



KNOWING OUR NEIGHBOURS III 2023

BY REBECCA DORRIS, MANAGER OF COMMUNITY ADVOCACY &
DR. SPENCER HENSON, UNIVERSITY OF GUELPH

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IMPACTS OF AND SOLUTIONS TO POVERTY AND FOOD INSECURITY



PARKDALE
FOOD CENTRE



At the Parkdale Food Centre (PFC), we believe in an Ottawa where everyone has the means and opportunity to live a healthy, connected and fulfilling life. Our mission is to build healthier, more connected Neighbours¹ and neighbourhoods through access to good food and innovative community partnerships, and by challenging inequalities to create lasting impacts. We believe that healthy food is a Human Right, and we are working to ensure all Neighbours have the means to access:

“a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food.”²

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

At the Parkdale Food Centre, we gather everyday at our table on the unceded and unsundered land of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation. In doing so, we stand in the footsteps of many whose rich and cherished food traditions and practices have been extinguished through colonialism and racism.

Food security and food justice are at the heart of our work at Parkdale Food Centre. As a part of our commitment to reconciliation, and in acknowledging the land where we gather, we recognize that food security includes powers that are built into our food system and impact who has a seat at the table, whose voices are heard and who are disproportionately affected by poverty and food insecurity.

We strive to honour the peoples and the land of the Anishinaabe Algonquin Nation, and commit to listening, learning and taking action in assisting to decolonize, heal and reconcile.

¹ At PFC, we use 'Neighbours' when referring to everyone who uses our services
² Article 25, UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR)



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: KNOWING OUR NEIGHBOURS

This report provides a summary of the results from the Knowing Our Neighbours III survey, completed in May and June 2023. The community at the Parkdale Food Centre has always used food as a way to connect with one another; through in person interactions as at our community meals and community programming, fresh produce markets, grocery offerings, and virtually via cooking workshops. We collect little, if any, demographic information from those who engage in our programs and services, in order to minimize barriers for access. However, this limits our ability to obtain a detailed understanding of our community, especially with respect to food insecurity, income and disability statuses.

In early 2021, we completed the first-annual “Knowing Our Neighbours” survey to obtain answers to these questions. The information from the survey helped us to adapt our services to meet the ever-changing needs of Neighbours and to inform our evolving advocacy work. We completed this survey once more in early 2022 in order to get an up-to-date and detailed picture of households, and are currently presenting the data from our third annual survey, alongside an overview of some of the key trends we have noticed over the last three years of surveying.

SOME OF OUR KEY QUESTIONS INCLUDED:

- Who uses the services of PFC?
- What are some of their challenges as they relate to income and expenses?
- What does food insecurity look like among our community?
- What are the usage patterns of our food bank? Where else do our Neighbours get food?
- What are the reasons people come to PFC?
- What are some things we can do better?

THE STUDY

Neighbours from all PFC programs were invited to participate in the Knowing Our Neighbours III survey, undertaken in late spring 2023. Available in English, French, and Simplified Chinese, all questions were voluntary, no identifying information was recorded with the survey data, and a \$10 grocery gift card was offered as an honorarium upon completion. 196 people completed the questionnaire on behalf of their households, but 22 households were excluded from the data results as some households had not used our services in the last year. Thus, this report was compiled from the key results obtained from the 174 households who completed the questionnaire, representing approximately 375 individuals living in these households. We must take the time to understand poverty through the narratives of those who experience it, and tune in especially to the voices of those who have multiple marginalized identities.



OUR NEIGHBOURS

While not all Neighbours completed the survey, we are confident that the households that did respond provide a representative sample of those who are supported through PFC programs. Here are some of the key results of the households and the individuals that live in them.

