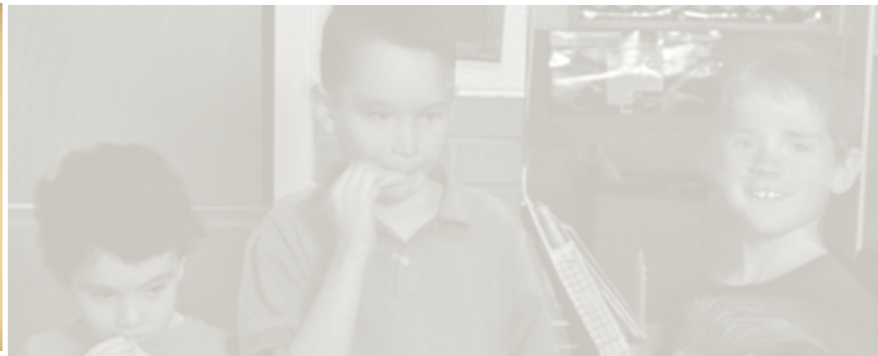


H U N G E R C O U N T 2 0 0 7



CANADA'S ONLY NATIONAL
SURVEY OF FOOD BANKS
AND EMERGENCY
FOOD PROGRAMS

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Canadian Association of Food Banks | Association canadienne des banques alimentaires

www.cafb-acba.ca

Hunger Facts 2007

FOOD BANK USE NATIONALLY

Number of people assisted by a food bank in March 2007: **720,231**

Number of meals served by food banks, in addition to groceries: **2,344,462**

Change in food bank use... since 2006: **- 4.4 %**

since 1997: **+ 8.4 %**

since 1989: **+ 91 %**

Number of food banks in Canada: **673 and 2,867 affiliated agencies**

Number of provinces and territories *without* a food bank: **0**

Years since Canada's first food bank opened in Edmonton: **26**

Percent of Canadians who believe that hunger is a problem in Canada: **73 %**

Percent who believe governments should take responsibility for solving the problem: **57 %¹**

FOOD BANK USE REGIONALLY

Highest provincial food bank use, as percent of population: **Newfoundland (5.3 %)**

Province assisting largest number of food bank recipients: **Ontario (318,540)**

Province with highest percent of employed food bank recipients: **Alberta (27 %)**

Province with highest percent of recipients on social assistance: **Newfoundland (70.6 %)**

MEETING THE DEMAND FOR EMERGENCY FOOD

Percent of food banks with no paid staff: **32.4 %**

Number of volunteer hours donated per month: **419,557**

Number of staff hours worked per month: **288,096**

Full-time equivalent jobs provided by volunteers in one month: **5 at each location**

INSUFFICIENT INCOME

Percent of food bank clients whose primary source of income is from employment: **13.5 %**

Percent whose primary source of income is from social assistance: **50.7 %**

Percent whose primary source of income is from disability income supports: **12.5 %**

Percent whose primary source of income is from pensions: **6.1 %**

FOOD BANK USE AMONG CHILDREN

Percent of food bank clients who are children: **38.7 %**

Percent of households containing at least one child: **50.6 %**

Years since the federal government promised to eliminate child poverty: **18**

Change in the number of hungry children since then (1989): **+ 127,729**



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Founded in 1985, the Canadian Association of Food Banks (CAFB) is an umbrella organization representing a national network of regional and community food banks, including provincial associations and food distribution centres. CAFB is the voice of food banks in Canada, with members and their respective agencies serving approximately 90% of people accessing emergency food programs nation-wide. In 2006, the CAFB moved over 8.5 million pounds of food industry donations to its members through the National Food Sharing System, the dollar value equivalent of \$17 million. In addition to food received from the CAFB, community-run food banks rely primarily on volunteers to collect and distribute an estimated 150 million pounds of food per year. CAFB conducts research, engages in public education and advocates for public policy change to eliminate the causes of hunger and food insecurity in Canada. While CAFB provides food daily for people in need, its ultimate goal is a hunger-free Canada.

Acknowledgements

Every year, the CAFB relies on the effort and goodwill of hundreds of food bank staff and volunteers to bring together information on food bank use. We appreciate the participation of everyone who has helped in this endeavour, and hope that we have created a resource that convincingly demonstrates the depth of hunger in this country.

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Executive Summary

First conducted in 1989, *HungerCount* is a unique national survey of food bank use in Canada. Every year since 1997, the Canadian Association of Food Banks (CAFB) has invited every food bank in the nation to participate in order to provide an up-to-date portrait of hunger and food insecurity.

The results of this year's *HungerCount* show an unacceptable level of hunger in Canada. Though unemployment has reached its lowest point in decades, and money continues to flow into the country thanks to a robust market for natural resources, high rates of food bank use remind us that governments cannot ignore their responsibility to the nation's most vulnerable citizens.

In March 2007, Canadian food banks provided groceries to 720,231 individuals, and served 2,344,462 meals. Findings from *HungerCount 2007* show that:

- 39% of those assisted are children, and 51% of households contain at least one child under age 18;
- Single-parent families account for 28.4%, dual-parent families 22.2%, single people 37.4%, and couples without children 12% of those assisted;
- 13.5% of food bank users report employment as their primary source of income, with 50.7% reporting social assistance, 12.5% disability supports, 6.1% pension, and 5.3% Employment Insurance;
- Over 85% of food bank users live in rented accommodation, with the majority paying market rent; 7.7% own their own homes;
- In areas with populations of less than 10,000 people, home ownership among food bank users jumps to 16.7%.

Food banks are the last line of defence against hunger in Canada. This network is able to partially fulfill the national need for emergency food assistance, offering between one day and a week's worth of food per month to each household in need. Seventy percent of food banks have risked running out of food, and the majority buy food in order to meet the need that exists in their communities.

The need for emergency food assistance exists in the nation's poorest regions, and in our most prosperous cities. It exists among single individuals, and among single and dual-parent families. Hunger affects people on welfare and those with jobs. Whether because of punishingly low welfare rates, meagre wages, insufficient pension income, lack of coverage by Employment Insurance, or barriers to workforce participation, food insecurity is experienced in every province and territory.

An established body of research highlights a number of factors that contribute to, and follow from, food bank use. Factors influencing the sustained need for emergency food assistance include the growing prevalence of low-paying, part-time, or temporary jobs, the increasing gap in wealth and income between the richest and poorest Canadians, low levels of literacy among a significant proportion of the population, and ongoing economic restructuring of the nation's

economic base. On the other side are factors that stem from hunger and poverty, including compromised physical and mental health in adults, and behavioural and developmental problems in children.

These problems are endemic to a social safety net that prioritizes reaction over prevention, and which depends too heavily on the voluntary and private sectors to address the shortcomings of an imperfect labour market. Food banks, community foundations, school breakfast and lunch programs, emergency shelters, and a huge network of family caregivers and volunteers struggle to meet the needs of people failed by the education system, facing discrimination in the job market, living with chronic health problems, or trying to balance raising a family with working. Responses to these needs are too often fragmented, under-resourced, and inadequate.

Findings from *HungerCount 2007* make it clear that more must be done to address the needs of Canada's poorest citizens. The past year has seen advances in this area, with increases to minimum wages in many provinces, the initiation of the federal Working Income Tax Benefit, and legislation ensuring predictable increases to the Canada Social Transfer. Federal and provincial governments can build on this progress through the following steps:

- Reform Employment Insurance to address the significant decline in coverage and benefit levels;
- Broaden eligibility for the Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB), and plan a series of annual increases up to \$2,400 per year for single adults;
- Increase the value of the National Child Benefit to \$5,000 per year by 2010;
- Institute a national strategy for affordable housing;
- Provide increased and ongoing support to a system of early learning and child care that is affordable, inclusive and of high quality;
- Raise provincial minimum wage rates to \$10 per hour, indexed to inflation;
- Immediately raise social assistance rates, and initiate or continue plans to reform provincial welfare systems.

Canadian food bank use has not dropped below 700,000 individuals per month since 1997. This fact suggests that the need for emergency food assistance has been only marginally affected by a decade of social policy reform at the federal and provincial levels. Governments must do more to help Canadians lift themselves out of poverty, and they must act immediately.

Foreword

Since food banks were first established in Canada in the 1980s, there has been much research to elucidate the social and economic conditions that give rise to food bank usage and household food insecurity more broadly, and to examine the health and nutrition consequences of food insecurity. We now have a very good understanding of the circumstances that render individuals and families vulnerable to problems of food insecurity. We also understand that food insecurity is a serious public health problem, linked to nutritional vulnerability. What we haven't figured out though is how to get our political leaders to take this problem seriously enough to do something about it.

This is particularly frightening when you consider the magnitude of the problem. The research on household food insecurity indicates that only a fraction of the people who are experiencing income-related food problems uses food banks. Some estimates imply that for every person using a food bank in March of 2007, there were four or five more who were also struggling to obtain the food they needed. Thus the numbers reported in *HungerCount 2007* are probably just the tip of the iceberg.

In addition to reporting food bank usage statistics, CAFB reports on the scope of charitable meal program provisioning activities, taking account of the meal programs run regularly by some food banks but also those run by agencies who receive food supplies from food banks. The tracking of meal provisioning activities will shed light on other problems of unmet food need in our communities that have so far garnered little attention. People who are homeless and those living in inadequate housing arrangements are often in desperate need of food, but they are more likely to seek help from charitable meal programs than food banks because they lack food storage and preparation facilities. We have no sense of the magnitude of this problem, but many communities now report increasing numbers of homeless and 'underhoused' individuals and growing demands for charitable meal programs. Just as the annual HungerCounts have importantly served to draw attention to the problems that give rise to food bank usage, CAFB's tracking of charitable meal provisioning activities will help us to better understand this other dimension of food insecurity in Canada.

There is precious little indication of political interest in addressing the very serious problems of poverty that underpin hunger and food insecurity in our country. Canada does not have a national anti-poverty strategy, and few provincial governments have taken on the challenge of poverty reduction. Welfare incomes continue to be set at levels well below basic costs of living in most jurisdictions, and low-income families in some provinces are now facing increasing hardships. To reduce the need for food banks and soup kitchens, a number of deliberate and sustained policy reforms are required at both the national and provincial levels. These are well outlined in the CAFB Policy Priorities. Now, where do we look for the political will to make such changes happen?

Valerie Tarasuk,
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Introduction

Initially founded as a temporary, emergency response to growing poverty and hunger in the nineteen-eighties, food banks have become an institutionalized part of Canada's weakened social safety net. As the 20th anniversary of the first *HungerCount* report approaches in 2009, food bank use remains at an unacceptably high level. The social and policy shortcomings that began to reveal themselves at the dawn of the food bank era show little sign of being addressed by governments of the present, who seem content to let the private and voluntary sectors deal with the nation's embarrassing social problems.

In March 2007, food banks in Canada provided groceries to 720,231 adults and children who did not have enough to eat. Though national food bank use declined marginally compared to the same period last year, this represents an increase of 91% since 1989, the first year such statistics were collected. Though we hear, again and again, that the operators of Canada's 673 food banks and 2,867 affiliated agencies – all extremely capable and committed people working for little or no pay – wish to close their operations, they remain in business because of a sustained need for food assistance.

Food bank operators are not alone in highlighting the food and income crisis affecting a significant proportion of the nation's population. Evidence from three successive Statistics Canada surveys²⁻³⁻⁴ demonstrates what the CAFB and its partners have been telling political leaders for many years: food bank use is shamefully high, it is an underestimate of the level of hunger in the country, and it is not going away under present circumstances. Analyses of the 1999 National Population Health Survey and Canadian Community Health Surveys from 2001 and 2004 show that as much as 14.7% of the Canadian population over age twelve, or 3.7 million people, experience food insecurity because they cannot afford enough to eat on a regular basis.⁵

Food insecurity can be experienced in several ways. It can mean worrying about where your next meal is going to come from, or about how long you will go without eating. It might mean that you eat food lacking in nutritional value, that is past its due date, or that you would otherwise rather not eat. It can mean going without food for a day or two so your children have enough to fill their stomachs. In the worst cases, it can mean that you and your children have to skip meals until payday, until the arrival of a welfare or E.I. payment, or until your local food bank has groceries to distribute.

Hunger and food insecurity are concentrated among low-income individuals and families: almost 50% of people in Canada's lowest-income households, and 30% of those in lower middle-income households experience food insecurity.⁶ Thus, the problem of hunger is in large part a problem of income. Solutions to the problem of hunger must address the systemic barriers that prevent Canadians from having an equal chance at gaining a living wage, and must acknowledge the right of people with low incomes to live with dignity.

Governments rely on voluntary and non-profit organizations – food banks, soup kitchens, shelters, school meal programs, community centres – to provide some aid to people experiencing hunger, but no one can claim that the help that is available is enough. Low-income Canadians must have the ability, without recourse to charity, to provide themselves and their families with an adequate quantity of suitable, nutritious food. The findings of *HungerCount 2007* make it clear that we have some distance to go before this can become a reality.

