

FSF RESEARCH · ISSUE 01

# The *Invisible* Crisis: Food Insecurity Among Black Children and Families in Ontario

Nearly half of all Black Canadians live in food-insecure households.

This report examines the data, the disparities, and the structural conditions producing one of the most severe — and least discussed — equity crises in Canada today.

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BASED ON DATA FROM STATISTICS CANADA, PROOF (UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO), FOOD BANKS CANADA, AND DAILY BREAD FOOD BANK

**46.7%**

OF BLACK CANADIANS LIVE IN FOOD-  
INSECURE HOUSEHOLDS  
(STATISTICS CANADA, 2024)

**4.1M**

FOOD BANK VISITS IN TORONTO ALONE  
IN 12 MONTHS  
(DAILY BREAD / NORTH YORK HARVEST,  
2025)

**10M**

CANADIANS LIVING IN FOOD-INSECURE  
HOUSEHOLDS – A RECORD HIGH  
(STATISTICS CANADA, 2024)

THE PROBLEM

## A Crisis That Doesn't Make Headlines — But Should

## Canada is experiencing the worst food insecurity on record. But within that national crisis, one community is bearing a disproportionate and largely invisible burden: Black Canadians.

The highest percentage of individuals living in food-insecure households in 2024 was found among Black people at 46.7%. That is not a rounding error. It means that in the wealthiest country in the G7, nearly one in two Black Canadians cannot be certain they will have enough food. In 2024, 25.5% of people in the ten provinces lived in a food-insecure household — the third consecutive increase and another record high. Black Canadians face this crisis at nearly twice that rate.

For reporters, funders, and policymakers trying to understand why charitable food systems are overwhelmed, this racial gap is not incidental — it is central to the story.

CANADA · FOOD INSECURITY BY GROUP · 2024 (STATISTICS CANADA / PROOF)

Black Canadians

**46.7%**

Indigenous Peoples (off-reserve)	<b>39.9%</b>
Lone female-parent households	<b>52%+</b>
National average (ten provinces)	<b>25.5%</b>
White households (2017–18 comparison)	<b>11.1%</b>

#### RACE AND FOOD

## Being Black in Canada Is Itself a Risk Factor

The connection between race and hunger in Canada is not new — but it remains systematically under-researched and under-funded. PROOF, the food insecurity research program at the University of Toronto, documented the disparity as early as 2012. Their findings were stark then, and remain so today.

Even when other sociodemographic characteristics were kept the same, Black households are still twice as likely to be food insecure as white households. Just being Black is enough to increase the risk of food insecurity.

This is not explained by income alone. It is not explained by education. It is not explained by employment. Researchers at PROOF found that after controlling for every measurable socioeconomic variable, a racial gap remained — pointing to the role of anti-Black discrimination in housing, hiring, credit access, and wealth accumulation.

***"When it comes to food insecurity, I feel like we're often footnotes."***

PAUL TAYLOR, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, FOODSHARE TORONTO — VIA PROOF

That invisibility — being a footnote in a crisis that is disproportionately yours — is at the heart of why the Food Security Fund was created. The gap is documented. The solutions require investment in the organizations closest to the community.

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CHILDREN FIRST

## Children Are Bearing the Heaviest Load

The consequences of food insecurity fall hardest on children. Hunger at a young age shapes cognitive development, academic performance, mental health, and long-term economic outcomes. In Canada today, children are not protected from this burden — they are at the centre of it.

In 2024, about 2.5 million children in Canada's ten provinces — roughly 33% of children under age 18 — lived in food-insecure households, a significant increase from previous years and a record high in recent surveys. One in three children in this country is going without enough food.

For Black children, the numbers are worse. Data from PROOF and the Breakfast Club of Canada shows that 46% of Black children in Canada live in food-insecure households. The classrooms where Black children sit are classrooms where nearly half the children may be hungry.

#### WHAT THE DATA TELLS US ABOUT CHILDREN

- 1 in 3 Canadian children arrive at school hungry
- Children represent 33% of food bank users nationally
- 46% of Black children in Canada live in food-insecure households
- Children make up 1 in 4 Daily Bread Food Bank clients in Toronto

→ Food insecurity in childhood is linked to depression, anxiety, and reduced academic performance

The link between hunger and long-term outcomes is well established. Research consistently shows that children who experience food insecurity face heightened risks of depression and anxiety, weaker academic performance, and long-term barriers to economic mobility. When nearly half of Black children begin life in a food-insecure household, the consequences compound across generations.

