




HARVEST

2022

VOICES

Stories of Hunger and Poverty in Manitoba



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Acknowledgements

Harvest Voices is a report dedicated to uplifting the voices of people accessing food banks across Manitoba. This report uses data gathered through surveys to identify trends in poverty and food security across our province.

A special thank you to all Harvest food bank recipients who participated in our survey, sharing their experiences and ideas. Thank you to our Community Food Network for helping us work towards a Manitoba where no one goes hungry.

Thank you to our team of staff and student volunteers who helped gather information and research for this report: Bailey Morlock-Tellier, Brooke Harding, Jen Gair, Julia Neufeld, Meaghan Erbus and Mikaela Marcalinas. We appreciate your commitment, time and support developing and authoring this report.

Harvest Manitoba would like to acknowledge that we are located on the original lands of the Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples and on the homeland of the Red River Métis.

We respect the sovereignty of each nation and the Treaties made on these territories. We are committed to continuously reflecting on our role as Treaty partners. We recognize the serious harms caused by colonialism and its lasting impacts on Indigenous Peoples across our province and our country.

Indigenous people have deep connections to the land and have made significant contributions to this territory. In the spirit of reconciliation and collaboration, we dedicate ourselves to moving forward with Indigenous communities. We honour the land itself and those who remain protectors of it, the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island.

Executive Summary

It takes a province to feed a province, and this has never been more true than this past year.

That means that Harvest is now providing food support through food banks, soup kitchens, schools, and daycare programs to nearly 90,000 people each month. This includes the 12 million pounds of food our facility handled last year, helping us ensure healthy food goes into our 15,000 monthly hampers.

Inflation has taken a toll on food bank recipients. Prices continue to rise for nearly everything we buy, particularly food. Food inflation in Canada reached 11.4% in September, a rate we have not seen for 30 years. This has contributed to food bank usage in Winnipeg doubling since 2019.

High prices and the lingering impacts of the pandemic have left many Manitobans with few options, and many have had to turn to food banks to make ends meet.

In this year's survey, there was a 50% increase in the number of clients with jobs accessing food banks. Our survey respondents, the voices of this report, have shared the difficult choices they are forced to make everyday. **Many mentioned loss of employment, rising food prices, life changes, and poor health as significant challenges they face daily.**

Manitoba is not alone. Similar stories are being shared across the country. In our big cities and small towns, the inner city and the suburbs, more and more Canadians than ever are turning to food banks to get through the month and put food on the table.

Here in Manitoba, we know there is much more that we need to do in partnership with Indigenous leaders, in particular in remote First Nations, to improve access to healthy and affordable food.

Harvest is about more than just hampers – it's about hope.

Hope is helping close to 40,000 food bank clients every month with food support. It's providing opportunities for education and employment training through our warehouse training program and hope in our new partnerships with First Nations leadership and communities.

There is hope in the strength that comes from all of you. The volunteers across our province who work in our warehouse, drive our trucks, sort the food, pack the hampers, and run our food banks — Together, we can build a healthier future for all where no Manitoban goes hungry.

Key Findings:

Food bank usage in Winnipeg has doubled since 2019.

69.2%

of respondents were predominantly female (69.2%), and an average of 45.9 years of age.

24%

of Harvest's clients are employed, a 50% increase over last year.

15,000

The number of children being served by Harvest has never been greater. More than 15,000 children are served by Harvest each month.





Respondent Demographics

Respondents were predominantly female (**69.2%**) and an average of **45.9** years of age. We are seeing more and more children accessing food support — over **15,000 children per month** were among food bank users in 2022.

We believe women were overrepresented as food bank clients due to having more part-time, low-paying jobs as compared to their male counterparts, and because they were often the sole or primary provider/caregiver for their children.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many women were forced to stay home as schools and daycares were closed. 16% of respondents identified child-care as a barrier to employment last year, and that number has stayed the same this year (16.13%).

Most respondents (72.8%) indicated they had an annual income of less than \$20,000 a year, which is well below the official poverty line in Canada.

Nearly a quarter (24.04%) of respondents were employed (43.33% full time), with the rest relying on various government programs for their income. The number of employed clients went up from 16% to 24%, an increase of 50% from last year.

“I go to grocery stores when I have bus fare to get there, but the bus tickets are expensive, and now the food is more expensive too, so I usually don’t shop for food.”

Over sixty percent (62.56%) of respondents indicated a disability or health condition; of those, most (85.29%) said that this limits their daily activities. 32.85% of respondents said that their illness or disability prevents them from working. Age and childcare were identified as being additional barriers to employment.

Most indicated a high school education or less as their highest level of achievement (62.50%).

Eighty-one percent (81.08%) rent their living accommodations.



“The cost of food is going up, but your EIA cheques stay the same, so I can barely afford food. Because of this I’m buying less and eating less to make my hamper last a month. It’s really tough some months.”