Method

The primary purpose of the annual *HungerCount* survey is to provide a national snapshot of food bank use in Canada. This is accomplished by counting the total number of individuals who receive groceries from food banks and their affiliated agencies during the month of March. Each person is counted only once regardless of the number of times they receive assistance during the data collection period. March has been chosen as the study period because it is an unexceptional month, without predictable high or low use patterns. Since March is used consistently, we are able to make relevant comparisons in use patterns over time.

With the *HungerCount*, CAFB also measures volunteer and paid staff hours contributed during the study period, frequency of food bank use allowed, days' worth of food provided, total number of prepared meals served, and coping strategies used when food banks risk running out of food. Demographic characteristics of those assisted by food banks, including primary income source, household composition, and housing type were measured in 2007.

For the first time, *HungerCount 2007* collected information on various aspects of food bank capacity, including ability to offer programs and services such as community kitchens and gardens, client advocacy, nutrition education, budgeting information and skills training. Food bank operators were asked to tell us about their capacity to collect and use client information, either through paper-based records or information technology.

Surveys were sent to all known Canadian food banks in February 2007. When needed, *HungerCount* Provincial Coordinators contacted food banks prior to the submission deadline to clarify survey questions. Completed surveys were returned to Provincial Coordinators, who checked responses for accuracy and completeness before forwarding copies to CAFB.

Throughout the summer, CAFB staff worked with Provincial Coordinators to collect outstanding surveys and resolve any inconsistencies in responses. Survey data were entered into a database, checked for accuracy, and analyzed by CAFB staff and volunteers. In a small number of cases where actual grocery program figures were not available, conservative estimates were produced in consultation with Provincial Coordinators and food bank operators, using 2006 figures as a guide.

HungerCount 2007 Results

FOOD BANK USE NATIONALLY

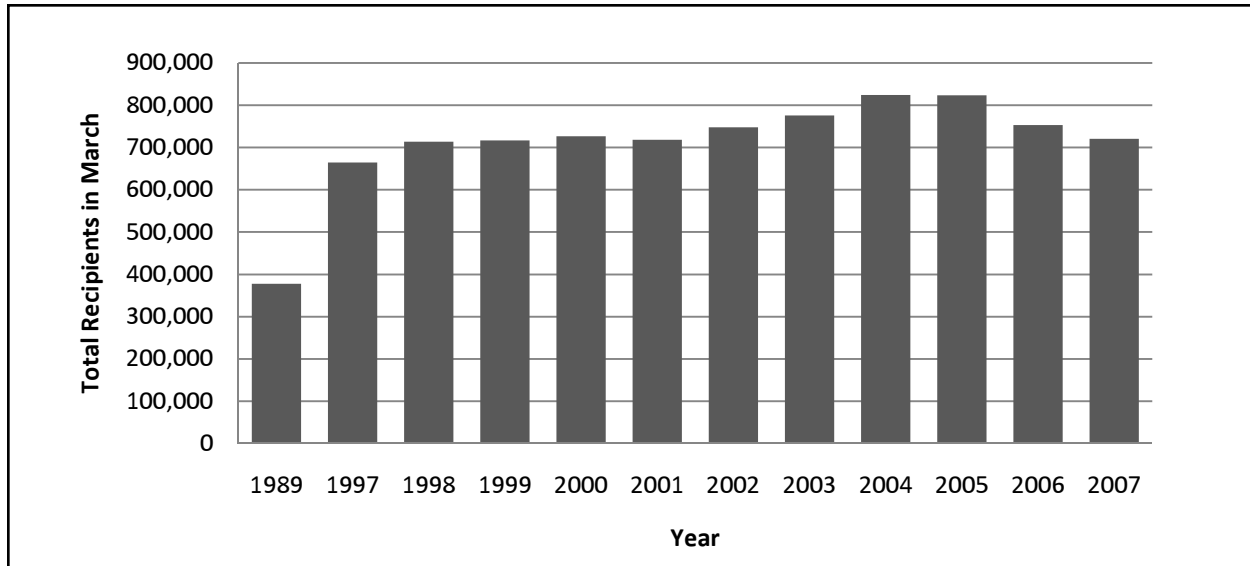
For *HungerCount 2007*, CAFB collected information from 656 food banks and 2,867 affiliated agencies. The size and structure of these organizations vary widely, from large warehouses/distribution centres to small, church-operated and volunteer-run programs open a few days each week. Regardless of their size, these organizations form a network that is the last line of defence against hunger in Canada (Table 1).

Table 1 Food Banks in Canada

Province/Territory	Known Food Banks	Participating Food Banks	% of Food Banks Participating	No. of Agencies Included
British Columbia	89	85	95.5	236
Alberta	102	96	94.1	288
Saskatchewan	25	23	92.0	174
Manitoba	46	41	89.1	359
Ontario	294	294	100.0	652
Quebec	18	18	100.0	1,004
New Brunswick	58	58	100.0	4
Nova Scotia	1	1	100.0	131
Prince Edward Island	6	6	100.0	0
Newfoundland & Labrador	27	27	100.0	19
Yukon Territory	2	2	100.0	0
Northwest Territories	3	3	100.0	0
Nunavut	2	2	100.0	0
Total	673	656	97.5	2,867

In March 2007, 720,231 individuals – 2.2% of the population – received groceries from a Canadian food bank. Figure 1 shows changes in use since 1989. This year's national total, a decline of 4.4% compared to March 2006, offers the hope that the record levels of food bank use seen in 2004 and 2005 may have been temporary. It remains the case that usage has not dropped below 700,000 individuals since 1997.

Figure 1 Canadian Food Bank Use, March 1989-2007



Though food bank use declined overall at the national level, it must be noted that 41% of food banks experienced an increase or no change in use between study periods in 2006 and 2007. In Alberta, a province with one of the strongest economies in North America, the number of people assisted increased slightly compared to 2006, and over 48% of Alberta food banks saw an increase in use. Figure 2 supplies national information on the percentage of food banks experiencing increases and decreases in the number of people assisted.

Figure 2 Change in Usage, 2006 to 2007

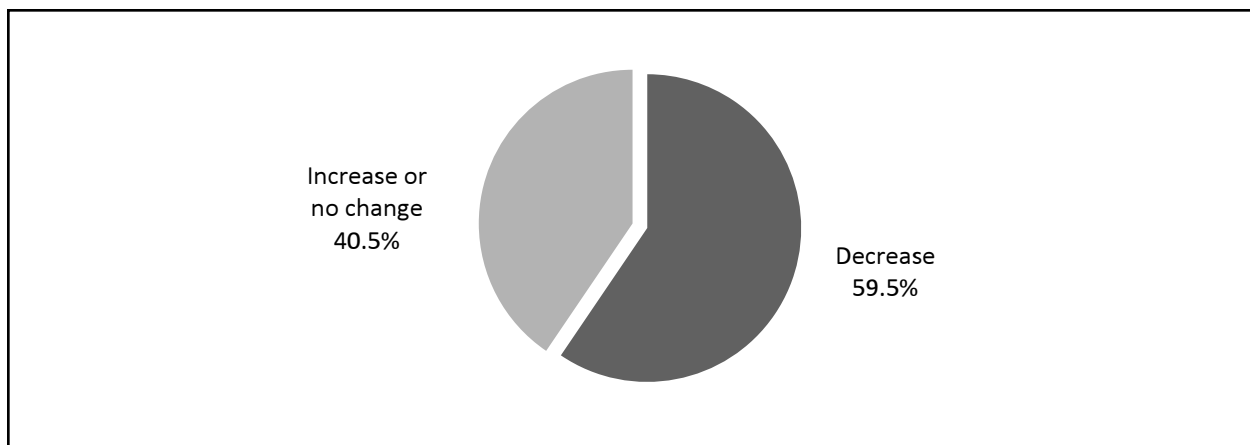
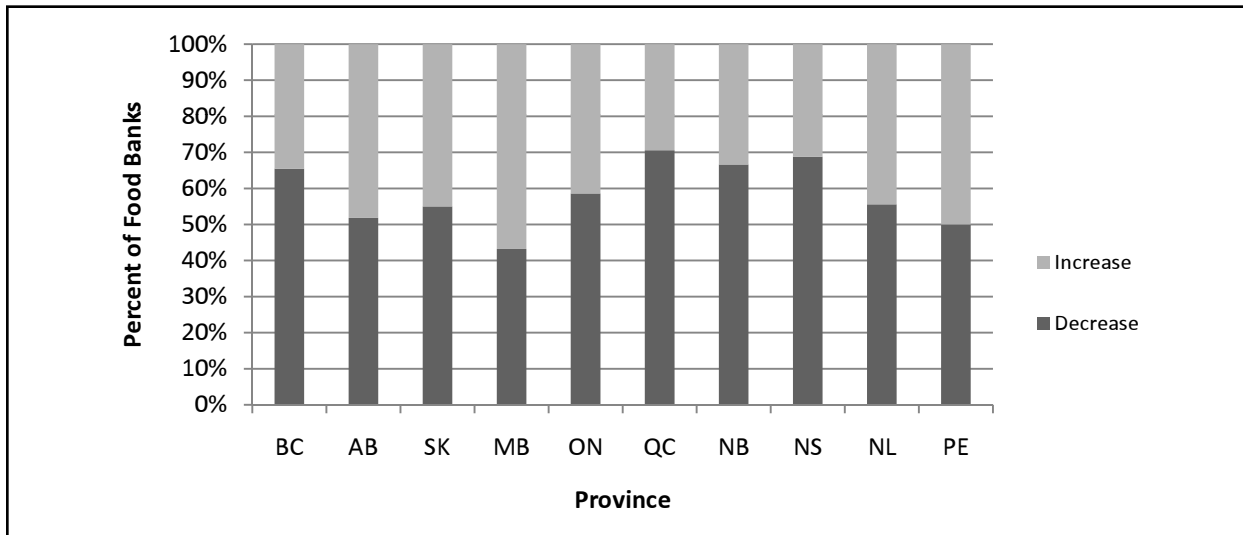


Figure 3 breaks down the percentage of food banks experiencing increases versus decreases in use from 2006 to 2007, by province. Over 60% of food banks in Quebec, Nova Scotia, British Columbia and New Brunswick saw decreases in use, with smaller majorities in Newfoundland and Labrador, Saskatchewan, Ontario, and Alberta. On the other hand, nearly 60% of food banks in Manitoba, and 50% in Prince Edward Island, saw an increase in the number of individuals assisted.

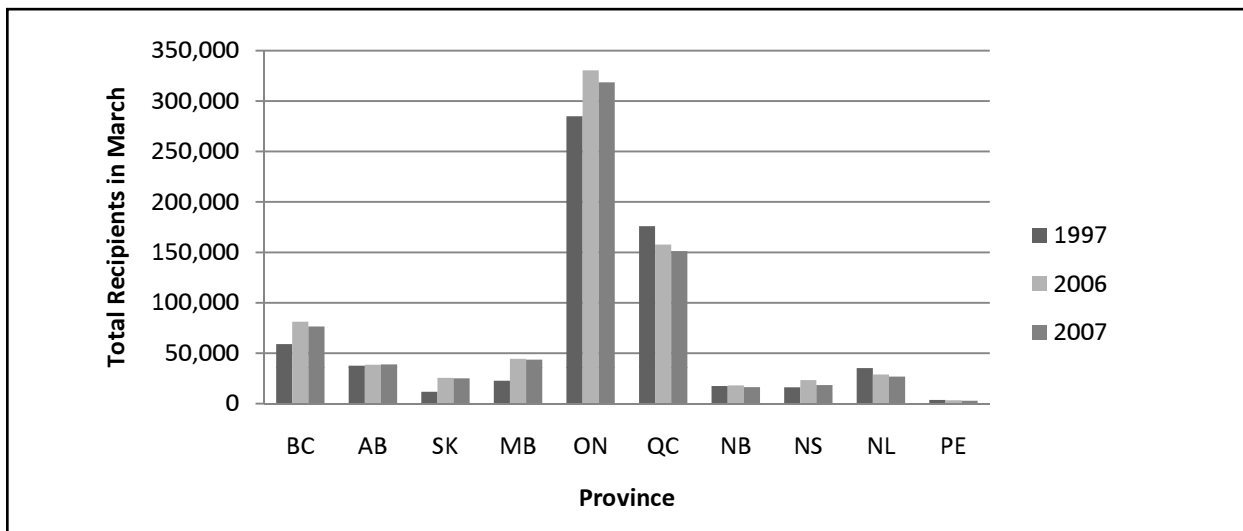
Figure 3 Changes in Provincial Food Bank Use, March 2006 to 2007



