



THE FOOD BANK OF YORK REGION'S
**REPORT ON FOOD
INSECURITY 2022**



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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 local food pantries, schools, community housing, shelters and other non-profit agencies that provide meals and food in their programs. In 2022, FBYR served a network of 88 non-profit agencies and community organizations, delivering \$6.2 million worth of perishable and non-perishable food. Our network provided food services to 30,000+ individuals in 2022, an increase of 25% from 2021.

About this Report

The 2022 Food Bank of York Region's Report on Hunger provides an analysis on the state of food insecurity in York Region based on numerous sources and surveys. This report reflects findings published by Statistics Canada, Food Banks Canada, Feed Ontario, Who's Hungry in 2022, and Second Harvest reports. This report also provides insights to food insecurity in York Region through an analysis of data gathered in 2022 by the Food Bank of York Region's network of non-profit community partners, utilizing the Link2Feed client intakes system.



Our Affiliations:



Supported by **Regional Municipality of York**



Member of **Feed Ontario**



Affiliate Member of **Food Banks Canada**

A Profile of Food Insecurity in 2022

Food insecurity, defined as the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints, has serious implications for people's health and wellbeing beyond just poor nutrition and diet. It has been deemed a public health crisis that negatively impacts people's physical, mental, and social health.¹

From April 2021 to April 2022, the price of food rose by 9.7 percent. In response to a Statistics Canada 2022 survey question regarding which area they were most affected by rising prices during the previous six months, the response of 43 percent of Canadians was food.²

Research conducted by Food Banks Canada indicated that food bank usage increased by 15 percent in Canada in 2022, representing the highest year-over-year increase since the aftermath of the 2008 recession.³ Feed Ontario reported that by March 2022, food bank usage had increased a cumulative total of 42 percent in Ontario over the previous three years.⁴ This marks the sixth consecutive year that food bank use has increased in Ontario—a very concerning trend.

This rise in food insecurity portends to continue throughout 2023 and beyond. According to Canada's Food Price Report 2023, "Canadians will continue to feel the effects of high food inflation, and food insecurity/affordability will be a big issue with rising food prices."⁵



The current trend of food insecurity in 2022 has been traced to:

- 1. Rising costs of food and rent and lack of affordable housing:** This has placed immense pressure on low-income households, leaving them vulnerable to food insecurity.⁶
- 2. Income inequality:** By June 2022, income inequality had reached an all-time high since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, with average disposable income declining by 5.7 percent for households with the lowest income.⁷ The real wages of two-thirds of employees have decreased, when adjusted for inflation.⁸
- 3. Insufficient Social Assistance:** While the cost of living has been rising year-over-year from 2020 to 2022, provincial social assistance rates have not kept pace. Food bank data for 2022 indicates that nearly two out of three people who access food banks are social assistance recipients, with 32.5 percent referencing Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and 26 percent Ontario Works as their primary source of income.⁹
- 4. Precarious and Low-Wage Work:** Despite an unemployment rate of 5.3 percent in 2022, noted as the lowest on record since 1976,¹⁰ food bank visits were the highest on record. People with low or minimum wage work and precarious contract work represent 14.1 percent of food bank users.¹¹

