

A snapshot of food insecurity in the face of **COVID-19**

Over the past 30 years, Hamilton Food Share has been the city's emergency food shipping and receiving hub for the network of hunger relief agencies we support. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic we have expanded our reach, providing food resources to 16 hunger relief organizations, operating 23 emergency food programs. Our food acquisition and distribution program acquired over 4.3 million pounds of nutritionally rich food, valued at almost 10 million dollars, distributed to food banks and hot meal programs operating across the city of Hamilton. Hamilton Food Share also manages the client intake database utilized by the network of agencies to collect data directly from frontline hunger programs. This report is formulated using this data.

Serving the Poorest of the Poor During a Pandemic

A recent study has shown that Hamilton food bank users have incomes that are 40-60% lower than the average Hamiltonian living with a low income. The study released by McMaster University in partnership with Hamilton Food Share also found that people living alone constitute the greatest number of foodbank clients of all households accessing a food bank. The study went on to state that single households visit most often and make up the greatest number of all low-income households.^[1]

The past year saw many in our city and across the globe face challenges they have never seen before, from job losses to evictions, and uncertainty about the future. **Unfortunately for those who rely on food banks, these conditions are all too familiar.** Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, households with children felt the greatest pressure as they increasingly relied on emergency food programs to feed their families.

Children Going Hungry

Prior to the onset of COVID-19, children in Ontario living in food-insecure households could access food supports through emergency food banks and school nutrition programs. Schools function as an essential infrastructure in emergency food supply to children, through the operation of school food programs.^[2] When these school nutrition programs were no longer available, visits made to the Emergency Food Network by school-aged children increased by almost 12%. As of this printing, school nutrition programs continue to be closed.



ALL HOUSEHOLD
VISITS IN MARCH
7,989



ALL VISITS
IN MARCH
ADULTS **13,319**
CHILDREN **8,568**
TOTAL **21,887**



UNIQUE
HOUSEHOLDS
IN MARCH
5,022



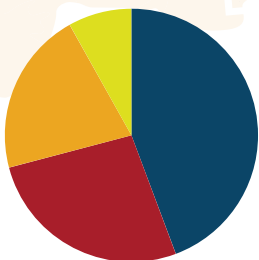
UNIQUE PEOPLE
IN MARCH
ADULTS **8,025**
CHILDREN **4,588**
TOTAL **12,613**



HOT MEALS
SERVED
IN MARCH
21,469

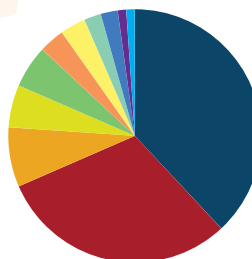
**On a typical day in Hamilton
45 seniors will seek
help at a food bank**

**On a typical day in Hamilton
286 children will line
up at a food bank**



Family Composition

- Single (44%)
- Two Parent Family (27%)
- Single Parent Family (21%)
- Couple with No Children (8%)



Primary Source of Income of Foodbank Service Users in Hamilton

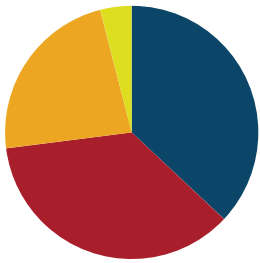
- *Disability (38%)
 - Ontario Works (OW) (28%)
 - Child Tax Benefit (7%)
 - Employed: Full-Time (5%)
 - Old Age Security (5%)
 - Employed: Part-Time (3%)
 - CPP Retirement (3%)
 - No Income (2%)
 - CERB (2%)
 - Other (6%)
 - Resettlement Assistance Program (1%)
- * (ODSP, CPP Disability, Private Disability)

Hunger Crisis for Seniors

The City of Hamilton's vision statement is for Hamilton "to be the best place to raise a child and age successfully," however, there has been a steady increase in the poverty rates among seniors since 2010, with 12% of Canadians over the age of 65 now falling under the low income measure.^[3] Nationally, food banks have seen a 30% increase in seniors accessing food banks in Canada from 2015-2019.^[4] In Hamilton, we have seen the same increase during that time, but more shockingly, 2021 saw an increase of 30% in one year alone.

