is not merely the absence of illness but also depends on such socio-economic factors as income and housing.⁴³ During hard times, the food budget in low-income households tends to take a backseat to other fixed expenses such as rent. There is a great deal of concern among food banks today about the health of their clients and the nutritional quality of the food that they distribute.

Out of the 447 food banks who responded to the survey question about food security, about 200 confirmed that they were working towards strengthening their clients' capacity to acquire nutritious and sufficient food. They do this by providing additional programs and services, many of which focus on nutrition and health education, home economics, shopping and personal budgeting workshops, community kitchens and gardens, and by maintaining active intra-community partnerships, such as with farmers and local health agencies.

Food bank workers know from direct experience what a plethora of research has been revealing: those living in households that are food insecure are at greater risk of malnutrition and obesity. The positive correlation between obesity and hunger may initially appear counter-intuitive but both can be symptoms of structural poverty. Foods high in calories and low in nutritional content are generally cheaper, making them a likelier choice for those shopping on a tight food budget.

The stresses of poverty and social exclusion are particularly damaging to the health of seniors, women and children. Children from low-income families generally experience worse outcomes, such as compromised emotional and cognitive development and overall low school achievement as a result of poor concentration and memory.⁴⁴

⁴³ Government of Prince Edward Island (December 2001) *Strategic Plan for the Prince Edward Island Health and Social Services System 2001 – 2005*.

⁴⁴ Blumberg, Stephen, Neal Halfon and Lynn M. Olson (June 2004) *The National Survey of Early Childhood Health. Pediatrics*.

Long-term malnutrition and obesity can lead to more severe illnesses and those living in low-income and hence food insecure households are at greater risk of heart disease and diabetes.⁴⁵ Health can also be affected indirectly by living in neighborhoods afflicted by structural symptoms of poverty such as high unemployment, poor quality housing and limited access to services.

Though they may not be immediately apparent, there is abundant evidence demonstrating the impacts of low-income on health and life expectancy. Even in an affluent country like Canada, poverty kills.

“If policy fails to address these facts, it not only ignores the most powerful determinants of health standards in modern societies, it also ignores one of the most important social justice issues facing modern societies.”

- WHO, *The Social Determinants of Health, the Solid Facts* Second Edition.

In these ways, structural factors conspire against low-income Canadians imperiling not only their present quality of life but also that of their future and the life chances of their children. No amount of charity can offset the real and dangerous long-term health implications of hunger. Health is extremely sensitive to social environment and public policy has an instrumental role to play in shaping this social environment.⁴⁶ Government initiatives in improving Canada’s social safety net must factor in nutrition and health when determining the costs of eating and living.

⁴⁵ Vozoris, Nicholas T. and Valerie S. Tarasuk. *Household Food Insecurity is Associated with Poorer Health*. The American Society for Nutritional Sciences. 133:120 – 126.

⁴⁶ World Health Organization (2003) *The Social Determinants of Health: The Solid Facts*. Second Edition.

Conclusion

The decline in the number of food bank recipients this year to some extent reinforces the fundamental argument that hunger as a social problem is tied to economic security. As revealed in this study for example, certain regions in Alberta experiencing a rise in employment levels are seeing a decline in the number of people visiting food banks.

The relief that improved overall economic performance can bring to those living in poverty and hunger will be limited and temporary if inefficiencies in the broader social infrastructure remain. In Fort McMurray, Alberta, for example, we have seen how the influx of new migrants lured by the economic boom has entailed the growing backlash of an intensifying housing problem and newcomers who are economically insecure are having difficulty meeting the rising shelter costs. One Alberta food bank worker predicts that in the absence of adequate subsidized housing and rent supplement programs, they may witness an eventual increase in the number of people needing food assistance. Food banks are already the last bastion of defense against homelessness for many of their clients. The rising shelter problem in this region threatens to further aggravate the common struggle people face between paying the rent and feeding themselves. Without an effective social support system, one that meets a combination of interrelated needs, gains in one area will only go so far in making a sustainable difference in people's lives.

A closer look at the drop in food bank recipients this year also reveals that a decrease is not necessarily indicative of less hunger and that there may be other explanatory factors.

