

Context: Student Hunger and Food Insecurity

Across the country, growing numbers of post-secondary students are facing hunger and food insecurity on their campuses. There are now food banks on almost every university and college campus in Canada, and while there is a lack of national data, the number of Ontario postsecondary students accessing food banks is rising.¹

Student food insecurity is worsening in recent years due to high tuition fees, growing student debt, and a challenging labour market. Since the federal government began drastic cuts to funding for universities in the 1990s, a growing proportion of the cost of post-secondary education is being passed on to students. In less than 35 years, the proportion of university budgets covered by government funding dropped from 83% to 55%.²

At the same time, Canadian tuition fees have tripled since the 1990s.³ With tuition fees on the rise, student debt has also skyrocketed to an average of \$28,000 per student, upon graduation.⁴ Federal student debt alone, which excludes provincial and private debt, has reached \$15 billion, making this the most indebted generation in Canadian history.⁵

Vital Facts:

- According to campus surveys, the University of Alberta has seen a doubling of campus food bank usage between 2007 and 2010, 10 percent of University of Ottawa students used the food bank in 2012,⁶ and over 2,500 Ryerson University students in downtown Toronto accessed emergency food relief in the 2013-14 academic year.⁷
- Student assistance is insufficient to cover the cost of living. For example, the Ontario Student Assistance Program leaves women with a \$1,232 shortfall and men with a \$1,712 per academic year.⁸ Students often choose to forgo food in the face of other basic needs.⁹
- Students who shop near campus spend more on food: the cost of a standard menu has been found to be nearly 50% more than the monthly food allocation provided by the Canada Student Loans Program.¹⁰
- Because of the high cost of food on campus, many students are resorting to unhealthy options.¹¹

¹ Ontario Association of Food Banks (2014). *Hunger Report 2014*. Retrieved from <http://www.oafb.ca/hungerreport2014>

² Canadian Association of University Teachers (2015). *CAUT Almanac of Post-Secondary Education in Canada, 2014-2015*. Retrieved from <http://www.caut.ca/resources/almanac>

³ Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (2015). *Alternative Federal Budget 2015: Delivering the Good*. Retrieved from <https://www.policyalternatives.ca/publications/reports/alternative-federal-budget-2015>

⁴ Burley, G and Awad, A (2015). *The Impact of Student Debt*. Ottawa: Canadian Federation of Students. Retrieved from <http://cfs-fcee.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2015/03/Report-Impact-of-Student-Debt-2015-Final.pdf>

⁵ Canadian Federation of Students (2015). *Funding for Education*. Retrieved from <http://cfs-fcee.ca/the-issues/funding-for-education/>

⁶ CBC News (2012, November 13). 1 in 10 University of Ottawa students uses food bank. *CBC News*. Retrieved from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/1-in-10-university-of-ottawa-students-uses-food-bank-1.1195942>

⁷ Nguyen, A, Labonté, D, and Silverthorn, D (n.d.). *The Hunger Report: A Demographic Overview of the Good Food Centre's Members from September 2013 – July 2014*. Good Food Centre and Ryerson's Students' Union. Retrieved from <https://goodfoodcentre.wordpress.com/hunger-report/>

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ferguson, M (2004). *Campus Hunger Count 2004 - Struggling to Feed Hope to Canada's Students: Food Banks Emerge in Response to Student Hunger*. Ottawa: Canadian Association of Food Banks and The Canadian Alliance of Student Associations.

¹⁰ Meldrum, LA and Willows, ND (2006). Food Insecurity in University Students Receiving Financial Aid. *Canadian Journal of Dietetic Practice and Research* 67(1): 43-46.

- The current generation is facing a labour market with higher unemployment, fewer good jobs, and a growing number of unpaid internships. National youth unemployment is double the Canadian average. Youth unemployment was 13.5% in 2014, while youth employment rates were 55.5%, still far from recovering to pre-recession rates of 59.5% in 2008.¹² One in four young workers is estimated to be underemployed, with many working part-time in service and retail.¹³

What Needs to Be Done: Reinvesting in Our Youth

The Food Secure Canada Youth Caucus recommends the federal government support students and promote student food security by restoring public funding for postsecondary education through the Canada Social Transfer and increasing up-front grants through the Canada Student Grants Program. Investments in students, colleges, and universities are investments in Canada's future, with strong economic and social returns.

¹¹ Canadian Federation of Students Ontario (n.d.). *Task Force on Campus Food Services: A look at food accessibility and affordability in Ontario*. Retrieved from <http://cfsontario.ca/en/content/373>

¹² Statistics Canada (2015). *Table 282-00002: Labour force survey estimates (LFS), by sex and detailed age group*. Retrieved from <http://www5.statcan.gc.ca/cansim/a26?lang=eng&id=2820002>

¹³ Canadian Labour Congress (2014). *Underemployment is Canada's Real Labour Market Challenge: A Profile of Canada's Labour Market*. Retrieved from <https://takingchargeofchange.files.wordpress.com/2014/09/2014-clc-underemployment-is-canadas-real-challenge.pdf>; Certified General Accountants Association of Canada (2012). *Youth Unemployment in Canada: Challenging Conventional Thinking?* Retrieved from http://www.cga-canada.org/en-ca/ResearchReports/ca_rep_2012-10_youthunemployment.pdf