

# Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the Upcoming Federal Budget



Food Insecurity Workgroup (FIWG)

August 4, 2023

# Recommendations

1. That the government increase the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) amount for low-income families.
2. That the government equal CCB amounts for families with children over 6 years old so that they are not receiving less when their children turn 6.
3. That the government create a federal CCB supplement for remote and Northern communities to address the exceedingly high percentage of food-insecure households and elevated costs of living.

# Situation

Household food insecurity (HFI) is a prevalent and persistent problem in Canada. The [latest statistics](#) indicate 18.4% of people in the ten provinces lived in a food-insecure household in 2022. This amounts to 6.9 million people, including almost 1.8 million children (approximately 1 in 4), living in households that struggled to afford food. This is the highest number and percentage documented since Canada began monitoring HFI in 2004. The situation has undoubtedly worsened in 2023 with extraordinary food inflation over the past year.

## Background

[Ontario Dietitians in Public Health](#) (ODPH) is the independent and official voice of Registered Dietitians (RDs) working in Ontario's public health system. Our [Position Statement and Recommendations on Responses to Food Insecurity](#) urges all levels of government to support policies that enhance incomes as the most effective responses to the persistent and increasingly prevalent problem of household food insecurity.

[HFI](#) is the inadequate or insecure access to food due to household financial constraints. It is a serious public health problem and a potent social determinant of health. Food insecurity has [serious implications for the health and wellbeing of Canadians](#) beyond just poor nutrition and diet. The health consequences of food insecurity put a large burden on our health care system and are costly for our public health care budgets.

Initially thought to be a “food problem,” [HFI is now understood as an indicator of pervasive material deprivation](#) that elucidates financial hardship in a way that income-based measures of poverty, like Canada's Official Poverty Line, do not. The deprivation captured by HFI is the product of household income; the stability and security of that income over the year; assets like homeownership; access to financial resources outside of income like savings, credit, or help from family or friends; debt; and costs of living. The economic well-being or hardship of households can be most sensitively measured by whether they have difficulty affording food, making this measurement an important focus for policy.

There is a [large body of evidence](#) showing food insecurity can be reduced through policy interventions that improve the financial circumstances of low-income households. When food-insecure households receive additional income, they spend it in ways that improve their food security.

Since its launch in 2016, the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) has been heralded as a crucial step towards [alleviating child poverty](#) and a policy success. On its seventh

anniversary in July 2023, the government [announced](#) an increase to the CCB to keep pace with inflation. While not specifically designed to reduce HFI, analysis of the CCB through the lens of HFI shows limited impacts. However, if redesigned to explicitly target the rate of HFI, [research conducted by Food Insecurity Policy Research \(PROOF\)](#) demonstrates the program has unrealized potential to do so.

## Assessment

A [study](#) comparing HFI before and after implementation of the CCB in 2016 revealed there was no change in the overall prevalence of food insecurity for families with children. However, the researchers identified a one-third reduction in [severe food insecurity](#) among low-income families. Given severe food insecurity is very strongly associated with serious negative health outcomes, this reduction is significant.

A more recent [study](#) found the families with children under age six receiving higher CCB (up to \$1068 more annually) had a lower risk of food insecurity. The study authors conclude that, “increasing benefits for economically disadvantaged households, characterized by low incomes, single parenthood, and renting (versus owning), may improve the program's efficiency and equity in supporting families' food security.” Additionally, the findings also support equalizing the CCB for families with children over age six in recognition of the high rates of food insecurity among those families. The current design of the CCB overlooks the needs of families with older children.

## Conclusion

The findings of recent Canadian research on the CCB demonstrate how modest income supplements can reduce food insecurity, with the largest effect being for lowest-income families most at risk for food insecurity and particularly severe food insecurity. This research also reinforces the need to design policies with the explicit outcome of reducing food insecurity to maximize their potential.

The cost of inaction is too high. Living in a household struggling to afford food is toxic to children's health and well-being. Not only does household food insecurity compromise children's nutritional health; they are at much higher risk for serious mental health problems.