



# THE FOOD BANK OF YORK REGION'S REPORT ON FOOD INSECURITY 2024

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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 delivers surplus food to municipal food banks, community food pantries, schools, social housing, shelters and other non-profit community organizations that provide meals and food in their programs. In 2024, FBYR served a network of 78 non-profit agencies and community organizations, delivering \$9.9 million worth of perishable and non-perishable food to 13,802 households.

### About this Report

The 2024 Food Bank of York Region's Report on Food Insecurity provides an analysis on the state of food insecurity based on numerous sources and surveys. This report reflects findings published by Food Banks Canada, Feed Ontario, Statistics Canada, Public Health Ontario, Dietitians of Canada, and other sources. This report also provides insights to food insecurity in York Region through an analysis of data gathered in 2024 by the Food Bank of York Region's network of non-profit community partners, utilizing the Link2Feed client intakes system.



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# What is Food Insecurity?

**Food insecurity** is defined in Canada as the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints.<sup>1</sup> Food insecurity is a serious public health issue that has profound impacts on the mental and physical health of individuals and places significant strain on the health care system.<sup>2</sup>

**Food security** is defined as the condition whereby people have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs for an active and healthy life.<sup>3</sup>

“Food insecurity is the state in which someone has inadequate or inconsistent access to nutritional food. People suffering from food insecurity are often poor, though not all count as ‘under the poverty line’. They tend to skip meals and eat foods with poor nutritional value, which is often more affordable.

“Many people are under the false impression that if someone has a home and a job, they won’t encounter food insecurity. In reality, low-income families with homes can still suffer. This impacts everyone in the household, including children. The impacts of food insecurity on children go beyond the feeling of hunger.” — *Children First Canada*.<sup>4</sup>

# An Overview of Food Insecurity in 2024

Food insecurity in Canada continued to trend upward in 2024—an ongoing and troubling trend that has shown little indication of abating. Since 2021, numerous studies and reports have been sounding the alarm regarding the precipitous increase in food insecurity, warning that the combination of rising food prices and housing costs and inadequate income are creating a perfect storm in relation to food affordability.<sup>5</sup>

Food Banks Canada reported over two million food bank visits in 2024, an increase of six percent from the previous year and a cumulative 90 percent growth in food bank usage since 2019.<sup>6</sup> Feed Ontario’s analysis indicated that over one million people, or one in 16 Ontarians sought food assistance in 2024, visiting food banks 7.7 million times.<sup>7</sup> These statistics represent the highest food bank usage in Canada in history, and provide evidence to the dimensions of this public crisis.

However, food insecurity extends beyond the increased demand for food assistance reported by food banks, as food banks are often a last resort for those who are most severely food insecure.<sup>8</sup> MNP’s quarterly consumer debt index, released in October 2024, found that 28 percent of Canadians had resorted to eating less to save money, reflecting “the harsh reality of the soaring cost of living”.<sup>9</sup>

“Food banks in Canada have been around for decades. During that time, they have reached some regrettable milestones that should have signalled to the country’s governments that social policies were failing those who needed support the most. It took around 25 years before food bank visits surpassed 1 million in a month. Incredibly, food banks recently registered another sombre milestone. They saw an additional 1 million visits per month — within the past five years. That milestone was reached in one-fifth of the time that it took to reach the earlier equivalent milestone. This unthinkable rate of growth is not sustainable for either food banks or people in Canada.” —Food Banks Canada





# Drivers of Food Insecurity

Despite the surge in demand for food assistance since 2020, the reality is that the drivers of food bank use have remained virtually unchanged. As one report noted, “In recent years, Canada has faced a whirlwind of economic challenges that have worsened both food insecurity and poverty levels.<sup>10</sup> The 2025 Food Price Report anticipates that food affordability will continue to be a major concern for Canadians, as food prices are predicted to continue to rise.<sup>11</sup>

Some of the main factors in the ongoing trend of rising food insecurity have been identified as:

