FOOD BANKS BC

Hunger Report 2025

Contents

Our Vision
A hunger-free British Columbia

Our Mission
To relieve hunger today and prevent hunger tomorrow for all British Columbians

Our Values
Integrity

We are honourable, inclusive, respectful, and trustworthy

Dignity

We see and respect the inherent value and worth of every British Columbian

Accountability

We are accountable to our members and transparent in our dealings with all stakeholders

Collaboration

We share and work with our stakeholders and each other collaboratively towards common goals

Equity

We advocate for and believe in equitable access to food for all British Columbians

Responsiveness

We adapt and respond appropriately to changing conditions with timeliness, flexibility, and innovation

Foreword

With the release of Food Banks BC's second annual Hunger Report, we are seeing a picture that is both deeply troubling and all too familiar.

Emerging themes that have been prominent in recent years continue to be evident. This was another year in which record numbers of British Columbians turned to food banks to feed themselves and their families. The trend of an increasing number of people holding down full-time jobs yet still needing support from the food bank has continued. The charitable system that props up this essential service is being pushed closer to breaking point, with the demand growing at a time when donations of food and funds continue to drop.

This has been the cold reality for the hunger relief sector and the people that it supports for many years. However, while it is deplorable that anyone in our province is unable to access the food they need, it is the normalization of this situation that must be among our gravest concerns. For an increasing number of people, the food bank is no longer a temporary supplement during a difficult period, but a necessary, entrenched lifeline of support.

BC's food banking system carries a heavy burden, one that it does not shoulder lightly. Beyond food distribution, food banks work tirelessly to create services that meet a diverse array of client needs. However, the innovations and interventions of food banks to address these needs do not only speak to the resourcefulness and commitment of our sector, but they also serve to highlight the absence of policies that address hunger, food access, and the root causes of food insecurity.

Charities should not be expected to bear the responsibility for this work. Many charitable organizations, particularly in rural communities, are facing an existential crisis. We hope that our policy recommendations, in conjunction with those of our advocacy partners, will advance our mission of alleviating hunger today and preventing hunger tomorrow, lessening the burden on our sector before it is too late.

Last year's report spoke to the hope that those of us who work in the hunger relief sector carry in this work. For many, this hope is being replaced by the fear of what lies ahead in these challenging, uncertain times. But through critical and decisive actions, we can arrest and reverse the trends we are seeing at the front lines of BC's food banks, and collectively, we can work toward a British Columbia where no one goes hungry.

Dan Huang-Taylor,
Executive Director, Food Banks BC

Land Acknowledgement

Food Banks BC is grateful and honoured to have its offices located on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territories of the Salish Peoples, including the q̓ ic̓ əy̓ (Katzie), q̓ ʷɑ:n̓ ƛ̓ ’ən̓ (Kwantlen), and Semiahma (Semiahmoo) Land-based Nations.

As an organization that supports a network of agencies throughout the province of British Columbia, Food Banks BC recognizes that our work takes place on the lands of many diverse Indigenous Peoples who have deep connections to this land and have cared for it since time immemorial. We acknowledge that many of us who are engaged in food banking are uninvited settlers on this land.

We acknowledge the historical impacts of colonization on Indigenous Peoples and the ongoing intersection of food insecurity with the legacy of colonialism. We support and empower Indigenous communities to reclaim their right to govern their own food systems.

We are committed to decolonizing our work, dismantling systems of oppression, and learning from Indigenous people. With humility, we are working on being active partners in the path toward reconciliation.

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Statement

This report is made possible through the personal information shared by BC food bank clients. We recognize that those providing this information are often among the most vulnerable in our society, facing significant systemic barriers. We thank them for their trust, and we are committed to handling their data with the utmost care and sensitivity.

In this report, we aim to highlight the systemic barriers and inequities that food bank clients and those living in poverty face, and to promote understanding of how these barriers impact lives, encouraging collective action to address these issues.

Using data from Food Banks Canada’s annual HungerCount and from members of the Food Banks BC agency network, this report exposes the lack of equity in British Columbia, shows how longstanding policies harm marginalized communities, and advocates for food as a basic human right. Addressing these systemic barriers is essential to reducing food insecurity. By recognizing and acting on these issues, we can move toward a hunger-free province and greater equity for all.

Racial equity is not a luxury — it is essential to a thriving society and the foundation of real economic resilience.[1]

Systemic inequities are built into society’s attitudes, policies, and practices. They block certain groups from fully participating in society and accessing the necessities that support their wellbeing. These inequities are ongoing and stem from racism, colonialism, sexism, ableism, homophobia, and transphobia. They create obstacles to accessing essentials like employment, housing, education, healthcare, and food, and often render marginalized groups invisible in official data.[2]

Poverty and food insecurity disproportionately impact:

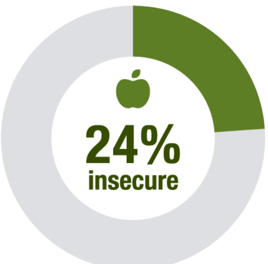
- Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC)
- Women, children, and youth in care
- People experiencing houselessness and/or living with disabilities
- Newcomers, refugees, and asylum seekers
- People in the criminal justice system and institutions
- Residents of rural or remote areas

The overlapping social identities some people face, known as intersectionality, can lead to greater discrimination and barriers.[3]

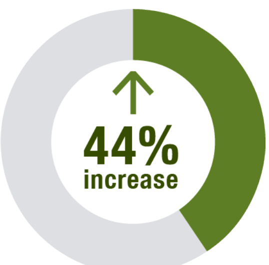
When looking at food insecurity statistics, it is important to remember the humans that those numbers represent. They could be children, single moms, people with disabilities, newcomers to our country, students, people managing complex challenges in their lives, and people doing all they can to make ends meet. These statistics are not just numbers; they represent real families that are being left behind by policies that fail to address the burdens placed on particular groups in our population.

Executive Summary

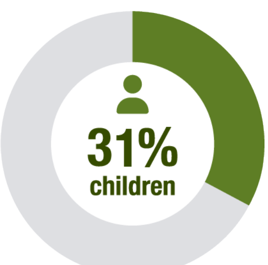
Food insecurity is at a record high in British Columbia, with food bank usage soaring to unprecedented levels. This crisis is not a result of personal failure but of systemic issues: poverty and a frayed social safety net. Overwhelmed food banks can no longer compensate for these fundamental gaps.



1.3 million or 24.4% of British Columbians are experiencing food insecurity.



113,606 individuals used a BC food bank in March of 2025, a 9% increase over 2024, and a 44% surge since before the COVID-19 pandemic.



33,000 children received food from BC food banks, 31% of all clients.

BC Food banks have reached their capacity. Many food banks reported shortages of food and donations, forcing them to purchase more food, place limits on how much food they can distribute or change how often their clients can pick up food. Critically, rising food bank visits are a leading indicator of housing instability, signaling a growing risk of homelessness across the province.

↑ **79%** increase in the number of visits to BC food banks since 2019

↑ **11%** of BC food banks turned people away because they ran out of food

Data from the HungerCount highlights who is using food banks and why client numbers continue to rise. Since 2019, the data shows not only substantial increases in the number of individuals and visits, but also a growing share of families and employed clients.

↑ **4%** annual increase in the proportion of newcomers using food banks

↑ **9%** annual increase in the proportion of racialized clients at BC food banks

Our province, along with the rest of Canada, is experiencing an affordability crisis, challenging BC households in their ability to meet their basic needs.

200% increase in number of people with employment income using BC food banks, since 2019

75% of people using BC food banks are renters

32% rise in the cost of food in BC since January 2019

24% users cite the Cost of Food as their main reason for using the food bank

The HungerCount also reflects a shift in the reasons for accessing food banks, with rising food and housing costs increasingly outpacing stagnant wages. The average Canadian household is predicted to spend $800 more on groceries in 2025 than in 2024. Rising costs are directly constraining the food banks' capacity to procure adequate food supplies for their clients.

Despite being stretched to their limits — leading to operational strain and high turnover — food banks are responding with ingenuity. Their deep commitment to community is fueling new efforts to pool resources and connect clients with supports that foster economic resilience.

Yet, while food banks are working tirelessly to meet the day-to-day food needs of their communities, they are not a solution to food insecurity. Poverty and food insecurity carry economic, social, and ethical costs to society. Research has shown that government has the power and the obligation to address poverty through policy.

We offer policy recommendations in alignment with other advocacy groups in order to decrease our province's food insecurity rate and support the wellbeing of BC residents. BC's poverty and food insecurity rates have been lowered in the past and through strong policy levers, we can do it again. Together, we can achieve a hunger-free British Columbia.

Policy Recommendation Focus Areas

- **Build community food security**

  Invest in the capacity and resilience of the charitable food sector to advance affordability, enhance food security, and strengthen regional food systems.

- **Provincial governance and national leadership**

  Set food insecurity reduction targets and establish capacity to coordinate and advocate for policies.

- **Improve household incomes**

  Strengthen wages and income supports to ensure all households can meet their basic needs.

- **Support Indigenous food sovereignty**

  Advance reconciliation by ensuring access to traditional foods and supporting Indigenous food initiatives.

Introduction

This year's HungerCount reports another record-breaking year for the number of individuals turning to food banks. With one in four British Columbians experiencing food insecurity, our food banks have reached their capacity. This report is a serious call to action to address poverty and hunger in our province.

The data on who is using BC food banks highlights that deep inequities persist in our province and that families and individuals are experiencing complex hardships. We share stories of the care and creativity of our province's hunger relief sector, and stories of critical support that clients have received at BC food banks. This report explores the significant cost of poverty to our province, adding to the ethical imperative to implement policies that help people to rise out of poverty. We provide policy recommendations that address building food security, improving household incomes, supporting Indigenous food sovereignty, and provide governance and national leadership.

With over **1.1 million visits to BC food banks in the first half of 2025**, we must work together to support our neighbours in accessing income and food that are critical to their wellbeing.

About Food Banks BC

Food Banks BC is the provincial agency leading charitable food access across over 130 member and non-member hunger relief agencies. Our team provides a myriad of supports for these hard-working agencies including funding, food provisions, emergency response, professional development, advocacy at the provincial level, and coordination with other poverty reduction organizations. More information can be found at www.foodbanksbc.com and in our Annual Report.

Our work aims to meet two goals: serve the charitable food needs of today and work towards a hunger-free tomorrow.

Our first BC Hunger Report was published in early 2025, reporting on the state of hunger and hunger-relief agencies for the 2024 year. The report laid out definitions, causes and impacts of food insecurity, as well as policy recommendations to decrease poverty and food insecurity in our province.