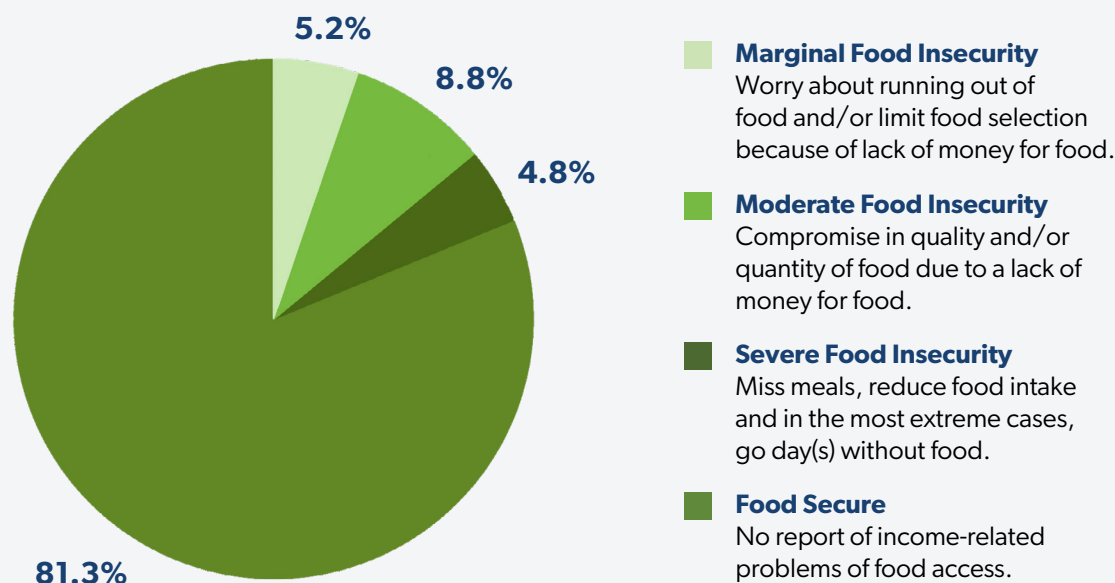
"To say that it's been a challenging year for Canadians at the grocery store would be an understatement," says Dr. Sylvain Charlebois, project lead and Director of the Agri-Food Analytics Lab at Dalhousie University.¹²

How is Food Security Measured?

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.¹³ Statistics Canada monitors the prevalence and severity of household food insecurity through its Canadian Income Survey.

Food insecurity, as it is measured in Canada, addresses a spectrum ranging from concerns about running out of food or lacking money to purchase food and having to skip meals and going hungry, and in extreme cases, to not being able to eat for whole days.¹⁴ Hunger is often mistaken for food insecurity, but they are not one and the same. Food banks serve people who are the most food insecure.

A Picture of Food Insecurity in Ontario in 2022



[Statistics published in "Household Food Insecurity Estimates from the Canadian Income Survey: Ontario 2019-2022," Public Health Ontario¹⁵]



Food Insecurity and Children

In their latest research, Food Banks Canada reported that in 2022 children represented 33 percent of people serviced by food banks. This indicates a disproportionate representation of children in food banks, given that children represent only 20 percent of the population.¹⁶ The higher costs related to raising a family due to inflation are rendering children vulnerable to poverty and hunger.

Food insecurity impacts children's wellbeing, and social and academic development. Experiencing food insecurity at an early age is associated with hyperactivity, difficulty concentrating and inattention. Food insecurity has been linked to lower test scores at school, trouble interacting with peers, poor health and higher prevalence of illness.¹⁷

It is critical to ensure that school-age children have sufficient access to nutritious food that will promote their development. School food programs have been identified as promising strategies for fostering children's healthy development and access to nutritional food.¹⁸ However, Canada is the only G7 country that relies on local community organizations and programs to provide free and subsidized meals and snacks to kids.¹⁹

The Food Bank of York Region launched its School Food Pantry Program in late 2022 to support food pantry programs in schools across York Region. This program currently supports school food pantries in 23 schools across York Region, providing school-safe, fresh and nutritious food for students facing food insecurity.

Inflation, the increasing number of families relying on low-wage work, and the exorbitant cost of housing in York Region means more families, many who have never experienced food insecurity before, are now relying on help from others.

We welcome the support of the Food Bank of York Region to establish supports in our schools that contribute to food security for students and families," said Yvonne Kelly, Community and Partnership Developer with York Region District School Board (YRDSB)."

— [Food Bank of York Region expands into schools](#), Jennifer McLaughlin, Markham Review, October 13, 2023.

