



York Region

Report on Hunger 2020

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About the Food Bank of York Region

The Food Bank of York Region (FBYR) serves as the food collection and distribution hub for York Region. In this capacity, the Food Bank of York Region collects and deliver surplus food to food pantries, homeless and women's shelters, social housing, and community organizations that provide meals and food to their clients. In 2020, FBYR distributed \$8.5 million worth of food and supplies to 83 community organization partners who provided food services to 24,000+ York Region residents facing food insecurity.



Contributor: The York Region Food Network

York Region Food Network (YRFN) is a centre for the promotion of food security – a healthy, accessible and sustainable food system in York Region. In support of this vision, YRFN works to raise public awareness on the many issues affecting food security such as affordable housing, adequate employment, education, accessible childcare and social assistance policies through programming, outreach and advocacy initiatives. YRFN is a member of Food Secure Canada.

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The Face of Food Insecurity in the Region

Food insecurity, defined as the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints, is a public health crisis that negatively impacts physical, mental, and social health.¹ According to a 2018 study by PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research, 4.4 million Canadians, or 1 in 8 households, were experiencing food insecurity.² Despite the perceived affluence and wealth of York Region, at the last census, 157,690 York Region residents lived in low-income households, representing 14% of households in York Region, and approximately 24,700

of York Region households experienced various levels of food insecurity.³ Of these, 28.5% were children.⁴

Canada's growing levels of food insecurity have been linked to: a) Changes in the labour market to precarious employment or self-employment without benefits, as well as unemployment and underemployment; b) Seniors and persons with disabilities, dependent on Old Age Security or disability support, struggling with rising costs of living; c) Cost of housing and effects of skyrocketing rental markets.⁵ Rising costs of food and rent

place immense pressure on low-income households, leaving them vulnerable to food insecurity and higher risk of poor physical and mental health.⁶

Households most vulnerable to food insecurity include households with children led by lone parents, households with minimum wage jobs and precarious work, those who identify as Indigenous or Black, and those who rent rather than own their housing.⁷ Food insecurity continues to increase because our governments have yet to address the root cause of food

insecurity—poverty and low income.

While it is too early to fully measure the impact of COVID-19, initial findings indicate that food insecurity has increased significantly across Canada since the onset of the pandemic.⁸ According to Statistics Canada, over one million jobs were lost in Ontario after COVID-19 lockdown measures were introduced in March 2020. The unemployment rate skyrocketed from previous levels of 5.6% to 13.7% in May 2020—the highest rate on record since 1976.⁹ As a result, the demand for food assistance increased significantly in 2020.¹⁰ The long-term economic impact of COVID-19 has

exacerbated existing trends of food insecurity in York Region for some time to come.

Food insecurity takes a steep toll on every facet of a person's health including their social, mental and physical well-being. Those who are food insecure often face increased levels of social isolation due to strained finances that prevent gathering with friends or family or participating in cultural activities. Food insecurity also increases the risk of mental illness and depression, while increasing the risk of chronic illness, such as heart disease, diabetes and back problems, and ultimately of decreasing a person's quality of life and lifespan.



About York Region

York Region is a large region, sprawling over 1,762 square kilometres and encompassing nine municipalities and Georgina Island. With a population of over one million, York Region is slated to grow to 1.5 million by 2031 and 1.8 million by 2041. The population in the region is aging and by 2031, it is estimated that 1 in 5 people in York Region will be 65 years or older.¹¹



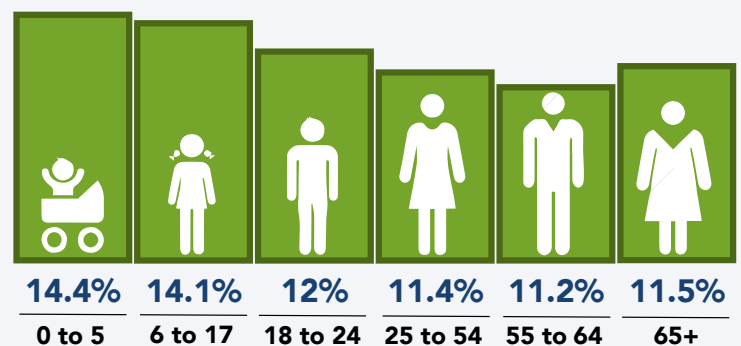
Photo Credit: The Regional Municipality of York, Ontario, Canada