This second BC Hunger Report builds on the first, utilizing the work of Food Banks Canada; both their data collection and analysis through the HungerCount and Network Survey, and also their advocacy work such as the Poverty Report Card, and Material Deprivation Index. We provide arguments for immediate action to address poverty and food insecurity, and again offer policy recommendations for local and provincial governments.

Food banks do not solve food insecurity. They do not put more money into household's pockets to shop for the foods that they need. But they are a public health intervention that is supporting households on a day-to-day, week-to-week basis, providing more than just access to emergency food. Food bank boards, staff and volunteers work tirelessly to support their communities, yet this year's HungerCount data shows that they are reaching their capacity; BC food banks cannot manage the current food insecurity levels of this province. Food banking isn't easy work, but it is important, critical work and Food Banks BC honours that work.

Methodology

The findings in this report are supported by data available from research on food insecurity in BC and across Canada, and uses the following instruments:

Food Banks Canada HungerCount

Food Banks Canada's annual cross-sectional census survey, the HungerCount, collects client data from the national network of food banks over the month of March, providing a point-in-time snapshot of food bank use across the country. In 2025, 130 hunger relief agencies participated in the HungerCount, 109 of which were members of Food Banks BC.

The data contained in the 2025 HungerCount has been presented provincially and broken down by region. As different regions of the province host different densities of the population, the estimates of the provincial population living in each region in 2025 are:[4]

Region	Population	Percentage of the Provincial Population
Fraser	2,263,717	40%
Interior	881,535	15%
Northern	299,435	5%
Vancouver Coastal	1,363,437	24%
Vancouver Island	912,944	16%
Total	**5,721,068**	**100%**

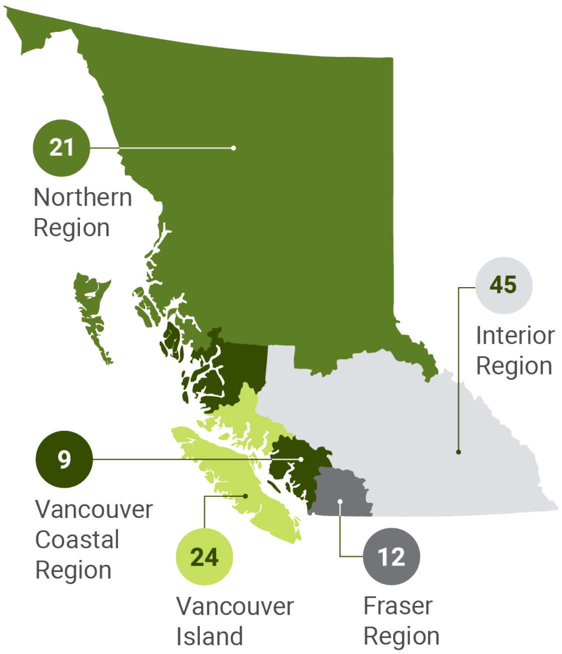
Key Terms from the HungerCount:

- **Individual** — Each unique person that receives food from a hunger-relief agency. The individual picking up food registers all of the members of their household.
- **Household** — A group of people that live together and share in expenses, including food and meals. Each person in the household is counted only once, regardless of how many times the individual picking up food on behalf of the household accesses the food bank in March.
- **Visits** — A visit counts each person once for each time they receive food from the food bank, as well as each person in their household. The number of times a household can receive food from a hunger-relief agency is determined by the policies of the agency.

Many, if not most, food banks partner with other agencies and programs to share food and resources. The HungerCount does not capture hunger relief efforts provided by programs other than food banks, like school breakfast programs, or free community meals. Therefore, the HungerCount data provides a sample of food insecure people in BC that access hunger relief programs.

Please note that the HungerCount provides a First Nation, Inuit and Metis category for personal identity in their survey. For the purposes of this report, we use the word "Indigenous" to represent these three groups when appropriate. Additionally, the HungerCount measures the number of Immigrant or Refugee clients, which we also refer to as "Newcomers to Canada".

Food Banks by Region in BC



Find a Food Bank Near You

Food Bank Surveys

In June and July of 2025, Food Banks BC and Food Banks Canada conducted surveys of their members. The results of these surveys were used to understand and illustrate how BC food banks are managing the demand for their services over the last year.

About The Author

Melissa Hemphill, a Food Security Specialist, has a passion for all things food-related. With an honours degree in Biochemistry from the University of Guelph and a diploma in Natural Nutrition, she has worked in developing community food security programs in the Revelstoke area for over 15 years. Motivated by a knowing that food can be a powerful agent in addressing both climate change and social discord, Melissa works to build socially just and resilient local food systems within British Columbia through a variety of projects, studies, and collaborations. When she isn't busy tackling community food security issues you can find her in the garden or on the trails.

How to Report Errors or Give Feedback

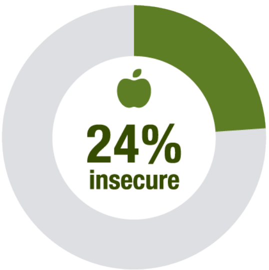
We welcome your feedback. You can contact us via email at info@foodbanksbc.com or via our website www.foodbanksbc.com.

Food Bank Use in BC — the HungerCount Data

Key Findings

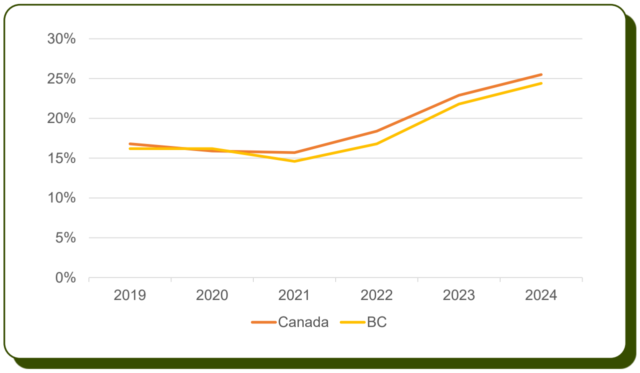
British Columbia's food insecurity rate reached 21.8% of the population in 2023 and 24.4% in 2024.[5] This means that 1.3 million British Columbians are missing meals, eating less, and worrying about where their next meal will come from. Though the provincial rate falls 1.1% below the national rate, there are far too many of our neighbours facing impossible choices for themselves and their families.

While many of those experiencing food insecurity turn to family and friends for help, choose to go without some of life essentials, or use food banks intermittently, our data on the 113,606 individuals that received support from BC food banks in March 2025 gives us a glimpse into the picture of hunger in our province.



1.3 million or 24.4% of British Columbians are experiencing food insecurity.

Figure 1: Rates of food insecurity by percentage of the population for Canada and British Columbia, 2019-2024.



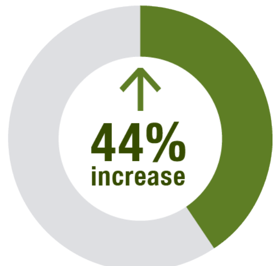
Source: Statistics Canada.[5]

Individuals & Visits

In March 2025, 130 hunger-relief agencies across the province of BC served 113,606 individuals, representing a 9% annual growth in the number of clients, and a 44% increase since 2019, prior to the COVID-19 Pandemic. This sets a record high for the number of people using food banks in BC, which is impacting the ability of food banks to support all those that request help. Food Banks Canada forecasts that this rate of increase will continue its steady climb with a 6% increase in food bank usage between March 2025 and March 2026.[6]

The number of visits that BC food banks recorded in **March 2025 is 223,340, a 79% increase over 2019** visits, a clearly unsustainable growth in service demand. With 58% of agencies reporting an annual increase in the number of individuals they serve, one would expect an increase in the number of visits those people made to BC food banks in 2025 over last year's number of visits. Yet, there was a 1% decline in visits to BC food banks in 2025. A reason for this discrepancy is the sector's inability to maintain the volume of support they have been providing. Essentially, this decline in visits is due to the capacity of the food banks and not in the lack of need for food banks.

With inadequate resources to meet client demand, BC food banks are being faced with impossible decisions about the level of support they are able to provide at each visit. Table 1 shows the impact that food supply is having on the services that BC food banks can offer, with BC food banks faring worse than the national average. This resource scarcity challenges food banks to continue their equity-focused practices, as agencies with a majority of racialized and Indigenous clients are reporting the worst capacity challenges.

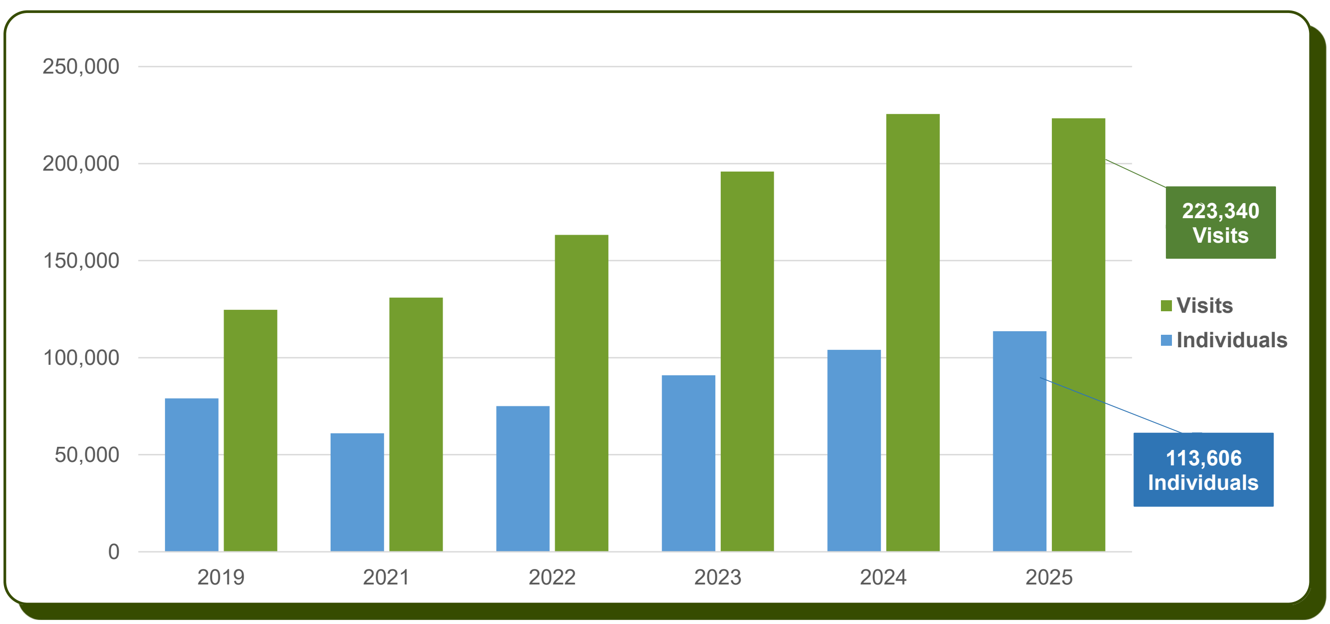


113,606 individuals used a BC food bank in March of 2025, a 9% increase over 2024, and a 44% surge since before the COVID-19 pandemic.

