



# THE FOOD BANK OF YORK REGION'S **REPORT ON FOOD INSECURITY 2025**

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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 2025, FBYR served a network of 72 non-profit agencies and community organizations, delivering \$7 million worth of food to over 11,700 households.

### About this Report

The 2025 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, Community and Health Services of York Region, Statistics Canada, PROOF Institute, Public Health Ontario and other sources. This report also provides insights to food insecurity in York Region through an analysis of data gathered in 2025 by the Food Bank of York Region's network of non-profit community partners, utilizing the Link2Feed client intakes system.



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# Introduction

Since 2020, The Food Bank of York Region’s annual food insecurity report has served to document the increase in food insecurity and demand for food aid services in York Region. Food insecurity in York Region continues to mirror levels experienced Ontario- and Canada-wide, and serves as an indicator of the reality that for many, the skyrocketing cost of living—in particular the costs of food and shelter—are not sustainable.

The 2025 York Region Health and Well-Being Review highlighted the alarming impact the ongoing affordability crisis is having on food security for a growing number of residents due to the persistent high cost of living, income insecurity, and housing unaffordability.<sup>1</sup> Seventy-six per cent of residents surveyed for a 2025 York Region Community Opinion Survey reported having to make financial “sacrifices” due to housing costs, with 41 per cent of respondents reducing their grocery budget.<sup>2</sup> Effective public policy at all levels of government are urgently needed to address the root causes of poverty and the primary drivers of food insecurity.<sup>3</sup>

The ongoing affordability crisis has placed enormous strain on food banks and non-profits to bridge the food gap with emergency food assistance. The 2025 Ontario Non-Profit Network report indicated that 85 per cent of non-profits in Ontario continued to report higher service demand, with 22 per cent reporting an inability to meet the growth in demand.<sup>4</sup> If food banks are to continue to provide effective food relief to meet the need of members of the community struggling with food insecurity, they require access to more funding, more surplus food, and ongoing support.

“Behind every food bank visit is a story. A parent skipping meals so their kids can eat. A senior choosing between medication and groceries. A worker juggling multiple jobs and still coming up short at the end of the month. These are not outliers.” — *Food Banks Canada*



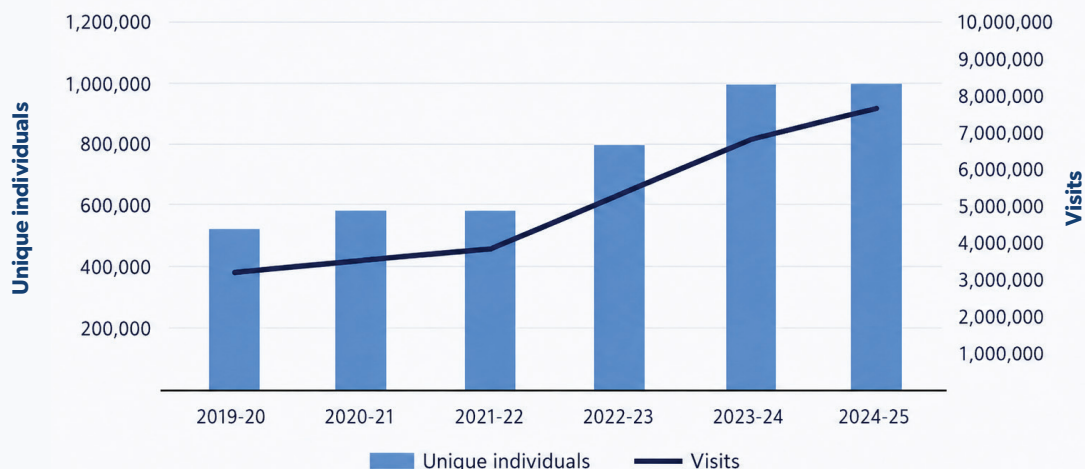
# An Overview of Food Insecurity in 2025

Food insecurity in 2025 continued to mirror trends in motion over the past five years in the aftermath of the global pandemic. Canada-wide, food bank usage increased by 5.2 per cent in 2025, representing a 99.4 per cent increase since 2019. The number of visits to food assistance providers in 2025 was the highest ever at 2.2 million visits in one month.<sup>5</sup>