HOUSEHOLD COMPOSITION

Approximately:

- 52%** of households were single-adult households
- 18%** of individuals were seniors aged 65+
 - 61%** of these seniors reported living alone
- 54%** of household members were working-aged adults (aged 18-64)
- 64%** of persons in households responding to the survey identified themselves as being Black, Indigenous, or a Person of Colour (BIPOC)
- 69%** of households had at least one person with a disability. Of those households, mental illness, physical disabilities, and chronic illness were the most commonly reported conditions

From these results, it is clear that many Neighbours represent vulnerable segments of the population of Ottawa, for example; being a member of a BIPOC group, living with a disability, and/or living alone. These trends are consistent from population-wide trends from Statistics Canada, stating that in 2021, seniors who lived alone were five times more likely to live in poverty when living alone versus in an economic family³. Further, the Canadian Social Survey found that in 2022, 42% of people with disabilities reported that it was very difficult or difficult to meet their basic household needs⁴, and people with a disability are twice as likely to live in poverty than non-disabled populations⁵. Racialized people, including Indigenous people and immigrants, are also more likely to live in poverty and find it more difficult to make ends meet when compared with white populations^{6,7}.

HOUSEHOLD INCOME

Of the households in the survey:

- 68%** 68% of households represented in the survey reported an annual income of \$20,000 or less
- 41%** of households represented in the survey reported an annual income of \$15,000 or less
 - on average, households made just short of **\$20,000** annually
 - when adjusted for number of adults in the household, each adult earned an average of **\$12,000** annually
- 30%** of households had at least one adult in full- or part-time employment
- 34%** had at least one adult receiving Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)
- 18%** had at least one adult receiving Ontario Works (OW)
- 24%** had at least one adult on the Canadian Pension Plan (CPP) and/or Old Age Security (OAS)

At the time of data collection, the basic annual social assistance rates for a single person on OW was \$8,796 and \$14,736. Adding in Federal and Provincial tax credits, these increase to \$10,253 and \$15,871⁸, respectively. The average family of four (couple with two children) received \$33,368. The Federal Government also provided a one-time benefit in 2022 to offset increased cost of living, but this only amounted to \$153 and \$194 for single adults with and without a disability, respectively, and \$467 for a family of four. Additionally, people no longer received pandemic-related support, introducing renewed precarity.

3 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1110013501>

4 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=4510008701>

5 <https://www.disabilitywithoutpoverty.ca/2023-disability-poverty-report-card/>

6 <https://www.tamarackcommunity.ca/hubfs/Tamarack-The-end-of-poverty-eight-pathways-that-are-ending-poverty-in-Canada-FV.pdf?hsCtaTracking=5c1848d4-d5d7-423c-bb67-72b6b218dec4%7C3c003ed0-2e1e-42ea-8875-08c960cb3abd>

7 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=4510008701>

8 https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/Welfare_in_Canada_2022.pdf