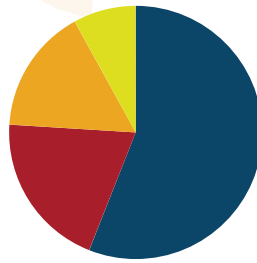
Affordable Housing Crisis; Over 3,000 Experiencing Core Housing Need

We know that the two main drivers of food bank use are insufficient incomes coupled with unaffordable housing. In Hamilton, 84% of households who access food banks and pay market rent pay more than 30% of their income on rent and utilities. Paying 30%-49% has been shown to put households at risk of homelessness. Paying 50% or more puts households at extreme risk of homelessness.^[5] The majority of food bank users in Hamilton who pay market rent spend over 50% of their income on rent and utilities. In fact, **each month, more than 3,000 Hamiltonians who use food banks are at the level of extreme risk of homelessness, based on the percentage of their income they spend on rent and utilities.**



Primary Income Sources of Food Bank Users Paying More than 50% of Their Income to Rent and Utilities

- Provincial Disability (37%)
- Ontario Works (OW) (36%)
- All Other Sources Combined (23%)
- Child Tax Benefit (4%)



Who is paying more than 50% of their income on housing costs?

- Single Households (56%)
- Single Parent households (20%)
- Two Parent Households (16%)
- Couples (8%)

Seventy percent of food bank users in Hamilton identify social assistance as their primary income source, with the median monthly income for a single food bank user being \$874 per month.^[6] Throughout the pandemic, CERB was introduced to give \$2,000 per month to people experiencing interruptions to their employment to make sure they could afford food and housing during the pandemic. The CERB demonstrated that with adequate financial supports, most households would be able to maintain their basic needs. **Over 90% of food bank users in Hamilton were not eligible to receive CERB.**

**On a typical day in Hamilton
95 households are at high
risk of homelessness**

One-time emergency benefits were made available to some people who were not eligible for CERB.^[7] These benefits allowed some households to receive a single payment of anywhere between \$100-\$600 and for families with children, \$250 per child.^[8] For almost all households receiving these one-time benefits, maintaining their basic needs was still far out of their reach, while thousands of their neighbours received assistance from the CERB that kept them adequately housed and fed.

The Hunger Gap

Days Worth of Food Needed

3-5 (1 Visit)
6-10 (2 Visits)
11-15 (3 Visits)
16-20 (4 Visits)
20+ (More than 5+ visits)

March 2021 Number of Unique People

7,635
2,483
1,226
770
499

Hamilton Food Share believes everyone has a right to the most basic necessities of food and shelter and that no one in our city should have to experience the pain of hunger, homelessness, and extreme poverty, simply because they have a disability or rely on government income assistance programs.

**On a typical day in Hamilton
Food equal to 13,981 meals is distributed
by the Emergency Food Network**

Defining the Hunger Gap

The Hunger Gap refers to how many days worth of food a household would need to receive from a food bank in order to meet their nutritional requirements for the month. At each food bank visit, a household will receive between 3-5 days worth of food. Sixty-one percent of people using a food bank visit only once per month, but for many, one visit is not enough to meet their needs.

¹Ruby Bokma, Martin Dooley, Arthur Sweetman and Melanie Yin, Department of Economics, McMaster University. "Which Low-Income Households Use Food Banks and How Often Do They Pay Visits? An Analysis Using Data from the Hamilton Food Share Network and the 2016 Census Low-Income Population of Hamilton" Working Paper, Secure Empirical Analysis Lab, McMaster University, September 2021. For a copy of the paper, please email mdooley1947@gmail.com. ²Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development (2020, September 29) COVID-19 and school food: The impact of the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic on student nutrition programs in Ontario, Indra Noyes University of Waterloo, Nicola Lyle Peterborough Child and Family Centres. ³Statistics Canada. (2018). Table 11-10-0135-01 - Low-income statistics by age, sex and economic familytype. Retrieved from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1110013501>. ⁴Banks Canada (2019) Hunger Count 2019, Mississauga, ON. ⁵Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (2016, March 23). "What Is Core Housing Need?" Housing Observer Online. ⁶Bokma et al. ⁷Government of Canada. (2020, July 12). Canada's COVID-19 Economic Response Plan. Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/departement-finance/economic-response-plan.html>. ⁸Government of Ontario. (August, 2020). COVID-19: Support for people. Retrieved from: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-support-people>

Emergency Food Programs Taking Part in the Survey

Ancaster Community Services / De Mazenod Door Outreach / Flamborough Food Bank / Good Shepherd Centres / Living Rock Ministries
Mission Services of Hamilton / The Native Women's Centre / Neighbour to Neighbour Centre / Niwasa Kendaaswin Teg / Salvation Army
Hamilton / Salvation Army Dundas / Stoney Creek Community Food Bank / Wesley / Welcome Inn Community Centre



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