RECOMMENDATION 2

INCREASE SUPPORTS FOR SINGLE ADULTS LIVING WITH LOW INCOMES

One of the most striking trends in food bank use in Canada is the growth of single unattached individuals walking through our doors across the country and asking for help. The percent of single people using food banks has increased significantly over the last decade, having grown from 38% of households in 2010 helped to almost half of all households (48%) in 2019.

Looking at the staggering economic statistics for this group, it doesn't take long to figure out why the food banks have seen this jump. Using the Market Basket Measure, the official poverty measure in Canada, the figure is just over 1 in 10. If we look only at unattached (i.e. single) working-age people, the figure jumps to 33%: one in every three single adults lives in poverty.[44]

This group alone represents a low-income population of 1.3 million people. These are Canadians who live in deep poverty, with average incomes that are 50% below the poverty line. This means these individuals are often struggling to survive on about $10,000 per year.

Given these statistics, it is hardly surprising that close to one in five single adults experiences food insecurity and that so many need support from a food bank to make ends meet.[45]

This is a population that, from a government program perspective, has few places to turn and seems to have been largely forgotten by federal and provincial governments. Many within this group have mental health issues that are exacerbated by poverty and low income. As mentioned in the report, single person households that are food insecure experience higher levels of mental health issues than other households. Many have mental health issues that go untreated for lack of supports available to them, are stuck in a cycle of inadequate social assistance or disability-related supports, or have lost a job and have nowhere to turn for new training and education programs to re-enter the workforce.

For decades, governments have focused policies on specific subsets of the populations such as families and seniors, yet have routinely overlooked working-age single adults as a group that requires targeted action.

A large number are receiving social assistance but can't climb out of poverty due to the grossly inadequate supports and strict conditions that come with these programs. Overall, government supports for this group of vulnerable people have declined by half since the mid 1990's.[46]

The federal government has recently increased their supports for low income Canadians who are working with the expansion of the Canada Workers Benefit. Food Banks Canada had called on the government to enact these changes and we applaud this step in the right direction - but more help is required for this segment of the population that has been ignored for far too long.

We recommend:

- **The creation of a new program to support ill and unemployed Canadians whose temporary Employment Insurance (EI) or disability benefits are about to run out.** This new program would close a major gap in our social safety net that leaves many people with no choice but to enter a cycle of poverty perpetuated by our broken social assistance systems across the country.

- **Develop new mental health measures as part of future health accords with the provinces and territories that include a specific focus on the needs of single, working-age adults.**

- **To make single, low-income adults a priority consideration in all future poverty reduction policy measures to ensure that this vulnerable population is no longer left behind.**

- **To implement our Basic Income recommendation (see recommendation 4) to address the high levels of poverty amongst singles with no attachment to the labour force.**

44 Food Banks Canada [2016]. *Nowhere to Turn,* Toronto: Food Banks Canada.
45 V. Tarasuk, A. Mitchell & N. Dachner [2014]. *Household food insecurity in Canada, 2014*. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF).
46 B. Murphy, X. Zhang & C. Dionne [2012]. *Low income in Canada: A multi-line and multi-index perspective*. Statistics Canada.