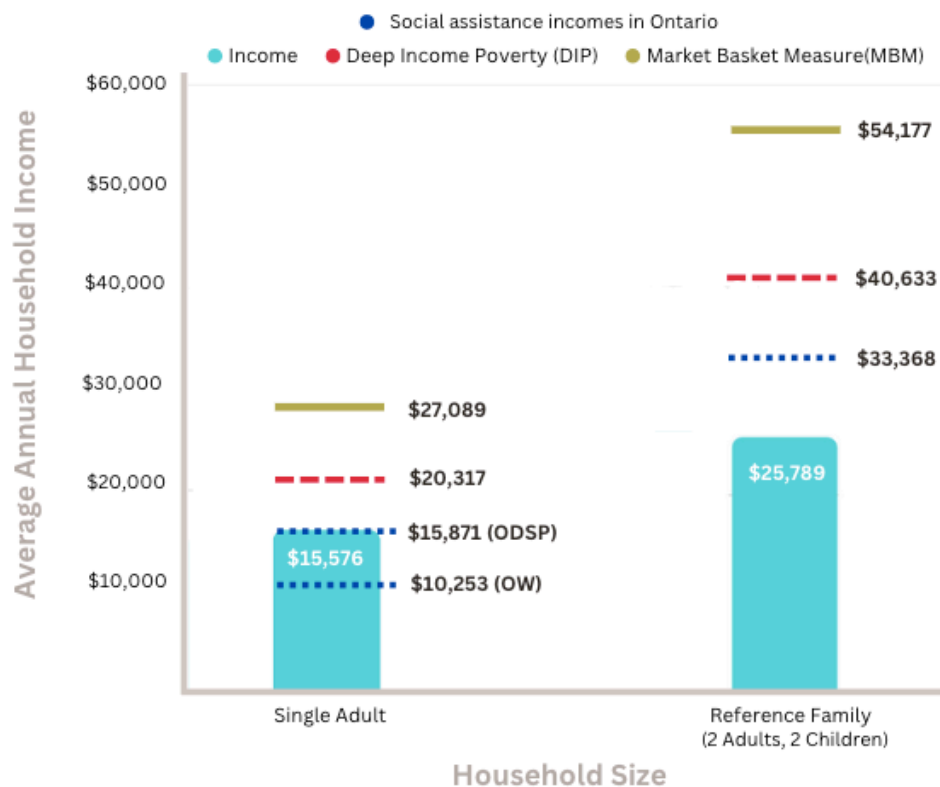


Although ODSP rates increased by 6.5% shortly after this data was collected in July of 2023 (bringing annual rates to \$15,871)⁹, OW rates have not changed in 3 years¹⁰, and both of these rates are far below the cost of a modest, basic standard of living as estimated by Statistics Canada's Market-Basket Measure (MBM). In 2022, the MBM for a single person household in Ottawa Gatineau was \$27,089, and for a four person (2 adult, 2 children household, it was \$54,177¹¹. Households with an income of less than 75% of the MBM are classified as being in Deep Income Poverty (DIP). The vast majority of households in the survey were below these thresholds, and so would be classified as living in Deep Income Poverty.

Statistics Canada also calculates poverty using a Low-Income Cut-Off (LICO) and a Low Income Measure (LIM). The LICO identifies households that are likely to spend a disproportionately large

share of their income on the necessities of food, clothing, and shelter, while the LIM identifies an annual household income that represents half of the median household income in Canada. In 2021, the LICO for a single-person household in a large urban area (like Ottawa) was \$22,801¹², and the LIM in Canada was \$26,503¹³, after taxes. The vast majority of households in the survey were below this threshold. According to Maytree, the total welfare income of both an unattached single adult considered employable and a family of four decreased 10% in constant dollars in 2022 when compared to 2021.¹⁴

Incomes Compared to Poverty Indicators



9 Statement on 2023 Increase to ODSP - Feed Ontario

10 <https://incomesecurity.org/from-the-archive-odsp-ow-rate-sheets-from-2015-to-2021/>

11 Market Basket Measure (MBM) thresholds for the reference family by Market Basket Measure region, component and base year (statcan.gc.ca)

12 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1110019501>

13 https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/ref/dict/tab/index-eng.cfm?ID=t2_4

14 https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/Welfare_in_Canada_2022.pdf (constant dollars reflect purchasing power taking inflation into account).



HOUSING AND COST OF LIVING

“ODSP does not give enough money and the cost of living is going up. Food, rent (are) more expensive now. Even though I am in subsidized housing the rent still goes up”

50% On average, households spent **50%** of their income on housing

49% of respondents lived in social or supportive housing

57% Of those still on the waiting list for social housing, **57%** of households have been on the waiting list for 4 years or longer

76% of respondents stated that if their household was to face an unexpected expense of \$500, they would not be able to cover it from their own resources

In its ‘What We Hear Report’ in 2021, the City of Ottawa identified that in their consultations for the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, the most common concern expressed by members of the public and stakeholders was the lack of affordable housing, which resulted in a barrier to improving their lives and the lives of other members of their community¹⁵. The fear and stress of not being able to make ends meet were also expressed by our Neighbours, describing they are able to afford less and less year after year, with stagnant income and rising costs.

“Cost of living went up but not hourly wages.”

FOOD SECURITY OF NEIGHBOUR HOUSEHOLDS

When asked about the last month:

69% of households reported that they worried that food would run out before they got money to buy more

61% of households reported that food actually ran out and there wasn't money to buy more

53% of households reported skipping meals because there wasn't money to buy more

70% of households reported being unable to afford a healthy and balanced diet

49% of households were unable to afford and access food that was culturally appropriate for their household

Percentages of food insecurity trends displayed above were comparable to the first two years of the survey, showing that the food insecurity status of households among our community remains relatively unchanged from year to year. This trend has also been reported in other communities, and is not isolated to this small sample of Ottawa alone. Although we are not able to compare responses to the Household Food Security Survey Module, as we changed the wording of questions this year to increase readability, it is clear that the majority of households experience food insecurity despite access to food programming from Parkdale Food Centre, food banks, and other community food programs.