The situation in Ontario was no less critical, as over 1 million people were unable to afford sufficient food for themselves and their families and had to resort to seeking assistance. While the rate of food bank access increased less in 2025 in Ontario than in previous years, the overall increase over the past five years was 87 per cent.<sup>6</sup> Food banks in the GTA reported similar increases in food bank usage, including York Region.<sup>7</sup>

Not only do these statistics represent the highest food bank usage in Canada and in Ontario in recorded history, but they also provide evidence to the growth in numbers of people in our country who can't make ends meet. Clearly this surge in food bank usage over the past five years is not sustainable.—Nor is the dependence on food banks to address the complex and growing issue of poverty that is affecting more households on a yearly basis.

## Food bank use in Ontario continues to grow



**Figure 1**  
Annual unique individuals and visits to food banks in Ontario.



# Drivers of Food Insecurity

Over the past five years, heightened rates of poverty and food insecurity have been documented Canada-wide, resulting in widespread advocacy for change. Meanwhile the factors identified as driving these have remained virtually unchanged. The increase in costs for housing and food by more than 25 per cent since 2021 have created a sustained affordability crisis for many people in low-income households. Wages have failed to keep pace with the rising cost of living; as a result, food bank usage amongst working people has reached its highest recorded level.<sup>9</sup>

According to Statistics Canada, food prices were 27 per cent higher in 2025 than 2020.<sup>10</sup> While inflation has cooled to some extent, Canada's Food Price report found that food affordability remains a top concern for Canadian households.<sup>11</sup> Nearly 85 per cent of people surveyed reported an increase in their household food expenses in 2025—a trend likely to continue in 2026.<sup>12</sup> The cost of housing, a non-negotiable cost, has increased dramatically since 2021, consuming up to two-thirds of the disposable income of people in the lowest income bracket.<sup>13</sup>

The findings of a recent study on food insecurity suggested that “inadequate and insecure incomes are the primary drivers of household food insecurity.”<sup>14</sup> Households with social assistance as their primary source of income constitute the largest percentage of food bank visitors in York Region, as is the case in Ontario.<sup>15</sup> The income provided by social assistance programs falls well below the poverty line and is woefully short of what is needed for a basic standard of living.

## Low-income Canadians Left Behind

“Our public policies have left low-income Canadians, particularly working age adults and their families, behind for a long time. And now with the record levels of inflation, we can expect food insecurity to worsen if the incomes of vulnerable households don't keep up with the costs of essentials. The cost of this continued inaction is serious harm to people's health and a large burden to our healthcare system... We can reduce food insecurity, but only if we address the inadequacy of incomes in Canada, both from employment and our social safety net for working-age adults.” —*PROOF Institute*<sup>16</sup>

# Food Insecurity in York Region: A Five-year Review

A review of the past five years in York Region reveals disturbing trends of growth in poverty, food insecurity and homelessness. A 2025 York Region Community and Health Services report found that over 230,000 residents of York Region were living below the poverty line, representing 18.4 per cent of the population.<sup>17</sup> The number of people accessing food banks has increased in York Region by an alarming 57 per cent over the past five years.

As previously noted, households reliant on social assistance programs have been the largest demographic to access food assistance in York Region over the past five years. However, food insecurity has expanded its reach to people with employment, as a report published by Statistics Canada highlighted in its findings: "Reliance on employment income is no longer protective against food insecurity."<sup>18</sup> The percentage of food bank visitors in York Region with employment as their main source of income increased by 113 per cent from 2021 to 2025.

Housing affordability in York Region has declined over the past five years, as rents increased by 37 to 48 per cent on average (depending on the municipality) from 2019 to 2024.<sup>19</sup> Homelessness more than doubled in York Region between 2021 to 2024, driven by limited affordable housing, and economic pressures.<sup>20</sup> Newcomers to the region are also at risk of food insecurity, due to the high costs of housing and employment challenges.<sup>21</sup> Forty-two per cent of respondents surveyed at York Region food banks in 2025 were newcomers in Canada for ten years or less. Meanwhile, the percentage of seniors accessing food banks has grown significantly over the past five years from 7.7 per cent to 10.5 per cent.



