



# **Is Increasing Hunger in Niagara a Catalyst for a Basic Income?**

**Appetite for Change**  
**Food: production, distribution, access and consumption**  
**14APR26**

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**Political Science**

# Overview

- NCO Policy Brief #58
- NCO Policy Brief #62
- Myth Busting
- Basic Income



# Policy Brief #58

## Sustaining Food Security in Niagara

### Sustaining Food Security in Niagara

By Joanne Heritz

#### INTRODUCTION

Historically, religious orders and charities provided social assistance to Canadians in the form of health care, lodging, and food. The welfare state emerging in the post-war era increasingly shifted responsibility for health care to the government, culminating in universal health insurance in Canada in the 1960s. The federal government's responsibility for community housing shifted to the provinces in the 1980s, which Ontario then shifted to its municipalities in the 1990s.

However, food security remains the one social service, for the most part, still under the purview of charities. In Niagara, charities have a long history of providing food security but have never faced the challenges they are experiencing today. Once thought to provide temporary relief for a small group of residents falling on tough times, they now serve a growing number of food-insecure residents.

There is an alarming growth in the number of residents in Niagara who are relying on food banks and food programs and this trend does not show any signs of slowing down. Against the background of growing food insecurity in Niagara, and Canada more generally, this policy brief investigates Niagara's response to the increase in demand for food security. Its purpose is to outline the magnitude of the problem at a local level and initiatives that have been implemented thus far to help combat the problem. However, much more needs to be done and this policy brief should be seen as a catalyst to beginning that conversation at all levels of government.

First, this policy brief outlines the extent of the problem of food security at a national, provincial, and local level, followed by the methodology that frames the research questions. It then provides context that addresses the question of why there is an increasing reliance on food banks by more residents in Niagara. Next, is an analysis of the federal, provincial, and local response to food insecurity, including a review of initiatives in Niagara that might utilize the abundance of produce harvested in the region. The policy brief concludes with recommendations aimed to reduce food insecurity in Niagara.

Growing Our Community Beyond Hungry



Community Care West Niagara

#### Terms and Definitions

**Food Insecurity** is the inability to afford adequate food to meet a household's basic needs.

*"Food security programs are considered the 'canary in the coal mine' ... The food banks are the point of entry for people in need—you cannot exist without food. Once you access a food security program, they can connect you with other supports and services that you need."*

—Betty-Lou Souter, CEO Community Care St. Catharines & Thorold.

**Food bank** is the common term that refers to community food acquisition and distribution centres. The term itself may not be preferred by the organizations, because it falls short of adequately describing the varied services provided, such as housing help, counselling, supports, and seasonal programs such as back-to-school supplies, and holiday food and toy drives.

# Feed Niagara Increases in Food Bank Visits 2022-2024

Municipality	Organization	Increases in Food Bank Use
Lincoln	Community Care	795 individuals monthly in 2024, 755 in 2023
	West Niagara	6 % increase from 2023 to 2024
Fort Erie	Salvation Army	37 % increase in households from 2023 to 2024
Grimsby	GBF (Grimsby Benevolent Fund)	1,141 individuals in 2024, 925 individuals in 2023, 765 in 2022, 36 % increase from 2022 to 2024
Niagara Falls	Project Share	13,995 individuals in 2024, 11,670 in 2023, 6,844 in 2022, 104 % increase from 2022 to 2024
NOTL	Newark Neighbours	2,283 visits in 2024, 1,436 in 2023, 918 in 2022, 148 % increase from 2022 to 2024
Pelham	Pelham Cares	4,029 visits in 2024, 2,891 in 2023, 1,586 visits 2022, 154% increase from 2022 to 2024
Port Colborne & Wainfleet	Port Cares	2,373 individuals in 2024, 2,825 in 2023, 1,762 individuals in 2022, 35% increase from 2022 to 2024
St Catharines & Thorold	Community Care	143,113 visits in 2024, 104,000 in 2023, 57,679 visits in 2022, 148 % increase from 2022 to 2024
Welland	The Hope Centre	5,312 individuals in 2024, 4865 in 2023, 3286 in 2022, 62 % increase from 2022 to 2024
West Lincoln	West Lincoln Community Care	1,986 visits in 2024, 1,921 in 2023, 1,572 in 2022, 26% increase from 2022 to 2024