FOOD BANK USE BY PROVINCE

In 2007, all provinces except Alberta saw an overall decrease in food bank use. The largest decrease occurred in Nova Scotia (- 21%), followed by Prince Edward Island (- 14%), New Brunswick (- 10%) and Newfoundland and Labrador (- 7.25%). The smallest declines were seen in Saskatchewan (- 2%), Manitoba (- 2%), Ontario (- 3%) and Quebec (- 4.1%). Food banks in the territories together showed an increase of nearly 19% over 2006.⁷

Figure 4 Provincial Food Bank Use, March 1997, 2006, 2007



The provinces of Ontario, Quebec, and British Columbia have traditionally accounted for the lion's share of food bank use in Canada, and the same is true for 2007. Food banks in these provinces together assisted 75.8% of all Canadian food bank users in the month of March (Figure 4). Figure 5 demonstrates that, at 5.3%, Newfoundland has by far the highest level of use as a percentage of provincial population, followed by Manitoba (3.7%), Saskatchewan (2.5%), Ontario (2.5%) and New Brunswick (2.2%). From 2006 to 2007, all provinces saw a decline in use as a percentage of their respective populations, though the opposite was the case in the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut (not shown).⁸

Figure 5 Food Bank Use as Percent of Population: 1997, 2006, 2007

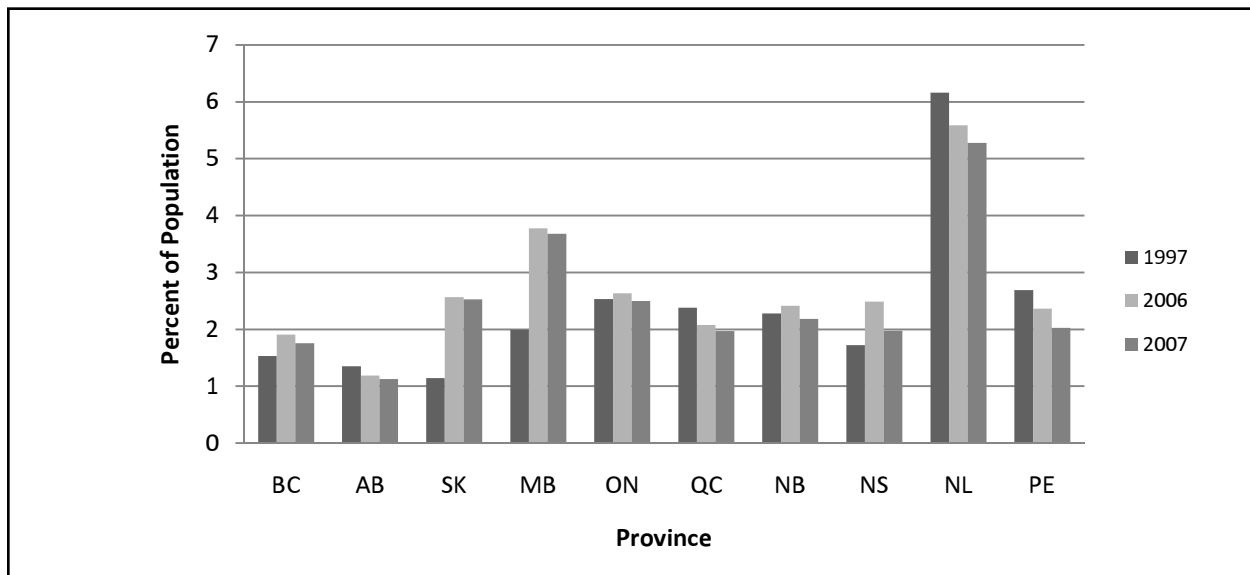


Table 2 presents the total number of individuals served in each province. It also compares each province's share of the national total of individuals served ("Share of Canadian Total") with each province's share of the Canadian population ("Share of Canadian Population"). We can see that in Alberta, British Columbia and Quebec, share of national food bank use is lower than each province's share of the national population. The opposite is true in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Ontario, and Newfoundland and Labrador, with the remaining three provinces and three territories breaking even.

Table 2 Number of People Assisted by Food Banks, March 2007

Province/Territory	Total	% Children	Share of Canadian Total	Share of Canadian Population
British Columbia	76,514	36.3%	10.6%	13.2%
Alberta	38,837	43.1%	5.4%	10.5%
Saskatchewan	24,997	46.5%	3.5%	3.0%
Manitoba	43,563	47.0%	6.0%	3.6%
Ontario	318,540	38.9%	44.2%	38.8%
Quebec	151,203	35.8%	21.0%	23.4%
New Brunswick	16,347	33.1%	2.3%	2.3%
Nova Scotia	18,417	34.6%	2.6%	2.8%
Newfoundland & Labrador	26,746	38.5%	3.7%	1.5%
Prince Edward Island	2,811	35.3%	0.4%	0.4%
Yukon Territory	543	33.7%	0.1%	0.1%
Northwest Territories	778	49.2%	0.1%	0.1%
Nunavut	935	42.2%	0.1%	0.1%
Total	720,231	38.7%	100.0%	100.0%

MEAL PROGRAM USE

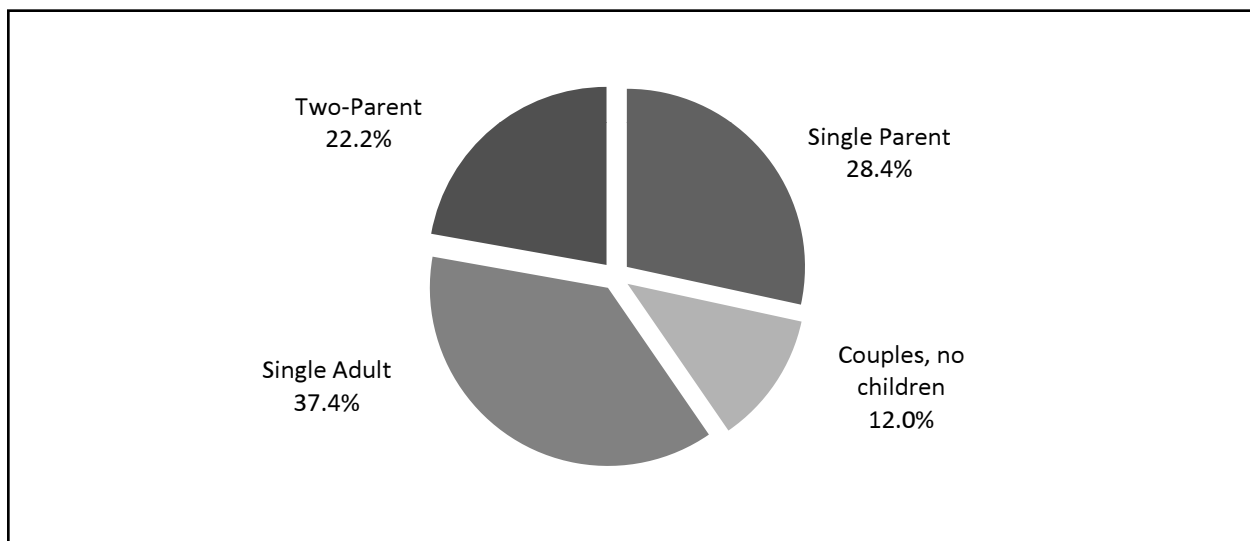
In addition to statistics on grocery distribution, *HungerCount 2007* collected information from organizations that provide hot or cold meals and snacks. In March 2007, 171 participating organizations (including food banks and soup kitchens) offered a regular meal program, or supplied food for agencies that did so; these organizations together provided food for 2,344,462 meals in that month alone. Given that *HungerCount* collects information from only a small sample of the soup kitchens and shelters that currently operate in Canada, this figure is likely to be a significant underestimate of the national total.

THE FACE OF HUNGER

Household Composition

Since 1998, CAFB has collected statistics on the family composition and primary income source of households assisted by food banks. *HungerCount 2007* offers a familiar picture: 39% of those assisted are children, and 51% of all households include at least one child. A large number of households using food banks are composed of single adults, both with children (28.4%) and without (37.4%). Two-parent families account for 22.2% of households using food banks, with childless couples accounting for the remaining 12% (Figure 6).⁹

Figure 6 Household Composition of Food Recipients, March 2007

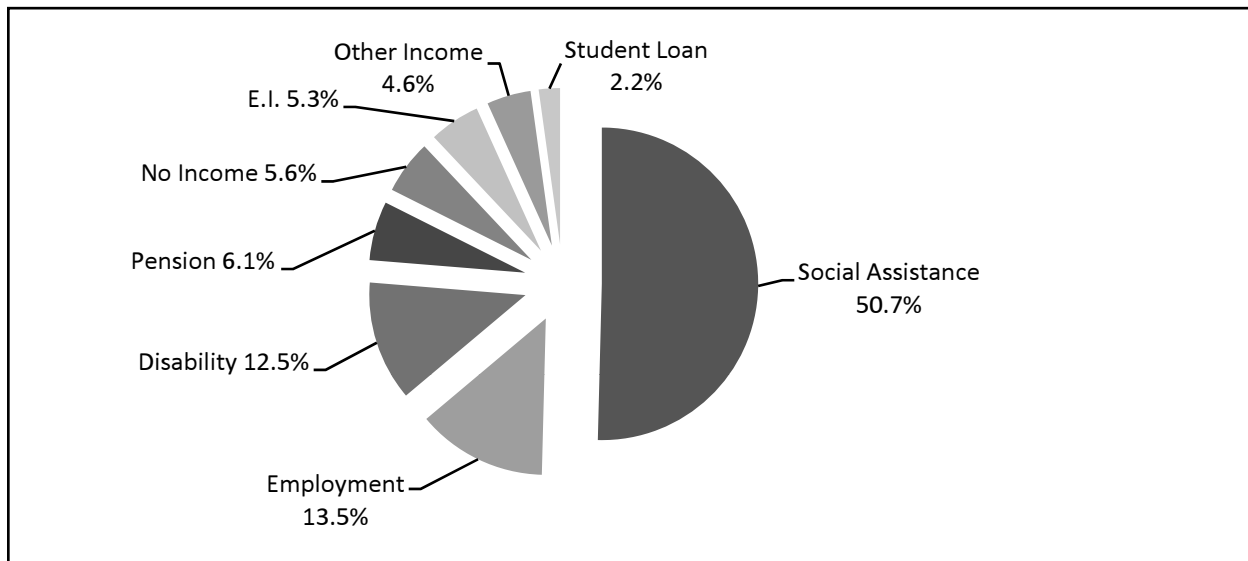


The fact that children are consistently overrepresented as food bank users – hovering around 40% of those assisted each year information has been collected – is an ongoing source of concern. Table 2 (above) demonstrates that food banks in the Northwest Territories assisted the highest percentage of children (49.2%), followed by Manitoba (47%), Saskatchewan (46.5%), Alberta (43.1%), Nunavut (42.2%), Ontario (38.8%) and Newfoundland and Labrador (38.5%).

Primary Source of Income

As in previous years, in 2007 the majority of households assisted by food banks reported social assistance as their primary source of income. Nationally, this figure dropped 2.8 percentage points in 2007, to 50.7% of the total (Figure 7).

Figure 7 Primary Income Source of Food Recipients, March 2007



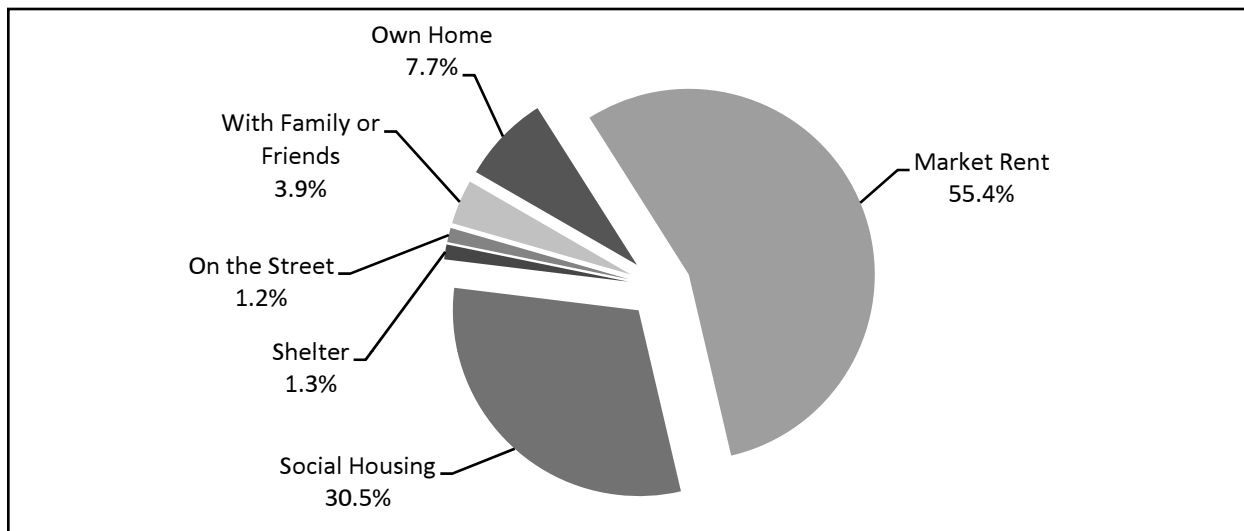
The percentage of households assisted by food banks reporting employment as their primary source of income remained stable this year, at 13.5%. Increases in the percentage of households reporting provincial disability income supports (from 11% to 12.5%) and Employment Insurance (from 4.2% to 5.3%) as their primary source of income made up for the drop in those collecting welfare benefits.¹⁰

The income situation of people in need of emergency food assistance becomes more complex if we examine only those food banks serving areas with populations of less than 10,000 people. Compared to the national average of 13.5%, the percentage of those assisted who are employed in these areas drops to 10.6%. Social assistance rates are only marginally higher, at 52%, but a higher percentage report income from pensions (8.4%), Employment Insurance (6.5%) and disability supports (15.3%). As might be expected given the change in pension income, the percentage of individuals over 65 years of age jumps to 12.1% in small towns, compared to the national average of 8.1%.