Food Insecurity in York Region

According to the 2021 Census, despite overall growth in York Region's economy, an average of 8.8 percent of households in the region were low-income.²⁰ Public Health Ontario's report estimated that food insecurity increased in the region from 11.5 percent in 2019 to 16.1 percent in 2022, representing a concerning upward trend in food insecurity.²¹

The rates of inflation in 2022 and rising costs of rent and food vastly outpaced increases in income for low-income households in York Region, which impacts over 102,225 residents.²² A study on how price hikes have affected the most financially vulnerable found that more than six in ten Canadians (63 percent) living in the bottom income quintile were very concerned about the impact of rising prices on their ability to meet day-to-day expenses.²³

In 2019, the majority of households within the bottom income quintile were already spending more than 50 percent of their income on rent and utilities. The hefty increase in food, rent, and fuel prices sustained in 2022 meant that a much larger proportion of their income had to be used to pay for these essential items.²⁴

Minimum Wage Falls Well Below A Living Wage



No Money for Food is...Cent\$less

When a family or someone struggles to put food on the table, it is a sign of over-all deprivation due to inadequate or unstable incomes... According to the [United Nations Human Right Council](#), all humans have the right to adequate food in socially dignified ways. In a country as rich as Canada, everyone should be able to buy enough food."

- [No Money for Food is... Cent\\$less](#), Ontario Dietitians in Public Health



York Region Food Program Access in 2022

The Food Bank of York Region (FBYR) is committed to alleviating severe food insecurity for York Region's most vulnerable residents in collaboration with our network of community organizations that provide food and meals in their programs. We provide a central hub to distribute healthy surplus food to 80+/- non-profit organizations that provide food services to at-risk residents. (See FBYR's [community partners](#) listed on our website.)

The statistics that follow have been collected from the food banks and meal providers of the network that FBYR partnered with in 2022, as well as recipients of FBYR's COVID Home Delivery Program, which ended in August 2022. These statistics provide some insights regarding the state of food insecurity in York Region and the demographics of individuals accessing food assistance services.

Statistics For Individuals Accessing Food Services



Gender:

Based on 14,927 respondents

Male	43.2%
Female	56.75%
Other	.05%



Age:

Based on 21,927 respondents

0-17 years old	31.2%
18-30 years old	16.3%
31-64 years old	42%
65+ years old	10.5%

Note: While the percentages for children and adults from 18-64 and children have sustained little change from 2021 to 2022, the percentage of seniors accessing food services grew by 2.5 percent]



Primary Income By Household:

Respondents represent 5,561 households

Government Benefits*	39.4%**	Pension/OAS	14.1%
No Income	20%	Other	11%
Employee Income	15.5%		

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

**44.6% of benefits recipients receive disability benefits



Housing Status:

Respondents represent 3,863 households

Private Rental	96%	On the Street	0.2%
Social Housing	0.8%	Group Home/Shelter	1.2%
Own Home	1%	Band Owned	0.5%
Rooming House	0.9%	Other	0.3%

Note: There was a significant rise in people in private rentals who accessed food services from 61.2% in 2021 to 96% in 2022.

Food Bank Access in York Region by Municipality

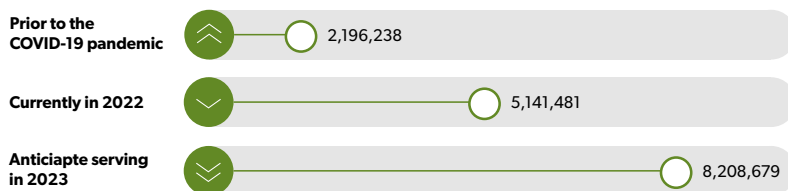
The following statistics represent 75 food banks, food pantries, homeless and women's shelters, and other non-profit agencies that provide meals and food to food-insecure individuals in York Region.