We have not had to close our doors completely yet, but we have run out of fresh products (dairy, produce, etc.) and have had to give clients the choice of taking a non-perishable only hamper today or returning at another time.

— Hope Food Resource Centre

Figure 2: The number of individuals served and the number of visits made at BC Food Banks during the months of March from 2019 to 2025, excluding 2020.



Source: Food Banks Canada 2025 HungerCount.

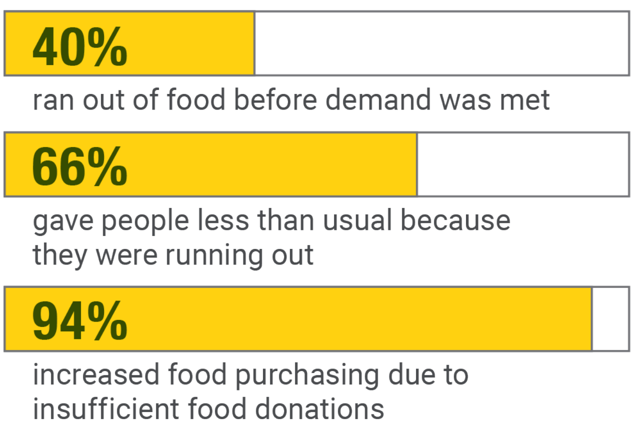
Table 1: Impacts to Services at BC Food Banks in the last twelve months (Survey administered in June 2025).

Impact	BC	Canada
Ran out of food before the demand was met	40%	23%
Gave people less than usual because running out of food	66%	52%
Increased food purchasing due to insufficient food donations	94%	78%
Closed early or didn't open due to lack of food	14%	6%
Turned people away without food because ran out	11%	6%

Source: Food Banks Canada Network Survey 2025.

In short, more people in BC need food aid, yet there are less resources available. Food banks have reached their capacity limit.

Food Banks BC data reveals that there have been **1,122,522 visits to their 110 member food banks in the first 6 months of 2025.** Additionally, 33,961 individuals visited a member food bank for the first time (new clients) between January and June of this year.



> Without the Perishable Food Recovery Program we would not be able to provide the quality and quantity of food we now do, but there are days we are running out due to the increase in need. We are receiving about 50 new registrations per month now this year.
>
> — Friends in Need Food Bank Society

Strain at the Golden Food Bank

Our most notable leap came after the pandemic, when the sharp increase in inflation and high costs of living immediately increased demand and reliance on our services. Over the next two years, our Board of Directors decided to dip into reserves to increase the number of hampers per household from one to two per month while also improving the quality of food distributed. Our food budget rose by 262% to support this shift, and we increased it again the following year. Given that we had the resources available at the time, it was the right thing to do.

While we hoped the intensity of inflation and high costs of living might ease over time, the crisis has continued and we are no longer working with a surplus of funds. Like any household, the GFB cannot simply out-budget an affordability crisis. Following two years of budgetary deficits and no end in sight to the growing number of community members seeking support, the Board again faced a crucial decision-making point. We needed to adapt services to reflect current funding realities or risk closing our doors.

By September 2024, we made the difficult transition to revert our base hamper policy to the previous level of one per month. This change ensured the continuity of our services while allowing us to take additional steps to provide more food support for those in greatest need.

Table 2: The number of visits to food banks and the number of unique individuals served in March 2025, and the proportion of the population served, for all of BC and by the regional location of the food banks.

	All of BC	Fraser Region	Interior Region	Northern Region	Vancouver Coastal Region	Vancouver Island Region
Visits	**223,340**	51,014	43,519	15,363	79,301	34,143
Individuals Served	**113,606**	28,928	32,192	8,402	23,155	20,929
Individuals Served as a proportion of population	**2.0%**	1.3%	3.7%	2.8%	1.7%	2.3%

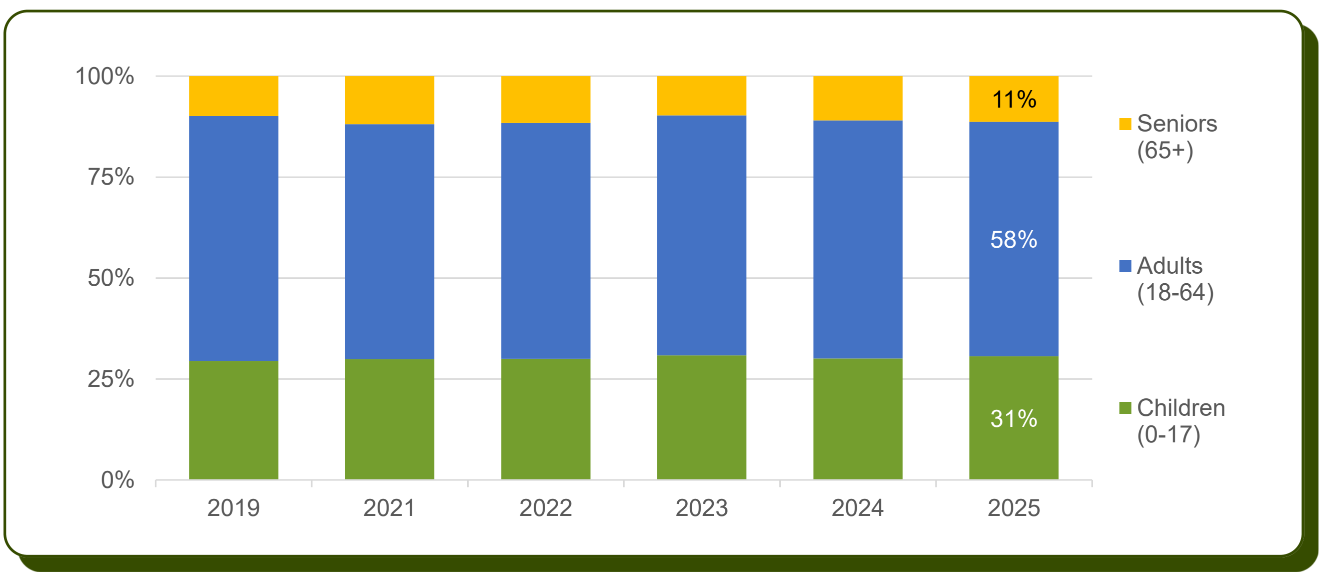
Source: Food Banks Canada 2025 HungerCount and BC Stats.[4]

While 2% of the province's population used BC food banks in March of 2025, a general survey of the population conducted by Food Banks Canada found that 1 in 10 people accessed a food bank in the last year.[7] The distribution of food bank clients across the different regions of the province is not equal. In the province's least populated regions (see Methodology section), the Interior Region food banks served 3.7% of that region's population, while the Northern Region food banks served 2.8% of that region's population. In the province's most populated regions, the Vancouver Coastal and Fraser Regions, food banks served 1.7% and 1.3% of the region's populations, respectively.

A range of factors — including overall affordability, employment opportunities, and geographic accessibility — shapes the need for and use of food programs in different regions. The Interior Region, characterized by lower living costs and rental rates, is home to more low-income households, some of whom rely on food banks.[8,9] In contrast, the Vancouver Coastal Region features the province's highest rental rates and living wages, attracting fewer low-income households and resulting in the lowest per capita food bank usage. HungerCount data show that more than 40% of clients in the Interior and Northern Regions, and 30% in the Vancouver Island Region, identified food costs as their primary reason for accessing food banks. In the Fraser Region, where a 2022 Food Costing study found the lowest food prices, 28% of clients cited housing costs as the main driver for food bank use.[10] In the Vancouver Coastal Region, low wages or insufficient work hours remain the top reason for use, at 32%.

Age Groups

Figure 3: Proportional age breakdown of BC food bank clients from 2019-2025, excluding 2020.

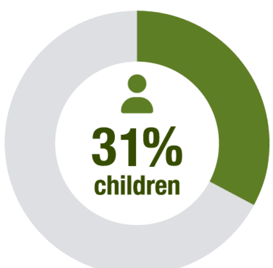


Source: Food Banks Canada 2025 HungerCount.

Table 3: The proportion of BC food bank clients that are children in March 2025, compared with the total population of children, for all of BC and organized by the regional location.

	Percentage of food bank clients that are children	Regional population of children
All of BC	**31%**	**16%**
Fraser Region	37%	18%
Interior Region	28%	16%
Northern Region	26%	20%
Vancouver Coastal Region	29%	13%
Vancouver Island Region	27%	15%

Source: Food Banks Canada 2025 HungerCount and BC Stats.[4]



33,000 children received food from BC food banks, 31% of all clients.

The proportion of children, adults and seniors served at BC food banks has stayed relatively stable over time, but the number of people in each of those age groups has grown. In March 2025, BC food banks served over 33,000 children, a disproportionate number to the province's population of children (Table 3). Though the federal and BC governments have made significant multi-year investments into school meal programs, too many families rely on food banks to feed their children.

Child food insecurity is especially harmful during the first three years of life, as the nutrition, care, stimulation and love that children receive during this period determine the architecture of the brain and central nervous system, the basic foundation on which a child's future is constructed. "Early deficits in household inputs can diminish human capital in young children, predisposing them to failure in school and diminishing their potential for forming and expressing future human capital as successful, productive members of the workforce and society."[11]

The BC Feeding Futures Program, bolstered by an agreement between the BC Government and the Government of Canada that enables BC to access National School Food Program funds, is helping to ensure that children have adequate foods to support their ability to learn and perform at school.[12,13] While 81% of BC food banks surveyed report that they support school food programs, only 50% report changes in needs or use at their food bank for families with school-age children, which echoes widespread sentiment that significantly greater investment will be required to achieve a universal school meal program.