The Food Bank of York Region's founder and CEO Alex Bilotta stated: "More and more people are looking to food banks to help them make ends meet," he said. "We're not the solution to food insecurity. The problem is that people don't have enough money to buy their own food." — [York Region Food Banks Strained by Soaring Food Insecurity](#), York Region, Dec 01, 2025

# 2025 York Region Food Program Access

The following statistics have been collected from The Food Bank of York Region's network of 72 food assistance providers, which include municipal food banks, local food pantries, school food pantries, shelters, and other food assistance providers in York Region. (See current listing of [FBYR's community partners](#).) However, these are not the full picture, considering that a 2019 study found that only 21.1 per cent of food-insecure households reported using food banks.<sup>22</sup> Many people struggling with food insecurity rely on credit, friends, family, or other charities, or skip meals altogether.<sup>23</sup>

While these statistics cannot provide a complete picture of the state of food insecurity in York Region, they offer insights regarding the demographics of individuals and households accessing food assistance services in 2025.

## Food Program Access in York Region by Municipality

Municipality	Individuals Served	Households Served
Aurora	2,332	808
East Gwillimbury	763	194
Georgina	3,116	1,247
King	503	244
Markham	6,205	2,035
Newmarket	9,215	2,205
Richmond Hill	8,514	3,414
Vaughan	4,181	1,562
<b>Totals</b>	<b>34,829</b>	<b>11,709</b>

## Statistics For Individuals Accessing Food Services



### Age:

Based on 29,920 respondents

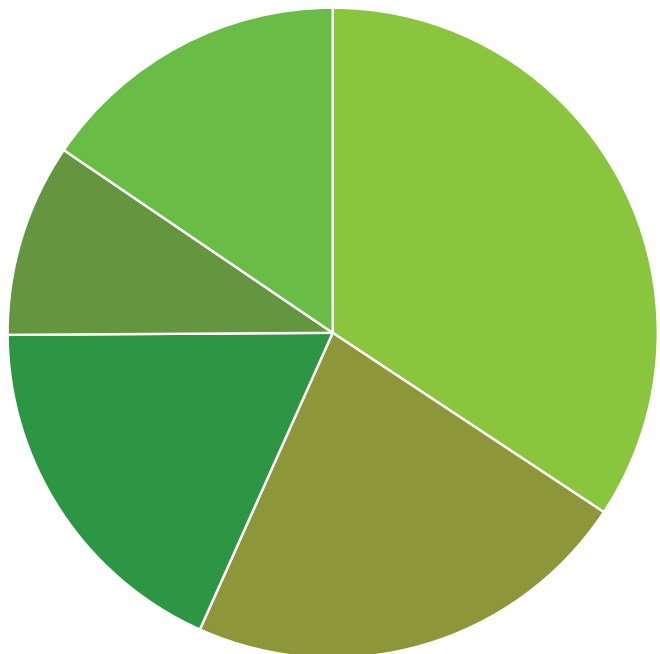
0-17 years old	<b>29.3%</b>
18-30 years old	<b>15.7%</b>
31-64 years old	<b>44.5%</b>
65+ years old	<b>10.5%</b>



### Gender:

Based on 20,973 respondents

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



### Household Demographics:

Based on responses from 11,155 households

<span style="color: #76b82a;">■</span> Single Person Households	<b>34.1%</b>
<span style="color: #8e9138;">■</span> Two Parents	<b>24%</b>
<span style="color: #2e8b57;">■</span> Single Parents	<b>17.3%</b>
<span style="color: #228b22;">■</span> Couples with no Children	<b>9.1%</b>
<span style="color: #32cd32;">■</span> Other	<b>15.5%</b>



### Primary Income by Household:

Respondents represent 7,323 households

Government Benefits*	<b>36%</b>	Pension/OAS	<b>11.4%</b>
Employee Income	<b>23%</b>	Other	<b>9.7%</b>
No Income	<b>19.9%</b>		

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



### Housing Status:

Respondents represent 7,769 households

Private Rental	<b>72.9%</b>	Group Home/Shelter	<b>1.7%</b>
Social Housing Rental	<b>13.6%</b>	Unhoused	<b>0.7%</b>
Own Home	<b>5.2%</b>	Other	<b>5.9%</b>

# Housing Affordability: An Ongoing Crisis

In 2019, the Canadian government enacted the National Housing Strategy Act, which recognized that adequate housing is a fundamental human right affirmed in international law, and essential to a person's inherent dignity and well-being.<sup>24</sup> According to the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, housing is considered affordable when it costs less than 30% of a household's pre-tax income.<sup>25</sup> However, this threshold is often impossible to meet for those living below Ontario's poverty line.