Food banks in Nova Scotia, for example, have observed that the same clients need food more often than what a food bank is able to provide. Generally speaking, food banks cannot assist the same client for more than one visit a month and a typical hamper provides only a few days' worth of food due to such factors such as resource constraints. *HungerCount* does not capture this unmet need. Additionally, what the Quebec example suggests is that the lower numbers may not reflect less need but less ability on the part of food banks to assist those in need as a result of closures of emergency food assistance agencies.

While there has been a decrease in the number of people receiving food hampers at food banks in March 2006 compared to the previous year, more meals were served in 2006, having increased by 9 %. This suggests that in certain regions there may be an emerging pattern in which people may be relying more on meal programs to meet their emergency food needs. This is the case in one community in Nova Scotia, for example, where soup kitchen numbers have risen due in part to changing population demographics.

However one may interpret the recent food bank findings, one thing is unequivocal: the enduring prevalence of food banks in communities throughout the country is resounding evidence that hunger- though easily hidden - is real and persistent. It demonstrates a continued lack of government commitment to making the social investments needed for lasting solutions to the problem of hunger. In fact, recent government action even threatens to compound the problem, such as the elimination of the federal-provincial agreements towards a national child care strategy. According to a recent poll, a majority of Canadians supported a national child care program.⁴⁷ Additionally, the promised \$25 million for early learning and child care on First Nations reserves has been terminated; and an historic agreement to address the glaring poverty and improve the quality of life for First Nations communities has been placed in fiscal limbo.⁴⁸

The actions that are needed to alleviate hunger are clear and well-known. They are concrete, measurable and above all, achievable objectives particularly given the recent string of budget surpluses including a current federal budget surplus of six billion.⁴⁹ Numerous studies consistently point to a common set of policy measures that would alleviate poverty in Canada: better jobs with livable wages for low-income workers, greater income security, a national, affordable child care program and more affordable housing. More tax incentives and individuals allowances are not the solution and only provide limited, short-term relief.

HungerCount attempts to contribute to the literature on hunger and poverty through its unique examination of hunger through food bank use. It seeks to provide answers to important questions about who is visiting food banks, why they are hungry and what the solutions are. But the answer to the biggest question continues to evade us, year after year: What will it take for our leaders to make a solid commitment to address this national disgrace?

⁴⁷ Environics Research Group (June 2006) *Canadians Attitude Toward National Child Care Policy. Final Report*. Prepared for the Child Care Advocacy Association of Canada.

⁴⁸ Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (May, 2006) *Federal Budget 2006: Opportunity Lost*. Editorial. <http://www.policyalternatives.ca/Editorials/2006/05/Editorial1349/index.cfm?pa=AE5DAA5F>

⁴⁹ *As of the end of August 2006 – five months into this fiscal year, April to August period*. Globe and Mail (October 25, 2006) *Ottawa awash in surplus cash: \$6.7-billion, five-month budget windfall poses political dilemma for Flaherty*. Steven chase and Heather Scoffield.

Food Bank: *A central warehouse or clearing house, registered as a non-profit organization for the purpose of collecting, storing and distributing food, free of charge, directly or through front line agencies which may also provide meals to the hungry. Food banks may also coordinate advocacy, public education and employment programs, as part of the effort to eliminate hunger.*

Affiliated Agency: *An organization that regularly receives a supply of groceries from a central food bank for direct distribution to the public.*

Grocery Program: *The distribution of groceries from food banks to the public. Food “hampers” or bags of groceries are provided with enough food for several days (at most).*

Meal Program: *The distribution of prepared meals to the public; may be operated by a food bank, or another agency, such as a soup kitchen, hostel or shelter.*

(Prepared) Meal: *Includes breakfast, lunch and snacks.*

Full-Time Job: *1,950 hours of paid employment per year; 37.5 hours per week.*

Food Security: *Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.*

Table 3: Provincial Breakdown of Selected 2006 *HungerCount* Results

2006 Item	Canada	BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NB	NS	PEI	NF
Total Volunteer Hours	245344	47241	27728	6207	11847	92365	19539	24134	11611	1432	3027
Total Staff Hours	104271	14745	17052	3825	3799	27626	21909	11711	2111	14	1326