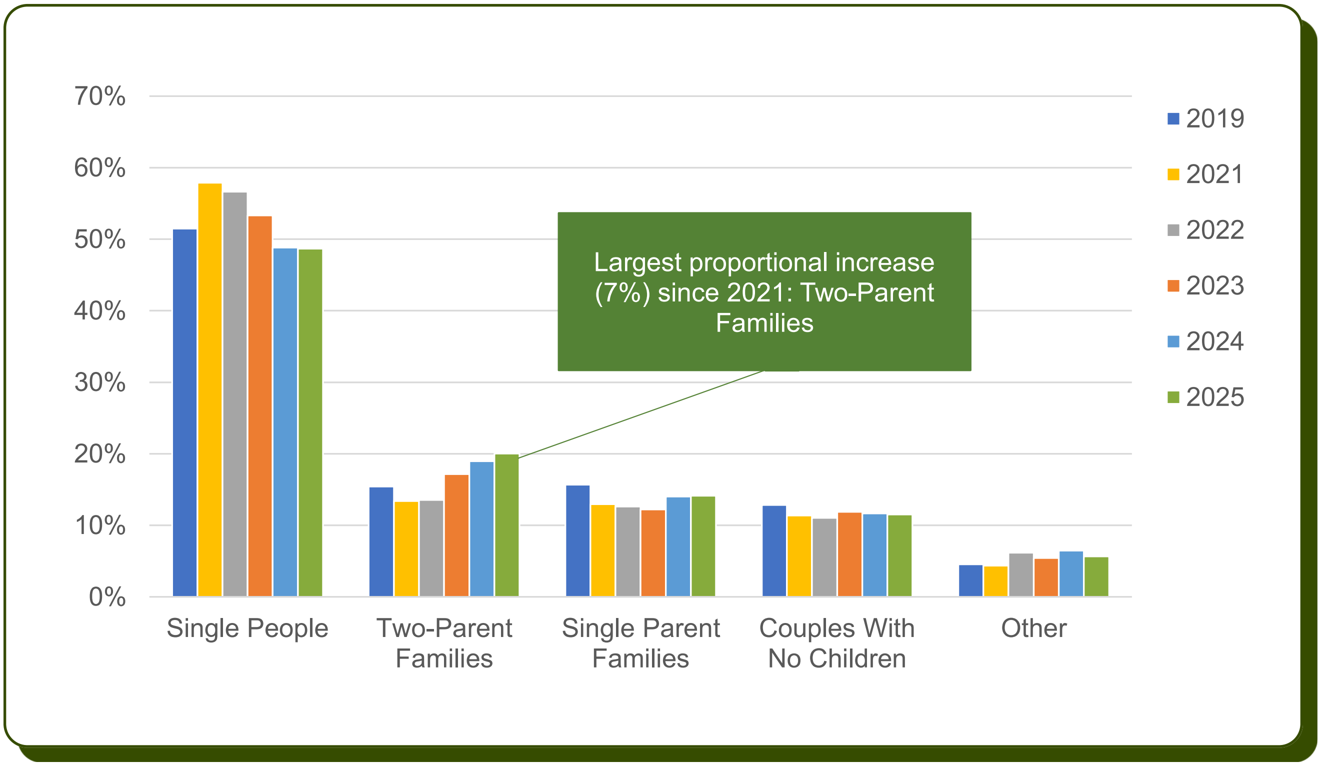
Women and moms finding support at food banks

As a single woman with a chronic illness, a mother to one son, and no family in town, Beth's community has supported her in many ways. Beth accesses the food bank when she needs it. Sometimes her illness prevents her from working, or from getting out of bed. Beth is supported by volunteers who deliver her food from the food bank. A community member also knew about Beth's situation and gifted her a car so that she could get around when her disability made it difficult. Beth and her son only access the food bank when they need it and it is always there for them when those moments come.

Beth represents the largest population of food bank users, women. As much as societal progress has improved gender equality, women are still paid less than men, and women with disabilities even more so. Beth does everything she can to support herself, but she faces barriers that are beyond her control. Food banks have always supported people facing social inequities; however, those inequities are growing beyond the capacity of the current model of food bank design. We no longer have a few people in precarious situations relying on food banks, food insecurity affects 1 in 4 BC households.

Household Composition

Figure 4: Composition of BC food bank client households from 2019 to 2025, excluding 2020.



Source: Food Banks Canada 2025 HungerCount.

The proportion of **Two-Parent Families** accessing food banks has grown by 7% since 2021, reaching an all-time high of 20% of BC food bank households in 2025. Single-parent families have remained vulnerable to food insecurity at similar rates over the last six years. More families are struggling with the high cost of living in our province and must turn to food banks to keep their children fed.

Table 4: Composition of BC food bank client households in March 2025 for all of BC and organized by the regional location of the food banks.

	All of BC	Fraser Region	Interior Region	Northern Region	Vancouver Coastal Region	Vancouver Island Region
Single People	**49%**	37%	52%	50%	51%	54%
Two-Parent Families	**20%**	32%	15%	13%	18%	17%
Single Parent Families	**14%**	14%	16%	20%	12%	12%
Couples With No Children	**12%**	13%	9%	10%	14%	11%
Other	**6%**	4%	8%	8%	4%	6%

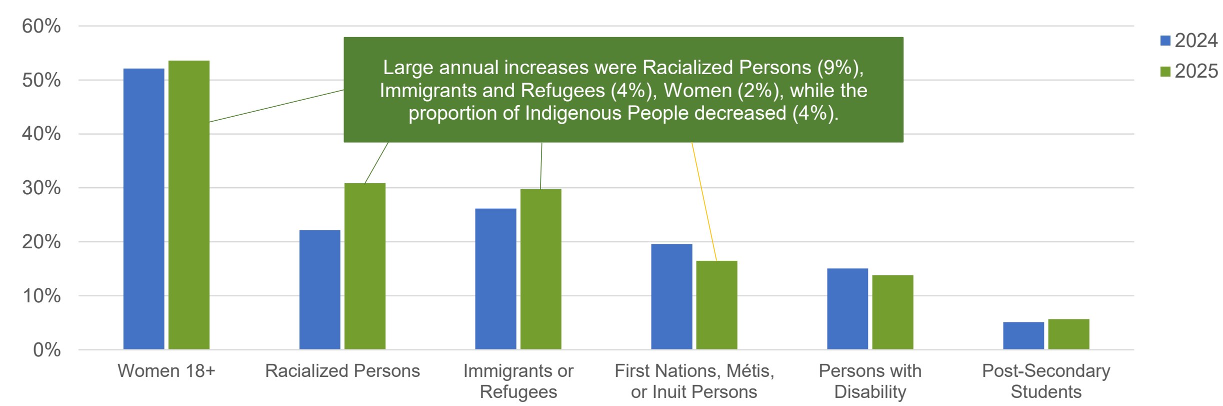
Source: Food Banks Canada 2025 HungerCount

Digging into the Demographics

Analysing the identity, income sources, housing situations and reasons for accessing food banks helps us to understand where our social safety net is falling short of protecting vulnerable residents and population groups disproportionately impacted by poverty. Proportionality is an important consideration in this analysis as the number of individuals served at BC food banks has increased since 2021, and therefore the number of people represented in each percentage point becomes larger. For example, while the number of women served was 52% in both 2023 and 2024, this represented over 7,000 more women in 2024 than in 2023.

Identity

Figure 5: Self-selected identities of BC food bank clients served at BC food banks during the months of March in 2024 and 2025.



Source: Food Banks Canada 2025 HungerCount.

Food Banks Canada's HungerCount survey allows food bank clients to choose which labels they identify with, and they may choose more than one. For example, an Indigenous woman with a disability will fit into three different categories for this question: *Woman 18+, First Nations, Metis or Inuit Persons,* and *Persons with a Disability.*

The 2025 HungerCount shows a significant annual increase in the number of *Racialized Community Members and Immigrants or Refugees*; 9% and 4% increases respectively. The increase in racialized community members attending food banks is representative of the systemic racism that continues to persist in BC. Racialized people continue to face significant barriers to housing, employment and social inclusion.[14] The increasing number of newcomers turning to food banks underscores systemic barriers to settlement in BC, a challenge that affects both racialized and non-racialized immigrants and refugees.

Despite relying on foreign labour to supplement its workforce, Canada extends limited rights and services to these essential workers. Although data is not formally collected, food banks anecdotally report serving significant numbers of Temporary Foreign Workers. Their vulnerability is systemic: by tying workers to a single employer, limiting benefits, and creating a credible fear of deportation for speaking up, the current framework permits exploitation to occur. The 2024 food insecurity rate was 29.8% for New Immigrants (less than 10 years in Canada) in BC, compared with 24.4% of the general population of the province.[15] Food Banks Canada's research "contradicts the persistent false assumption that newcomers, or newly arrived refugees in particular, receive a disproportionate amount of government benefits."[16] Their findings suggest that governments do not support newcomers adequately, as many are ineligible for and/or unaware of government benefits such as employment insurance, disability supports and the Canada Child Benefit, leaving newcomers with few places to turn for food and other supports in their first few years.

After years of record-high immigration that helped to keep our economy afloat, the federal government has now limited pathways to permanent residency. This leaves many racialized newcomers in BC in limbo, facing precarious working conditions and barriers to affordable housing.[1]

Additionally, many settlement services programs have seen major or total funding cuts from the federal government as of March 31, 2025.[17] For adults and children fleeing violence, persecution and hardship, these programs provide services and supports that newcomers need to thrive and integrate into the community, such as language classes, after-school and weekend programs for kids and youth, and job-readiness training. Without these supports, newcomers will struggle to find safety, security and be able to successfully rebuild their lives in Canada, jeopardizing their future, their ability to contribute to local economies, and our collective prosperity.[18]

Newcomers find community at food banks

The Mansour family arrived in BC as Syrian refugees. A designated group of community members committed to supporting their arrival. As refugees, they had nothing when they arrived and carried heavy trauma from the war and destruction they fled. They were supported by the community group for the first two years of living in BC with rent supplements and other refugee services.

The Mansour family became regular food bank users and volunteers. They spoke very little English and found the food bank to be a place where they connected with the community and practiced their English. After their initial community supports ended, they were introduced to supports from the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction, as well as BC Housing. The Mansours could remain in the community where they first arrived. The Mansour children attended high school and went on to pursue post-secondary education.

These opportunities were made possible, in part, by the food bank. The Mansour family represent the BIPOC and newcomer groups that are populations that rely heavily on the support of food banks. Would they have relied on the food bank as a constant resource if they had made a living wage? What would have happened to this family without the community and provincial support?

Racialized community members in BC have a food insecurity rate of 26.1%, elevated 2% over the general population, demonstrating the deep racial inequities evident in our province's housing, labour and economic systems.[10] In a 2023 Statistics Canada analysis, it was found that "among the 11 racialized groups compared, 10 had a higher poverty rate than the White population" and that "for Black, Latin American, Arab, and West Asian groups, the difference in the poverty rate persisted into the third generation or more."[19] The high rate of food insecurity among Black Canadians is closely linked to economic disadvantages, such as lower household incomes and higher unemployment rates."[20]

Table 5: Self-selected identity of individual food bank clients in March 2025 for all of BC and organized by the regional location of the food banks.

