



RECOMMENDATION 4

INCREASE SUPPORTS FOR LOW-INCOME SINGLE ADULTS

Over the last few years, Food Banks Canada's annual HungerCount report has highlighted that single working-age adults account for a consistently increasing percentage of the people who need help from a food bank.

Over the last decade, the percent of single people using food banks has increased significantly, having grown from 38 per cent of households helped by a food bank in 2010 to almost half of all households helped (46%) in 2021.⁷³

Looking at the staggering economic statistics for this group, it doesn't take long to determine why food banks have seen this jump. Using Canada's Official Poverty Measure (the Market Basket Measure), just over 1 in 10 Canadians live on or below the poverty line. If we look at only unattached (i.e. single) working-age people, that figure jumps to 33%: 1 in every 3 single adult lives in poverty.⁷⁴

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 per cent 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 experience food insecurity and that so many need support from a food bank to make ends meet.⁷⁵

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 members of this group have mental health issues that are exacerbated by poverty and low incomes.

⁷³ Food Banks Canada, HUNGERCOUNT 2019.

⁷⁴ Food Banks Canada [2017]. *Nowhere to Turn*. Toronto: Food Banks Canada. Retrieved from https://www.foodbankscanada.ca/getmedia/00977c90-66cb-45fe-8133-ed4744037e9/Nowhere-to-Turn_FINAL_EN.pdf.aspx?ext=.pdf

⁷⁵ Statistics Canada. (2020). *Table 13-10-0385-01 Household food security by living arrangement*. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25318/1310038501-eng>



As mentioned in our HungerCount 2019 report, single-person households that are food-insecure experience higher levels of mental health issues than other households.⁷⁶ Many people in this situation have mental health issues that go untreated because of lack of supports, 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 equip them to re-enter the workforce. All these issues have been heightened by the pandemic.

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

Applying an optimistic lens, Food Banks Canada is encouraged by recent announcements from the federal government that it will review its antiquated EI program, and we hope our recommendations outlined above (see recommendation 2) are implemented quickly, as they would have a positive impact on the lives of many single adults who are struggling to make ends meet.

Among those people who are unable to work, many are receiving social or disability assistance but cannot climb out of poverty because of the grossly inadequate supports and strict conditions that come with these programs. Current social assistance amounts do not consider the increased cost of living associated with having a disability. And among single Canadians, those with disabilities are facing the intersection of physical, mental, and financial struggles.

Our recommendations

- **Make single, low-income adults a priority consideration in all future poverty reduction and recovery policy measures, including an expanded and modernized EI, to ensure that this vulnerable population is no longer left behind.**
- **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.**
- **Implement our recommendation that governments move towards a Minimum Income Floor (see recommendation #3) for all to replace our current, broken social assistance system to address the high levels of deep poverty among single people with no attachment to the labour force.**
- **Beyond a Disability Hiring Strategy (see recommendation #2), the rapid implementation of the Canadian Disability Benefits that brings recipients to or near their Market Basket Measure (MBM) is needed to help pull more than 30 per cent of Canadians with a disability⁷⁷ out of poverty.**
 - **This implementation should also include a review of the MBM for Canadians with a disability so that the poverty line can better reflect the costly realities of living with a disability.**

⁷⁶ Food Banks Canada, HUNGERCOUNT 2019.

⁷⁷ Morris et al., *A demographic, employment and income profile*.