

## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**October 28, 2021 (Leduc, Alberta)** - According to the latest [HungerCount report released today by Food Banks Canada](#), food banks across Alberta saw 116,396 visits to a food bank in March 2021, one of the highest in the country. While COVID-19 continues to affect individuals and families across the country, [Food Banks Alberta](#) wants to remind families that food banks are open, essential and ready to support all Albertans.

[Food Banks Canada](#) released the first HungerCount report since 2019, which offers a collection of data from food banks across the country that reflect the challenges, resilience and opportunities of the COVID-19 pandemic. The data reflects a perfect storm that has driven thousands of new families to local food banks over the past 18 months; noting rising food and housing costs, pandemic-related job loss and unemployment as the main factors for the increase in accessing food banks and their services.

### Key 2021 HungerCount Findings:

- 116,396 Albertans visited a food bank in March 2021. A total increase of 29.6% since the 2019 HungerCount.
- There were over 44,586 visits to Alberta food banks by children in March 2021.
- 45% of Alberta's food bank users are families.
- 15.2% of food bank users receive Provincial Disability Supports.
- In rural Alberta, 30.5% of food bank users are seniors or persons with a disability.
- 1 in 8 Canadians access a community food program like a food bank.

"It's staggering to see these numbers in Alberta, but not surprising with how hard hit the province was largely due to the pandemic," said **Arianna Scott, Interim CEO, Food Banks Alberta**. "Our member food banks across Alberta have all been reporting a surge in food bank access, which includes a new population of Albertans accessing their local food bank largely due to increases in rental or housing costs, increased food costs, unemployment and other pandemic-related circumstances."

Scott says Food Banks Alberta is working closely with Food Banks Canada, as well as their member food banks across the province to ensure all food banks are prepared for these numbers to continue to trend upwards as government support options are expected to decrease.

Food Banks Canada indicates that this volatile combination created a "perfect storm" that has food banks across the country bracing for a "tidal wave" of new clients in the months ahead.

"As a nation, we have a pivotal choice to make, to return to a "pre-pandemic" cycle of poverty, or to build a better Canada where no one goes hungry, and poverty is addressed at its root causes," says **Richard Matern, Director of Research, Food Banks Canada**. "The 2021 HungerCount data shows early in the pandemic, government supports helped flatten demand at Canada's food banks, but in recent months, visits are beginning to surge with one-in-seven food banks experiencing a doubling of demand. Our goal with the 2021 HungerCount report is to not only be able to

confirm trends in food bank usage across Canada, but help prepare local food banks for what's expected to still come."

Scott says seniors and people with disabilities have been especially hard-hit in Alberta, and the HungerCount data confirms a significant increase of food bank use by these populations.

"We have heard from our member food banks that an increasing number of seniors and individuals with disabilities are accessing food banks more than ever before; particularly in rural areas, who are seeing over 30% of total users falling into this group," **says Scott**. "Benefits that were available to the rest of the country, like CERB that made such a difference in keeping households afloat just weren't available to seniors and those with disabilities. The fact is, food costs keep rising, and so do the basics like rent and transportation. They just can't afford to do it all."

The HungerCount reports that Canadians on fixed incomes like seniors and disability benefits make up 27% of visits across the country, indicating that the trend in access continues nationally. Many food banks across the province have launched delivery programs and partnerships to meet the needs of seniors and isolated individuals who may have difficulty accessing their local food banks.

Food Banks Alberta continues their Alberta-wide awareness campaign to let Albertans who may not have prior experience navigating social support, that they can safely access their community food banks, despite recent surges in COVID-19 cases across the province.

"If there's one good thing that's come out of the pandemic, it's the generosity of our communities. The retailers, the individuals and communities - they've really stepped up and continued to support us. We continue to purchase food in order to meet the demands of increased use." **says Scott**. "We are seeing similar trends in generosity across the country, and we are grateful that people recognize people and families shouldn't have to make the choice between paying bills and putting food on the table."

Food Banks Alberta reminds families that while local food banks are considered an essential service, safety measures are in place. Volunteers and staff members wear full PPE (gloves, mask and a face shield) while handling all food, and continue to follow regulations and requirements set forth by Alberta Health Services. Similar to grocery stores, proof of COVID-19 vaccination is not required to access a food bank, though contactless options may be utilized to protect the health and safety of each community.

"We urge any Albertan that needs help with making ends meet to reach out to their local food bank," **says Scott**. "We're here for you. You're not alone."

Food bank supports include perishable and non-perishable items, menstrual and hygiene products, household essentials, pet food and more. Hampers are accessed by calling a local food bank, and arranging assistance. Food bank assessment and identification requirements vary by location.

### **About Food Banks Alberta:**

[Food Banks Alberta](#) is the provincial association of food banks in Alberta, with a mission to strengthen the impact of the provincial food bank network by creating new opportunities, increasing knowledge, providing resources, and

delivering innovative programs. We seed connections for positive social change. We are composed of a strong network of more than 104 member food banks across Alberta.

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