**1) Lack of Affordable Housing:** Unaffordable housing has continued to be a significant driver of food insecurity. There has been an 80 percent increase in the number of renters accessing food banks in Ontario since 2020.<sup>12</sup> Studies indicate that people with the lowest incomes spend over 80% of their disposable income on housing and food alone.<sup>13</sup> A Toronto-based report found that food bank clients on average had just \$7.78 left per day after paying rent and utilities, while 20 percent of clients spent their entire income on housing.<sup>14</sup>

**2) Inadequate Income.** Insufficient income coupled with rising costs of living have led to increased food insecurity for low-income households. According to Statistics Canada’s 2024 report, 45 percent of Canadians indicated that “rising prices are greatly impacting their ability to meet daily expenses.”<sup>15</sup> While an increase to the minimum wage was implemented in 2024, Ontario’s minimum wage remained significantly lower than a living wage, defined as the amount needed to cover basic costs like housing, food, and transportation.<sup>16</sup>

**3) The Growing Gap in Social Assistance:** Households reliant on social assistance experience the highest prevalence and severity of food insecurity.<sup>17</sup> Sixty percent of food bank visitors in Ontario rely on provincial social assistance as their primary source of income, which includes general welfare (Ontario Works) and disability support (Ontario Disability Support Program).<sup>18</sup> However, the income provided by social assistance programs has not kept pace with the rising cost of living and falls well below the poverty line.

## Why Food Insecurity Matters

“Insufficient access to safe and nutritious foods can severely impact physical, mental, and social well-being. Without proper nutrition, focus levels, energy, and immune system support can decline, leading to long-term health challenges. Food insecurity increases the likelihood of malnutrition, chronic conditions, and social stigma, affecting individuals’ overall quality of life.” —Gupta Palak USU, Melanie Meisenheimer, Center for the Study of Social Policy<sup>19</sup>

# Food Insecurity in York Region

With a population of nearly 1.2 million at the last census, York Region presents as a region of rapid growth and perceived wealth.<sup>20</sup> However, a recent report from York Region's Community and Health Services indicated that 18.6 percent of York Region residents are living below the low-income threshold.<sup>21</sup> Key trends of concern in the Region were identified as decreasing income security and challenges with housing affordability.

According to the most recent Canadian Income Survey, in 2023, 19.4 percent of York Region households had experienced food insecurity in the previous year, representing 79,300 York Region households.<sup>22</sup> The 34 percent gap between the minimum wage and a living wage has led to an ongoing increase of residents with employment income accessing food banks in York Region.<sup>23</sup> Households reliant on social assistance programs are also highly vulnerable to food insecurity, as the income provided is inadequate to afford a basic standard of living.<sup>24</sup>

Housing affordability continued to be a major issue in York Region, with 46.9 percent of renters spending above the recommended threshold of 30 percent of their income on rents, the highest proportion in Ontario.<sup>25</sup> A United Way Greater Toronto report positioned York Region at a "breaking point" in its lack of affordable housing, which particularly impacts low-income renters.<sup>26</sup> The number of low-income households in York Region struggling with the effects of rising costs of living increased throughout 2024, as statistics for food bank usage indicate.



"The demand for food assistance in York Region continues to rise at a distressing rate. Food banks are stretched to their limit and cannot sustain the current operations without more food and monetary donations." — Alex Bilotta, CEO, Food Bank of York Region. [Food Bank of York Region highlights solutions amid surging demand](#), Newmarket Today, Jun 26, 2024

# 2024 York Region Food Program Access

The Food Bank of York Region (FBYR) provides a central hub to collect and redistribute healthy surplus food to non-profit organizations throughout the region that provide food services to at-risk residents. In collaboration with our network of 70+/- community organizations, we serve York Region's most vulnerable residents struggling with food insecurity. (See current listing of [FBYR's community partners](#).) To meet the unprecedented increase in demand for food aid in recent years, since 2020 our network has grown its services year-over-year to serve 57% more food-insecure individuals and 76% more households.

The following statistics have been collected from 78 community partners, which include municipal food banks, local food pantries, school food pantries, shelters, and other food assistance providers in York Region. While these statistics cannot provide a complete picture of the state of food insecurity in York Region, they offer insights regarding food bank use and the demographics of individuals accessing food assistance services.