Housing and Food Bank Use

For the first time, *HungerCount 2007* inquired into the housing situations of those assisted by food banks. Though a large majority of food bank users are renters, with 85.9% living in either market rental units (55.4%) or social housing (30.5%), a significant number (7.7%) own their own homes (Figure 8).¹¹ Home ownership is highest in New Brunswick (15%), Nova Scotia (13.1%), Manitoba (11%), and Alberta (11%).

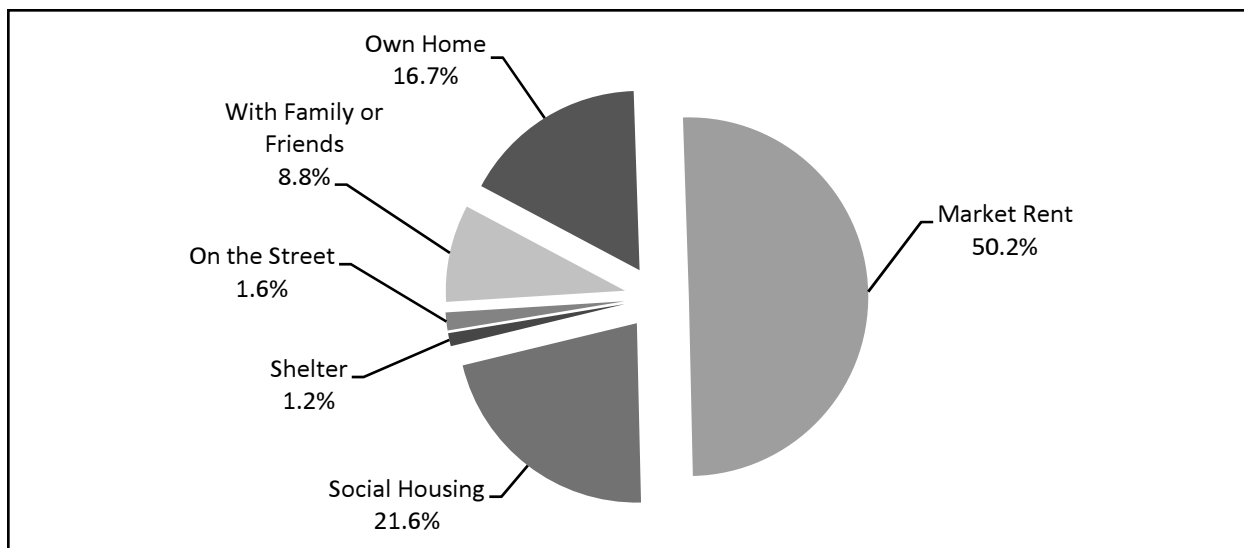
Figure 8 Housing Situation of Food Recipients, March 2007



Nationally, 3.9% of individuals assisted by food banks reported living with family or friends, a situation sometimes referred to as “couch surfing”. This figure varied among the provinces, from highs of 10.2% and 9.2% in Manitoba and Alberta, to lows of 2.1% and less than 1% in Ontario and Newfoundland and Labrador, respectively. Two and a half percent of food bank users reported living in the shelter system or on the street, with British Columbia (5.8%), Alberta (3.8%) and Ontario (2.4%) assisting the highest percentage of homeless clients.¹²

As with income, the housing situation of people assisted by food banks changes significantly in areas with populations of less than 10,000. Figure 9 presents housing-related information in these areas and shows that, in small towns, the percentage of food bank users who own their home more than doubles, to 16.7% of the total. The percentage of those living with family or friends also increases, from 3.9% to 8.8%, with a corresponding decrease in those living in social housing.

Figure 9 Housing Situation, Population less than 10,000, March 2007



FOOD BANK OPERATIONS

Food banks differ widely in structure, capacity, and method used to distribute food. Some are open for a few hours on specific days each month or week. Others are open during regular business hours and, in addition to regular (e.g. monthly) grocery hampers, may offer bread, cereal and other perishables as they become available. Larger food banks may distribute food in bulk to smaller agencies with specific clientele, while also providing direct assistance to households in nearby communities.

The majority (64%) of food banks offer groceries that provide less than a week's worth of food per household, with most (60.5%) limiting households to one visit per month. Thirty-six percent of food banks are able to offer more than 5 days' worth of groceries, and a small percentage (8.5%) assist households on a weekly basis. Figure 10 illustrates the range of grocery amounts provided, and Figure 11 provides an overview of frequency of use.¹³

Figure 10 Days' Worth of Food Provided, March 2007

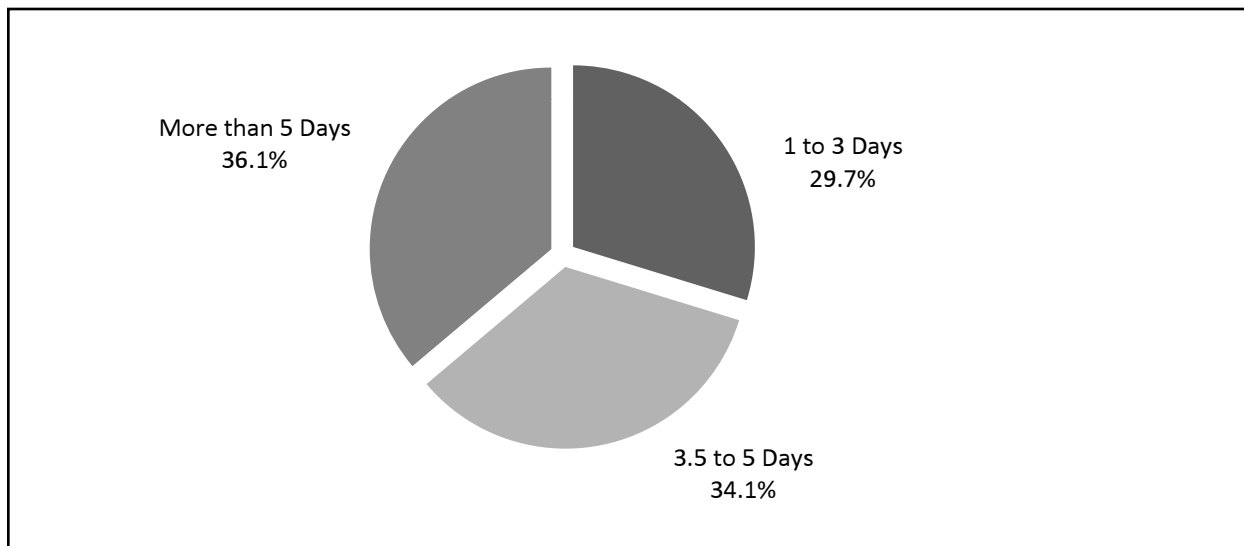
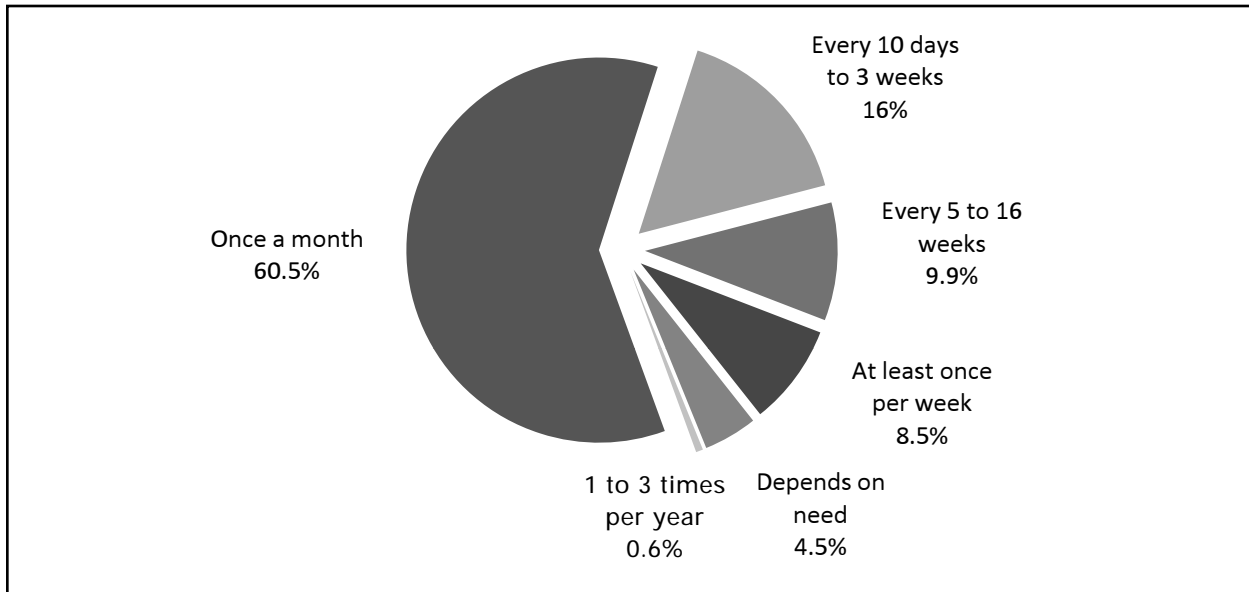
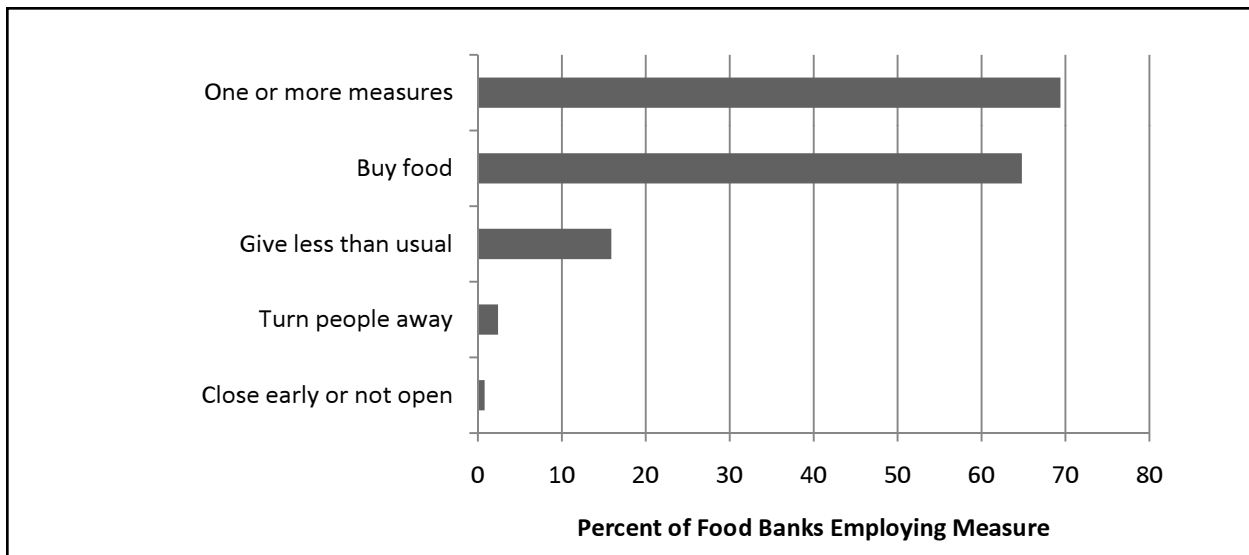


Figure 11 Frequency of Food Bank Use Permitted, March 2007



In response to the sustained demand for food assistance, 69.4% of food banks utilized one or more measures to address the risk of running out of supplies. The majority of these bought food using monetary donations. Alternatively, 16% were forced to cut back the size of hampers in order to provide food for all who needed it (Figure 12).¹⁴

Figure 12 Response to Shortage of Food, March 2007



Provincial and Territorial Perspectives

To provide a richer portrait of hunger and food insecurity across Canada, the following section presents provincial reports by *HungerCount 2007* Provincial Coordinators. These discuss changes in food bank use and the food bank network, provincial policy developments, and trends likely to affect the need for emergency food assistance in the coming years.