	All of BC	Fraser Region	Interior Region	Northern Region	Vancouver Coastal Region	Vancouver Island Region
Women 18+	**54%**	54%	51%	50%	61%	50%
Racialized Communities	**31%**	26%	23%	5%	68%	18%
Immigrants or Refugees	**30%**	34%	23%	8%	51%	16%
First Nations, Métis, or Inuit Persons	**17%**	9%	18%	50%	8%	23%
Persons with Disability	**14%**	13%	16%	21%	8%	15%
Post-Secondary Students	**6%**	3%	6%	5%	11%	5%
New Clients	**5%**	4%	5%	5%	4%	7%

Source: Food Banks Canada 2025 HungerCount.

The rate of food insecurity for Indigenous People living off-reserve is 36.8% (over 15 years of age) according to Statistics Canada[10], but climbs to 54% on-reserve[21], and up to 70% in some Inuit communities.[22] Notably, there was a 4% decrease in the number of BC food bank clients identifying as Indigenous in 2025. Research suggests that this decline may be due to the government agreements and settlements that are increasing the income of Indigenous households.

Food banks starkly reveal systemic inequities in our province, highlighting significant barriers to food security. People with disabilities have historically been disproportionately represented among their clients. While the proportion of food bank clients who are Persons with a Disability has decreased by 1.3% since 2024, this follows the introduction of the Canada Disability Benefit. Advocates are now calling for this benefit to be increased[23] and its application process streamlined[24] to further alleviate need.

The proportion of *Post-Secondary Students* at BC food banks has increased by 1% over last year. This group faces significant challenges to afford tuition, books, food and rent, putting their studies, wellbeing, and thus future, at risk.[25] As a result, many campuses have set up food banks specifically to serve their student population.

Women continue to be the largest demographic using BC food banks, increasing by 2% from 2024 to 2025. *Women 18+, Racialized Community Members and Immigrants or Refugees* showed significant overrepresentation in the Vancouver Coastal Region in comparison with the rest of the province.

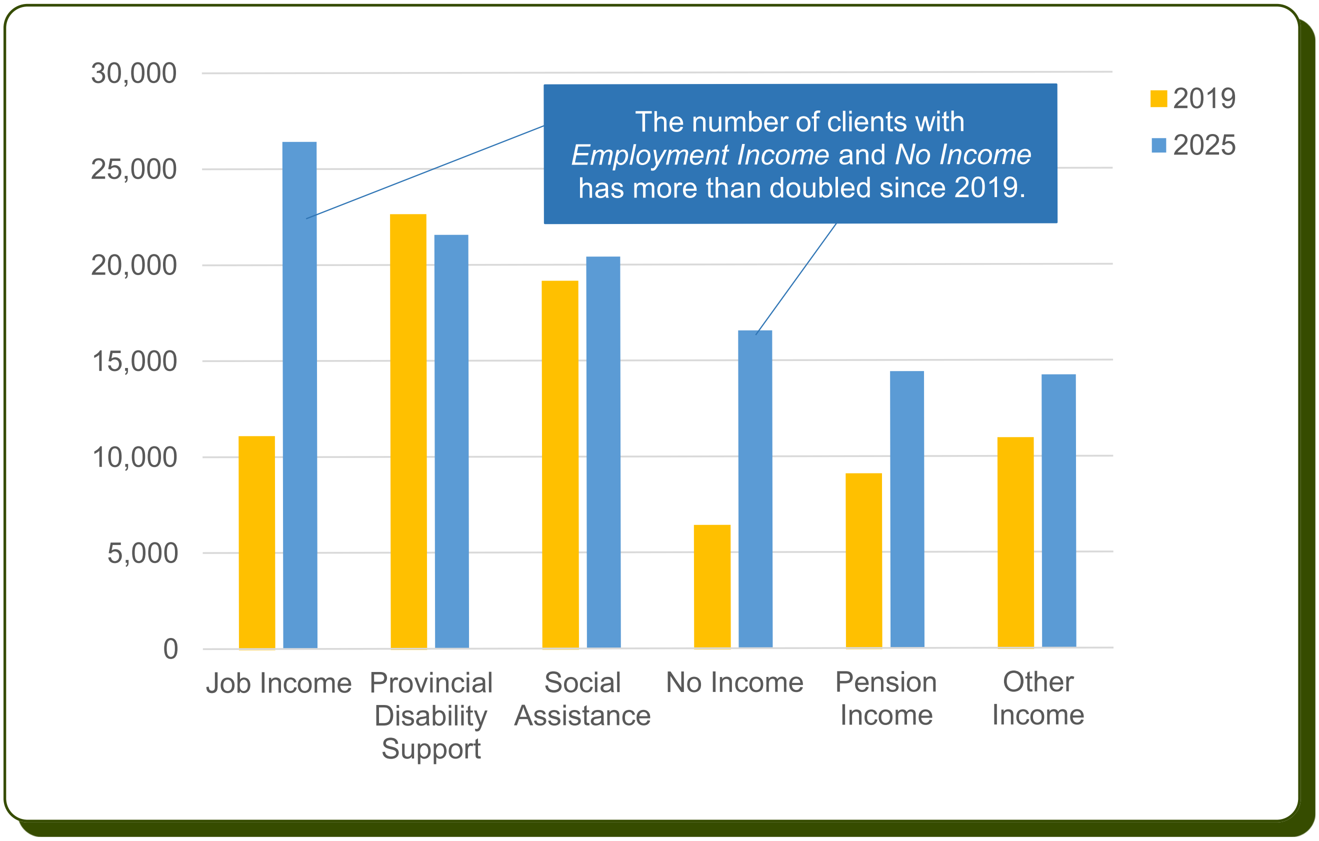
↑ **23%** increase in clients identifying as Immigrants or Refugees, since 2021

↑ **26%** increase in clients identifying as members of Racialized Communities, since 2021

♀ **54%** women continue to make up more than half of food bank clients

Income Sources

Figure 6: BC food bank client's primary household income sources for 2019 and 2025.



Source: Food Banks Canada 2025 HungerCount.

Despite various contributing factors, food insecurity in Canada is inextricably linked to low income. "Households with the lowest incomes are the most likely to be food-insecure and more severely so."[26] Food banks serve individuals facing both situational poverty (triggered by events like job loss) and systemic poverty, where government assistance rates are insufficient. The high volume of long-term clients underscores that income support programs legislate poverty rather than alleviate it. This is starkly illustrated by the 2024 rates: a single adult on BC assistance might receive $12,376, which is $15,248 below the national poverty line of $27,624.

The fact that recipients of Social Assistance and Provincial Disability Support constitute 37% of food bank clients is a direct indictment of the inadequacy of these programs. Stagnant rates have effectively reduced their value below 2021 levels after inflation. This explains why 20% of all support recipients need food banks, as they spend over 80% of their disposable income on food and housing alone.[27,28] The result is a high prevalence of severe food insecurity within this group, which is linked to the most negative health outcomes, the highest risk of premature death, and the greatest associated healthcare costs.[21]

A trend we have continued to see is clients who are employed. More food bank users than ever before have income from employment, 23.3% in 2025, up 9% from 2021, highlighting the growing gap between wages and the cost of living. As a result of the climbing number of employed food bank clients, some food banks are considering changing their operational hours to better serve employed clients.

The rise in food bank use is no longer limited to the unemployed or unhoused. Increasingly, it's workers who are turning to these services.[29]

In June of 2025, the minimum wage in BC was increased from $17.40 to $17.85, which still falls far short of the wage required for basic living (a "living wage") across the entire province, as calculated by Living Wage BC. The gap between the living wage and minimum wage is at least $3.70/hour and as high as $11.75/hour across BC.[7] Without an adequate minimum wage, workers must find alternative means to be able to meet their basic needs, such as working multiple jobs, living in inadequate housing, or leaning on charitable programs such as food banks. For example, Living Wage BC calculated in 2024 that to meet the $27.05/hour living wage in Metro Vancouver, a minimum wage worker would need to work 53 hours a week for 52 weeks of the year, when the average BC worker works only 35.5 hours per week.[30]

> Minimum wage doesn't work to afford life in Canada.
>
> — Surrey Food Bank

Table 6: Income sources of BC food bank client households in March 2025 for all of BC and organized by the regional location of the food banks.

	All of BC	Fraser Region	Interior Region	Northern Region	Vancouver Coastal Region	Vancouver Island Region
Job Income	**23%**	18%	25%	17%	32%	25%
Provincial Disability Support	**19%**	16%	23%	19%	10%	23%
Social Assistance	**18%**	27%	15%	21%	11%	14%
No Income	**15%**	15%	13%	15%	15%	16%
Pension Income	**13%**	12%	11%	11%	20%	11%
Other Income	**13%**	12%	14%	16%	11%	11%

Source: Food Banks Canada 2025 HungerCount.

Regional trends in food bank clients' income sources reflect the wide disparities in cost of living, employment rates, and rental costs across British Columbia. In the Vancouver Coastal Region, where living costs are highest, 32% of food bank users report job income and 20% pension income, while reliance on income supports is notably lower. Both the Interior and Vancouver Island Regions display similar income patterns, yet the cost and availability of employment and housing differ substantially. Fraser and Northern Regions have the highest proportion of clients on social assistance, with fewer users reporting job income compared to other areas.

These discrepancies likely stem from factors such as regional demographics, cost of living pressures, employment opportunities, and housing affordability. For example, higher living costs and wages in Vancouver Coastal may attract more working clients, while lower costs in Fraser and Northern regions are more accessible for people on fixed incomes or government assistance.

Ultimately, job income remains the leading source for food bank users in three out of five regions, yet regional variations highlight the intricate relationship between local economies, housing costs, and employment — a relationship too complex to explain fully with available data, but strongly linked to broader trends in affordability and economic opportunity across the province.

A Case for Basic Income Guarantee

People need to know where their income is going to come from and that it meets their basic needs. Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) studies have demonstrated that providing residents with a guaranteed source of income leads to greater long-term financial stability, better health outcomes, upskilling, and improved social mobility and labour market participation, with residents who face the greatest socioeconomic barriers tending to show the most positive outcomes.[31]

A report from Northern Policy Institute's BIG Series argues that a basic income guarantee would be an effective policy solution to reduce household food insecurity among those most vulnerable to this ongoing problem.

> **Problems of food insecurity are not limited to any single population subgroup defined by household structure, main income sources, or some other socio-demographic characteristic. The only common denominator is inadequate, insecure incomes. A major advantage of a Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) over policy initiatives tailored to specific population subgroups such as seniors, social assistance recipients, working families, youth, etc., is that a BIG can reach all individuals and households who are vulnerable to food insecurity by virtue of inadequate, insecure incomes.[32]**

Housing Type

Table 7: Housing type of BC food bank clients by proportion of households, from 2019 to 2025, excluding 2020.