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TORONTO

## **The City That Feeds More People Than Ever — and Can't Keep Up**

Toronto is Canada's largest city and its most visible example of the food insecurity crisis. The numbers coming out of the city's food bank network are staggering — and they are accelerating.

Food bank use in Toronto keeps hitting new records, with a new report finding 4.1 million visits made from March 2024 to April 2025 — an increase of hundreds

of thousands from the year before. To put that in context: it took 38 years to get to one million visits, two years to get to two million, a year to get to three. And now another year has passed and visits sit at 4.1 million.

The cost of maintaining this level of service has grown almost twenty-fold. The Daily Bread Food Bank has gone from spending \$1.5 million a year in 2020 to \$29 million a year in 2024. That money ensures clients are able to obtain three days worth of food from each visit — a stopgap, not a solution.

#### TORONTO FOOD BANK CRISIS · KEY NUMBERS

Annual visits to Toronto food banks (2024–25)	<b>4.1M</b>
Increase since 2019 (pre-pandemic)	<b>+340%</b>
New individual food bank clients in one year	<b>155,000</b>
Median daily budget after rent/utilities (food + all essentials)	<b>\$7.78</b>

Daily Bread annual cost to feed communities

**\$29M**

More than one in ten Torontonians now rely on food banks — a 36% year-over-year increase in unique clients. Of 155,000 new individuals who started making use of food bank services for the very first time, more than 50% are employed full-time, and more than 60% have a post-secondary education. This is not a story about people who failed to work hard. This is a story about a system that has failed them.

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#### THE STRUCTURAL GAP

## Why Black-Led Organizations Are Overwhelmed

Black-led and Black-serving food organizations often serve the communities most affected — yet they consistently operate with the fewest resources. They are called on to do more with less, year after year.

These organizations are not failing. They are operating beyond capacity. The gaps are not in effort or intention. The gaps are in infrastructure: cold storage,

transportation logistics, volunteer coordination systems, and reliable operational funding. What looks like organizational instability from the outside is, in reality, the predictable result of trying to run warehousing and distribution work without warehousing and distribution resources.

***"Food banks cannot and will not solve this problem. The supports that we provide are critical — but do not mistake them for solutions."***

RYAN NOBLE, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, NORTH YORK HARVEST FOOD BANK

The national food banking system itself acknowledges this limit. Kirstin Beardsley, CEO of Food Banks Canada, said: "Poverty and hunger are becoming normalized in Canada, and we cannot build a strong Canada when our neighbours are hungry."

Building the systems behind food access — the logistics, the storage, the supply coordination — is exactly the gap the Food Security Fund was designed to close. Not to replace the community organizations doing the work, but to give them the infrastructure they need to do it sustainably.

## THE ASK

## What Systemic Change Looks Like in Practice

The Food Security Fund (FSF), a strategic initiative of Support Black Charities, operates from a clear premise: the problem is not the absence of caring organizations. The problem is the absence of coordinated infrastructure to support them.

FSF does not provide direct grants to individual organizations. It funds capacity — storage, logistics, distribution, operational systems — and contracts qualified third-party service providers to execute these functions at fair market value. Community organizations participate as implementation partners, freed to focus entirely on feeding people rather than managing supply chains they were never resourced to manage.

**Phase 1 target: \$250,000 to \$500,000** in seed funding and founding partnerships. This capital will build the team, the systems, and the first coordinated infrastructure pilots with 4 to 5 trusted community

organizations. The goal: prove the model, adapt with community input, and scale.

The Food Security Fund is not a charity drive. It is a long-term infrastructure investment. If the Princess Margaret Cancer Foundation can build a globally recognized, multi-stream philanthropic ecosystem in Toronto, the same model can be applied to the food security crisis — particularly for the communities facing the sharpest need.

The builders are already in the room. The organizations are already doing the work. What is missing is the system behind them.

**Learn more and connect: [foodsecurityfund.ca](https://foodsecurityfund.ca)**

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