According to Ottawa Public Health's Nutritious Food Basket in 2022, the total cost for a month of healthy groceries for a single adult is \$392 and a family of four was \$1088¹⁶. Further, the estimation was that, after paying for groceries and rent in Ottawa, a single adult on OW would be \$588 short of paying for any other basic necessities, while a single adult on ODSP would still be \$363 short. Statistics Canada shares that the MBM calculation for a food basket rose 8.8% from 2021 to 2022, up from just a 2.4% increase between 2020 and 2021¹⁷.

15 https://ehq-production-canada.s3.ca-central-1.amazonaws.com/775d5fa9843e01f5f38fc9e8d95e747d1b226588/original/1622817326/573bbbf385cf53287073f45813fe524_WWH_Report_Phase2_Accessible_FINAL_EN_1.1.pdf?X-Amz-Algorithm=AWS4-HMAC-SHA256&X-Amz-Credential=AKIA4KKNQAKIOR7VAOP4%2F20230927%2Fca-central-1%2Fs3%2Faws4_request&X-Amz-Date=20230927T160848Z&X-Amz-Expires=300&X-Amz-SignedHeaders=host&X-Amz-Signature=ab8d8f086ab4ea0e5b88290f05d6298dd20fe2d38682ffb993f5885e220128df

16 <https://pub-ottawa.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=99834#:~:text=The%20NFB%20survey%20measures%20the,survey%20every%20year%20in%20May.>

17 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2022008-eng.htm>



ACCESSING AND PREPARING FOOD

- 30%** On average, households reported spending **30%** of their monthly income on food, with monthly grocery bills being an average of \$450 per household.
- 86%** of households reported that their spending on food has increased over the last year
- 82%** of households said it had been more difficult to access and/or afford food in the last year, citing inflation, rising food prices, and lack of increase in social assistance rates being the cause
- 64%** Similar to previous years, **64%** of households purchased at least some of their food in a dollar store.

Households surveyed reported using a variety of methods to stretch their limited incomes to meet the needs of themselves and their families. In addition to visiting food banks multiple times per month, most months of the year, Neighbours also used other food banks and community food services to stretch their food budget, like accessing from community agencies (like those in Belong Ottawa, Salvation Army, and Causeway Work Centre), churches, through vouchers from Community Health Centres, and from friends and family. Of those who got food from food banks, food centres, meal programs, community fridges, and from members of the community, households reported that these provided an average of just 5 days of food per month. Statistics Canada stated that food prices increased by 8.5% in July 2023 when compared to the previous year¹⁸. Clearly, Neighbours have to use many strategies to ensure they can eat enough each month when incomes are not enough to support themselves and their households to afford basic needs.

FOOD BANK USE

- 94%** of households have accessed a food bank in their lives
- 46%** of these, **46%** of households have been accessing a food bank for four years or more
- 77%** of all households have used the Mino'weesini Grocery Program in the last year
- 45%** of households accessed 9 or more months of out the year

For most Neighbours, food banks are an established and ongoing source of food; it is far from an emergency measure that is used when money gets tight. When asked why there were periods of time when their household didn't access a food bank, two-thirds (67%) said yes, reporting that it was because they didn't need it: they had more hours at work, had enough money to buy that month, or were getting food from family, friends or the community. However, some stated that they were too embarrassed to go back to a food bank when money ran out, and preferred the "Dignity of shopping for my own groceries" to accessing food banks. Other people stated that transportation was an issue, either through the cost of bus fare, or their disability preventing them from travelling.

"I received two lump sum payments from CRA and government pension plan, owing for the past three years, that enabled me to afford more food."

¹⁸ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230919/dq230919a-eng.htm>



THE ENDING OF THE FRESH EATS NO-COST PRODUCE MARKET

A few months into the pandemic in 2020, PFC introduced a weekly no-cost produce market called Fresh Eats. It grew over the course of two years, from a few Neighbours accessing what we had left over from our Grocery Program, to a market that was held at 3 locations and was accessed by hundreds of households weekly on Fridays. However, funding cuts resulted in the ending of this program at the end of 2022. When asked how the ending of the market impacted households, respondents shared their perspectives:

"Because we can only get food once a month from the food bank, the market helped supplement those off weeks."

