

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

A DUAL PATH TOWARD A BETTER ROAD AHEAD

In last year's HungerCount report, we raised alarms about the post-pandemic recovery and what it could mean for Canada's economy and people. There were clear signs that the road to recovery would be bumpy, but few could have expected just how dire things would get for so many individuals and families.



As our current report points out, the past year has seen historic inflation for basic necessities like food, fuel and housing, while the invasion of Ukraine has led to massive disruptions in supply chains, the global food supply, and global economics.

What does this all mean for people living in Canada? Groceries are more expensive, gas is more costly, basic necessities are taking more of our incomes, housing is harder to afford, and governments are reluctant to offer the assistance that was rightfully available at the height of the pandemic.

While all people in Canada have felt the pinch in one way or another, it is clear that some groups are being particularly affected more than others. As the data plainly shows, longstanding fissures in our social safety net are being exposed in the midst of this economic turmoil.

Food banks are seeing an increasing number of seniors and people living on fixed incomes walk through their doors. People who are employed (or who were recently employed) are turning to food banks more often because their incomes are still too low, even with a job. Students who may have had enough budgeted for their previous academic years are now being forced to turn to their local food banks as well.

What the number of food bank visits showed us this year is that no one is safe from these economic challenges.

What the data also shows us is that while food insecurity can affect anyone, this past year's economic climate has exposed and further entrenched the deep poverty that existed before the current economic downturn.

While inflation continues to be unbiased in its wrath, many people in Canada have the incomes and savings needed to weather the storm. Others aren't so lucky – already having been living in deep poverty prior to the current inflationary crisis, being able to 'scrape by' has gone from dire to impossible for far too many. As governments at all levels in Canada look to the road ahead in building a more resilient Canada, it is crucial that attention not only be put on temporary solutions to address recent inflationary issues, but also toward the long-term solutions needed to reduce the systemic poverty that has existed for decades.

This means developing a much stronger social safety net through a dual focus – one that balances the need to reduce the cost of living (increase affordability) while also striving to increase people's incomes (reduce poverty).

A dual approach of addressing the root causes of food bank use, which are low incomes and poverty, while also targeting the more recent acute causes, which relate to the skyrocketing costs of living, can pave the way for a more resilient Canada where no one is left behind, and no one goes hungry.