Family & Household Composition – Estimated Percentages (weighted by total number of people assisted in grocery programs)

Sole-Parent	30.4	33.3	29.6	30.7	29.9	30.9	26.7	27.3	35.0	31.1	38.9
Single People	35.5	39.4	29.6	39.1	33.2	36.2	37.2	35.0	29.7	25.0	23.7
Couples No Children	11.5	10.0	12.7	10.0	13.2	11.3	11.1	17.3	13.5	16.4	11.2
2-Parent	22.6	17.3	28.1	20.2	23.7	21.6	25.0	20.4	21.8	27.5	26.2
Students	4.6	3.5	4.2	4.3	3.9	5.4	Not available	2.4	4.9	3.0	2.1
Seniors	6.8	7.0	5.3	4.8	6.4	6.9	Not available	6.4	18.0	15.0	3.4

Income Sources – Estimated Percentages (weighted by total number of people assisted in grocery programs)

Social Assistance	53.5	50.9	33.7	76.0	44.3	47.2	61.8	66.3	62.9	32.8	78.4
Employment	13.4	11.2	27.7	6.8	14.3	16.9	9.9	10.1	7.3	17.1	0.5
Employment Insurance	4.2	4.7	4.1	1.6	4.1	2.4	5.7	6.7	6.5	27.2	5.6
Disability Support	11.0	15.6	12.7	2.0	8.8	18.2	1.5	4.4	10.8	10.3	3.8
Pension Income	6.0	5.7	5.6	3.5	6.1	4.9	7.8	6.0	7.2	7.1	8.5
Student Loans	1.8	1.2	3.2	2.5	3.8	1.2	2.4	0.8	0.5	0.2	0.9
Other Income	3.9	2.9	3.4	3.2	4.8	4.4	4.7	2.8	1.6	2.3	0.4
No Income	6.2	7.8	9.6	4.4	13.8	4.8	6.2	2.9	3.2	3.0	1.9

Amount of Food in a Hamper – Percentage of Food Banks

2006 Item	Canada	BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NB	NS	PEI	NF
1-3 Days	26.7	36.1	5.6	30.0	37.1	28.5	Not Available	19.5	19.7	66.7	50.0
3.5-5 Days	36.6	39.8	20.1	35.0	40.0	36.0	NA	48.8	49.2	33.3	42.3
More than 5 Days	36.7	24.1	74.4	35.0	22.9	35.5	NA	31.7	31.1	0.0	7.7

Frequency of Food Bank Use Permitted – Percentage of Food Banks

At least once a week	6.4	12.9	4.4	0.0	9.8	4.6	NA	2.4	11.0	0.0	3.8
Every 10 days – 3 weeks	17.8	14.1	9.9	36.4	58.5	15.7	NA	14.6	16.4	0.0	3.8
Once a month	62.3	61.2	49.5	45.5	24.4	69.0	NA	80.5	68.5	100.0	76.9
Every 5-16 weeks	11.8	10.6	29.7	9.1	7.3	10.2	NA	2.4	4.1	0.0	15.4
1-3 per year	1.6	1.2	6.6	9.1	0.0	0.5	NA	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Measures Taken due to Lack of Food – Percentage of Food Banks

1+ measures taken	34.5	37.5	19.8	40.9	35.6	39.1	NA	35.4	28.4	66.7	54.8
Close early/do not open	2.5	1.1	0.0	0.0	2.2	4.3	NA	2.1	3.4	0.0	0.0
Turn people away	3.3	1.1	1.0	0.0	11.1	3.4	NA	2.1	5.4	0.0	0.0
Buy food	25.0	34.1	13.5	31.8	17.8	25.5	NA	33.3	20.9	66.7	38.7
Give less food	13.2	15.9	4.2	13.6	20.0	14.0	NA	10.4	12.8	33.3	19.4
Other	12.8	17.0	7.3	18.2	6.7	14.0	NA	10.4	12.8	0.0	19.4