"It has a big impact on my life. I have not enough food for living."

PFC'S OTHER SERVICES

People come to the drop-in at the Parkdale Food Centre at 30 Rosemount Avenue for many reasons: to have coffee, seek respite, access produce from our community fridge, share a meal in house or for take out, and to access wrap-around support. Since opening in January of 2023, the Parkdale Food Centre's Community Advocacy office has been open to help Neighbours gain information and referrals, navigate the social service system, create goals and plans such as obtaining employment or improving housing, and just to have a space to talk about one's challenges and objectives. 11% of households surveyed have visited the Advocacy Office in the month previous to taking the survey, and 46% of Neighbours say they come to 30 Rosemount Avenue at least partially to get information and support. Many Neighbours have commented on the welcoming environment provided by all who attend: staff, volunteers, and Neighbours alike.

"I think the advocacy branch will help a lot of people. I think the program as is, will be a key component in creating a safe social network for many people who have very few resources and are in need of continuous support."

"They are always very welcoming and helpful and will look for solutions and referrals for times where and when their services don't cover your issue."

Since shortly after the Covid-19 pandemic began, PFC has offered weekly virtual cooking workshops. Participants obtain the ingredients they need and then cook these at home during the workshop. Around 10% of households responding to the survey had attended one of these workshops in the previous month.

"It's amazing to have the at-home cooking classes. It has helped with food."

"Wonderful staff, including Chef Anna and guest chefs whether Neighbours or professionals. Volunteers, for example packing meal kits and driving to deliver them. Fresh, local, in-season produce. Broadening my horizons in terms of cooking affordably, and using ingredients I may not have been previously familiar or comfortable with. The camaraderie of the zoom cooking group."



Neighbours commented that having access to good food and welcoming spaces makes them feel grateful, helps combat loneliness and social isolation, and improves their overall mental health.

"It makes me feel more worthy and affirmed as a Worthy person. Makes me feel healthier physically and PSYCHOLOGICALLY. I feel loved."

"I'm able to regroup, rest and meet (the) community, which is very important if you are more isolated."

"Hopeful, energized, validated and empowered."

"Welcoming spaces like this help me feel less isolated and actually, part of a community that allows me to participate and lifts me up in my spirits. Most places of assistance do not do this in my opinion. I can't tell you the number of times a food pantry/food bank has me feeling worse about myself or my situation. I always cried when I left."

"I absolutely love going to Parkdale (30 Rosemount), because they are wonderful people there who have made me feel included and have offered such great support for various things. I couldn't picture my days without them."

"To be safe and I have a disabilities and everyone is friendly and respects me for my disability."

"I am very satisfied because of the efforts and quality of service and food. People are friendly and welcoming at Parkdale."

SUGGESTIONS FROM NEIGHBOURS

Many of the suggestions given by Neighbours involved increasing points at the Grocery Program, increasing hours of the drop in, and adding back in program components such as the outdoor Community Fridge and the Fresh Eats no-cost produce market.

"If they had a social worker liaison who could help with clothing/ household vouchers for Salvation Army or St Vincent de Paul that would help enormously."

"Being more accessible outside of regular work hours. People who work still need access to these services."

"When there is funding, when they had the funding I saw that PFC made the world a better place for ALL ... the ripple effect is real ...make life livable for one human and that human can then help someone else in need...I have seen it hundreds of times at PFC."

While we strive to provide improvements where we can, we recognize that our limitations are a reflection of the limited resources available to the Parkdale Food Centre. It is the responsibility of our governments at all levels to prioritize measures to end income inequality so that all Neighbours can live a healthy and connected life.



KEY TAKEAWAYS FROM LAST THREE YEARS

Even though some of the questions change from year to year (e.g., asking Neighbours to reflect on the last month versus the last year of their lives), the trends of how often and how deeply people experience food insecurity stay relatively the same. The majority of Neighbours regularly worry about running out of food before they can afford to buy more, often running out of food without money to buy more, even after cutting the size of meals, skipping meals, and generally eating less than they thought they should. Over the last three years, at least ¾ of households report that they would not be able to afford an unexpected expense of \$500 or more. Consistently, 70% of households earned \$20,000 or less, regardless of the size of their households. Growing income disparity, social inequality, issues of affordability, and barriers to accessing services continue to be themes amongst what we hear each year; not only in our survey, but in our everyday conversations with Neighbours. When we are seeing these trends of food insecurity and poverty remaining the same year after year, it is clear that the way our systems have been operating is not working.

WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS?

Just as in 2021 and 2022 data revealed, the data collected this year reveal that food banking does not have a significant impact on food security in urban areas such as the City of Ottawa. Despite PFC providing an average of 1600 meals per month and Grocery Program (food bank) access to an average of 1000 individuals per month, and individuals and households implementing many other strategies to stretch their food budgets, people are still food insecure. Neighbours were generally satisfied with the amount, choice and quality of food they received, as well as the general services provided by PFC's regular food and community programming. Despite this, approximately half of households had to regularly go without food because they did not have enough money to buy more. This speaks to

the fact that, though valuable, community-based approaches to food provision are insufficient to significantly impact the food insecurity of low-income households in a city like Ottawa. Even after the Covid-19 pandemic has subsided to manageable levels, people living in the margins continue to struggle, with increasing grocery prices and inflation rates, and stagnant or marginally increasing social assistance and minimum wage rates, which are not even close to keeping up with the incomes required to live in many cities, including Ottawa.

"...my life would be far better if my income was enough to cover healthy food. I'd be able to get fresh produce that would last longer. I'd be able to get food that works for my allergies and intolerances. I wouldn't worry about the stigma of people seeing me going to the centre."

According to reports from the Canadian Income survey, poverty generally is trending downward, but progress towards ending poverty has not been equal¹⁹. Similar to 98% of Canadian households receiving social assistance, the income provided by OW and ODSP is far below what is needed to even meet the most basic needs, such as adequate and appropriate food and housing, among other necessary regular household expenses²⁰. As a result, the social safety net provided by governments is not providing the protection and support that it is supposed to.

"The government should lower the prices of food."

¹⁹ https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/esdc-edsc/documents/programs/poverty-reduction/national-advisory-council/reports/2022-annual/NACP_2022-Report-EN-final.pdf

²⁰ https://www.odph.ca/upload/membership/document/2021-04/ps-eng-corrected-07april21_2.pdf



Ottawa Public Health estimates that 1 in 7 people in the city are food insecure, and that these numbers are higher amongst marginalized populations, like BIPOC individuals, single parents, and those on social assistance²¹. The Government of Canada further recognizes that single adult, single parent households, and marginalized communities, such as individuals who are racialized and live with disabilities, are disproportionately more likely to experience food insecurity^{22 23}.

Ultimately, food insecurity in urban centres like Ottawa is the result of poverty. Sadly, this is not new information; income inequality remains a product of structural and political systems that fail to provide a sufficient social safety net for all citizens to, at the very least, meet their basic needs. It is important to note that the cost of these basic needs and the bare minimum income to support them is regularly calculated by Statistics Canada in its' Market Basket Measure. Indeed, the \$2,000 monthly payment under the Federal Government's Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) that was implemented during the COVID-19 pandemic was based on this benchmark. The CERB aimed to help Canadians make ends meet during a particularly challenging time. This contrasts with an individual on OW who receives \$733 a month, and with individuals on ODSP that receive \$1,228 monthly. Further, most people on social assistance did not even qualify for CERB, as eligibility depended on a minimum income level that excluded income earned through social assistance. When people experience a crisis, either personally or broadly like a global pandemic or

community disaster, governments must support all communities affected to be lifted out, rather than being forced to live in a state of crisis and inadequacy. The vastly inadequate rates for social assistance and punitive rules associated with them are legislating people into deep income poverty.

People living in food insecure households are much more likely to suffer from poor health outcomes, such as mental illness, chronic diseases, and infections, and sometimes a combination of complex expressions of these illnesses^{24 25}. Without sufficient income to afford therapeutic diets and/or medications to adequately manage their conditions, chronic illnesses worsen, which places an additional burden on the health care system, not to mention increasing suffering of the individual trying to manage the condition²⁶. Furthermore, being stuck in the cycle of poverty and punitive social assistance systems limits people from fully contributing to their communities in ways that are meaningful to them.