York Region is made up of a mix of urban and rural municipalities. Relatively speaking, York Region is affluent with a median household income of \$97,776 (2016 Census). Eighty-six percent of York Region households are owned – the highest rate of ownership in the Greater Toronto and Hamilton Area (GTHA).¹²

Rental housing vacancy in York Region is extremely low and consequently the cost of housing is extremely high. Fifty-two percent of renter households in York Region are spending 30 percent or more of their incomes on housing – the highest in the GTHA.¹³ As a result, many York Region residents are placed in precarious and insecure financial positions, often

forcing them to choose between paying for housing or purchasing food. In such cases, food often becomes a discretionary expense. When people do not have enough money to purchase food, they tend to eat less, and skip meals.

PROPORTION OF POPULATION IN LOW INCOME HOUSEHOLDS



[Graph Courtesy of YR+2016+Census+Release+Report+-+Income.pdf]

The Role of Food Banks in York Region

"Food banks provide an immediate, emergency response to people and families that have been unable to afford sufficient food. While food banks are not a solution to food insecurity, they work tirelessly to provide nutritious food support and programming that helps to alleviate hunger and increase access to income. ... Further, food banks advocate on behalf of those they serve at the municipal, provincial, and federal level for income-based solutions to poverty."

– **Feed Ontario, Hunger Report 2020**



NUTRITIOUS FOOD BASKET FOR YORK REGION¹⁴

For a family of four with one minimum wage earner:

| | |
|-----------------|----------|
| Monthly Income: | \$3,633* |
| Rent: | \$1,522 |
| Food Basket: | \$929 |

Remainder:** **\$1,182**

For a senior on Old Age Security / Guaranteed Income Supplement:

| | |
|-----------------|---------|
| Monthly Income: | \$1,694 |
| Rent: | \$1,170 |
| Food Basket: | \$212 |

Remainder: **\$312**

For single adult on Ontario Disability Support Program:

| | |
|-----------------|---------|
| Monthly Income: | \$1,251 |
| Rent: | \$1,170 |
| Food Basket: | \$292 |

Remainder: **-\$211**

* Monthly income includes additional benefits and credits.

** Remainder must cover all other expenses.

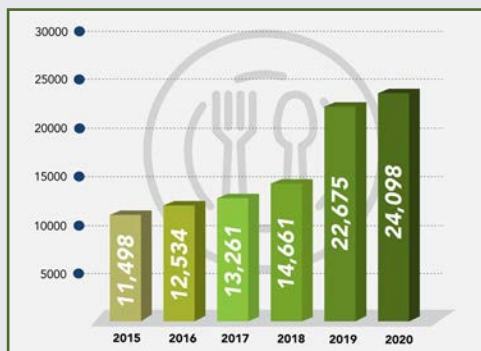


Statistics for Individuals Accessing Food Services

The Food Bank of York Region is committed to alleviating food insecurity for York Region's most vulnerable residents in collaboration with our network of non-profit community organizations that provide food and meals in their programs. Our mandate is to provide a nexus between the abundance of surplus food in Ontario and the organizations that provide food services to at-risk residents.

This partnership strategy has proven to be highly effective in enabling local agencies and community organizations to focus on their primary services without having to divert scarce resources to sourcing food.

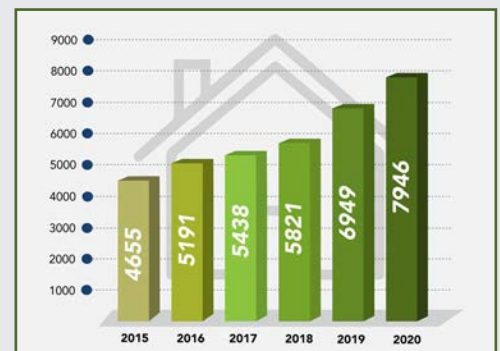
Since its founding, the Food Bank of York Region has continued to increase its services to a growing number of community partners and agencies, to alleviate extreme food insecurity in York Region.



