



Right to Food Campaign GRAN Backgrounder – Hunger in Canada

Introduction

As GRANs learn about global hunger, we want to also be clear-eyed about the hunger that exists here at home. This backgrounder offers a brief overview of hunger here in Canada, exploring its causes and offering some possible solutions. Links to additional resources are included for those wishing to deepen their understanding of the issue and support efforts to reduce hunger in their communities.

Exploring Hunger and Poverty in Canada

Chronic hunger in Canada is deep-rooted and persistent. The main cause of hunger is poverty. While some conventional wisdom suggests otherwise, poverty is not a choice people make, but a reality they live. Those in our country most vulnerable to poverty and chronic hunger include children, Indigenous peoples, new immigrants, single parents, people living with a disability, and unattached people aged 45-64. Information regarding the definitions of hunger and malnutrition can be found in GRAN's [Small Sips #3](#).

The poverty rate in Canada has decreased steadily since 2015. [Canada's Official Poverty Dashboard of Indicators](#) shows an overall reduction in poverty in Canada from 14.5% in 2015 to 6.4% in 2020, the last year for which statistics are available. The biggest drop was between 2019 and 2020, when the overall poverty rate fell by more than one third. That was a year which saw unprecedented but temporary government-funded income security measures during the pandemic. The supports introduced in 2020 helped lift Canadians with the lowest income out of poverty. Now that those supports have been withdrawn, and with the rise in inflation, poverty is undoubtedly on the increase (statistics are not yet available). The substantial decrease in the number of Canadians living in poverty in 2020 is a lesson demonstrating that poverty (or its elimination) is a policy choice, not an economic inevitability. Emily Renaud, National Coordinator of [Canada Without Poverty](#) confirms, "**People don't live in poverty because of poor choices. People live in poverty because of weak policies.**"

Child hunger in Canada is especially concerning given the long-term developmental impacts of malnutrition in the young child. Based on the [latest data from Statistics Canada's Canadian Income Survey](#), in 2021 one in five children in the ten provinces under the age of 18 lived in a household that experienced some level of food insecurity. Households with children led by female lone parents are especially vulnerable to food insecurity; 38% of these households were food-insecure. In June 2022

the head of [Food Banks Canada](#) stated about a third of people who rely on Canadian food banks are children, with food bank use rising especially among single-parent families. [GRAN's Small Sips #5](#) provides more information regarding children and hunger.

“Health professionals and researchers have documented the negative and compounding effects of poverty on those with low and very low incomes. This results in premature mortality, additional burdens on the health system, deteriorating long-term health conditions and effects on mental health and addiction...”. ([Daily Bread Research Bulletin](#))

[Canada's Official Poverty Line](#) is based on the cost of a basket of goods and services that individuals and families require to meet their basic needs and achieve a modest standard of living in communities across the country. Due to cost of living differences, Canada's Official Poverty Line varies from region to region.

Hunger in Canada is not just about the recent increase in food costs, but rather is a deeper, systemic issue. It is about the failure of governments to make good policy choices that could eradicate poverty. These choices are often the result of racism, ableism, and system-wide social inequity. Inflation in 2023, which has seen the cost of food, housing, transportation, and other basic necessities rise dramatically, is bringing new urgency to the need to respond to the joint crises of poverty and hunger.

Solutions: Governments

According to anti-poverty experts, the causes of hunger and poverty demand a policy response from all levels of government and from civil society. We need investments in:

- Affordable housing
- Income Supports (disability payments, social assistance, etc.)
- A Guaranteed Livable Income (Note that the recently-ended Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) provided a real-world demonstration of how a guaranteed basic income can lift people out of poverty.)
- Reducing precarious employment (continuing to increase the minimum wage, providing fair sick leave policies and other benefits)
- Mental Health, wellness, learning and accessible childcare.

The federal government has both a [Poverty Reduction Strategy](#) and a [National Housing Strategy](#), which include some of the measures needed -- the Canada Disability Payment, the Canada Worker's Benefit as well as new money for affordable housing and top ups to existing programs such as the Seniors Guaranteed Income Supplement. The Child Tax Benefit, launched in 2015 has helped to lift many children and their families out of poverty. Most provinces and many municipal governments also have their own strategies.

While strategies are important and the new investments welcome, there is a need to act with more urgency to implement these strategies. And we must address the systemic barriers that have kept people in poverty.

Solutions: Civil Society

Food Banks and anti-poverty groups are at the forefront of addressing hunger, but they themselves say: “*Food banks are not the solution; governments are.*” [Food Banks Canada](#), including [Daily Bread](#) and many others across the country, continue to ask governments to “put them out of business”, and have been doing so for decades.

Research and advocacy organizations like [Basic Income Network](#), [Canada Without Poverty](#), [Ontario Living Wage Network](#), University of Toronto’s [PROOF Research Program](#) and the [Homeless Hub](#) continue to press government to make good policy choices and provide the research to support these choices.

Digging Deeper *(courtesy of Daily Bread Food Bank)*

Websites, Podcasts Books:

- Who’s Hungry? <https://www.dailybread.ca/research-and-advocacy/whos-hungry-report-2022/>
- Click/Hear reports: <https://www.dailybread.ca/research-and-advocacy/clickhearprogram/>
- University of Calgary report on impact of public policy on food bank visits: <https://www.dailybread.ca/research-and-advocacy/uofcreport/>
- *Deep Poverty* report: <https://www.dailybread.ca/research-and-advocacy/advocacy/tackling-deep-poverty-2/>
- *Toxic Charity* by Robert D. Lupton
- *Walking with the Poor* by Bryant L. Myers
- *Asset Based Community Development* by John McKnight
- *When Helping Hurts* by Brian Fikkert and Steve Corbett
- *Becoming Whole: Why the Opposite of Poverty isn't the American Dream* by Brian Fikkert and Kelly M. Kopic