21 <https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/resources/Documents/NFB-2022-Report-EN.pdf>

22 <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230502/dq230502a-eng.htm>

23 <https://proof.utoronto.ca/2023/new-data-on-household-food-insecurity-in-2022/>

24 <https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/food-insecurity.aspx#Negative-health-impacts-of-food-insecurity>

25 <https://proof.utoronto.ca/resource/food-insecurity-a-problem-of-inadequate-income-not-solved-by-food/>

26 https://www.odph.ca/upload/membership/document/2021-04/ps-eng-corrected-07april21_2.pdf

27 <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.2019.01637>



CALLS TO ACTION

In 2022, Canada's inflation rate hit a 40 year high at 8%, with the cost of groceries rising 11%²⁸. Working-age adults face the highest rates poverty rates, yet income supports available to them are inadequate in the face of current economic realities^{29 30}. Further, 83% of households were living in deep income poverty.³¹ With costs of living drastically rising, and economic and social inequality growing, it is critical for citizens and community organizations to work together to advocate for policy change at different levels of government. Many groups, including the National Advisory Council on Poverty, have heard these struggles of income inadequacy and unaffordability year after year as well, and are calling to transform our social systems if we want to meet poverty reduction targets and effectively and equitably eliminate poverty.³²

Food security is an urgent public health and social justice issue. Food insecurity is ultimately a result of poverty, which is the outcome of social and economic public policy that favours the privileged. Adequate and nutritious food that is available and accessible in a dignified way is not a privilege; it is a Human Right. It is the moral, legal, and political obligation of governments to ensure everyone is able to realize the Right to Food. That said, the presence of such a deep level of poverty in just a small pocket of Canada's capital city is a violation of Human Rights, particularly as this is not an isolated problem. Persistent poverty is impacted by and impacts the social determinants of health in one's lives (e.g, housing status and quality, level of isolation, physical and mental health, use of emergency and social services, etc.). Charity is not a solution to food insecurity, as poverty is a public issue, not a private one. Under-resourced non-profit organizations are not positioned to solve issues that are, at their core, income-based. We need thoughtful, workable plans, ensuring that peoples' fundamental Human Rights are upheld and respected, at minimum, having an adequate standard of living with sufficient income and a decent home. Based on our survey and the wealth of other voices on the topic of poverty and food insecurity, we are advocating for the following:

- Ensure that access to nutritious, affordable, culturally appropriate food is a Human Right, as was ratified in the 1976 UN International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, and was recognized in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

28 <https://www.thestop.org/wp-content/uploads/EOY-COVID-REPORT-2022.pdf>

29 <https://maytree.com/wp-content/uploads/What-is-the-Canada-Workers-Benefit.pdf>

30 <https://cfccanada.ca/en/News/Advocacy-Issues/Canadian-Income-Survey-2021>

31 https://www.odph.ca/upload/membership/document/2021-04/ps-eng-corrected-07april21_2.pdf

32 https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/esdc-edsc/documents/programs/poverty-reduction/national-advisory-council/reports/2022-annual/NACP_2022-Report-EN-final.pdf



INCOME SOLUTIONS:

- Generally expand and accelerate targeted benefits and supports for populations with disproportionately high rates of poverty and ensuring that all Canadians are lifted above Canada's Official Poverty Line, whether through income assistance and benefits, employment, or a combination thereof
- Better financial and social support for marginalized populations, such as racialized persons, persons living with disabilities, single parents and seniors
- Raising the rates of social assistance to meet at least a minimum income standard so that social assistance is at minimum above Canada's Official Poverty Line
- Indexing rates of social assistance to inflation in the city or region of residence
- Increasing the amounts that can be earned by work or other benefits without clawing back social assistance, which would empower those whose circumstances allow to find and maintain meaningful employment while accessing the government benefits they are eligible for
- Recognizing and providing adequate financial assistance for the added costs of living with a disability
- Increasing rates and accessibility of Federal income benefits (e.g., Canada Disability Benefit, Canada Child Benefit)
- Enhancing existing benefits to increase support for low income renters from the Canada Housing Benefit, and transforming the Canada Workers Benefit into the Canada Working Age Supplement to increase the maximum benefit level and remove requirement of labour force participation
- Implementing federally-regulated Living Wages adjusted for cost of living in each region in Canada
- Considering proven income solutions, like Basic Income methods, which would provide an adequate income floor while complementing other social support services