# Children

- Feed Niagara - 40% children
- Food4Kids Niagara
- Niagara Nutrition Partners
- Community Crew



# Brock Students

BUSU Grab & Go Breakfasts

Pay-What-You-Can Pop-Up Produce Market

Free Food Giveaways



# Myth#1 People who use food banks simply need to get a job

- Food bank visitors *are* working
- A minimum wage worker
  - 106 hours a week to pay rent for a one-bedroom apartment
  - People are working several jobs
  - Seasonal employment

# Myth# 2 People who use food banks just need to budget better

- People are not receiving enough income
- Survey by Feed Ontario
  - 78% reported a monthly household income of \$2,000 or less
  - Paid more than \$1,000 monthly for housing
  - 68 % reported skipping meals to make ends meet

# Myth# 3 Food bank use has increased because of immigration

- Canada needs immigrants to make up for declining birthrate
- Aging population
  - By 2046, 25 % population will be over 65
  - In 1971, 8 % population were over 65
- In 2023, 98 % of Canada's population growth was from immigration
- Asylum seekers in Niagara Falls in 2022
  - Housed in Niagara Falls due to backlog in processing claims
  - Many became volunteers at Project Share: "grateful for the opportunity to give back"!

## Income Scenarios & Funds Remaining After Rent & Food (Niagara 2023, 10)

Income Scenario	Monthly Income	Average Monthly Rent (% Income Required for Rent)	Cost of Nutritious Food (% Income Required for Food)	Remaining Funds
Family of Four, OW	\$2873	\$1366 (48%)	\$1212 (42%)	\$295
Family of Four, Full-time minimum wage earner	\$4218	\$1366 (32%)	\$1212 (29%)	\$1640
Family of Four, Median after-tax income	\$9329	\$1366 (15%)	\$1212 (13%)	\$6751
Single Parent Household, two children, OW	\$2636	\$1258 (48%)	\$848 (32%)	\$530
Married Couple, ODSP	\$1792	\$1070 (60%)	\$689 (38%)	\$33
One Person Household, OW	\$851	\$833 (98%)	\$414 (49%)	-\$396
One Person Household, ODSP	\$1387	\$1070 (77%)	\$414 (30%)	-\$97
One Person Household, OAS Guaranteed Income	\$2035	\$1070 (53%)	\$299 (15%)	\$666

# Basic Income

- Wages/Income
- Housing



# Recommendations

## Federal

- Basic Income
- Prevent financialization of housing

## Provincial

- Basic Income
- Raise minimum wage

## Municipal

- Community housing
- Secure fed & prov support for affordable housing
- Investigate impact of severe food insecurity





**Thank you**

**Faculty of Social Sciences**

**Niagara Community Observatory**  
**<https://brocku.ca/niagara-community-observatory/>**

# Link to Policy Brief

## Brock University Niagara Community Observatory Policy Brief #62 Increasing Hunger in Niagara: The Need for Action

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### Increasing Hunger in Niagara: The Need for Action

By Joanne Heritz

#### INTRODUCTION

Hunger and food insecurity are complex issues that comprise the basic need for reliable access to safe and adequate nutrition (Hassan 2017). In 2021, 18.4 per cent of all Canadians lived in a food-insecure household, as

did 16.8 per cent of those under 18 years old. (Cumiskey et al. 2024, 453). Food is essential for our physical and mental well-being and without it, we die. Food insecurity is strongly associated with negative health outcomes, including poor mental health, chronic pain, diabetes, increased hospitalization, and premature death from infectious diseases (Men & Tarasuk 2021, 203).

In Niagara, one in five households and one in five children and youth are food insecure (Niagara 2023, 13). The number of people in Niagara struggling to provide themselves and their households with nourishing food is increasing over time.



*This policy brief was written in consultation with Susan Venditti (Chair, St. Catharines Out of the Cold Interchurch Committee) and Chandra Hardeen (Director of Community Investment, United Way Niagara). We would like to thank United Way Niagara for its support.*