TOTAL UNIQUE INDIVIDUALS SERVED 2015-2020



TOTAL FOOD SERVICE VISITS 2015-2020



OF HOUSEHOLDS SERVED 2015-2020

The statistics that follow have been collected from the 83 food banks/meal providers of the network that the Food Bank of York Region (FBYR) provided food for in York Region in 2020, as well as FBYR's COVID Home Delivery Program. These organizations provided food to 24,098 people. (For a full list of FBYR's community partners, see <https://fbyr.ca/community-partners/>.)

**GENDER:**

| | |
|---------------|-------------|
| 35% | Male |
| 43% | Female |
| .03% | Transgender |
| 21.97% | Unknown |

**AGE:**

| | |
|------------|----------------------|
| 26% | 0-17 |
| 35% | 18-44 |
| 18% | 44-64 |
| 9% | 65+ |
| 12% | Undisclosed (Adults) |

**PRIMARY INCOME (BY HOUSEHOLD):**

| | | | |
|---------------|----------------------|---------------|-------------|
| 35.83% | Government Benefits* | 5.19% | Pension/OAS |
| 16.67% | No Income | 3% | Other |
| 7.37% | Part-Time Work | 26.31% | Undisclosed |
| 5.64% | Full-Time Work | | |

(*EI, OW, ODSP, OSAP, CCB, CRB/CERB)

**HOUSING STATUS:**

| | | | |
|---------------|---------------------------|---------------|------------------------|
| 48.88% | Private Rental | 0.34% | On the Street |
| 10.68% | Social Housing | 0.29% | Group Home/ Shelter |
| 6.63% | Own Home | 0.21% | Band Owned |
| 0.94% | Stays with Friends/Family | 1.86% | Other |
| 0.45% | Rooming House | 29.73% | Undisclosed |



Food Access by Municipality

AURORA

With an estimated population of 62,800, at the last census an average of 8.9 percent of Aurora households were considered low income.¹⁵ Needless to say, these numbers have doubtless changed since COVID. In 2020, 1,760 Aurora residents residing in 617 households sought out food assistance from the eight Food Banks and agencies that provide meals and food that were canvassed for this report.

Food banks in the northern parts of the region are working to help families in need with a decrease of food donations while facing an increase in demand. Allison Stuart, the chair of the board for the Aurora Food Pantry, said the decrease in food donations is because many food drives have not taken place this year which otherwise would have had it not been for COVID-19. — Toronto.com, Dec. 16, 2020

Food Bank Access
Aurora 2020

Adults Served (18-64): **862**
Children Served (0-17): **513**
Seniors (65+): **385**
Total Households: **617**



EAST GWILLIMBURY

The population of East Gwillimbury is currently estimated at 24,000 people. At the last census, an average of seven percent of households were considered low income.¹⁶ In 2020, 665 residents sought out food assistance from the four Food Banks and agencies that provide meals and food canvassed for this report.

Joyce Brown, along with fellow lead organizers Laura and Bill Wells, at the Mount Albert Food Pantry inside the Mt. Albert United Church have been overwhelmed with donations from businesses like Foodland during the pandemic.

Just how generous has the East Gwillimbury community of businesses and residents been this pandemic? The Mount Albert Food Pantry located at Mount Albert United Church is having to find extra space. — East Gwillimbury Express, March 18, 2021

Food Bank Access
East Gwillimbury 2020

Adults Served (18-64): **324**
Children Served (0-17): **217**
Seniors (65+): **124**
Total Households: **251**



GEORGINA

Georgina has an estimated population of 45,400 people, which includes approximately 1,200 residents of First Nations communities. At the last census an average of 11.3 percent of Georgina's households were considered low income.¹⁷ In 2020, 2,063 residents sought out food assistance from the 11 Food Banks and agencies that provide meals and food canvassed for this report.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has been felt throughout the Town of Georgina, changing daily life for residents and businesses. During this time, the Georgina Food Pantry has been particularly hard hit, experiencing record demand and running low on supplies...

"COVID-19 has impacted everyone in Georgina and now, more than ever, we need to support the local organizations that are working tirelessly to help families and the most vulnerable," said Mayor Margaret Quirk. — Town of Georgina, April 2020

Food Bank Access
Georgina 2020

Adults Served (18-64): **1,238**
Children Served (0-17): **672**
Seniors (65+): **153**
Total Households: **866**



KING

With an estimated population of over 25,000 people, an average of 7.5 percent of households in King were considered low income at the last census.¹⁸ In 2020, 284 residents sought out food assistance from the three Food Banks and agencies canvassed for this report.

