

***Chew on This!* 2022 Backgrounder: Food Insecurity in Canada**

Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: *Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control.*

Canada has a duty to uphold the human rights of all people in this country and has signed on to multiple international human rights conventions, including the right to food. Reports from the federal government say they are on track to meet, or even exceed, the targets of their Poverty Reduction Strategy. But even with these improvements, millions are being left behind. At the same time, rates of food insecurity have continued to climb in Canada, **with a provincial average of 15.9% in 2021, and even higher rates in the territories.**

Food insecurity is not about a lack of food, it is about a lack of income and access. Social assistance rates (including welfare and disability supports) fall short of the poverty line in every province and territory¹ with 63.1% of recipients' households experiencing food insecurity.² 13.7% of households whose main source of income is employment are also food insecure.³ Inadequate wages and income supports are compounded with high costs of housing, childcare, medical needs, and other essentials, leaving millions of people sacrificing their food budgets when there isn't enough money to pay for rent and other "non-negotiable" expenses.

Food insecurity is felt disproportionately by people who are Black, Indigenous, disabled, and people with precarious immigration status. 28.9% of Black households and 28.2% of Indigenous households live with food insecurity, compared to just 11% of white households.⁴ Food insecurity rates intensify for people with intersecting forms of oppression, such for those who are 2SLGBTQ+, women, single mothers, as well as for seniors and young adults.

In Nunavut, nearly half the population is food insecure. Shipping expenses result in the highest food prices in the country, while rising fuel prices and the impacts of climate change make it harder to hunt and gather traditional food sources. The hunger and mental distress brought on by food insecurity and poverty in the north has led to family violence and increased rates of suicide. Inuit communities in Canada suffer from the highest rates of suicide in the world.⁵

Many migrant workers and undocumented residents work in Canadian farms, factories, food production plants, restaurants, grocery stores, and in the food delivery gig economy. They are vital to our food systems and to our society, but currently do not have access to fair wages, worker

¹ Maytree Foundation, Welfare in Canada (2021). Retrieved from <https://maytree.com/welfare-in-canada/canada/>

² Tarasuk V, Li T, Fafard St-Germain AA. (2022) Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). Retrieved from <https://proof.utoronto.ca/>

³ Same as above.

⁴ Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), 2017-2018

⁵ Affleck W, Chachamovich E, Chawky N, Beauchamp G, Turecki G, Séguin M. (2020). Suicide amongst the Inuit of Nunavut: An Exploration of Life Trajectories.

protections, healthcare, and many other government benefits and programs, leaving those who sustain our food systems ironically food insecure themselves.

Food charity is not the solution. Food banks offer some emergency relief, but do not address the underlying causes of food insecurity. It is estimated that there are between 3 to 7 times as many food insecure people compared to actual food bank users.⁶ Food banks can also have access barriers, such as inaccessible buildings and lack of affordable and accessible transportation, and the common practice of requiring government-issued ID. Additionally, many food bank users report receiving a lack of nutritious or culturally appropriate options.

Food security leads to community wellbeing, health, and dignity, but requires the governments to uphold human rights and build sustainable food systems that ensure safe working conditions for all. Food security requires income security and affordable housing. It requires empowering community-led food systems where everyone can access the foods they want and need with dignity.

Upholding our human rights means ending food insecurity and eradicating poverty. All policy actions must recognize and overturn the systems of oppression that disproportionately strip certain groups of their fundamental rights and work to close the gaps in our health and socio-economic outcomes.

RECOMMENDED POLICY ACTIONS

- ❖ **Increase income security:** Increase federal income benefits, including Employment Insurance, the Canada Worker's Benefit, Canada Disability Benefit, Guaranteed Income Supplement, Canada Housing Benefit, and the Canada Child Benefit, to reflect current gaps and inadequacies. Expand eligibility to ensure all people living in Canada are automatically enrolled for benefits
- ❖ **Status for All:** Give everyone living in Canada permanent resident status to ensure that they have access to fair wages, worker protections, healthcare, EI, government benefits and programs.
- ❖ **Subsidise Food Shipping Costs to the North:** While this recommendation will not address all forms of food insecurity in northern communities, increasing government subsidies for food shipping expenses will make food costs immediately more affordable for residents.
- ❖ **Support Community-led Programs & Food Sovereignty:** Provide stable, adequate funding to community-run and non-profit food programs (particularly for Indigenous and Black-led organizations), recognizing community members with lived experience of food insecurity as experts in what services and food options are needed.

⁶ <https://proof.utoronto.ca/resource/relationship-between-food-banks-and-food-insecurity-in-canada/>