	2025	2024	2023	2022	2021	2019
Rental Market Tenants	**75%**	67%	72%	70%	68%	71%
Homeowners	**9%**	7%	8%	8%	8%	7%
Social Housing Tenants	**7%**	6%	8%	10%	9%	9%
Precarious Housing	**6%**	17%	10%	11%	13%	11%
Emergency & Youth Shelters	**4%**	2%	2%	1%	1%	1%

Source: Food Banks Canada 2025 HungerCount.

The proportion of food bank households in rental housing has increased 8% over 2024, with 75% of households renting.

Market Rental Housing remains the most common housing type for BC food bank clients, making up 75% of client's housing. In 2025, we continue to see an increase in the number of *Homeowners*, climbing 1.4% to 8.7% of clients, and a doubling of the proportion of *Emergency and Youth Shelter* users to 4%. It is encouraging to see a 13% decline in the proportion of *Precariously Housed* clients since 2024, which includes folks living on the street, with friends or in non-traditional housing like living in a car.

The 2025 Point-in-Time Homeless Count in Greater Vancouver revealed that 5,232 individuals were experiencing homelessness on March 10th and 11th, 2025, an increase of 9% since 2023. The total number of individuals experiencing homelessness in the Greater Vancouver area increased by 141% from 2005 to 2025, while the population of the same area increased by 44% over that period.[33] This is further evidence that more people are finding it harder to make ends meet, forcing difficult decisions that impact the wellbeing of individuals, families and society.

Research shows that "as people approach the loss of housing, their use of food banks increases significantly, suggesting that the use of food banks may be an early warning indicator of potential homelessness."[34] Additionally, for many individuals and households, homelessness is not the result of a sudden catastrophic event but rather a steady worsening of one's circumstances. Government policies that prevent homelessness could therefore also decrease demand on food banks.

A widely accepted standard is that housing should cost no more than 30% of a household's gross income in order to be considered affordable. Exceeding this threshold can lead to financial hardship, where individuals may struggle to afford other essential needs such as food, healthcare, and transportation.[35] Affordability extends beyond housing to include the ability to maintain a reasonable quality of life while covering necessary expenses. When more than 30 per cent of a household's income goes to rent, food becomes negotiable; and when households are forced to spend a disproportionate amount of their income on housing or food, they may face significant trade-offs, such as reducing spending on health care or education, which can have long-term negative impacts on their wellbeing.[36]

The link between housing and food insecurity is especially troubling for racialized households. Many racialized families face precarious conditions due to a shortage of affordable housing, increasing rent costs, and displacement from their communities. This instability often results in food insecurity, as limited financial resources must be divided among basic needs. Black Canadians are disproportionately affected by, and more likely to experience, homelessness than their White counterparts, and other racialized groups in Canada, after Indigenous Peoples.[37]

Table 8: Housing type of BC food bank clients by proportion of households in March 2025 for all of BC and organized by the region location of the food banks.

	All of BC	Fraser Region	Interior Region	Northern Region	Vancouver Coastal Region	Vancouver Island Region
Rental Market Tenants	**75%**	86%	75%	59%	71%	73%
Homeowners	**9%**	4%	10%	12%	10%	9%
Social Housing Tenants	**7%**	5%	4%	15%	13%	5%
Precarious Housing	**6%**	3%	6%	10%	4%	8%
Emergency + Youth Shelters	**4%**	3%	6%	6%	3%	6%

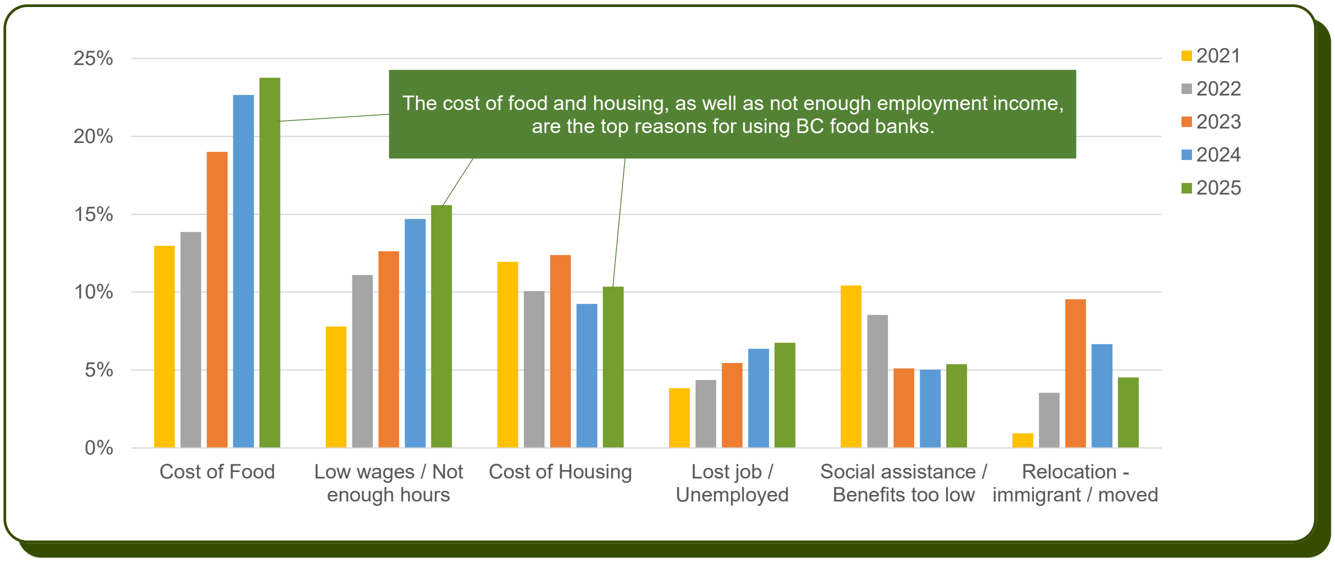
Source: Food Banks Canada 2025 HungerCount.

Housing types among food bank clients in BC reveal marked regional differences. The Northern Region stands out, with just 59% of clients as rental market tenants — well below the provincial average of 75%; it also has the highest proportions for homeowners (12%), social housing tenants (15%), and those in precarious housing (10%). In comparison, other regions closely mirror the BC average, except Fraser Region, which has significantly more rental market tenants (86%) and correspondingly lower rates of all other housing types. Interestingly, a notable share of Vancouver Coastal Region clients access social housing, despite this area having fewer social housing projects per capita.[38]

Recent federal initiatives, including a September 2025 interest rate cut and new programs to address homelessness and expand affordable housing, reflect attempts to mitigate persistent housing challenges. These efforts are well-timed, as food bank data show that rental and housing affordability remain key pressures for vulnerable households throughout the province.

Reasons for Accessing a Food Bank

Figure 7: The top six reasons why households accessed a BC food bank from 2021–2025.



Source: Food Banks Canada 2025 HungerCount.

When other parts of the social safety net do not provide sufficient income support, when labour markets fail to provide employment, or when housing markets fail to provide affordable housing, food banks can enable individuals and families to reallocate income away from expenditures on food toward meeting other basic needs.[39]

The Cost of Food has emerged as the leading cause of food bank visits in BC, a trend that began with high inflation in 2023 and has continued to climb to 23.8% in 2025. This indicates that even as headline inflation cools, the cumulative effect of price shocks — a 31.7% increase in food costs since 2019 — continues to overwhelm household budgets.[40] Consequently, financial stress remains at a peak of 43% among Canadians.[6] With the average grocery bill projected to rise by another $800 in 2025, healthy food is becoming increasingly inaccessible, creating dual pressures for both low-income households and the food banks that support them.[41]

Inadequate income from work is a primary driver of food bank use in BC, highlighting the insufficiency of minimum wage and the impact of low-paid work. While the overall unemployment rate has risen to 6.2%, the youth unemployment rate is significantly higher at 12.8%.[42,43] This difficult job market, exacerbated by economic uncertainty and hiring cuts,[44] is reflected in a 3% increase since 2021 in clients citing job loss as their reason for visiting a food bank. Furthermore, despite rental rates having been tied to inflation, the cost of housing remains a critical pressure, rising as a cited reason from 3% in 2019 to 10% in 2025, squeezing household budgets from multiple sides.

Not only is the ongoing financial stress impacting the future resilience of these households, but it deeply impacts their emotional well-being as well.[6]

Managing the Demand

Food banks are facing a dual crisis: a surge in demand coinciding with a sharp decline in support. According to a Food Banks Canada network survey, 91% of BC food banks report considerable or moderate impacts from fewer food donations, and 82% from fewer cash donations. Their survey also revealed that 11% of BC food banks have turned clients away because they have run out of food. This strain is epitomized by food banks witnessing a tragic new reality — former donors are now becoming clients.

> Our donor pool has become smaller since COVID-19 — those who previously were on the edge of the pool have, in some cases, become clients. So, our food drives have gone way down, financial donations have gone down, the grant landscape has changed significantly, and there are just so many more organizations adding food services to their programming (as they are also seeing the need in their clients).
>
> — The Mustard Seed Street Church

Food banks rely on cash donations and grant funding to maintain operations beyond the provision of food. With no core funding and a competitive donation and grant environment, food bankers must work diligently to keep the lights on, the doors open, and the shelves stocked.