The Food Bank of York Region — a regional food network serving the nine municipalities of York Region (Vaughan, Richmond Hill, Markham, Whitchurch-Stouffville, Newmarket, Aurora, East Gwillimbury, Georgina, and King) — has experienced an increased demand.

“Due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increased demand for food assistance from seniors, families with children, refugees, people on social assistance, and those who have been laid-off or lost their jobs,” said Alex Bilotta, the Food Bank of York Region CEO.

— Vaughan Citizen, December 18, 2020.

Food Bank Access King 2020

Adults Served (18-64): **251**
Children Served (0-17): **21**
Seniors (65+): **2**
Total Households: **212**



MARKHAM

Founded in the 1790s, Markham is home to more than 350,000 people. While it is overall a thriving city, 15.1% of households were ranked as below the poverty line at the last 2016 Census.¹⁹ The eight Food Banks and agencies canvassed for this report provided food assistance to 4,024 Individuals.

According to Markham Food Bank president, Bob Ysseldyk, there was a 38 per cent increase in the number of families using the food bank by the end of last year [2020] compared to pre-COVID-19 use. The non-for-profit agency was “coping well” with the surge in demand, largely due to a “terrific” increase in the amount of food and monetary donations, Ysseldyk added.

“Due to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been an increased demand for food assistance from seniors, families with children, refugees, people on social assistance, and those who have been laid off or lost their jobs,” said Alex Bilotta, the founder and CEO of the Food Bank of York Region. — Markham Economist & Sun, January 11, 2021

Food Bank Access Markham 2020

Adults Served (18-64): **2,548**
Children Served (0-17): **1,247**
Seniors (65+): **229**
Total Households: **1,300**

NEWMARKET

Newmarket currently has an estimated population of 85,000 people. At the last census, an average of ten percent of its residents were considered low income.²⁰ Needless to say, these numbers have doubtless increased since COVID. In 2020, 7,432 residents sought out food assistance from the 19 Food Banks and agencies that provide meals and food canvassed for this report.

Although the food pantry has found it difficult to handle the increases of demand, Bain [the executive director at the Newmarket Food Pantry] said the community has been extremely generous with their food or monetary donations and ensuring everyone's basic right to food is being met.

Bain said that pre-pandemic they had already been seeing a spike in numbers especially for first time users. However, once the government intervened with CERB, and other benefits, the food pantry noticed the numbers flattened. — Newmarket Era, December 2020

Food Bank Access
Newmarket 2020

Adults Served (18-64): **5,654**
Children Served (0-17): **1,430**
Seniors (65+): **348**
Total Households: **1,741**

RICHMOND HILL

With an estimated population of 208,000+ people, at the last census an average of 15.9 percent of Richmond Hill residents were considered low income.²¹ In 2020, 5,032 residents sought out food assistance from the 18 Food Banks and agencies that provide meals and food canvassed for this report.

Since the onset of COVID-19, the Richmond Hill Community Food Bank has received calls from local businesses on a daily basis, inquiring about what they need and what they can do for them, said Fergie Reynolds, board chair.

He estimated that small businesses donated a total of 70,000 pounds of food and non-food items to the Richmond Hill food bank, representing 25 per cent of donations it received in 2020. The food bank has recently launched a home delivery program to reach out to vulnerable individuals and families who have difficulty coming in person. — Richmond Hill Liberal, March 16 2021

Food Bank Access
Richmond Hill 2020

Adults Served (18-64): **3,218**
Children Served (0-17): **1,387**
Seniors (65+): **423**
Total Households: **1,945**



VAUGHAN

With an estimated population of 305,000+ people, at the last census an average of 8.8 percent of Vaughan's residents were considered low income.²² In 2020, 2,729 residents sought out food assistance from the 13 Food Banks and agencies that provide meals and food canvassed for this report.

The executive director of Vaughan's Chasdei Kaduri Jewish Food Bank has noticed a "worrying increase in demand" since COVID-19 struck. "The phones would not stop ringing and people showed up at the door," said Jonathan Tebeka.

