

## ***HUNGER COUNT 1998***

The main purpose of the HungerCount survey is to determine the number of people assisted by food banks throughout Canada. Therefore, the survey also provides a perspective on hunger in Canada.

The survey provides other information as well, including the level and type of assistance rendered by food banks, income sources of the households assisted, and additional information pertaining to the operation of food banks across the country.

The report presents the results of HungerCount 98. The main highlights of the study are as follows:

- 716,496 people were assisted with emergency food hampers (i.e., in grocery programs) in March 1998
- the number of people assisted with emergency food hampers increased by 5.4% since last year, and doubled (i.e. grew by 118%) since 1999
- the number of people assisted in hamper programs represents 2.4% of Canada's population; in general, rates of food bank use are highest in Eastern Canada and lowest in the West
- children account for 41.5% of all people assisted in emergency hamper programs
- food banks also served 1,686,331 prepared meals to people in need
- approximately three-quarters of households receive income from social assistance, while only 10% receive employment income

## ***SURVEY OUTLINE***

The Canadian Association of Food Banks (CAFB) mailed the HungerCount questionnaire to 625 food banks throughout Canada in February 1998. Subsequently, the CAFB and provincial coordinators initiated follow-up contact with most food banks, especially those located in small communities. Each food bank was requested to provide the following information for the month of March 1998:

- their location, area served and weekly or monthly hours of operation
- the number of affiliated or member food banks
- the number of adults, children, and households assisted
- the average frequency of food bank use by the households assisted

- the number of meals served (if the food bank runs a meal program)
- the amount of food distributed
- the proportion of households receiving income from various sources

Of the 625 food banks contacted, 394 (or 63%) returned a useable response, and the provincial coordinators supplied firm estimates for another 68 food banks. Therefore, as Table 1 shows, the survey yielded data from 463 food banks (i.e., a response rate of 74%)<sup>i</sup>

Some food banks, such as Daily Bread Food Bank (Toronto) and Moisson Montreal are hubs for a number of member agencies or affiliates. These central agencies responded to the questionnaire on behalf of their members. Consequently the 462 food banks included in this HungerCount represent an additional 1678 agencies. This amounts to a grand total of 2141 food banks covered by HungerCount 98.

**TABLE 1- Food Banks in HungerCount 98**

Province	Number of Food Banks	Provincial Share (%)	Food Banks Hamper Programs	Food Banks w/ Member Agencies	Number of members or affiliates
British Columbia (W)	86	20	86	6	111
Alberta (W)	74	17.2	74	2	179
Saskatchewan (W)	17	3.9	17	0	0
Manitoba (W)	17	3.9	16	2	240
Ontario	149	33.9	140	8	337
Quebec	31	n/a	23	12	778
New Brunswick (E)	35	8.1	34	3	24
PEI (E)	4	0.9	4	1	2
Nova Scotia (E)	37	8.6	36	1	2
Newfoundland (E)*	12	2.8	12	1	5
Yukon (N)	2	0.5	2	0	0
Northwest Territories (N)	1	0.2	1	0	0
TOTAL	462	100%	445	36	1,678

n/a- in Quebec, this calculation would have been misleading because the province is dominated by a small number of large food bank operations

\*there are perhaps twice as many food banks in Newfoundland. However, the provincial coordinator submitted a pooled total for many of the small agencies

### ***FOOD BANK PROFILE***

Quebec is distinguished by its high proportion of agencies that operate through a network of members and affiliates, and the inordinately large number of agencies that are members of a central hub (Table 1). Therefore, Quebec alone is dominated by a small number of large food bank operations.

However, excluding Quebec, a clear regional pattern in the distribution of food banks emerges. Eastern Canada has a very high concentration of food banks compared to Ontario and the west. Eastern Canada accounts for 20% of all food banks even though only 10% of the population reside there (Tables 1 and 2). Conversely, Ontario accounts for almost half of the population but only a third of all food banks. Regional differences in unemployment rates (Table 2) appear to influence this uneven distribution of food banks relative to population: the unemployment rate in Eastern Canada is about twice as high as in Ontario and the west (i.e., around 13 to 14% compared to approximately 7% in the West and 7.6% in Ontario)

Almost all food banks in Canada offer grocery (hamper) programs (Table 1). However, except for BC, Quebec, and PEI, most grocery programs serve a relatively small clientele, and operate outside of a network of members agencies. Meal programs are similarly small: half of all programs serve less than 2000 meals per month. Most food banks also operate on a part-time schedule: 61% are open to the public for less than 60 hours per month.

Despite their small size, food banks distribute an impressive quantity of food. Only 171 food banks (or 38%) supplied firm data on the quantity of food distributed a total 3.5 million kg of groceries. In addition, in the food banks that offer meal programs, 1.7 million prepared meals were served.