## Food Program Access in York Region by Municipality

Municipality	Individuals Served	Households Served
Aurora	2,763	962
East Gwillimbury	856	284
Georgina	2,734	995
King	95	61
Markham	8,172	2,697
Newmarket	6,265	2,279
Richmond Hill	8,608	3,409
Vaughan	4,318	1,655
Whitchurch-Stouffville	82	24
<b>Totals</b>	<b>33,893</b>	<b>12,366</b>

## Statistics For Individuals Accessing Food Services



### Age:

Based on 31,534 respondents

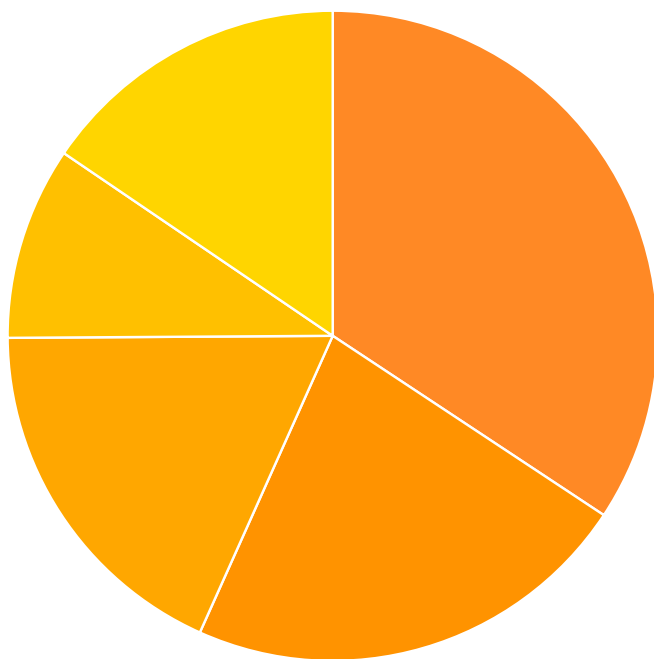
0-17 years old	<b>29.7%</b>
18-30 years old	<b>16.7%</b>
31-64 years old	<b>44.2%</b>
65+ years old	<b>9.4%</b>



### Gender:

Based on 21,873 respondents.

Male	<b>45.1%</b>
Female	<b>54.8%</b>
Other	<b>0.1%</b>



### Household Demographics:

*Based on responses from 11,795 households*

<span style="color: #f4a460;">■</span> Single Person Households	<b>35.4%</b>
<span style="color: #f4a460;">■</span> Two Parents	<b>22.7%</b>
<span style="color: #f4a460;">■</span> Single Parents	<b>17.2%</b>
<span style="color: #f4a460;">■</span> Couples With No Children	<b>9.3%</b>
<span style="color: #f4a460;">■</span> Other	<b>15.4%</b>



### Primary Income By Household:

*Respondents represent 6,890 households*

Government Benefits*	<b>36.7%</b>	Pension/OAS	<b>11.7%</b>
Employee Income	<b>20.9%</b>	Other	<b>10.6%</b>
No Income	<b>20.1%</b>		

*\*Government benefits include EI, OW, ODSP, OSAP, CCB, CRB*



### Housing Status:

*Respondents represent 7,542 households*

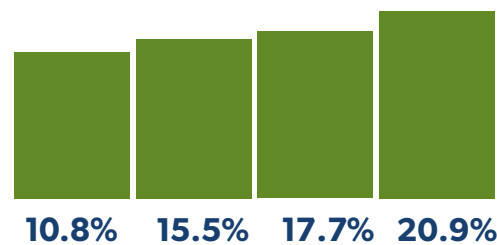
Private Rental	<b>71%</b>	Group Home/Shelter	<b>2.8%</b>
Social Housing Rental	<b>15.8%</b>	On the Street	<b>0.6%</b>
Own Home	<b>4.4%</b>	Other	<b>5.4%</b>

# Shifting Demographics in Food Banking

Low-income employed people are one of the fastest-growing demographics at Ontario's food banks, with 24 percent of food bank visitors indicating employment as their primary source of income.<sup>27</sup> Employed food bank visitors represent Canada's working poor, who despite their best efforts, are not able to generate sufficient income to provide enough nutritious food for themselves and their families.<sup>28</sup> A high portion of their income of necessity goes toward non-negotiable costs of housing.<sup>29</sup>

Statistics for food bank usage in York Region indicate that the percentage of visitors whose main source of income is employment increased by 93.5 percent from 2021 to 2024.