These days, Vaughan's Chasdei Kaduri Jewish Food Bank receives about three times the normal numbers of applications from people wanting to use the food bank, which feeds more than 2,500 people per month. — Vaughan Citizen, December 18, 2020

Food Bank Access
Vaughan 2020

Adults Served (18-64): **1,656**
Children Served (0-17): **664**
Seniors (65+): **409**
Total Households: **972**



WHITCHURCH-STOUFFVILLE

With an estimated population of over 50,100 people, at the last census an average of 8.2 percent of households in Whitchurch-Stouffville were considered low income.²³ In 2020, 109 residents were canvassed for this report, who sought out food assistance from the Food Bank of York Region from its COVID Home Delivery Program.

As changes in the community have caused people to stay home, the need for food remains the same. "Food bank volunteers are still out there working to help ensure those in need can get food, but it hasn't been easy," Susan Smith, new co-chair and volunteer at the Whitchurch Stouffville Food Bank, said. Smith said the food bank has around 30 volunteers and on a regular day about 12 people would come in to work. — Stouffville Sun-Tribune, April 2020

Food Bank Access
Whitchurch-Stouffville 2020

Adults Served (18-64): **69**
Children Served (0-17): **34**
Seniors (65+): **6**
Total Households: **32**

Recommendations

As the statistics presented in this report clearly indicate, food insecurity is an issue of serious concern in York Region. Individuals and households are increasingly feeling the pressure of York Region's high cost of living, making it difficult for a segment of the population to make ends meet, particularly during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Moving forward, we need to ensure that food insecure residents have access to food as quickly as possible. In parallel with providing people with emergency food access, public policy must be improved to strengthen our social safety net, thereby reducing and preventing food insecurity and poverty.



RECOMMENDATION 1

DEVELOP A POLICY FRAMEWORK TO ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY AND POVERTY

We recommend that:

- All levels of government formally acknowledge that food insecurity is an urgent public health crisis that impedes human rights and social justice.
- In partnership with researchers, food security organizations and the community, each level of government develop a comprehensive policy framework to adequately address food insecurity and reduce poverty.
- Municipal and regional governments have dedicated staff who serve as members of Food Councils and food networking groups.
- The Federal government commit to regularly measuring, analysing and reporting the prevalence and severity of food insecurity in all provinces and territories. This process should include ongoing analysis of disaggregated race-based food insecurity data, including Indigenous and Black Canadians.²⁴





RECOMMENDATION 2

DEVELOP PUBLIC POLICY TO ADDRESS POVERTY

Public policy can have a significant impact on reducing food insecurity if it addresses the root cause of the problem – poverty. We recommend that:

- The Federal and Provincial governments establish targets for the reduction of food insecurity and poverty and be required to report on their progress towards reaching those targets regularly.
- Employers in York Region are Living Wage Employers so that workers earn a wage that more closely aligns with the cost of living in York Region.
- Municipal and regional governments take an active role in creating an enabling environment for the development of community gardens, community farms and other grassroots food initiatives that build food sovereignty.



RECOMMENDATION 3

BUILD AND SUPPORT THE EMERGENCY FOOD SECTOR

The emergency food sector cannot continue to rely primarily on volunteer labour and inconsistent donations. Many stakeholders operate within York Region's food system. Dedicated resources are required to build a coordinated regional food system.

We recommend that:

- Flexible and core funding is instituted to enable food security organizations to adapt to new and unanticipated challenges, offer predictability and contribute to a more consistent level of service.
- Resources are dedicated to conducting a York Region Community Food Assessment and mapping food security initiatives. It is imperative that the regional food system is in regular communication and works collaboratively to address the immediate food needs of the community.

Conclusions



York Region's Food Bank network works tirelessly in all nine municipalities to meet the ongoing need for emergency food support in York Region, even as we continue to address the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic. While provincial and federal support have helped to ensure that food banks continue to provide their vital services, municipal and regional governments must also play an important role in fostering food secure communities and food sovereignty.

Every level of government has a role to play in building a food secure York Region, and it is imperative that each level of government commits to actions within their jurisdiction to address this issue. By investing in strong social and public policies to ensure that York Region residents are able to access sufficient income for their basic needs and affordable housing, poverty and food insecurity can be effectively reduced, and an improved quality of life can be enjoyed by all York Region residents.

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