According to a 2025 study, 30 per cent of Canadians spend over 50 per cent of their income on rent, while 12 per cent spend 70 per cent on rent.<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile 22 per cent of Toronto food bank clients surveyed reported spending their entire income on housing—leaving nothing for essentials such as food, clothing, or transit.<sup>27</sup>

Market rentals represent on average 76 per cent of housing arrangements of food bank clients in Ontario, providing clear evidence to the impact of unaffordable housing on low-income households.<sup>28</sup> York Region experienced a 49 per cent increase in the subsidized housing waitlist between 2022 and 2025,<sup>29</sup> while known homelessness increased in Ontario by 49 per cent from 2021 to 2025.<sup>30</sup>

A recent study suggested that food bank usage is a potential indicator of eventual homelessness, and heightened levels of food bank usage are often a predictor of increased homelessness.<sup>31</sup>

"Homelessness in York Region is growing and becoming more visible. Behind every number is a real person, a family, a senior or a young person who cannot find a home they can afford. It is deeply troubling, but it is solvable if we create more affordable homes... The mission is simple — protect affordable housing and create homes that will always stay affordable so people in the York Region community always have a dignified place they can afford to live."<sup>32</sup> —*Emmy Kelly, COO Blue Door*





# The Income Gap: Minimum Wage versus Living Wage

Food insecurity in Canada, as has often been stated, is not about a shortage of food but is primarily a problem of inadequate income.<sup>33</sup> Ontario is experiencing growing levels of food insecurity amongst households with employment income, with 23 per cent of food bank clients in 2025 reporting employment as their primary source of income.<sup>34</sup> This percentage has more than doubled since 2020, when 10 per cent of food bank clients cited employment as their primary source of income.

The Ontario Living Wage Network (OLN) provides annual living wage rates based on real costs of living across the province to calculate the hourly wage a worker needs to earn to cover basic expenses. Their 2025 calculations show average living wages in Ontario ranging in different regions from \$21.05 to \$27.20 per hour in the Greater Toronto Area.<sup>35</sup> According to these calculations, there is nowhere in Ontario where someone earning the current minimum wage at \$17.60 per hour could afford the basic costs of living, in particular in the Greater Toronto Area.<sup>36</sup> This disparity is even more visible in rates for social assistance, which fall well below the poverty line and in many cases do not provide for basic costs of living.<sup>37</sup>

## An Entrenched Crisis

The emergency crisis is becoming entrenched. Employment and education no longer protect against food insecurity, as many clients balance multiple jobs and hold post-secondary degrees but still cannot afford the food they need. ... Emergency food programs are shouldering a crisis that is becoming permanent. Charity alone cannot and should not be the solution to poverty and food insecurity. Every visit to a food bank is a stark reminder that policies at all levels of government are falling short. The social safety net that once protected us has been weakened, leaving our friends, neighbours, coworkers, and classmates behind.—[Who's Hungry Report 2025](#)

# Recommendations

For the sixth consecutive year, in 2025 Canada reported historic rates of food bank use, with Ontario at the forefront with more than 1 million people turning to emergency food support nearly nine million times.<sup>38</sup> Food banks in Toronto reported over 4.1 million food bank visits in the past year alone, an ominous sign that this crisis is becoming entrenched.<sup>39</sup> Food insecurity is a symptom of poverty; the root causes of the economic precarity and income inadequacy it represents must be addressed, and a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy implemented to bridge the gap between income and the cost of living and to rebuild the social safety net.