**Percentage of food bank clients with employment as main source of income**



In 2024, ongoing inflation further impacted the purchasing power of people who were employed as the cost of living continued to rise.<sup>30</sup> Ontario's minimum wage (\$17.20 per hour in 2024) fell significantly below a living wage in 2024, estimated at \$26.00 per hour for the Greater Toronto Area.<sup>31</sup> While the problem of working poverty is complex, the rising costs of rent and food have been identified as the primary causes of the increase in the hourly amount needed for a living wage to ensure that a day's work covers a day's expenses.<sup>32</sup>

"The proportion of food bank clients whose main source of income comes from employment is now at an all-time high of 18.1%, surpassing last year's 16.7%. Historically, the figure for this group hovered between 10% and 12%, but it began to increase in 2022, when the impacts of rapid inflation took effect. This year, the cumulative impact of inflation has further eroded the purchasing power of people in employment, including many whose incomes are above the official poverty line."—Food Banks Canada



# The Role of Food Assistance Providers

Canada is experiencing unprecedented levels of food insecurity, evidenced by a 90 percent increase in food bank visits in just five years. Considering that food banks are a last resort for people struggling to make ends meet, properly supporting and resourcing food banks is critical.<sup>33</sup> Originally founded in Canada in the 1980s as an emergency solution, food banks have become a permanent fixture in Canada's social landscape.<sup>34</sup> Food banks are being relied upon increasingly to bridge the food insecurity gap, placing enormous strain on often underfunded charitable organizations.

While food banks do not propose to represent a solution to the systemic issues underpinning poverty, they do provide an essential response to people facing severe levels of food insecurity. As such, local and provincial levels of government have been urged to recognize food banks as a core part of Canada's social safety net—and to fund them as such.<sup>35</sup>

Food banks do represent a component of the solution to food insecurity in their redistribution of surplus food that would otherwise end up in landfills. However, according to Second Harvest's 2024 report, avoidable food waste in fact increased in Canada in 2024, even in the face of overwhelmed food charities.<sup>36</sup> The rescue and redistribution of surplus food to support at-risk members of the community is critical both for addressing growing food insecurity and for decreasing food waste, thereby addressing environmental harm caused by surplus food disposal.

Over the past few years, there has been a growing gap between the demand for support and the resources available to food banks. While there was an outpouring of generosity towards food banks during the first few years of the pandemic, and some food banks were able to put some of these added contributions into their reserves in anticipation of the harder times they knew were ahead, no one could have anticipated the sharp increase that is currently being seen.—*Feed Ontario 2024*



# Recommendations

In 2024, Canada experienced the highest recorded rates of food bank usage in history, with Ontario leading the way with over a million people having sought out food assistance. The financial challenges Canada has faced in recent years have worsened levels of poverty and food insecurity, particularly impacting low-income households.<sup>37</sup> The increase in economic precarity must be addressed to bridge the growing gap for low-income households between income and the costs of living and rebuild Canada's social safety net.<sup>38</sup>

The Food Bank of York Region supports the following recommendations to address food insecurity in Ontario.