Municipality	Unique Individuals Served	Adults Served	Children Served	Seniors Served	Households Served
Aurora	1,675	955	575	145	569
East Gwillimbury	1,386	813	475	98	147
Georgina	2,950	1,849	827	274	1,051
King	56	53	1	2	56
Markham	3,848	2,315	1,158	375	1,305
Newmarket	10,137	8,362	1,364	411	1,860
Richmond Hill	5,067	3,204	1,381	482	2,140
Vaughan	5,311	3,052	1,628	631	1,960
Whitchurch-Stouffville	12	4	7	1	2
Totals	30,442	20,607	7,416	2,419	9,090

Food Rescue and Distribution to Bridge the Food Insecurity Gap

A survey conducted by Second Harvest of more than 1,300 non-profit organizations in December 2022 found that the demand on food distribution programs had continued to increase at a rapid pace. According to this research, the number of people seeking food assistance increased by 134 percent in 2022. To meet the future need, 70 percent of the agencies surveyed stated that they need both increased food donations and financial support.²⁶

Number of People Served Per Month



[Courtesy of Second Harvest, "[Canada Needs a New Year's Resolution for Food Insecurity](#)", 2022]

The rescue and distribution of surplus food that would otherwise go to waste provides immediate, effective, and low-cost emergency relief for food insecurity. A 2022 report indicated that 96 percent of the 3.2 million tonnes of surplus edible food produced by Canada's food industry each year is not rescued and redistributed for human consumption.²⁷ The work of food assistance programs continues to play a critical role in addressing heightened food insecurity and fulfilling Canada's commitment to the UN Sustainable Development [Goal 12.3](#) to halve global food waste by 2030.²⁸

Food Security of the Most Vulnerable

"While the cost of living increases, the charitable food sector is facing unprecedented demand for services and new challenges with funding. In addition to increasing demand, over the last several months, many organizations have seen a major reduction in donations and funding opportunities. ...

Despite financial cuts, organizations continue to pull off amazing feats — and risk further burnout — as staff and volunteers try to produce more with less time, to meet the growing need of the community members to access emergency food services. But this is not sustainable.

Food organizations are susceptible to fluctuations in donations and volunteer capacity, which means the food security of our community's most vulnerable members are at the mercy of donated time, resources and labour. If all levels of government are relying on the charitable food sector to provide food to communities, instead of providing income-based solutions, they need to support the organizations that are on the ground providing food services.

- [Food security of most vulnerable at the mercy of donations, resources,](#) Morgan Sage, YorkRegion.com, May 15 2023.



Recommendations

Food insecurity has continued to increase at alarming rates throughout Ontario, as the statistics presented in this report indicate. Ongoing inflation and hikes in rent and food costs in 2021 and 2022 are impacting individuals and households in the lowest income quintile, resulting in a growing percentage of people who report experiencing food insecurity. In order to address the growing gap between income and the cost of living, the Food Bank of York Region proposes the following recommendations.

Recommendation 1: Address the housing affordability crisis

While there are many factors that pressure Canadians to seek food assistance, one of the most pressing is the increasingly high cost of housing.²⁹ In both 2021 and 2022, rental tenants represented 86 percent of all food bank users in Ontario.³⁰ The Rental Housing Index reported that people within the lowest income bracket spent over 56 percent of their income on average on rent and utilities in 2022.³¹ Two-thirds of food bank visitors surveyed in Ontario reported having less than \$100 left after paying their housing costs each month.³²

We support the following recommendations of Food Banks Canada, Feed Ontario and the Who's Hungry in 2022 report, that the province of Ontario:

- Build and introduce new affordable housing units and work to make the existing market more affordable.³³
- Invest in social housing as outlined in the costed plan of the Ontario Non-profit Housing Association, including 69,000 affordable rental homes and 30,000 new supportive housing units.³⁴
- Ensure that 300,000 of the 1.5 million homes the provincial government plans to build over the next ten years are permanently affordable and supportive homes.³⁵