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



## Recommendation 1: Take Measurable Steps to Tackle Poverty at its Roots

Ontario's 2020–2025 poverty reduction strategy came under assessment in 2025, which included the solicitation of feedback from non-profits and other sectors to develop the next strategy.<sup>40</sup> The assessment from various sectors indicated that a more comprehensive strategy was needed. Maytree noted: "Addressing poverty requires a whole-of-government approach."<sup>41</sup> The Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives concluded that the next strategy must meet our current societal moment by providing "a strengthened social safety net and clear, time-bound targets that will move—and keep—people out of poverty."<sup>42</sup>

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

- Acknowledge the systemic causes of poverty and develop a strategy to address these, with transparent, measurable goals and supporting indicators for reducing poverty.<sup>43</sup>
- Address the growing disparity between minimum wage and cost of living in Ontario, and take steps to progressively increase minimum wage to a living wage.<sup>44</sup>
- Acknowledge the growth in household food insecurity in Ontario and set measurable targets to reduce food insecurity.<sup>45</sup>

## Recommendation 2: Reform Social Assistance Programs

Financial support provided through social assistance in Ontario continued to fall far below the poverty line in 2025.<sup>46</sup> Households reliant on social assistance are the group that experiences the highest levels of food insecurity.<sup>47</sup> In 2025, social assistance was the primary source of income for 31.9 per cent of food bank clients in Ontario.<sup>48</sup> This percentage was higher in Toronto (34 per cent) and in York Region at 36 per cent.<sup>49</sup> Studies published in 2025 found that increasing income provided by social assistance programs has proven to be effective in reducing household food insecurity.<sup>50</sup>

### We support the following recommendations:

- Acknowledge the inadequacy of current social assistance benefits and work to reform social assistance programs and rebuild Canada's social safety net.<sup>51</sup>
- Increase social assistance rates to align with the cost of living and index these to inflation annually to ensure they continue to keep pace with the rising cost of living.<sup>52</sup>
- Ensure income support rates are benchmarked at or above Ontario's official poverty line.<sup>53</sup>

## Recommendation 3: Address the Housing Affordability Crisis

Housing affordability continues to be noted as one of the critical drivers of poverty and food insecurity in Canada. Food Banks Canada reported that 83 per cent of food banks in 2025 identified the need for more affordable housing as the single most important policy.<sup>54</sup> Although rental affordability improved slightly in 2025, average rents for all tenants rose, while housing affordability remained low.<sup>55</sup> According to Statistics Canada, rent prices have risen 28.5% since 2020.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, known homelessness has increased in Ontario by nearly fifty per cent from 2021 to 2025.<sup>57</sup> While subsidized and social housing are essential for addressing chronic housing insecurity, the demand far exceeds supply.<sup>58</sup>

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

- Take action to address the critical issue of housing unaffordability with public policies that take into account the affordability challenges for low-income renters.<sup>59</sup>
- Invest in building permanently affordable and social housing, where affordable housing is consistently defined as rent that does not exceed 30 per cent of a renter's income.<sup>60</sup>
- Protect rental affordability by implementing rent controls to support and protect tenants.<sup>61</sup>





#### **Recommendation 4:** Increase support for the food bank sector

Over the past five years, the food insecurity crisis has led to an increased demand for food aid services for people struggling to put food on the table. Food banks play a vital role in providing immediate food assistance, and in their distribution of surplus food that would otherwise end up in landfills. Food banks are working hard to meet the need, but they cannot do it on their own. Support for the food bank sector is critical to ensure that everyone has access to the daily food they need to for themselves and their families to thrive.

#### **We recommend that:**

- The role of food banks in providing emergency relief be acknowledged and supported as an important measure to address food insecurity
- Local and provincial government provide support to the emergency food assistance sector to equip them to respond to the surge in demand for food assistance.
- Government at all levels support food rescue programs to ensure that surplus food is makes its way to food-insecure households through food bank services.

## **Conclusions**

The sustained affordability crisis continued to impact a growing number of low-income households and families in 2025. The heightened rates of food insecurity and food bank use—both in Ontario and Canada—serve as foreboding indicators that the rising cost of living is making life unaffordable for many people in our communities. Although inflation was relatively stable in 2025, income has not kept pace with the cumulative rise in costs of housing and food over the past four years. The need for measurable solutions to address the root causes of poverty is becoming increasingly critical.

The National Advisory Council on Poverty noted that non-profit organizations providing essential services such as food assistance are overextended and struggling with high demand and not enough funding, as they carry the weight of providing essential supports to people experiencing poverty.<sup>62</sup> A targeted effort—involving all levels of government—is required to effectively address food insecurity and ensure that no one in our communities is left behind.

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