## **Recommendation 1: Address Income Disparity**

The incidence of a growing percentage of employed food bank users is an indicator that employment does not guarantee that low-income households will not experience food insecurity. Low-income households, which contend with competing demands for limited resources, of necessity will spend less money on food while prioritizing rental costs, resulting in food insecurity.<sup>39</sup>

### **We support the following recommendations, that the province of Ontario:**

- Address the growing gap between income and the cost of living, evidenced by the year-over-year increase in food-insecure households reliant on employment incomes.<sup>40</sup>
- Adopt living wage standards for employment and progressively increase minimum wage to a living wage.<sup>41</sup>
- Invest in income security and address precarious forms of employment (self-employment, gig workers or independent contractors) increasingly relied on by employers.<sup>42</sup>

## **Recommendation 2: Resolve the Affordable Housing Crisis**

Despite the fact that housing is a legislated human right in Canada,<sup>43</sup> 48 percent of Canadians in the lowest income quintile reported being very concerned with their ability to afford rent.<sup>44</sup> The number of food bank visitors that are renters increased by 80 percent from 2020 to 2024, and in 2024,<sup>45</sup> market rentals were the housing type of nearly 70% of food bank users.<sup>46</sup> Ontario has built very little affordable housing for decades, in particular social housing critical to supporting low-income households that cannot afford market rental prices.<sup>47</sup>

### **We support the following recommendations, that the province of Ontario:**

- Address the critical issue of housing unaffordability with public policies that take into account supply constraints and affordability challenges for low-income renters.<sup>48</sup>
- Invest in building more social housing units as outlined by the Ontario Non-profit Housing Association, where rent does not exceed 30 percent of a renter's income.<sup>49</sup>
- Implement rent controls and vacancy controls to protect tenants and preserve affordability.<sup>50</sup>



### **Recommendation 3: Rebuild Social Assistance Programs**

Provincial social assistance is the predominant source of income for people who access food banks. Severe food insecurity is most prevalent among households reliant on social assistance.<sup>51</sup> Social assistance rates are woefully inadequate in Ontario, with financial support through Ontario Works falling 66 percent below the poverty line in 2023, and 53 percent below the disability-adjusted poverty line.<sup>52</sup> Evidence-based studies indicate that increasing income provided by social assistance programs reduces the risk of household food insecurity.<sup>53</sup>

#### **We support the following recommendations:**

- Address the growing gap between income and the cost of living, evidenced by the year-over-year increase in food-insecure households reliant on employment incomes.<sup>54</sup>
- Adopt living wage standards for employment and progressively increase minimum wage to a living wage.<sup>55</sup>
- Invest in income security and address precarious forms of employment (self-employment, gig workers or independent contractors) increasingly relied on by employers.<sup>56</sup>

### **Recommendation 4: Address Avoidable Food Waste**

Despite Canada's commitment to the UN Sustainable Development [Goal 12.3](#) to halve global food waste by 2030, research indicates that avoidable food waste – food that could have been eaten, but was instead landfilled, incinerated or managed as organic waste – increased in 2024.<sup>57</sup> An estimated two million tons of food goes to waste annually in Ontario, which represents a significant environmental burden.<sup>58</sup>

#### **We support the following recommendations:**

- Introduce policy and comprehensive strategies at the provincial level to address food waste.
- Encourage businesses to donate surplus food by creating and expanding tax incentives.<sup>59</sup>
- Address the problem of “best before dates,” often confused with expiration dates, which are not accurate reflections of products' actual shelf life and are responsible for 23 percent of avoidable food waste.<sup>60</sup>



# Conclusions

The precipitous rise in rates of food insecurity in Ontario and Canada-wide since 2021 provide a clear indication that current public policies are leaving low-income families behind. Household food insecurity is a serious public health concern, which impacts significantly on health outcomes for low-income households and represents a burden on already strained healthcare systems.<sup>61</sup> Investment in solutions to address the root causes of poverty at the federal, provincial and local levels is critical—which include affordable housing, adequate social assistance rates, and living wages.

Food banks have been increasingly relied upon to bridge the food insecurity gap, despite shortfalls in funding and food donations. If food banks are to continue to provide effective food relief in the face of the skyrocketing demand, they require access to more funding, more surplus food, and ongoing operations support. To address food insecurity effectively and immediately, a collaborative effort—including government at all levels, charities, and the community—is critical to ensure that no person in our communities is left behind and every person has access to food security.

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The Food Bank of York Region is a registered charitable organization  
(Charitable Registration B/N: 849539473RR0001)