## ***PEOPLE ASSISTED IN GROCERY PROGRAMS***

### ***Provincial Comparisons***

In March 1998, *Canadian food banks assisted 716,496 persons*, or 2.4 % of Canada's population,<sup>ii</sup> through emergency hamper programs. Together, Ontario and Quebec account for 67% of all food recipients, which is only marginally higher than their share of the country's population (62.2%).

However, the provinces of Newfoundland, PEI, Nova Scotia, and Manitoba all have relatively *high rates of food bank use* (i.e., close to or exceeding 3% of the provincial population), while rates are lower in BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, the Yukon, and NWT.

In general, economic wellbeing appears to influence the demand for emergency food assistance (and the extent of hunger). Specifically, variations in rates of food bank use reflect provincial unemployment levels. There are two notable exceptions to this trend-Manitoba (high rate of food bank use in relation to unemployment) and New Brunswick (low rate of food bank use in relation to unemployment). Nonetheless, the Eastern provinces' higher rates of food bank use, and higher concentration of food banks as well, are consistent with their elevated unemployment rates.

*Children* constitute a substantial share of food recipients.<sup>iii</sup> For the country as a whole, 41.5% of food recipients are children even though children account for only a quarter of Canada's population. Among the provinces and territories, only in the Yukon is the

proportion of children among food recipients more or less equivalent to the proportion of children in the provincial/territorial population.

Children are especially over-represented among food recipients in Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Newfoundland in particular. However, only two provinces/territories average more than two children per household assisted by the food banks, and the average household varies between two and three persons. This suggests that food recipients generally comprise a relatively large proportion of families with one or two children (probably a high concentration of single parents as well), rather than families with several children. This seems to be particularly the case in Saskatchewan. Newfoundland and the NWT are exceptions to this trend- households include larger numbers of children which inflate the overall average household size.

Social assistance is the *main source of income* for most households assisted by grocery programs. Relatively few households derive income from employment, although food banks commented that the proportion of 'working poor' is increasing. In other words, food recipients are drawn from low-income households. This indicates that the level of hunger which culminates in assistance from a food bank is a function of insufficient and insecure income. BC and Newfoundland have the highest proportions of households receiving social assistance and the lowest proportions of households receiving employment income. At the other extreme, food banks in Alberta serve the smallest proportion of social assistance households and close to the highest proportion of households receiving income from employment.

Grocery programs provide emergency assistance to people in need. They are not intended to ensure that people are adequately fed or have sufficient resources to be free from hunger. In other words, they are not a substitute for public policy. Food banks also operate under a severe resource restraint – they generally cannot afford to acquire or distribute more food than they now do. For several reasons, and despite a popular misconception, *the amount of food distributed to a individual households is not large*. On average, households receive a food hamper once a month, with enough groceries for five days. In fact, one-third of food banks normally provide recipients with enough groceries for three days or less in a 30 to 60 day period.

Across the regions of Canada, rates of food bank use decline from east to west: the rate of food bank use in Eastern Canada is more than double the rate in BC. This pattern clearly reflects a similar distribution of unemployment across the country.

On average, households assisted by food banks in Eastern Canada are one and a half times larger than those in Ontario and Western Canada, and the number of children per household differs by a similar magnitude. In other words, households are larger in Eastern Canada because they contain more children. However, the proportion of children among food bank recipients is roughly the same in all regions of the country – 38% in the North, 40% in the West, 42.5% in Ontario, and 41% in the East. These patterns suggest that food recipients in Ontario and Western Canada comprise relatively large proportions of childless households with one or two adults, and single parents with one or two

children. Conversely, two-parent families with one or two children (rather than single-parent families) are perhaps more prevalent in Eastern Canada and the North than in the other regions.

**TABLE 3 Total number of people assisted by food banks**

Province	Total Assisted*	Prov. Share (%)	Households	Adults	Children	Total Assisted+	Number of food banks reporting
BC	64,587	9.01	24,56	27,665	17,374	45,039	48
Alberta	36,479	5.09	12,452	21,669	13,873	35,572	66
Saskatchewan	17,345	2.43	6,902	8,769	8,223	17,019	14
Manitoba	32,778	4.57	17,352	19,538	13,130	32,668	15
Ontario	290,925	40.60	78,972	93,003	68,682	161,685	115
Quebec	188,440	26.30	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	(6)
New Brunswick	19,008	2.65	6,281	10,282	5,703	15,985	31
PEI	4,246	0.59	1,637	2,365	1,881	4,246	4
Nova Scotia	26,190	3.66	10,633	15,825	10,365	26,190	34
Newfoundland	35,871	5.01	6,853	18,968	14,903	33,871	12
Yukon	384	0.05	180	263	121	384	2
NWT	153	0.02	32	70	83	153	1

\*total for all food banks

+food banks reporting age breakdown

### ***The North***

HungerCount 98 includes only two food banks in the Yukon and one in the NWT, which together represent less than one percent of the entire count of food banks in Canada. Obviously, this low number of food banks will not influence in any substantive was the overall extent of institutionalized charitable food assistance in Canada.