BRITISH COLUMBIA

Prepared by Dave Murray, Abbotsford Community Services Food Bank

Individuals assisted: **76,514 (1.8% of provincial population)**

Percent children: **36.3%**

Percent reporting employment income: **11.5%**

Percent receiving social assistance: **42%**

Percent receiving disability income supports: **21.5%**

Percent living in a shelter or on the street: **5.8%**

As we reflect on the state of food banks in British Columbia it is definitely a “cup half full” scenario. The great news is that food bank usage declined in the 2007 *HungerCount*. The number of adults served declined by 3.6%, and the number of children served declined by 10.3%. Overall the total number of people served dropped by 5.8%, from 81,248 to 76,514.

On the surface this appears to be a cup filled with reason for great optimism. Combined with a record-setting 3.9% unemployment rate and the creation of 371,400 new jobs, it appears that our cups are overflowing in B.C.

However, the cups of food bank clients are not as full as one might expect.

In 2007 it is expected that a single mother’s income will decline by \$3,900 per year. Here are a few indicators that lead us to this conclusion:

- Welfare benefits have been cut by \$43 per month;
- If no disability is recognized the client will not be eligible for earnings exemptions;
- The child maintenance exemption of \$100 per month has been eliminated.

Further, a study released by the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives finds that British Columbia’s welfare system is systematically discouraging, delaying, and denying assistance to many of the people most in need of help, with harmful consequences – including homelessness – for some of the province’s most vulnerable residents. The report examines why the number of people receiving welfare plummeted in the wake of changes to eligibility rules and the application system in British Columbia.¹⁵

Another sobering fact is that British Columbia continues to have the highest child poverty rate of any province in Canada for the third consecutive year. The B.C. rate is 23.5%, or nearly one in every four children, living in poverty in our province. This is well above the national child poverty rate of 17.7%.¹⁶

The fact that the number of children using food banks dropped significantly (-10.3%) must be taken with guarded caution. A one-month snapshot may only be a reflection of what truly is in the food bank cup.

As one food bank operator stated, "It is wild out there." New roads are being forged, building cranes are in abundance, and facilities are taking shape for the 2010 Olympics. The sad fact is that for most food bank clients their cups remain at best "half full".

ALBERTA

Prepared by Marjorie Bencz CM, Alberta Food Bank Network Association (AFBNA)

Individuals assisted: **38,837 (1.1% of provincial population)**

Percent children: **43%**

Percent reporting employment income: **27%**

Percent receiving social assistance: **34.9%**

The website of the provincial government describes Alberta as "one of the world's most vibrant and competitive economies." In 2006, Alberta's economy grew by 6.8%. This was more than double the national average and experts predict that Alberta will have one of Canada's top-performing economies in the future. Alberta's exports of goods and services more than doubled between 1996 and 2006, to \$90.1 billion.

With low taxes and voluminous pages of help-wanted ads – Alberta's average unemployment rate was 3.6%, the lowest in Canada – Alberta has become the land of milk and money for thousands seeking a better life. But as the booming economy needs every skilled worker that it can find, Alberta's boom has a dark side. The inherent problems associated with massive growth are not limited to larger centres. Many communities are finding that they are in need of more doctors, nurses, teachers, firefighters, and others. "I think that everyone in Alberta recognizes there are issues we are tackling whether it's managing the labour force shortages, or managing housing," said Iris Evans, Alberta Minister of Employment and Immigration.¹⁷

Evans' comments came at the same time as Lyle Oberg, Alberta's Finance Minister, pondered tax incentives for developers to get more housing built. However, Oberg also stated that the complications of market intrusion make such initiatives dicey.

This summer, Statistics Canada reported that the cost of living in Alberta increased nearly three times as fast as the national average inflation rate over the past twelve months. Alberta's annual inflation rate was 6.3% while the national average was about 2.2%. Edmonton and Calgary had the most rapidly rising living costs among Canadian cities. Climbing housing costs with tight

markets generated by surging economic and population growth and rising incomes were some of the factors contributing to the inflation rate.

So, how does all of this affect food banks across Alberta? Why has overall food bank demand stayed similar to last year? Some communities in Alberta have a 0.5% rental housing vacancy rate and others are reporting up to 50% month-to-month rent increases. Fort McMurray Food Bank reports that 100% of their clients pay more than 50% of their income on rent. Athabasca reports that there is "no social housing in our community!!!" and that in addition to high rents, utility costs are "very high."

As in previous years, a very high percentage of Alberta food bank clients state that their main source of income is from employment. Despite low unemployment and rising average income, many are struggling. For some, employment income is not keeping pace with rising costs. For example, Camrose and District Food Bank reports that 90% of their clients receive the majority of their income from employment. Edmonton's Food Bank reports that, although unemployment is low, welfare continues to play a key role in the income cycle of many of their clients.

In March 2007, 25,206 households were on the welfare program in Alberta. 46% of welfare households lived in Edmonton and 26% were in Calgary. Like similar programs across Alberta, social assistance rates have decreased considerably in recent years. For example, a single person in Alberta received \$4,800 less in assistance in 2005 than in 1986.

For the most part, food banks in Alberta are well supported by their communities. They rely on their communities to provide volunteer time, financial and in-kind contributions, and of course, food. One major concern expressed by a number of food banks is their need for funds or grants for operations, including facilities, trucking, staff costs and food purchases.

SASKATCHEWAN

Prepared by Linda Robinson, Adult Centre for Employment Readiness and Training,
Regina & District Food Bank

Individuals assisted: **24,997 (2.5% of provincial population)**

Percent children: **46.5%**

Percent reporting employment income: **7.0%**

Percent receiving social assistance: **63.9%**

HungerCount results for March 2007 indicate that the number of people in Saskatchewan assisted by grocery programs is down from March 2006, however the survey also indicates that the number of children benefiting from these programs has unfortunately increased. Saskatchewan is currently undergoing an economic boom, with an abundance of job opportunities, increasing wages, and the implementation of tax cuts for small businesses. Saskatchewan's appealing lower cost of living, as compared to neighbouring Alberta, appears to be reducing the out-flow of skilled young people, and may even be attracting migration back towards Saskatchewan, thereby helping to maintain and/or possibly grow our population and improve the business climate.

The provincial government has invested significant dollars to revitalize Saskatchewan neighbourhoods and provide better access to education and skills training, while also promoting skilled trades and technologies as alternate career choices for youth. Several Saskatchewan food banks continue to provide services to address underlying social issues through educational programming and employable skills training. For example, the Regina & District Food Bank emphasizes literacy and employment skills in its educational programming.

HungerCount 2007 information on income sources indicates increased food bank usage amongst students, pensioners, those on employment insurance and disability support as well as the working poor, however the percentage of people receiving social assistance appears to have decreased.

Despite the obvious improvement in the provincial economy, there continues to be a growing gap between the rich and the poor. As of March 1st, 2007, the minimum wage in Saskatchewan was increased to \$7.95 per hour. However, the so-called “working poor” are still not making enough to wholly support their families, given unforeseen cost-of-living increases. Recent substantial increases in the cost of housing have further distanced the possibility for many to become homeowners. Likewise, increases and upgrades to rental properties impact decisions with regards to living accommodations or supplying food for the table.

Bill Hall, Executive Director of the Food Banks of Saskatchewan, commented: “The booming economy is great news for those who are currently employed and have been or are able to get into the housing market, however, as the latest *HungerCount* statistics indicate, a disturbing trend is starting to appear. Those on fixed incomes (i.e. students, pensioners, minimum wage earners) are experiencing an increase in the cost of housing as a result of the boom. My concern is that this group of food bank users will increase in the next few years as property taxes rise to reflect the increased value of homes, and as rents rise in a province that lacks any type of rent controls. Saskatchewan is poised to experience the same social concerns and pressures that are already being felt by its western neighbours, Alberta and British Columbia.”

Wayne Hellquist, CEO of the Regina & District Food Bank, commented on the impact of food bank usage amongst children: “Food bank usage for families with school-aged children continues to be a concern in Saskatchewan. A large percentage of those who are reliant on food banks are children and youth who face food insecurity on an ongoing basis. Children who experience food insecurity and live in poverty typically have fewer educational and developmental opportunities and are at risk of developing hunger-related symptoms such as an inability to concentrate, disciplinary problems, lower test scores and increased absences from school. They are more likely to experience serious health risks including limited physical, mental, social and spiritual growth. Children who are living in poverty are also at increased risk of being involved with the child welfare system. These effects are long standing and have a tremendous social cost.”

MANITOBA

Prepared by Karen Flett, Winnipeg Harvest

Individuals assisted: **43,563 (3.7% of provincial population)**

Percent children: **47%**

Percent reporting employment income: **14%**

Percent receiving social assistance: **43.1%**

Percent reporting no income: **14.6%**

Unemployment in Manitoba is at a 30-year low. That means Manitobans are working. In fact, they are working harder than ever. We are all contributing to a growing economy, and even the poorest among us are working more. Yet, one in every three low-income children has a parent working full-time all year, and it is still not enough to pull them out of poverty. A sizzling economy and plentiful jobs aren't enough to pull poverty rates down to those enjoyed in many countries with less robust economies.

In Winnipeg you see child poverty everywhere you go; it could be in a local playground, schools, streets or community recreation centres. It seems to be endless, and it is a sorrowful situation when children are standing in line with their families at local food banks.

If you drive down some of our streets you will see numerous people who are homeless or living on the edge of homelessness. The causes of the problems are complex, but inadequate incomes must first be addressed for housing to be affordable. Although homelessness may not be only a housing problem, it is always a housing problem. The gap between the cost of adequate housing and the income available to pay for it is too large for many individuals and families.

Front line staff working at programs for immigrants and refugees have seen a slight increase in clientele requesting food assistance. Currently, there are five agencies who partner with Winnipeg Harvest that are working with refugee families, and we have also noted an increase in the number of new Canadians calling to register for food assistance, as well as new agencies that work with this population applying to become food banks.

In Manitoba, there are more rural communities that are requesting food and help for their families. Food banks have reported that a high number of clients served are people on social assistance, and that they are seeing new people who have recently moved out of the city. Some communities have been assisting people just passing through, which is usually more prevalent in the summer months. One food bank stated that they had to send some clients to a soup kitchen to receive additional help, and a few would like to be able to offer more services and financial help to their clientele. However, due to financial difficulties they are unable to do this.

Transportation restrictions are always a problem in rural communities, and many individuals request that their food hampers be delivered. Volunteers within the food banks deliver to those in need that are housebound due to illnesses or other physical challenges. However, some food banks are unable to deliver because of safety concerns and the high cost of gas. One particular food bank would like to start fundraising just for gas.

Some communities are seeing a continued decrease in population as individuals and families leave their communities to find employment, education, and better housing. As populations shrink, and particularly in the north, access to a range of nutritious foods can be severely limited in some communities. Some food banks have reported extremely high prices for food products in isolated areas. For example, when the grocery store burned down in one northern community, many residents were without access to food for about a week.

ONTARIO

Prepared by Nicola Cernik and Adam Spence, Ontario Association of Food Banks

Individuals assisted: **318,540 (2.5% of provincial population)**

Percent children: **38.9%**

Percent reporting employment income: **14.2%**

Percent receiving social assistance: **46.2%**

Percent receiving disability income supports: **21.1%**

Percent new immigrants or refugees: **29.3%**

Almost 300 food banks from Windsor to Ottawa and Thunder Bay to Niagara Falls tracked data on those they served during the month of March. Ontario's food banks remain a vital service to 318,540 individuals in hundreds of communities, from our villages and towns to our large urban and suburban centres. Although we have experienced a modest decline, the results must be read with caution. Food bank use has increased by 15% since 2001. Two and a half percent of Ontario's population must turn to a food bank in order to put food on the table. Almost 40% of those served are children under the age of 18 years. Food banks are feeding our future.

This year's report raises new questions about housing, and about poverty amongst Ontarians with disabilities. We continue to work to increase the depth of understanding of the characteristics and circumstances of those we serve.

The survey results tell a sad tale: life continues to be very difficult for the working poor as well as social assistance recipients. One in seven Ontarians served by food banks cited employment as their primary form of income. Well over half of those served by Ontario's food banks rely on woefully inadequate social assistance. Despite a three percent increase in social assistance rates this year, it is highly unlikely that we will see any decrease in the number of food bank visits until the rates meet reasonable standards of adequacy.