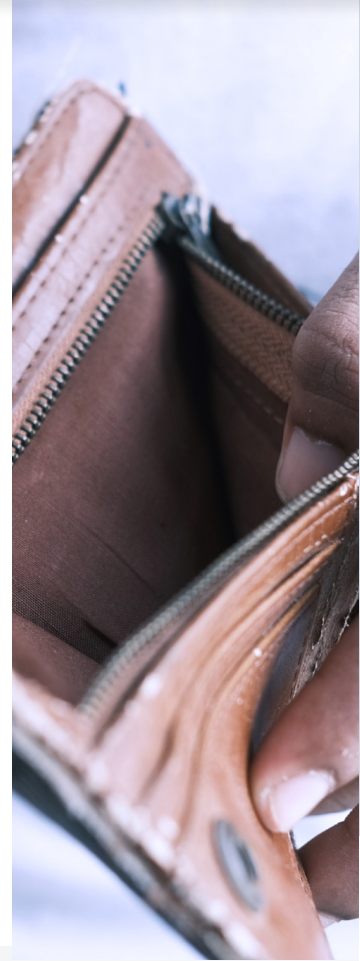
Recommendation 2:

Address the disparity between income and the cost of living

Research on food insecurity indicates that Canada's public policies have failed to address the needs of low-income Canadians, both those who are recipients of social assistance, and low-income working age adults and their families.³⁶ The financial support provided through Ontario's social assistance programs have not kept pace with inflation and price hikes for food and housing. Nor does the current minimum wage ensure food security for low-wage, short-term or precarious workers, given the high costs of living.

We support the following recommendations of Feed Ontario, Food Banks Canada, and PROOF Institute, that the province of Ontario:

- Address the inadequacy of wages in Canada, given that the majority of food-insecure households are in the workforce.³⁷
- Progressively increase minimum wage to a living wage.³⁸
- Improve social assistance by increasing the financial support provided through Ontario's social assistance programs.³⁹



Recommendation 3:

Support the food assistance sector

Studies of food insecurity often highlight the fact that food assistance services cannot provide end solutions to the growing issue of food insecurity.⁴⁰ Long-term solutions based on increase in income and governments supports are reiterated, while yet another year goes by where thousands more people face severe food insecurity. Food banks have been overwhelmed by the surge in demand and have become increasingly relied upon to subsidize government policy changes, budget cuts and inadequate social support programs.⁴¹ Food banks and other food providers need support to continue to provide a critical safety net for people experiencing food poverty.

We recommend that:

- Government at all levels support the emergency food sector to address severe food insecurity.
- The critical role that Food Banks play in providing emergency relief be acknowledged and publicly supported as an important measure to bridge the food insecurity gap.
- Government at all levels support food rescue programs and educate corporations to recycle surplus food through food assistance programs.



Conclusions

The statistics referenced in this report from numerous surveys, reports, and demographics of food bank users across Ontario provide concerning evidence of a significant increase in food insecurity and growth in the number of households accessing food assistance services. This increase has placed significant pressure on food assistance providers to expand their services and procure more funding and food to meet the need. Many programs, including the Food Bank of York Region's, have grown by over 100 percent since the onset of Covid-19 in 2020, and continue to grow.

The Food Bank of York Region and the many food banks and pantries and food assistance programs we partner with in the region work tirelessly to ensure that people facing food insecurity in our region have sufficient access to food. While it is evident that food assistance programs do not represent the end solution to food insecurity, they are critical to address people's immediate needs. We and our network of food providers are committed to continue to distributing food aid to bridge the food insecurity gap.

The systemic causes of the rapid increase of food insecurity have yet to be addressed, including the rising costs of food and rent, the lack of affordable housing, insufficient social assistance programs, and income inequality. It is essential that food insecurity and poverty and their underlying causes, are made a top priority by government at all levels. Food bank and food assistance services must be supported and bolstered to meet the increased demand for immediate food aid. A collaborative effort is critical to reduce poverty and food insecurity, and to ensure that all residents of York Region have access to food security, which is foundational to health and quality of life.

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