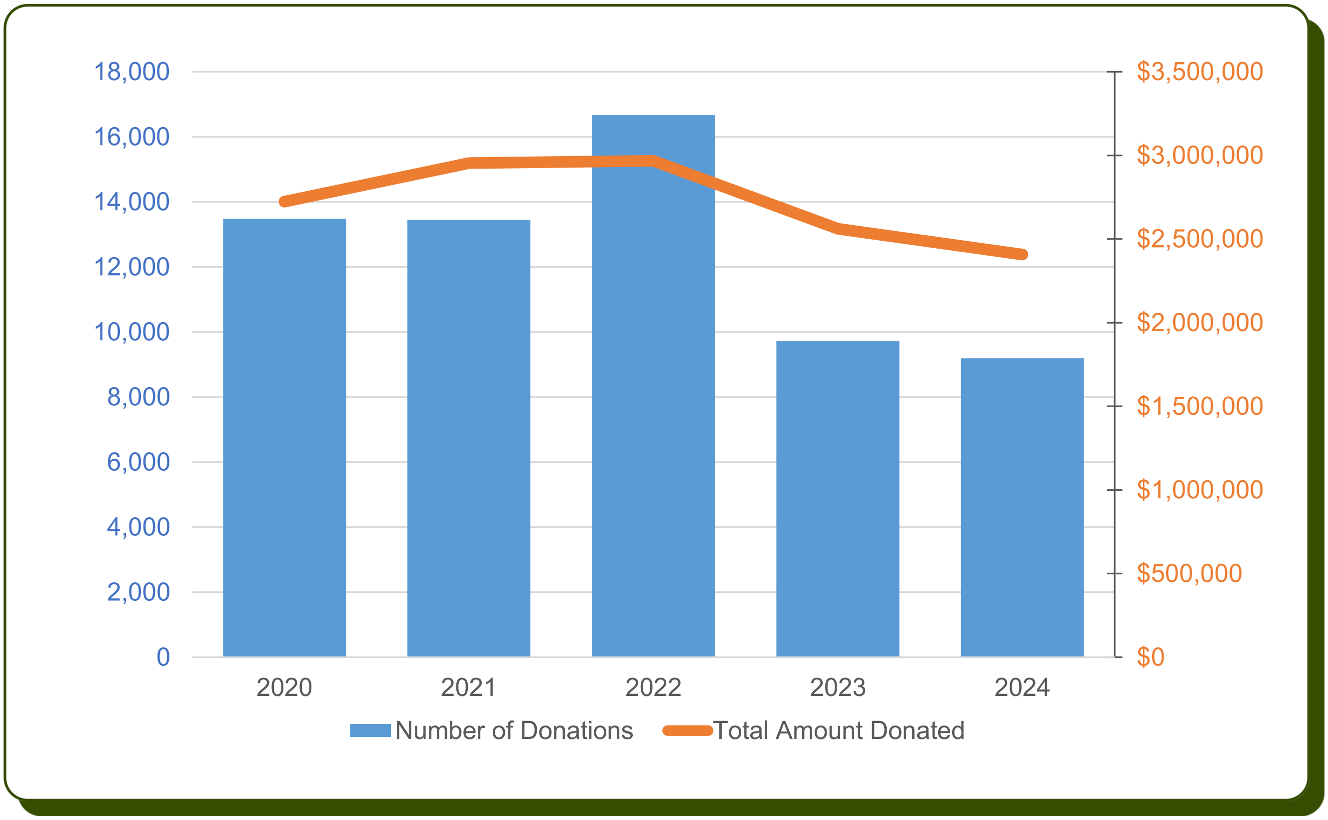
The cost of food is also impacting food bank operations. On an annual basis, BC food banks spend between $30,000 at small agencies, to over $6 million at BC's largest food bank[45], the Greater Vancouver Food Bank, on food expenses. Inevitably, price increases on staple items can have dramatic impacts on a food bank's ability to purchase the amount of food required to serve a rising number of clients (see Table 1: Impacts to Services). In the Food Banks BC survey, 81% of food banks reported the cost of food as a challenge for their food procurement, compounded with a decrease in monetary donations.

> Increased food costs have made an impact on food donations since 2022. We had an abundance of donations, but it has been difficult to maintain that level and provide certain items in our food program. We have stopped purchasing over nine key food items because of cost. At the beginning of spring 2025, perishable donations dropped by 3000 pounds, leaving our shelves close to empty.
>
> — St. Marks Food Bank

> One thing that continues to stand out is that the increase in client usage has made everything at our food bank significantly more complex. It increasingly feels more about running a business, which can make the process of running a food bank feel a little colder at times, maybe less of a feeling about helping people.
>
> We are constantly working to generate more revenue, improve efficiency, engage the community in new ways, and source more free food. And we're facing this growing pressure without enough time, resources, energy, or specialized skills to respond effectively. And with the cost of living showing no signs of improving, it's hard to see how these challenges will ease anytime soon.
>
> The future feels uncertain, and the demands are only growing — and I'm sure many food banks across the country would echo this sentiment.
>
> — Kimberley Helping Hands Food Bank

Most food banks operate with minimal staff, relying heavily on volunteers for daily operations. This limited capacity creates a critical Catch-22: according to Food Banks Canada's 2025 Network Survey, 56% of BC food banks lack sufficient staff or volunteers to dedicate time to fundraising — the very activity essential to their mission. Financial pressures are forcing some organizations to cut staff, while others must hire additional personnel to manage soaring demand, further straining their food budgets and forcing difficult leadership decisions.The emotional toll on staff and volunteers is immense. They face burnout, leading to high turnover rates, and must explain resource shortages to clients experiencing profound scarcity. Despite being well-versed in equity and poverty issues, food banks are simply overwhelmed. With scarce resources stretched to a breaking point, many are struggling to maintain their current level of service.

Figure 8: The number of donations and the total dollar value of donations received for CBC's BC Food Bank Day fundraising campaign held in December, from 2020 to 2024.



Source: Food Banks BC internal records.

Collaboration in Action

As food insecurity rises, so too does the number of organizations fighting it — a heartening sign of community mobilization. Yet, this very success creates a new challenge: more groups are now vying for the same finite pool of donations and volunteers. Rather than fragmenting their efforts, BC's food banks are leaning into the adage that we are "stronger together." A powerful wave of collaboration is building, with formal and informal networks emerging across the province to ensure help reaches those who need it most.

On Vancouver Island, the Nanaimo-based Loaves and Fishes Food Bank is expanding its facility to become the major agency for food recovery on the island. This expansion will shift operations from their several locations to a centralized warehouse. From this central location they run a fleet of trucks, which operate "Free Food Markets" around the island and support 110 partner non-profit agencies with purchased, donated and recovered food. Their vision is for a centralized model of food banking that serves a large geography through satellite locations, providing the backbone structure and food for efficient operations that utilize local volunteers on the frontlines. They hope to ease the regulatory burden on small food banks through this centralized model.

The Surrey Food Bank have begun picking up perishable food on a weekly basis to distribute through their food bank and to share with their own community partners. This relationship came about when the Surrey Food Bank saw a 50% increase in people accessing their services. The Surrey Food Bank is able to adopt a “say yes” policy to all donations because they share space, food, knowledge, vehicles and services with other agencies. This allows them to effectively share even large donations through their network, resulting in a 15% increase in the amount of food at their partner agencies and a 30% increase in the amount of food they are able to distribute at their food bank.

BC’s rural regions face different challenges. The difficulty of moving and sharing food is amplified due to isolated communities, travel costs, limited routes for commercial carriers, and a lack of storage infrastructure. These struggles all compound to create a distribution challenge. The geography of our province which includes many small communities, spread far apart, means that small food banks with limited access to infrastructure and donor support have reduced capacity. The Lake Country Food Bank understood these issues and created the Helping Through Sharing Network, supplying small food banks throughout the Okanagan region with purchased and donated foods. This network has grown to over 45 food banks and agencies, and through their infrastructure, donor and partnership development they have been able to receive and share large quantities of perishable foods to agencies in the interior region of BC.

Within the food banking network and their partner agencies, there are countless stories of food sharing. Some sharing is formal and regular, while some is ad hoc when there are surpluses to share. Though in general there is a shortage of resources in the charitable food sector, there are some communities with richer assets or donors, and some communities that really struggle to support their vulnerable members. Together, the network is able to support each other with food, knowledge, and other resources. This innovation and collaboration are necessary because of the growing demand on food banks. If BC communities could support themselves there would be no pressure on the food bank network. Food banks could operate as they were always intended to; a support for times of need, instead of an essential service.

Going Beyond Food: Off-ramping Clients

Faced with increased competition for funding and donor fatigue, food banks are innovating by becoming community hubs. In many small BC communities, they are the primary service provider for low-income households, naturally evolving into central locations for integrated social supports. These now often include employment, immigration, and social services, alongside programs like the Volunteer Tax Program to help clients access government benefits. By hosting specialists from provincial ministries and other agencies directly within their walls, food banks bring critical supports to people in a safe, familiar space, dramatically improving access for vulnerable clients.

> **Our team has come together, time and time again, to help our community with poverty. We have a ministry outreach worker, housing worker, a nurse, and nurse practitioner. Once a month you can get a haircut. We do this in a 100-year-old building that is shared with 40 other groups and our building is also available to rent by the public. The larger our client list is, the more creative we have to be with how we serve our clients.**
>
> — The Sooke Food Bank

In Summerland, BC, the food bank added a resource centre to their operations in 2013, in an effort to provide services to unhoused individuals in their community via partner services. They built a kitchen, laundry, and shower facility, and host 18 agencies that provide on-site services to clients. When clients enter the resource centre and register for the food bank, staff are able to identify clients' needs and suggest appropriate partner services that co-locate on particular days of the week. The partner agencies also refer people to the food bank. The food bank is looking to expand services to provide greater access to more wraparound supports, including the development of the community's first provision of subsidized housing.

Several BC food banks have established formal programs to help "off-ramp" clients from relying on the food bank. A notable example of such a program is the Central Okanagan Food Bank's *More Than Food Program*. Recognizing that food insecurity is often just one part of a larger, more complex picture for families and households, this program offers customized supports, working with clients to build skills, confidence, access resources, and pursue their goals to help move them beyond the need for charitable food assistance. Working in partnership with other agencies, offering support such as workshops, certificates and bursaries, they are able to track the long-term impact this program has on their clients' success.

Although measuring long-term outcomes is challenging, food bankers recognize that physical access is a major barrier to social services. To address this, they strategically use their spaces as central hubs for service providers to meet clients. These formal and informal partnerships are vital, co-locating essential supports directly within a trusted community environment to help people navigate poverty.

Receiving help during challenging times

The Boyko family emigrated from Ukraine to BC after the war started in 2022. The Boyko family had secured housing and jobs for their arrival, however, as newcomers to Canada had many other changes to make. They had to improve their English-speaking skills, enroll their son in school, and establish a new support system. Their arrival in BC was welcomed by the community and they were quickly connected to the social safety net that exists in small communities; people directed them to the local food bank. The Boyko family accessed the food bank for the first few months of their arrival in BC. From the food bank they also connected with the local Settlement Services support worker who offers service from the food bank. Once established within the community the family no longer needed the food bank, or support services, but were grateful for the help when they needed it.

Bodhan stated: "To be welcomed to BC with free food was very helpful. We just needed to get set up and start working and then we were fine."

This family demonstrates situational poverty, and the benefits of co-locating social services within a food bank. For many food bank users, the current social services are exactly what they need and were designed to meet their needs. Since 2022, food banks are now being used as a constant, ongoing resource, which exceeds the capacity of the service design.

Policy Recommendations

Achieving a poverty-free province is possible. The data from food bank usage helps inform the strategic government investments we need to see to meet this goal. We must treat household food insecurity as the critical public health issue that it is — a symptom of poverty, requiring unwavering, multi-partisan solutions. Addressing food insecurity builds a more just society and creates meaningful pathways for reconciliation.

To this end, Food Banks BC, in alignment with the BC Poverty Reduction Coalition, proposes four pillars for policy action: building community food security, improving household incomes, supporting Indigenous food sovereignty, and provide governance and national leadership.