POVERTY REDUCTION:

- Levels of government work together to create an official realistic poverty reduction plan, one that is aligned with the visions and values they state
- Ensuring systems and benefits are streamlined, coordinated, straightforward, equitable, and adequate; emphasizing dignity and compassion rather than stigma and confusion
- Poverty reduction plans and interventions must be ongoing to address the continuous and long-term effects of poverty on the individual, family and society
- Contribute to sustainable core funding for non-profit community-based organizations that are working to enhance, not replace, income-based measures by supporting the health and quality of life of those with low incomes

COST OF LIVING:

- Improve transit services and decrease cost of riding, at least for those living in poverty
- Affordable childcare for all
- Increase availability of deeply affordable urban rental housing and establish rent control
- Ensuring all low-income Canadians get adequate access to drug and dental plans, regardless of social assistance enrolment
- Provide maximum shelter allowances to all social assistance recipients, regardless of living situation
- Ottawa Public Health needs to continue to monitor food affordability, implement a local food strategy that aligns with the Community Safety and Well-Being Plan, and advocate to Provincial and Federal Governments to implement long-term solutions to make life more affordable



FURTHER, WE ADVOCATE THAT THESE CONDITIONS OF POLICY DEVELOPMENT BE CONSIDERED:

- We need to centre the voices of those who are most impacted by food injustice and the oppressive burden of poverty in decision making. Policy design and implementation must be co-developed, culturally appropriate, and trauma-informed
- Promoting equity amongst marginalized communities and prioritizing peoples' differing needs and circumstances. This must be done by using an anti-oppressive lens when developing policies, like involving members of different cultural and social groups on decisions that impact their communities, and promoting Indigenous food sovereignty
- Ensuring that policies developed are consistent with evidence-based recommendations from leaders in poverty reduction and food security
- Incorporated human-centred collaborative design into the development of policies, including participation from those with lived experience and cross-sectoral collaboration to address gaps in benefits and services
- Ensuring the people are automatically enrolled in benefits that they are entitled to
- Empowering and adequately funding community-led local services and solutions
- Ensuring disaggregated data is collected and shared so that it is possible to see the differing progress towards governmental poverty reduction targets among and between groups with and without marginalized identities
- Setting clear and specific targets on food insecurity and poverty reduction indicators and transparently reporting on progress towards those targets, and ensuring that policies change to accommodate groups of the population that are consistently left behind
- Commitment to sharing data in ways that are able to be simply understood by all, regardless of language and reading ability
- Cooperation and coordination of benefits from all levels of government
- Acknowledging the addressing the roots of poverty, which include colonialism and discrimination of all kinds discrimination

Overall, governments need to prioritize making life affordable for all Canadians. We need informed policies for poverty reduction, with adequate budgets, accountability and transparency, and actionable equitable implementation of plans to ensure all Canadians can live a life with dignity. At minimum, a life with dignity entails that individuals and communities have an adequate standard of living, and this includes having adequate access to appropriate and nourishing food. We must ask ourselves as a society why we accept that some of our Neighbours must live in poverty, and are not able to afford the food they need to survive and thrive. We want the best Ottawa - one where we can all live with dignity, equity and opportunity.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We would like to thank all of those who helped to make the Knowing Our Neighbours III project possible. Firstly, to the Neighbours who responded to our extensive survey, which we recognize was at times intrusive and required much time and energy to complete. The insight and wisdom our Neighbours shared informs our programs and services, and shapes how we do what we do. We would also like to thank the dedicated staff and volunteers who helped to organize, distribute and analyze the survey data, and to share the results with the community. Everyone who contributed in some way to the information we are sharing here is a key player in helping increase understanding of the realities of those who are food insecure and, ultimately, in helping PFC in its efforts to advocate for adequate income and food security for all Neighbours, near and far.

“This program feels safe and welcoming. I have never felt any intimidation or lack of self worth when I come. Thank you for this.”





PARKDALE FOOD CENTRE

30 ROSEMOUNT AVE #2
OTTAWA, ON K1Y 1P4
613-722-8019

PARKDALEFOODCENTRE.CA



@PARKDALEFOOD



PARKDALE FOOD CENTRE



@PARKDALEFOOD