New figures on housing help to dispel the myths and stereotypes about those relying on Ontario's food banks. Those who visit food banks are our siblings, our cousins, our parents, our friends and our neighbours. Over 91% are rental market tenants or live in social housing. Over four percent live in their own home. The hidden homeless – those who stay with friends or family – comprise just over two percent of those served by food banks. Only two percent of all Ontarians who visit food banks each month in Ontario sleep in a shelter or on the streets. Poverty is not just something you pass on the street. It lives next door.

Ontario's food banks are changing to respond to the challenge that we face every day. Relieving hunger is no longer as simple as distributing food. In addition to supplying individuals with a food hamper, many other services are being made available to those who struggle financially. Non-food items such as toiletries, cleaning supplies and clothing are becoming commonly-distributed items. In addition, a more community-centred approach is becoming commonplace in both rural and urban settings in Ontario. Food banks are evolving from the stand-alone operations of the past. Other services, such as referrals, community kitchens, budgeting assistance, community gardens, provincial voting information, nutritional counseling, advocacy and education are finding their way into Ontario's food bank operations. Food banks recognize that hunger and poverty are interdependent factors that need to be addressed in a comprehensive fashion.

So where do we go from here?

We need to start by re-thinking how we approach hunger and poverty in our province from the viewpoint of government, the third sector, and the broader social movement. We need a new perspective on hunger and poverty to inform our poverty reduction efforts, which must include a poverty reduction plan. This perspective should not only be informed by our experiences, but by the experiences of experts, other nations, and other movements to provide a strong basis for our new system of thinking. In this way, it is not a completely "new" perspective, but a fusion of proven perspectives that can help us to address the great challenge that we face.

There is a very apparent and immediate need for a new perspective on hunger and poverty. Canada is currently experiencing record low unemployment, burgeoning market and profit gains, unprecedented domestic economic growth, and record setting government surpluses, and yet hundreds of thousands of Ontarians live without adequate food or housing, have insufficient medical care and protective benefits, are functionally illiterate and have limited education, and are employed in temporary and low-wage jobs with little opportunity for advancement.

We must respond to the pressing issues that affect our common interest. The depth of poverty in our province is great and growing for many Ontarians. The associated impacts of poverty such as poor health and development result in greater expenses for the provincial government in terms of health care and broader social services. We also risk our collective prosperity if a significant number of our citizens are underemployed, do not have the qualifications or means of advancing into higher skill occupations, and have greater and growing debt or financial pressures.

We need to do what is right, what is just, and what fits with our stated values as a nation, which is to ensure that all citizens have equal opportunity to a high quality of life.

QUEBEC

Prepared by Clément Bergeron, l'Association québécoise des banques alimentaires et des Moissons

Individuals assisted: **151,203 (2% of provincial population)**

Percent children: **35.8%**

Percent single people: **41.2%**

Percent reporting employment income: **12.63%**

Percent receiving social assistance: **59.5%**

Economic analysts in Quebec agree that the level of employment is higher this year than it has been in a long time. The unemployment rate is the lowest in 30 years, and the economy is showing positive signs for the second year in a row.

The results of *HungerCount 2007* in Quebec are slightly lower compared to last year. This year, we integrated a new regional food bank in the Ottawa Valley region, under the name of Moisson Outaouais. The number of persons receiving help in the Ottawa Valley region changes the total number of persons receiving help in Quebec.

On the other hand, data gathering improves year after year and enables us to provide increasingly exact data on the situation of hunger and of people in need. Moisson Montréal and Moisson Rive-Sud improved their data gathering system and we can notice a significant variation between the number of people receiving help in March 2007 compared to March 2006.

Along with the *HungerCount*, Quebec also conducted an investigation into the role of local food banks (18 regional food banks and 970 local organizations) in processing, referring and following up with individuals receiving help. We will know the results of this investigation next fall. We are trying to determine to what extent the food bank network is used as a starting point for the social reintegration of people in need.

In conclusion, the *HungerCount* enables us to note a certain stability in the use of food banks in Quebec although the economy has improved over the past two years, which should lead to a decrease in the use of food banks.

NEW BRUNSWICK

Prepared by George Piers, Fredericton Community Kitchen

Individuals assisted: **16,347 (2.2% of provincial population)**

Percent children: **33.1%**

Percent reporting employment income: **10.7%**

Percent receiving social assistance: **65%**

Percent seniors: **9.2%**

Again this year New Brunswick has experienced a decrease in the use of food banks, but a general increase in the use of soup kitchens. The decrease in food bank use has been the result of a demand for workers in call centers, the service industry, construction, and grocery chains.

We should continue to see a decline in the use of food banks as industry continues to develop throughout New Brunswick, for example potash mines in the Sussex area, and the refurbishing of the dry docks in the Saint John area, along with the building boom in Moncton and Fredericton. The demand for farm workers in central New Brunswick far exceeds the supply, forcing many farmers to rely on immigrant workers during the planting and harvesting times. Hopefully this will not be offset by the closure of various lumber mills throughout the province, as a result of the rising dollar and the decrease in the demand for export lumber.

Even with this economic boom we still see trenches of poverty, primarily among people with a lack of marketable skills, and people with mental health, social, and family problems. These issues make it difficult to hold any type of a job, and increase the likelihood of becoming poor and having to rely on food banks and soup kitchens to meet basic needs.

There are still far too many children who are caught in the cycle of poverty throughout New Brunswick. In March 2007, 33% of those assisted by food banks were children under 18 years of age. This is the result of many of the above-mentioned problems being passed from generation to generation.

Government and the private sector have increased the number of families in subsidized housing, but the demand continues to rise above supply. The cost of housing in the private sector still makes it difficult for those with low incomes, and especially those on social assistance, to acquire suitable housing, with the result that many are forced to live in crowded and substandard living conditions.

The present provincial government of New Brunswick is attempting to address many of these problems by conducting a study examining how it can resolve the issues faced by non-profit service providers, as well as how to reintroduce people into the workforce. During the past year minimum wage has been increased to \$7.25 an hour.

We continually see individuals who have hit bottom financially and emotionally. With the assistance of food banks, soup kitchens and outreach workers, they are in many cases able to become productive citizens and hold responsible jobs. In return, they give back to those organizations that have assisted them in their time of need, so that others can be helped.

NOVA SCOTIA

Prepared by Dianne Swinemar, FEED NOVA SCOTIA

Individuals assisted: **18,417 (2% of provincial population)**

Percent children: **34.6%**

Percent reporting employment income: **9.4%**

Percent receiving social assistance: **53.9%**

Percent reporting pension income: **10.2%**

For the third year in a row, Nova Scotia is reporting a decrease in overall food bank usage. Although potentially good news, Nova Scotia's food bank staff and volunteers haven't observed decreased need and are concerned that the drop in numbers may be due in part to reductions in available services and not to a reduction in the number of people requiring food assistance. A number of food bank closures in the province during 2006-2007 may have contributed to decreases in food bank usage. Some food banks were also forced to tighten up their service areas due to decreased supplies of food on hand, or had to reduce services because of rising costs. At least one food bank that used to deliver door-to-door in rural parts of Cape Breton has ended this service because of rising gasoline prices. Taken together, this may have had the effect of reducing food bank numbers, but does not represent a reduced need among individuals and families.

In addition, FEED NOVA SCOTIA has observed a cyclical variation in food bank usage over the past ten years, one which has seen numbers drop significantly and then rise again. In 1997, for example, the *HungerCount* survey reported that 16,188 Nova Scotians used a food bank in March. This number increased to 26,190 the following year and fell to 18,436 in 2002. The statistics suggest that baseline food bank use is around 16,000-18,000 people a month, with a further 5,000-7,000 individuals who use food banks off and on over the years, depending on the state of the local economy. Only time will tell if the trend this year is a sign of real progress or only a low point in the cycle.

A major concern continues to be the high number of children affected by hunger in Nova Scotia. According to the results of *HungerCount 2007*, 34.6% of the individuals using food banks in the province are children under the age of 18. Research has shown that the negative impact of hunger can last a lifetime, hindering a child's ability to succeed academically and, later, in the workplace. It is crucial to reduce the rates of child poverty in Nova Scotia. Our shared future as a province depends on taking good care of our children today.

Nova Scotia is currently enjoying one of the lowest unemployment rates in recent years. Coinciding with this good news, however, is the sad fact that more and more working people are relying on food banks because their jobs do not pay enough to live and eat. While fewer people on social assistance are accessing food banks than in previous years, the number of working poor has continued to rise due to wages that have not kept up with the cost of living.

Another area of concern for FEED NOVA SCOTIA is the rising Canadian dollar and the negative impact this may have on manufacturing jobs in the coming year. According to the Canadian Manufacturers and Exporters Association, nearly 25% of Nova Scotians work in the manufacturing

sector, and job losses in this sector could lead to significant increases in food bank use in affected communities. In fact, in the past seven years, 6,000 manufacturing jobs have left Nova Scotia. The recent closures of the Hershey's (Moirs) plant in Dartmouth, and the TrentonWorks rail car plant in Trenton, have created significant regionalized unemployment in these communities. It is anticipated that food bank usage in these areas will increase over the coming year.

This decrease in manufacturing jobs is being offset to a small extent by an increase in the number of knowledge-based jobs in the province. Of concern to FEED NOVA SCOTIA, however, is the fact that the cost of the education required for these jobs is simply beyond the means of most low-income Nova Scotians. Student loans do not provide enough to cover education and living expenses, and clawback provisions built into the social assistance and employment insurance systems are having the effect of minimizing a low-income household's chances of getting ahead.

The vulnerability of urban food bank users is also of concern. The global trend towards city living has created a spike in the cost of living that far exceeds any increases in the minimum wage or social assistance benefits. For example, the cost of a two-bedroom apartment and heating oil in Halifax, according to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, has increased by 24% and 60% respectively between 1995 and 2005. The minimum wage during this same period has only increased by 19.4%, and social assistance benefits have actually decreased in relative dollars compared to 1991, according to the National Council of Welfare.¹⁸

Related to this issue, the percentage of food bank users reporting pension income has increased by over 40%. Citizens on fixed pensions are typically more affected by cost-of-living increases, and seniors in particular, many of whom have increased health care costs, are put in a difficult position where they may have to choose between purchasing food or medication.

FEED NOVA SCOTIA is hopeful that we may have turned a corner in terms of reducing poverty, but with over 18,000 Nova Scotians requiring the help of a food bank in March of 2007, much more needs to be done to find long-term solutions that lead to significant and consecutive declines in food bank use year after year, reducing the number of children affected by hunger, and ensuring that working families can afford to live and eat.

NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

Prepared by Eg Walters, Community Food Sharing Association

Individuals assisted: **26,746 (5.3% of provincial population)**

Percent children: **38.5%**

Percent reporting employment income: **9.5%**

Percent receiving social assistance: **70.6%**

Percent single parents: **37.9%**

Percent seniors: **10.6%**

Food banks and related feeding programmes throughout Newfoundland and Labrador continue to face many challenges in assisting those who are less fortunate among us. Our rural areas are still

experiencing much uncertainty with the fishery and the pulp and paper industry. Outmigration continues to drain our young people as job fairs for placements in Western Canada are attracting thousands of individuals searching for employment in the Alberta Oil Patch and its related industries.

This past year has seen much uncertainty in the continued development of the offshore oil industry. A hard-nosed approach by the provincial government over an equity position in the Hebron Field resulted in the breakdown of negotiations and loss of momentum in the oil industry. While the economy on the east coast of Newfoundland and Labrador remains strong, it will take time to regain this momentum. The recent signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between our provincial government and the Hebron consortium should kick-start things once again and we should see a continued growth of economic activity leading up to the construction stage of this project.

Also recently, Fishery Products International, a major player in the fishing industry, was sold. The sale is said to be a good one which should provide stability and growth in an industry that has been plagued by downturns and labour unrest.

Over this past year, we have seen a slight decrease across the board in food bank figures. Some of this can be attributed to the closure of several food banks, some to the cutback in serving hours of others, while the continued growth in our economy is obviously contributing as well. In all fairness, some credit has to go to our provincial government for their implementation of a Poverty Reduction Strategy to assist those who have been marginalised by society.

PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Prepared by Mike MacDonald, Upper Room Food Bank

Individuals assisted: **2,811 (2% of provincial population)**

Percent children: **35.3%**

Percent reporting employment income: **23.7%**

Percent receiving Employment Insurance: **29.2%**

Percent receiving social assistance: **33%**

Prince Edward Island continues to have too many of its residents relying on food banks. In March of 2007 over 2,800 people had to turn to food banks to put food on their table. Although this is a decrease in comparison to the last couple of years, it remains too high for such a prosperous province and country. Half of P.E.I.'s food banks saw decreases in food bank usage in March 2007 in comparison to March 2006.