The proportion of Indigenous food bank clients continues to grow.
Nearly half (41.37%) of food bank clients are Indigenous.

41.87% of respondents reported white or European descent as their ethnicity, and 41.37% identified as Indigenous. The number of respondents that identified as Indigenous is significant, considering that they make up only 18.1% of Manitoba’s population and 12.4 % of Winnipeg’s population.¹

Harvest Manitoba is working with First Nations leaders in communities around Manitoba to listen and understand how Harvest can support local needs. Access to healthy and affordable food is not something that we will solve alone, but Harvest Manitoba must be a part of the overall solution.





Rob's Voice

A stroke and organ failure left Rob unable to work

In 1999, at the young age of 33, Rob suffered a stroke. The stroke was the result of a malfunctioning kidney, and after 20 years of working as a cook, Rob found himself off and on dialysis support and unable to work. Rob is now 56, is still receiving dialysis following a failed transplant in 2016, and EIA disability is his main source of income.

Rob is not only a Harvest client, but also a dedicated volunteer, having recently celebrated 11 years of service with the organization. He receives a financial top-up from EIA disability as a result of his volunteer work which he relies on to supplement his monthly budgeted expenses.

"We are put on this earth to help people, not hurt people."

Rob also visits the Meeting Place Harvest food bank on Smith Street to collect a monthly hamper — a service he says he didn't need until just over a year ago as food prices started to rise. **However, his need for a hamper is relatively new — a service he says he didn't need to access until recently — just over a year ago when food prices started to rise.**

He is very grateful for his volunteer position as it's important to him to give back to the community. "We are put on this earth to help people, not hurt people," he says.

Rob is hopeful for an increased EIA top-up in the near future, which would help toward his rent, food and clothing.

Monthly Expenses

Rent	\$820.00
Phone/Cable	\$120.00
Hydro	\$30.00
Food	\$120.00
Laundry Card	\$10.00
Bus Pass	\$106.00
Personal Expenses	\$120.00
Total Monthly Expenses	\$1,363.00
Monthly Earnings	\$1,360.00



Life changing help.

In 2013, Linda received the diagnosis no one ever wants to hear — terminal cancer. Told to get her affairs in order, Linda took an early retirement from a career that included many years of work with various community organizations in Winnipeg. Although she feared the worst, Linda was able to beat back the terminal cancer diagnosis. While she still has many health challenges and continues to receive cancer treatment, Linda is able to live on her own — with her dog Maggie of course!

Linda has always thought of herself as a thrifty person. She raised four children on her own in St. James and knows the value of a dollar. She never thought she would ever need to get support from an organization like Harvest — until now.

Linda overcame the biggest battle of her life in the fight against endometrial cancer, but the experience took a tremendous toll on her health and financial independence. The pharmacare deductible for her cancer medicine is a big hit to her grocery budget.

The pace of inflation over the past year has made it even harder.

“I have \$150 to spend on my monthly groceries,” said Linda. “I used to be able to get one meat item like chicken. Lately my protein has been chicken wieners.”

Harvest Manitoba is there for thousands of people just like Linda all over our province who can't make ends meet with rising prices for food and other necessities.

By signing up for a Harvest hamper at a local food bank, people like Linda can stretch their small budgets further to make it to the end of the month. Although Linda knew that Harvest was there for people in need, she was still reluctant to make the call for help.

“Please know that you are worth it. Don't be afraid to ask Harvest for help. There are always people worse off than me, but for anyone who is struggling to pay for healthy food, please know that you are worth it.”

A portrait of a woman with dark hair and bangs, wearing a blue patterned top and a necklace with a small cross. She is sitting on a yellow tufted chair. The background is a plain, light-colored wall.

Nataliia's Voice

In addition to the increased pressures of inflation and economic uncertainty, Harvest Manitoba has a new group of clients requiring its services: Ukrainian newcomers who are restarting their lives in Manitoba. Thousands of Ukrainian refugees have settled in Manitoba since the war began in February.

In addition to the increased pressures of inflation and economic uncertainty, Harvest Manitoba has a new group of clients requiring its services, Ukrainian newcomers who are restarting their lives in Manitoba. Thousands of Ukrainian refugees have settled in Manitoba since the war began in February.

These newcomers do not have the resources and supports to buy everything that they need to restart their lives in Manitoba. Harvest Manitoba is able to help these new Manitobans by providing nutritious foods, and comfort to this new group of clients.

Faced with the loss of their homes and every facet of their lives being overturned, Harvest hampers provide nourishment to these clients.

Nataliia is one of those clients. She came to Winnipeg with her five-year-old son in August. They were forced to flee their country with only two suitcases, leaving their homeland, family, and friends behind. She is incredibly thankful to the organizations that have provided them with a new home, a sense of community, and healthy food.