Poverty has a complex mix of institutional and individual causes. Poverty has no single cause. It results from a mix of institutional impediments including our system of social assistance, skills and credential recognition, and cultural barriers as well as individual gaps such as lower skills, education or literacy.[46]

Poverty is not just a hardship for those who experience it; it is costly to British Columbians as a whole. We all pay for the negative consequences of poverty.[47]

> **We urgently need government investment in proactive, upstream solutions that prevent people from falling into deep, systemic poverty. Strengthening and rebuilding the safety net — reinforcing those ropes of support — will restore hope and provide people with the stability they need to move forward. It's time to give both our clients and the organizations that support them a real fighting chance.**
>
> — Central Okanagan Food Bank

Poverty places a significant financial burden on our society. The healthcare costs for a severely food insecure adult are approximately double those of someone that is food secure.[48] It has been estimated that the cost of poverty in Canada is $73-82 billion a year, while the cost of a Basic Income Guarantee is estimated at $36 billion.[49]

It costs money to implement policies that increase government payouts and programs, but the cost is short-term. People living in poverty require immediate action and pathways out of poverty.

Maintaining the status quo will actively harm British Columbia. As the cost of living outpaces incomes, more people will face hunger, and relief agencies will collapse under the weight of insufficient resources, burnout, and despair. Furthermore, without proactive government planning, climate emergencies like wildfires will deepen social inequities, overwhelming a food bank network that is already at its breaking point.

Through the BC Premier's January 2025 Mandate Letter, the Ministry for Social Development and Poverty Reduction[50] has been directed to:

- Ensure programs reduce poverty
- Continue to develop tools and approaches to prevent poverty and increase income
- Lead work on food security and find opportunities to support BC farmers and food producers in this work
- Be innovative, bold and aggressive in achieving the Ministry's and citizens' goals

And the BC Ministry of Agriculture and Food[51] has been directed to:

- Expand affordability and food security in the province by working with farmers to find ways to control costs for them and for the BC families who rely on their products, and by advocating with the federal government for fair programs for British Columbia food producers.
- Strengthen our regional food systems by supporting farming, expanding local food processing, identifying supply chain disruption vulnerabilities, and by increasing economic opportunities through FeedBC and BuyBC.

Current efforts by these ministries, though commendable, are insufficient because food security transcends the mandate of any single ministry. The entire food system — encompassing agriculture, distribution, retail, and consumption — impacts and is impacted by a range of provincial portfolios, including Transportation, Health, and others. Consequently, a siloed approach is inadequate. The province must champion a collaborative, multi-ministerial strategy that also integrates actions across all levels of government.

The HungerCount data reveals that food insecurity in British Columbia is not random — it systematically impacts marginalized communities. Women, Indigenous Peoples, racialized individuals, newcomers, and those on inadequate government supports are disproportionately turning to food banks in record numbers. This reliance on emergency food aid is a direct consequence of policy failures that deny people the stability needed to live healthy, productive lives. When basic nutrition is out of reach, so is the opportunity to contribute and thrive.

Food insecurity is a failure of the social contract.[52]

Ensuring food security is an ethical, fiscal, and strategic imperative. It is foundational to civil stability and social progress. Food insecurity, conversely, erodes the public trust essential for effective governance and collective well-being, leading to social distress and dysfunction. By addressing hunger, we invest not only in human dignity but also in the trust necessary for a cohesive and prosperous society.

Hunger lands among the people who have the least amount of power. So, we have to think way beyond food to get into issues of equity or equality. And when you think about equality and equity, those can be very abstract ideas. We have to go even deeper and think about discrimination, hatred, a sense that people who are different from us are somehow not a part of our human family, that allows us to think that they are unworthy of food, unworthy of sharing our food.[53]

Food Banks Canada's Material Deprivation Index Study revealed that "unfavourable material living conditions may in part drive the lack of trust between the population and their leaders" and found a high correlation between those with significant material deprivation and a high level of distrust with family and colleagues.[54]

When full-time workers can't afford food or housing, the issue isn't poor budgeting — it's systemic failure. The government must take real, meaningful action to make life affordable.[24]

As we have seen in the HungerCount data, more British Columbians are struggling with food insecurity than ever before, and "like the proverbial canary in the coalmine, increased visits to food banks may be considered an early warning sign of trouble developing in social programs."[34] In order to keep our province's nonprofit sector alive, agencies require additional funding and supports to serve their clients and their staff. When 30% of nonprofit staff are food insecure and 70% of nonprofit workers feel burned out and exhausted at least occasionally[55], the writing is on the wall: our social support system has reached maximum capacity and can no longer manage the demand of supporting the wellbeing of our province in its current state.

Every level of government has an urgent responsibility to secure people's fundamental right to food, working to address the root causes of poverty and food insecurity through legislation that is impactful today and protects society into an uncertain future.

Provincial policy decisions are key elements of determining food insecurity rates. The most impactful immediate change is to increase household income through increased minimum wage, increase welfare income, and lower income tax rates.[21]

Other research shows that "the number of visits to food banks increase with increases in rent, fall with increases in the minimum wage, and increase with reductions in the disability benefits available to people requiring social assistance. The most significant influence is disability benefits."[34] Policies that address income, resources and power can impact the structural conditions that perpetuate food insecurity.[56]

Given the tremendous burden on people's health and the healthcare needs, food insecurity is a drain on provincial health care budgets. Provincial governments should make food insecurity reduction a priority and recognize that their decisions about minimum wage, welfare benefits, and income tax rates for the lowest income households are food security policies.[21]

Though the Government of BC has enacted some policies to tackle poverty, such as increasing the funding for rental supplements and subsidized childcare, the province's food insecurity rate and food bank usage data indicate that these policy advancements are not enough.

Food Banks BC, in alignment with policy recommendations offered by Food Banks Canada, the BC Poverty Coalition, and Living Wage BC, recommends the following areas and opportunities to address food insecurity in our province.

Building Community Food Security

1. **Strengthen Local Food Systems and Infrastructure** through investing in resilient, regionally coordinated food systems by supporting the development of Regional Distribution Centres, expanding climate-resilient infrastructure for agriculture and aquaculture, and increasing support for local food production — especially in remote areas of the province. Key items to be included:
   - Multi-year grant funding for sustainable local food systems;
   - Financial assistance and subsidies for freight costs in remote areas;
   - Regulatory support for surplus food redirection to recovery programs;
   - Increased funding for programs like the Farmers Market Nutrition Coupon Program to improve access to fresh, local food.

2. **Support Municipal and Community Capacity Building** to improve local food security through equity-centered emergency planning, development of cultural food assets and inclusive food policies, and incentives that prioritize small and independent food organizations. This includes building municipal staff and council capacity to understand food security issues and enact meaningful change.

3. **Ensure stable and inclusive funding for non-profit food organizations** by adopting equity-based practices such as flexible reporting and multi-year funding, echoing recommendations presented in the 2026 Budget Consultation Report.[57] This includes flexible operational support for food banks, food recovery programs, and low-cost grocery initiatives that are central to community food systems.

Improving Household Incomes

1. **Strengthen income and disability supports** by expanding eligibility and increasing rates above the poverty line, indexing them to inflation, factoring in the cost of food, eliminating clawbacks, and removing earnings limits and spousal caps to enable full workforce participation.
2. **Advance wage equity** by raising the minimum wage to the Living Wage for BC over the next three years, incentivizing employers to adopt Living Wage policies in the interim, and eliminating the piece rate minimum wage for hand harvesters to protect agricultural workers.
3. **Build a plan to enact a Basic Income Guarantee**, ensuring all British Columbians have a legislated right to income that meets basic needs and reduces reliance on other social support programs.
4. **Commit to expanding funding** for universal food programs in all public schools to ensure equitable access for children.
5. **Support and fund the creation of an Indigenous Poverty Reduction Strategy.** Included in this should be special focus on rural, remote and Indigenous communities in provincial food costing studies to ensure income and wage policies reflect regional realities.

Supporting Indigenous Food Sovereignty

1. **Recognize and uphold Indigenous food sovereignty** by formally acknowledging the health and cultural importance of traditional foods, protecting harvesting rights and ecosystems, and setting targets to return land to Indigenous communities to support access to traditional food sources.
2. **Advance reconciliation through education and data** by improving and funding data collection on food insecurity in Indigenous communities, centering Indigenous lived experience in research to reduce health disparities (Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action #19), and providing public education on the impacts of colonization to build support for reconciliation.
3. **Increase funding and support for Indigenous food initiatives** that are accessible, equitable, and culturally grounded. These efforts should be informed by the **Indigenous Advisory Council on Agriculture and Food** to ensure Indigenous leadership and guidance in program design and delivery. This includes:
   - Supporting Indigenous and traditional foods education
   - Funding innovative models such as mobile food markets to improve access in remote communities and provide skill-building opportunities (e.g., mechanical training, irrigation, business management) to strengthen sustainability.

Provincial Governance & National Leadership

1. **Legislate a provincial target** to reduce food insecurity rates by 50% by 2030.
2. **Establish a cross-ministry Advisory Group,** a Parliamentary Secretary for Food Security, and a multifaceted Food Security Secretariat to coordinate policies and plans across jurisdictions and ministries.
3. **Advocate for reform at the federal level including;**
   - **Improving Canada Child Benefit** by increasing benefits for low-income families and creating a Northern supplement.
   - **Work with the federal government to deliver automatic tax filing** to ensure low-income households receive all benefits and credits they are entitled to.

Conclusion

The Challenge: A Record Broken, A System Strained

This year, our province faced a sobering milestone: food banks served a record 113,606 people in March alone.

Behind this number are our neighbours — one in four British Columbians — facing food insecurity, and a third of them are children. While visits slightly decreased in 2025, this reflects a grim reality: food banks, stretched beyond capacity by a lack of resources, are being forced to do more with less.

Data from Food Banks Canada's HungerCount illuminates who is being left behind. Women, Indigenous and racialized communities, newcomers, and people with disabilities are disproportionately affected. They are being pushed to the brink by the soaring costs of food and housing, and incomes from low-wage or part-time work that simply cannot keep pace.

The Hope: A Proven Path Forward

Food banks demonstrate incredible resilience every day, but charity alone cannot solve this systemic crisis. The good news is that we have a proven solution: purposeful government policy.

History shows us that targeted investment can — and has — driven down poverty and food insecurity. We can achieve this again. By championing policies that build food security, ensure adequate household incomes, support Indigenous food sovereignty, and provide governance and national leadership, we can create a different future for British Columbia.

This is not just an ethical imperative; it is an economic one. Investing in the end of poverty builds a stronger economy and a healthier province for everyone. Together, we can replace records of need with a legacy of health and prosperity. The solution is within our reach. Let's build it.

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