

720,000 people turned to food banks in March: survey

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[CBC News](#)

More than 720,000 people used a food bank in Canada in the month of March, almost 40 per cent of them children, according to a survey released Thursday.

The Canadian Association of Food Banks conducted the survey, seeking numbers from all known food banks in Canada, including the 656 the association represents. Nearly all organizations participated.

The survey found that in March 2007:

- 720,231 individuals used a food bank at least once
- 2,344,462 meals were served
- 39 per cent of users were under the age of 18
- 28 per cent of users were part of single-parent families
- 14 per cent of users reported being employed, 51 per cent were on social assistance
- Newfoundland and Labrador is the province with the highest food bank use per capita (5 per cent)
- Alberta is the province with the highest percentage of employed food bank recipients (27 per cent)

Katharine Schmidt, the executive director of the food bank association, said the total numbers of users is four per cent lower than in March 2006, but up nearly nine per cent from 1997. She said the numbers should be of concern.

"700,000 people is just slightly less than the population of New Brunswick," Schmidt said at a news conference in Ottawa.

She said the fact that 14 per cent of users were employed illustrates that hunger is a problem that affects the working poor, as well as those who are on social assistance, disability support or pensions.

Ed Borkowski, chair of the association's board of directors, said the number of children using food banks is also troubling.

"Children experiencing hunger are at risk of a range of negative developmental outcomes," he said in a news release.

"These include behavioural problems, poor school performance, and mental health issues. We have the ability to ensure the food security of all Canadian families, but we need leadership from federal and provincial governments."

The food bank association says Canada needs to expand its tax benefit programs for low-income earners and low-income parents, raise social assistance rates and develop a national strategy to make housing affordable.

The association also wants to see provincial minimum wages rise to \$10 an hour across the country.