



### Title

**Who's Hungry 2017: A Profile of Hunger in Toronto**

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Daily Bread Food Bank

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### Research Tags

Poverty Reduction, Social Policy, Social Programme, Hunger, Food Bank Usage, Toronto, Basic Income Pilot Project

## Summary of Research Report

The number of Torontonians accessing food banks has increased in 2017 despite an overall improvement in the economy. According to the Daily Bread Food Bank study, the numbers are back to levels not seen since the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis. To make matters worse, are using food banks for twice as long as they did in the past on average. Daily Bread has welcomed changes to Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program in 2017. It is also encouraged by the Basic Income Pilot Project taking place in Hamilton, Lindsay and Thunder Bay. Still, a lot more needs to be done. (p. 5)

## Key Findings & Figures

- ◆ Between April 2016 to March 2017, there were a total of 990,970 client visits to Daily Bread Food Bank and North York Harvest Food Bank member agencies. This is the highest annual client visit number in Toronto since 2010. This is 9% higher than 2016, and 24% higher than 2008. (p. 11)
- ◆ Toronto food banks saw a steady increase in visits starting in the second quarter of 2015, reversing the previous trend of decline. This may be an indication of more people falling out of the labour market due to disability and age, as well as people struggling to cope within a labour market that is becoming more fragmented and less likely to provide enough steady income to manage rapidly increasing costs of living. (p. 13)
- ◆ The inner suburbs have seen a 13% increase in the last year alone, and a 68% increase since 2008. Despite rapid gentrification and a closure of a food bank in the Beaches East York area, the city core has also seen an increase of 4% in the last year. (p. 13)
- ◆ Even with this sudden increase in the city core this year, the general trend of people being pushed to the outer reaches of the city to find affordable housing has resulted in a 13% decrease in the city core from 2008. (p. 13)
- ◆ In the past 12 months, 77% of food banks distributed less food than usual because they were running out of food; 13% had to close early (or not open) due to lack of food; and about one fifth had to turn people away because there was no food left to give out. (p. 14)
- ◆ Overall, 62% of food bank clients reported having a disability or serious illness in 2017, versus 53% in 2007. Stagnant incomes, along with the rapidly rising cost of food, are causing many with disabilities to have an increasingly hard time affording food. (p. 19)



## Why Research?

The Yonge Street Mission believes in the incredible value that evidenced-based research and information sharing plays in developing—as well as delivering—the most enhanced and effective programs and services to our community members. We are called to be stewards of knowledge; educated, informed and diligently tapping into innovation and insight. Best practices are continually refined, and studies, research and analysis are regularly being published. Keeping up to date and well-versed with this literature is essential. It is for this reason we've designed this Research Bulletin to promptly scan and disseminate the key findings and recommendations from recently published research materials relevant to the Social Service sector, and to our work at The Yonge Street Mission.

**This summary has been prepared by The Yonge Street Mission. The information given does not purport to be an exhaustive or exact replica of the original research. Omissions or errors resulting from the summation process are the responsibility of The Yonge Street Mission.**

## Proposed Recommendations & Areas For Action

- ✦ Daily Bread has advocated for increasing social assistance rates, in particular bringing the Ontario Works rate for single-person households to the full \$100 increase, as well as setting a lower rate of social assistance claw-back, and less than the dollar for-dollar claw-back that had previously existed. In terms of housing, Daily Bread requested a commitment from the province to examine and design a Housing Benefit to help allow low-income tenants in Ontario better afford their housing. (p. 9)
- ✦ The Basic Income Pilot Project seeks to explore whether a “basic income” can reduce poverty and increase opportunity. This has the potential to address the existing problems in our social assistance system. Still, there is evidence that income alone isn't enough to prevent poverty and hunger, and non-income related benefits such as medications or other disability and health supports are also essential in supporting those in need. It is recommended that the benefits of such in-kind supports are factored into the evaluation of the Basic Income Pilot Project. (p. 37)
- ✦ The Income Security Reform Working Group has been tasked to outline ways in which the present social assistance system can be simplified, and made more accessible and responsive to the range of needs that exist. It can help address barriers that many clients discussed in accessing employment or other needed services, by promoting a system that can enable and allow a more collaborative relationship between the system/clients relying on it. (p. 37)

## Notable Quotes

- ✦ “With all three levels of government committing to poverty reduction strategies, and firm investments being made in initiatives that help get at the root causes of poverty and hunger, successes in the last year show that positive change is possible. We hope to report even more changes in the months to come, and positive impacts in the lives of Torontonians.” (p. 5)
- ✦ “In order to live on low income in a city like Toronto, people often go hungry and make many trade-offs that can have short- and long-term physical, financial, psychological and social consequences. Low-income households do what they can to budget for food despite most of their income going to rent, but inevitably there will be times during the month when money has run out and food becomes a “flexible” expense.” (p. 30)
- ✦ “There is a large social cost to living in poverty. Survey respondents repeatedly mentioned how lack of money or employment, and practical barriers such as the cost of transportation have affected their ability to see friends and family, or otherwise interact with others in the community.” (p. 32)