One of the major problems people are continuing to have on P.E.I. is meeting the cost of housing. There is a lack of social housing throughout the province. Many food bank users only earn minimum wage or slightly higher. It is extremely difficult for these people to pay rent, deal with the high price of oil, and to buy groceries. Many people are concerned with the high price of oil, and wonder how they will continue to heat their home or how they will put gas in their car to get

to work. Too many people have to make the decision of paying rent, heating their home, or buying groceries for their family.

A lack of employment continues to be one of the main reasons people are forced to use food banks. Many of our young people continue to make the trip West to find employment. This is especially true during the winter months. We are now finding that it is no longer just our young people making the trip – more and more people that work in our seasonal industries such as fishing and farming are now joining them. They are leaving their families behind so they will be able to make ends meet during the winter months.

The provincial government has been addressing the issue of employment over the last number of years. This, along with the western migration, is starting to lead to lower unemployment rates. Although farming, fishing, and tourism remain the key industries, aerospace, information technology, and bio-science are having a positive effect on our economy. Many Islanders are leaving rural areas of the Island and are moving into the Charlottetown and Summerside centres to try and take advantage of these opportunities.

A new provincial government was elected in the spring and many are hoping that this government will address the difficulties that many have accessing social assistance benefits, and many are hoping that they will make social housing a priority.

THE YUKON, NORTHWEST TERRITORIES, AND NUNAVUT

Individuals assisted: **2,256 (2.2% of territorial population)**

Percent change, 2006-2007: **+19%**

Percent children: **43.7%**

In March 2007, people assisted by food banks constituted 2.2% of the population of the Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut. The number of people assisted by food banks in the territories rose to 2,256 individuals, a 19% increase since 2006, with the increase concentrated in three of seven reporting food banks. The percentage of territorial food bank users under age 18 is higher than any province except Saskatchewan, at 43.7%.

Evidence from the 2001 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) suggests that the need for emergency food outstrips supply in the territories. A recent Statistics Canada report indicates that Northern residents are particularly vulnerable to hunger, with 56% (Nunavut), 28% (Northwest Territories) and 21% (Yukon) of residents experiencing food insecurity.¹⁹ In Whitehorse, a recent feasibility study recommended that, to meet existing need, Yukon food banks would need to increase their intake of food donations by 10,000 to 20,000 pounds of food per month.²⁰

Anecdotally, the CAFB has heard from food bank operators that the cost of living is rising in the major cities in the territories. Though Northern cities are seeing growth in new housing, there continues to be a shortage of affordable shelter, and overcrowding and couch surfing are prominent. The cost of goods such as gasoline, electricity, and fresh produce is prohibitively high

compared to southern regions and, though minimum wage and social assistance rates are among the highest in the country, many struggle to make ends meet.

The government of the Northwest Territories recently announced a planned overhaul of its income security system, which administers the region's social assistance program. As of September 1, income supports are to no longer be considered a last resort for individuals with nowhere else to turn. Instead, programs are to "provide adequate financial assistance in combination with supports and services to help people achieve self-reliance," with resources put toward integration of services and active case management.²¹ Welfare benefit rates have been increased, with lower clawback rates applied to income earned from employment.

Though reforms are reportedly in the planning stages,²² no such changes have been implemented in the Yukon, where social assistance rates provided lower benefits in 2005 than in 1997. The same is true of Nunavut, where social assistance rates have declined in real dollars since the territory's founding, in 1999.²³ This seems especially punitive in a region where residents continue to adapt to a decline in markets for the products of traditional hunting and aquaculture, and where the unemployment rate hovers at 25%.²⁴

Discussion

In January 2007, Statistics Canada reported that the national unemployment rate had reached 6.2%, and unemployment has continued to hover at historic lows.²⁵ More Canadians are working and, as is made clear in this document's provincial reports, the national economy is enjoying robust health.

More Canadians are working, and more Canadians are obliged to work. Social assistance rates fall well below Statistics Canada Low Income Cut-Offs (LICO), the most widely-used indicator of poverty. Employment Insurance benefit levels have also dropped, and E.I. provides coverage to only 40% of those who pay into the program, compared to 75% in 1990.²⁶⁻²⁷

Many Canadians are obliged to work at jobs that pay too little, provide few extra-wage benefits, and are part-time or temporary. Though average education levels have risen in the past 25 years, the percentage of adults working for less than \$10 per hour – 16% of the workforce – has not changed since the early nineteen-eighties.²⁸ Work has simultaneously become more precarious, with an increase in the percentage of adults working part-time or temporary jobs with few benefits, and who are likely to work for more than one employer.²⁹ Particularly in Ontario, the manufacturing sector is in decline, with former factory employees increasingly forced to find work in the growing service sector.

HungerCount 2007 provides surprising glimpses into the links between economic change and the need for emergency food assistance. For example, this year's findings remind us that hunger exists in even the most prosperous regions. In Calgary, 40% of those assisted by the city's largest food bank reported employment as their primary source of income. In Grande Prairie, 30% of food bank users are employed, and in Fort McMurray this figure jumps to 95% – astonishing figures in these Alberta resource boomtowns. Nationally, levels of employment among food bank users are striking, from an average low of 7% in Saskatchewan to highs of 27% in Alberta, 14.2% in Ontario and 14% in Manitoba. For many, work does not lead the way out of poverty.

While more Canadians are working, the nation's low unemployment rate hides the fact that, in many regions, employment remains difficult to find. For example, unemployment in St. John's stands at 6.5%, with the rest of Newfoundland and Labrador at 18.1%. In Nova Scotia, Statistics Canada reports a rate in Halifax of 5.9%, compared to 14.6% in the eastern part of the province. Unemployment in northern Manitoba has reached 26%, compared to 5.8% in the south, with a similar trend in Saskatchewan.³⁰ The largest urban areas are driving national employment rates, along with reported average wage increases,³¹ while other regions lag behind.

Reports of national economic prosperity also hide the growing gap between Canada's rich and poor. The middle class has declined considerably and, in terms of both income and wealth, low-income Canadians have been losing ground since 1989. As inequities in after-tax income have grown, government responses to these inequities have stagnated or decreased.³²⁻³³⁻³⁴ Greater shares of yearly income and accumulated wealth have accrued to the wealthiest 20% of Canadians, and it is a struggle for the less wealthy to enter or maintain their place in the middle class. With decreased income, savings, and investments, individuals and families are finding it more difficult to plan for the future, and to manage rough patches when they occur.³⁵

Vulnerability to low income, and to persistent low income, is concentrated among particular groups. This vulnerability is reflected in the findings of *HungerCount 2007*, which shows an

overrepresentation of single parents and single unattached individuals. Recent studies have shown that these two groups are likely to struggle to rise out of poverty, difficult as it has become to live well on the proceeds of a single salary, or on welfare benefits provided to single people.³⁶⁻³⁷ For single individuals who are over age 45, who can be identified as a visible minority, who have less than a high school education, or who experience activity limitations because of a physical or intellectual disability, the likelihood of long-term poverty is very real.³⁸

Taken together, these facts suggest that there is no single explanation for the stubborn levels of food bank use in Canada, and no simple solution to the problem. The demand for emergency food assistance exists in areas of both low and high unemployment. It exists in isolated rural areas, and in Canada's growing cities. It exists among single people and single parents, but also among two-parent families with children. While unemployed persons are most vulnerable, it is clear that work cannot always provide enough to meet basic needs.

The individuals and families assisted by food banks do, however, have something in common: the increased risk of poor physical and mental health stemming from food insecurity. This risk may be the result of a number of factors, including insufficient intake of nutritious food, the substitution of cheap, calorie-rich foods for fresh produce, and stress related to worrying about finding and keeping work, paying rent and bills, and feeding oneself and one's children.

The link between low income, food insecurity, poor nutrition, and poor physical health is neither new nor surprising. For individuals receiving welfare – by far the largest group of food bank users – income, nutrition and health are bound together, with deficiencies in one area leading to problems in others. Welfare recipients are likely to have poorer physical health than the general population, even before taking into account the benefit levels of social assistance.³⁹ Upon resorting to welfare, individuals must make do with incomes less than two-thirds the level of Statistics Canada's Low Income Cut-Offs,⁴⁰ which are barely sufficient to pay the average rent in many urban areas, much less to afford food for a nutritious diet.

For recipients of income benefits and the working poor alike, food insecurity is likely to lead to a decline in overall adult and child physical health, and to an increase in reported health conditions.⁴¹⁻⁴²⁻⁴³⁻⁴⁴ Low income severely restricts a household's ability to purchase an adequate quantity and quality of food, leading to a lower intake of healthy foods such as fruits, vegetables, meat and meat alternatives.⁴⁵⁻⁴⁶⁻⁴⁷⁻⁴⁸⁻⁴⁹ Poor nutrition can have a range of health-related effects, and contributes to the fact that, "as economic and social circumstances decline, people have shorter, sicker lives."⁵⁰

Food insecurity is also likely to introduce significant stress into the day-to-day routines of adults and children, and can contribute negatively to the mental health of those who experience it.⁵¹⁻⁵²⁻⁵³ For welfare recipients, stress can come from many directions, the most prevalent being the problem of making a benefit cheque last to the end of the month. For any family whose income is predictable but insufficient, food insecurity tends to be cyclical,⁵⁴ and therefore a persistent source of worry. Welfare incomes have steadily decreased over the past two decades, and are grossly inadequate to meet the needs of single people, single parents, and two-parent families alike.⁵⁵ Furthermore, when applying for benefits, and for the duration of the benefit period, people receiving welfare are subjected to an invasive and demoralizing process designed "to deny access to social assistance and to remove those who are on as quickly as possible."⁵⁶

Though they are not exposed to the bureaucratic stressors faced by recipients of social assistance, the working poor also risk mental health effects stemming from low income and food insecurity. Regardless of income source, food insecurity is associated with higher levels of clinical depression and anxiety, and with behavioural problems in children.⁵⁷⁻⁵⁸⁻⁵⁹⁻⁶⁰⁻⁶¹⁻⁶² The combined physical and mental health effects of food insecurity present barriers to adults trying to work themselves out of poverty, and to children who need optimal levels of health to excel in school and the transition to work.

Food insecurity sits at the centre of a collection of policy failures. There are a small number of well-identified groups – including the undereducated, people with disabilities, visible minorities, single parents, and older unattached individuals – who are at increased risk of experiencing hunger. People in need turn to a support system that is systematically underfunded and under-prioritized, and which often acts as an additional source of stress and disadvantage. When individuals not traditionally considered vulnerable – two parent families or couples without children, for example – turn to public supports for help, they face an already overburdened system, and risk becoming caught in a cycle of disadvantage.

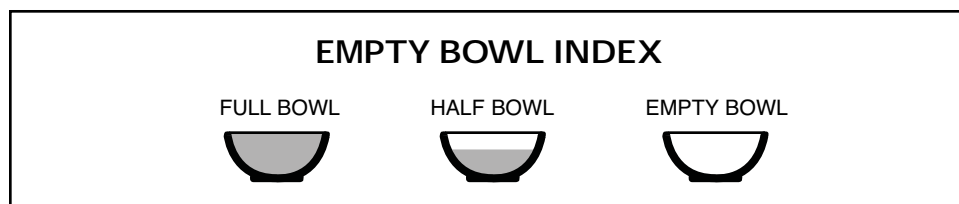
These problems are endemic to a social safety net that prioritizes reaction over prevention, and that depends too heavily on the voluntary and private sectors to address the shortcomings of an imperfect labour market. Food banks, community foundations, school breakfast and lunch programs, emergency shelters, and a huge network of family caregivers and volunteers struggle to meet the needs of people failed by the education system, facing discrimination in the job market, living with chronic health problems and disabilities, or trying to balance raising a family with working. Responses to these needs are too often fragmented, under-resourced, and inadequate.

It is with an eye to these problems that CAFB puts forward a number of policy recommendations, crafted to address the particular needs of those assisted by food banks. These recommendations are outlined below.

CAFB Policy Priorities

The 2007 Federal Budget, released to the Canadian public in March of this year, was presented, in part, as contributing specifically to the amelioration of problems faced by 'vulnerable' Canadians.⁶³ Though the current government's top priorities, as outlined in *Advantage Canada*,⁶⁴ do not position poverty as a central problem, the budget nevertheless introduced several policies that were welcomed by the CAFB. These include changes to the Canada Social Transfer and the introduction of the Working Income Tax Benefit, a refundable tax credit available to low-income working Canadians.

These and other CAFB policy priorities are reviewed below, using the Empty Bowl Rating to evaluate government performance and progress.



The Canada Social Transfer (CST)

Problem:

Since federal-provincial funding transfers were cut in 1995-96, provinces and municipalities have struggled to provide an adequate safety net for low-income Canadians. In several provinces, governments have retreated from an active social role, leaving municipalities to bear a heavy fiscal burden for traditional provincial responsibilities.⁶⁵ The CST is used to fund provincial welfare benefits, and a shortage of federal support is one reason why current provincial social assistance rates are punishingly low, forcing recipients to live in severe poverty.