However, the low proportion of food banks in the North does not necessarily mean that household food insecurity is of negligible importance there. For example, the three food banks in the Yukon and NWT amount to 0.65% of Canadian food banks, even though this region has only 0.33% of the country's population. In other words, excluding Quebec, only Eastern Canada has more food banks per 100,000 people.

Yet the North has the lowest rate of food bank use among all regions. Certainly, dispersed communities are less likely to generate high levels of food bank use because they are unable to sustain a highly organized food bank infrastructure. Except where regions differ in the extent of household food deprivation, rates of food bank use are likely to be relatively low in the North because of its lesser degree of urbanization and low population density.

### ***PERSPECTIVE***

In comparing HungerCount 98 with last year's, it should be noted that HungerCount 1997 under-reported the numbers of people assisted in grocery programs in Manitoba (by about 25%), PEI (by approximately 8%), and Nova Scotia (by 13%). The revised counts give a total of 679,960 persons (Table 4).

Since 1997, the number of people assisted by food banks has increased by 5.4%. By comparison, Canada's population grew by about 1%. All regions of the country recorded an increase in food recipients, as did all provinces except Alberta (Table 4). Except in the North, where a high rate of increase had a negligible impact on final totals, the increase in Eastern Canada was particularly rapid. The provinces in the East accounted for more than one-quarter (27.6%) of the total increase.

Two factors help to explain the growth in numbers of people assisted. First, the growth in numbers of people assisted since 1997 (5.4%) is almost identical to the increase in food banks (5.2%) over the same period. BC and Nova Scotia in particular recorded increases of 30% and 20 % respectively in the number of food banks, and Yukon had only one food bank in 1997 but two in 1998. This implies that the number of food banks grew in response to a need that would otherwise have remained unserved. Consequently, the number of food recipients probably underestimates the number of people in Canada who are seriously food deprived on a regular basis.

However, in many parts of the country, most of the increase in food bank use occurred in urban areas in food banks that existed prior to 1997. For example, 80% of Nova Scotia's increase in food recipients occurred in an established food bank in Halifax. This raises a second and more compelling explanation for the growth in food bank use; it is driven by deteriorating levels of livelihood rather than a simple response to better accessibility.

Observations from food banks across the country indicate that they are assisting increasing numbers of the 'working poor' (i.e., people who are working part time and/or receiving low wages). Not only did food banks in Halifax record a massive increase in the numbers of people assisted, but food banks in Nova Scotia assisted a larger proportion of households receiving income from employment than food banks in other provinces. The increased presence of 'working poor' is a likely consequence of the massive economic restructuring that has occurred in Canada in recent times, which is associated with the increasing prevalence of tenuous low-wage jobs.

The trends described above explain why food bank use should increase while unemployment rates fell across the country (except in BC). But despite the downward trend in unemployment, it is clear that unemployment remains a severe problem in Eastern Canada and, to a lesser degree, in Quebec and Ontario. This is reflected in provincial and regional rates of food bank use.

**TABLE 4 – Food Recipients 1997 and 1998**

<b>Province</b>	<b>Total Assisted 1997</b>	<b>Total Assisted 1998</b>	<b>Percentage Change</b>
British Columbia	59,042	64,587	9.4%
Alberta	37,582	39,479	-2.9%
Saskatchewan	16,949	17,435	2.9%
Manitoba	30,000	32,778	9.2%
Ontario	285,000	290,925	2.1%
Quebec	176,000	188,440	7.1%
New Brunswick	17,407	19,008	9.2%
PEI	4,000	4,246	6.2%
Nova Scotia	18,688	26,190	40.1%
Newfoundland	35,145	35,871	2.1%
Yukon	49	384	683.7%
NWT	98	153	56.1%
<b>CANADA</b>	<b>679,960</b>	<b>716,496</b>	<b>5.8%</b>

## ***CONCLUSION***

The share of Canada's population assisted by food banks in a typical month now stands at 2.4%, compared to 2.3% in 1997, and children continue to be grossly over-represented among food recipients.

Food bank use doubled from 1989 to 1997, and then grew by 5.4% from 1997 to 1998. This situation is particularly disturbing. Even in a period of economic growth, hunger continues to increase throughout Canada.

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<sup>i</sup> In Ontario and Newfoundland, at least one-third of food banks did not respond to the survey. The provincial coordinators were able to track down non-responding food banks and derive pooled estimates of the numbers of people assisted

<sup>ii</sup> Population figures are Statistics Canada estimates for 1997 published in *Annual Demographic Statistics*

<sup>iii</sup> The proportions of children and household characteristics are restricted to the 77% of food banks that submitted the required breakdown of recipients (i.e., households, adults and children)