Progress:



The federal government introduced changes to the Canada Social Transfer, including the identification of separate funding streams for post-secondary education, social programs, and children's programs; extension of the current system of transfers to 2013-14; and application of an annual 3% escalator beginning in 2009-10. These changes will increase the predictability of federal transfers, and allow the tracking of provincial spending according to funding stream.

CAFB Position:

While the 3% escalator is a welcome development, federal transfers must be raised to 1994-95 levels as soon as possible. Though transparency of the CST has increased, there are no standards attached to this funding, and provinces are not required to apply funds to their intended purpose. It is incumbent on provincial governments to utilize federal transfers to increase the quality of education and social programs. With the increased support provided by a predictable Canada Social Transfer, CAFB strongly recommends an immediate increase of provincial social assistance rates, with yearly increases indexed to inflation.

Liveable Wages

Problem:

Employed individuals are the second largest group of people assisted by food banks, at 13.5% of the total. 'Precarious employment,' i.e. the type of job that is casual, part-time, temporary, or without benefits, has increased as full-time jobs with benefits have become more scarce.⁶⁶ Minimum wage rates are not adequate to lift households above poverty, particularly in the case of single earner households.⁶⁷

Progress:

In March 2007, the federal government introduced the Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB), a refundable tax credit for low-income employed Canadians. This tax measure provides, for those who are eligible, up to \$500 per year for individuals, and up to \$1,000 per year for parents. The Supplement for Persons with Disabilities provides for an additional \$250 per year.



Minimum wage rates have been increased in several provinces, but remain well below the minimum standard of \$10 per hour.



CAFB Position:

While the WITB is a promising start, it must be reformed if it is to meet the government's stated goals. Within the current structure, only those individuals living far below the poverty line will have access to the benefit, and many in need will be left out. Eligibility must be widened, and benefits increased to a maximum of \$2,400 per year for individuals.

Minimum wage rates must be increased to \$10 per hour, and indexed to inflation.

Employment Insurance

Problem:

In an effort to increase the mobility and flexibility of the Canadian workforce, the federal government has made significant reforms to the national system of unemployment insurance: narrowing eligibility, lowering benefit levels, and decreasing the length of benefit periods. Only about 40% of employed Canadians paying into the program are eligible for benefits when they lose their jobs, compared to about 75% coverage in 1990.

Progress:

No relevant changes have been made to federal Employment Insurance.



CAFB Position:

The federal government must streamline eligibility requirements across jurisdictions, i.e. by decreasing entrance requirements in low-unemployment areas. The CAFB recommends raising E.I. benefit levels, and lengthening benefit periods.

National Child Benefit

Problem:

The National Child Benefit is a progressive and effective program that helps low and middle-income families. However, several changes can be made to increase the utility of this tax benefit. Many provinces continue to 'claw back' the National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS) from families on social assistance, and the federal government has introduced a regressive element into the system with the Universal Child Care Benefit (UCCB).

Progress:



An end to the NCBS clawback could help many families assisted by food banks,⁶⁸ and some provinces have made changes that offset the clawback to some degree. However, in many cases provincial governments continue to deny the full benefit to those receiving social assistance.⁶⁹

CAFB Position:

Provincial governments must end the NCBS clawback while maintaining current social programs targeted to low-income families. To make more sensible use of funds earmarked for families, the federal government should cancel the Universal Child Care Benefit and divert the savings to a strengthened Canada Child Tax Benefit.

Affordable Housing

Problem:

Food bank operators across the country report that housing costs are a major contributor to the ongoing need for emergency food assistance. For people on social assistance, benefit rates barely cover the cost of shelter in many jurisdictions, with little left over to cover other basic needs. As municipal governments move to increase revenues, rising property taxes disproportionately affect low-income homeowners, and put home ownership out of reach for renters.⁷⁰

Progress:



The \$1.4 billion announced for affordable housing in the March 2006 budget has been dispersed to provinces, but accountability measures are lacking, and few provinces have announced plans for use of these funds.⁷¹ While social housing programs proliferate at the provincial and municipal levels, waiting lists continue to be years long.

CAFB Position:

The supply and management of affordable housing is a complex and capital-intensive undertaking, and requires regular, adequate and predictable federal funding. Housing must be seen as a central element in federal social and health policy, as housing adequacy is clearly linked to outcomes in physical and mental health, child development, and social well-being.

Child Care

Problem:

Child care experts have consistently called for a comprehensive system of early learning and child care, supported by adequate federal financing. The current federal government's Universal Child Care Benefit, and the Child Care Spaces Initiative, provide only limited support for such a system. Currently, regulated child care meets the needs of less than 20% of children in Canada.

Progress:

The Universal Child Care Benefit is a taxable benefit not geared to income that, as noted above, would be better used to supplement a strengthened Canada Child Tax Benefit. The Child Care Spaces Initiative is not equal to the need for ongoing federal support of early learning and care.



CAFB Position:

For the 51% of households assisted by food banks who report welfare as their primary source of income, the cost of child care is a significant barrier to entry into the workforce. For those who are working, the combination of child care, housing, and employment-related expenses such as clothing and transportation may make it impossible to maintain a job. To address the needs of these and other groups, governments must provide ongoing support to a system of early learning and child care that is affordable, inclusive and of high quality.

Conclusion

A growing number of voices can be heard speaking out about hunger and poverty in Canada. The earliest were heard – and continue to be heard – at the community level, where people living in poverty, social service workers and volunteers can speak personally about what it means to be unable to make ends meet, and to need help from food banks, soup kitchens, school and after-school meal programs, friends and family.

These voices are amplified through the efforts of social advocates across the country: in municipal social planning councils, community development agencies, social and supportive housing boards, welfare rights and anti-poverty groups, unions, and countless other organizations that provide platforms for people living in poverty to speak out about their lives.

Findings from a number of studies from university and federal government researchers help to paint a picture of increasing income and wealth inequality, the failure of welfare systems, a stubborn level of poverty, and an embarrassing problem of food insecurity that puts the long-term health of a significant number of Canadian adults and children at risk.

HungerCount 2007 shows the extent to which the need for policy intervention is spread across the nation, in every province and territory, in large cities, small towns and rural areas, in areas of high and low unemployment, and in economies – resource, agriculture and aquaculture, knowledge, service, manufacturing – of every kind.

Governments must make the eradication of hunger a priority. While encouraging steps have been taken – for example, poverty reduction strategies in Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador, welfare reform in the Northwest Territories, and a federal refundable tax credit for low-income working Canadians – much more remains to be accomplished. As long as the need for food banks exists, the work of governments will remain unfinished.

Endnotes

- 1 These data are taken from a national poll with a sample size of 808 randomly selected eligible Canadian voters, fielded by Strategic Communications, December 27-30, 2005 and January 2-3, 2006. Margin of error is +/- 3.4%, 19 times out of 20.
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- 7 In several provinces, including Newfoundland and Labrador, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia, there was a slight decrease in the number of food banks and/or agencies reporting. This likely contributed to the size of the decrease in these provinces – particularly in Nova Scotia – but cannot be said to be the only reason for the decrease in overall national use. In Alberta and Ontario, utilization numbers were estimated for several operational food banks that did not submit *HungerCount* surveys in 2007. These estimates increase the likelihood that, in these provinces, the overall change seen in 2007 is not the result of the decrease in number of food banks reporting.
- 8 Statistics Canada population estimates for April 2007 were used to calculate provincial use as a percentage of population. See Statistics Canada (2007), *Quarterly population estimates, national perspective – Population*. Available: http://www.statcan.ca/english/freepub/91-002-XIE/2007001/t002_en.htm .
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- 10 Income source percentages are based on surveys from 484 food banks, including 50 Nova Scotia agencies. Weighted by total number of people assisted by grocery programs.
- 11 Housing questions were not asked of food banks in Quebec, and the number of food banks reporting in each of the territories is too low to provide a reliable estimate of the housing situation of food bank users. Therefore, the housing-related information provided in this report refers only to Canadian provinces, with the exception of Quebec.
- 12 Housing type percentages are based on surveys from 352 food banks, including 49 Nova Scotia agencies. Weighted by total number of people assisted by grocery programs.
- 13 Days' worth of food percentages are based on surveys from 554 food banks, including 75 Nova Scotia agencies. Frequency of use percentages are based on surveys from 626 food banks, including 73 Nova Scotia agencies.
- 14 Based on surveys from 640 food banks, including 74 Nova Scotia agencies. Though the study period in March is considered unexceptional, or average, in terms of usage levels, a single-month measure of the ability of food banks to meet demand is unable to take into consideration the yearly ebb and flow of food and monetary donations, which vary widely at different times in the year.
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Table 3 Provincial Breakdown of Selected HungerCount 2007 Results

2007 Item	Canada	BC	AB	SK	MB	ON	QC	NB	NS	PEI	NL
Total Volunteer Hours	419,557	40,562	31,588	4,967	24,760	84,159	194,082	22,882	11,666	1,265	3,463
Total Staff Hours	288,096	16,411	16,676	4,646	4,148	35,866	186,164	13,246	8,280	598	1,810
Family & Household Composition - Estimated Percentages (weighted by total number of people assisted by grocery programs)											
Single-Parent	28.4	30.7	30.9	23.5	28.1	28.6	26.6	25.6	27.5	35.6	37.9
Two-Parent	22.2	20.0	23.6	23.3	24.4	21.6	22.4	20.0	20.6	26.4	26.2
Couples No Children	12.0	10.0	17.9	14.8	12.7	12.3	9.9	16.9	13.3	12.5	10.7
Single People	37.4	39.4	27.6	38.5	34.8	37.5	41.2	37.6	38.6	25.5	25.2
Income Sources - Estimated Percentages (weighted by total number of people assisted by grocery programs)											
Employment	13.5	11.5	27.0	7.0	14.0	14.2	12.6	10.7	9.4	23.7	9.5
Employment Insurance	5.2	3.9	3.3	4.2	4.1	3.2	7.5	7.3	5.4	29.2	14.6
Social Assistance	50.7	42.0	34.8	63.9	43.1	46.2	59.5	65.0	53.9	33.0	70.6
Disability Support	12.5	21.5	13.2	3.8	9.6	21.1	1.5	4.2	13.3	4.9	0.2
Pension Income	6.1	7.8	7.2	5.1	6.2	3.9	8.3	7.3	10.2	6.8	5.0
Student Loans	2.2	0.7	2.7	5.2	3.7	2.4	n/a	0.7	0.9	0.3	0.0
No Income	5.6	7.2	8.9	5.9	14.6	4.4	4.8	3.5	4.8	1.3	0.1
Other Income	4.6	5.4	2.8	4.9	4.8	4.6	5.8	1.3	2.0	0.8	0.0
Amount of Food in a Hamper - Percentage of Food Banks											
1-3 Days	29.7	23.9	4.3	30.4	50.0	31.9	n/a	31.9	32.0	66.7	61.1
3.5-5 Days	34.1	42.3	25.7	30.4	28.6	34.3	n/a	31.9	38.7	33.3	33.3
More than 5 Days	36.1	33.8	70.0	39.1	21.4	33.8	n/a	36.2	29.3	0.0	5.6
Frequency of Food Bank Use Permitted - Percentage of Food Banks											
At least once per week	8.5	15.7	5.9	4.3	5.7	9.5	n/a	0.0	9.6	0.0	0.0
Every 10 days to 3 weeks	16.0	16.9	7.1	30.4	57.1	12.8	n/a	17.6	16.4	0.0	0.0
Once per month	60.5	54.2	49.4	60.9	25.7	63.4	n/a	76.5	68.5	100.0	85.7
Every 5 to 16 weeks	9.9	9.6	25.9	4.3	8.6	8.6	n/a	2.0	2.7	0.0	14.3
1 to 3 times per year	0.6	0.0	4.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	n/a	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
Depends on need	4.5	3.6	7.1	0.0	2.9	5.8	n/a	3.9	2.7	0.0	0.0
Measures Taken due to Lack of Food - Percentage of Food Banks											
1+ measures taken	69.5	77.1	61.2	65.2	62.2	63.6	n/a	72.7	85.1	100.0	85.7
Close early/do not open	0.8	1.2	0.0	0.0	2.7	0.8	n/a	1.8	0.0	0.0	0.0
Turn people away	2.3	2.4	0.0	0.0	2.7	1.2	n/a	1.8	9.6	0.0	4.8
Buy food	64.8	74.7	61.2	65.2	56.8	56.0	n/a	70.9	77.0	100.0	85.7
Give less food	15.8	15.7	8.2	4.3	24.3	14.8	n/a	20.0	20.3	16.7	23.8



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