“Harvest Manitoba helps us a lot,” shared Nataliia. “I am still looking for a job. Without Harvest, I wouldn’t be able to get the food that I need for my family. Harvest Manitoba makes it simple and easy to sign up. They do a great job.”

In addition to supporting these newcomers with food, Harvest Manitoba has brought some of these clients onto its team and welcomed them into our training programs.

“I am still looking for an accounting job. Without Harvest, I wouldn’t be able to get the food that I need for my family. Harvest Manitoba makes it simple and easy to sign-up. They do a great job.”



Experiences with Food Insecurity

In 2021, one in six households or 220,000 Manitobans were food insecure, meaning they did not have sufficient access to safe and nutritious food.²

Harvest Voices Data:

40.80%

of survey respondents said they sometimes do not have enough to eat.

23.66%

of survey respondents said they are personally hungry a couple of days a week because they cannot afford food.

17.47%

said they experience hunger at least one day a week.

54%

of survey respondents said that in the past month they have had to miss a meal in order to be able to pay for something else.

Figure 2. Experience with hunger because they cannot afford food (%)

A couple times a week	24%
One day a week	17%
One day a month	19%
Rarely	25%
Never	15%

What is Food Insecurity?

Food insecurity refers to the inability to access an adequate amount of nutritious food due to financial constraints.

Food insecurity does not look the same for everyone and experiences with food insecurity can take many forms. These experiences can range from concerns of running out of food with no income to purchase more, to compromising nutritious food due to the cost, to missing meals to pay for something else. Some go hungry for days.³

Although food insecurity is often understood as a food problem, research has shown that food insecurity signals a much larger issue of material deprivation.⁴ Household food insecurity is tightly linked to income and reflects the broader circumstances of the household. For example, if a household is experiencing food insecurity, they may also be compromising on other necessities such as housing, utility bills, and medical costs.⁵

“Sometimes I don’t just miss a meal to pay for other bills, sometimes I won’t eat for a week to make sure my daughter has enough for three meals a day.”



Food and Inflation

The impact of inflation has struck our clients and communities across Manitoba. In September of this year, we saw an 11.4% inflation rate — a level not seen for 30 years. Grocery budgets simply do not stretch as far as they did a year ago. With costs continuing to rise, we can expect reliance on food banks to worsen.

“I used to use the food bank a lot when I was younger in 2012-2016, and then I stopped because I found cheaper housing and had some extra money, but I started again in April of 2022 because of the high prices of everything and not having enough money for our basic needs.”

We asked our clients if their household experienced a significant change in income (e.g. loss of job, disability, etc.) this past year and 42% said yes. When asked what led to the significant change of income, most responses were related to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic (67.8%). Job loss and business closures were the most common response, but other impacts of the pandemic such as prolonged illness and school closures were also common. Disabilities or illness resulting in a change of income were the second highest response (23.4%).

A typical grocery bill rose by 70% between 2000 and 2020.⁶ Lower-income households spend a higher proportion of their income on basic needs such as housing and food, resulting in them having a harder time maintaining their existing quality of life.⁷

93% of respondents said that current food prices changed the way they shopped. Many responding that they can no longer afford healthier options and must regularly forgo purchasing produce, meat and dairy. Respondents said they often had to make choices between essentials as they could not afford everything, or focused on feeding their children and took less for themselves.

Harvest food bank clients have identified several strategies to get enough to eat such as swapping nutritious food like vegetables, meats, and dairy for other food that is lower quality and less expensive, as well as looking for deals and discounts, and purchasing essentials only.

Food support from Harvest can help to stretch budgets, but it cannot fill the gap left by inadequate income.



Impact on Families and Children

In Manitoba **1 in 6** people are living in food-insecure households.⁸

Lone parent households are at higher risk of poverty and experience moderate to severe food insecurity at twice the rate of couples with children.⁹ Female lone parent households are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity.¹⁰

In the month of October, Harvest Manitoba served 15,330 children. Nearly half of survey respondents (47.9%) have children under 18, and 26.4% of respondents are single parents (18.9% single; 2.8% separated; 3.3% divorced; 1.4% widowed). 84.6% of respondents with children under 18 self-identify as female.

Food insecurity in childhood can lead to many negative and long-lasting health and behavioural outcomes, all of which can contribute to challenges related to school performance.¹¹ Studies have shown that food insecurity can be associated with poorer math scores, grade repetition, absenteeism, tardiness, and anxiety.¹² It can also be associated with a decline in social skills, weight gain and poorer reading performance.^{13, 14, 15}

In addition to the stress of managing their households, parents may experience significant stress and anxiety when it comes to managing bills such as hydro, water, and rent.¹⁶ Time and financial resources are increasingly spent on meeting household needs, the ability to support childhood development in other areas may decrease. For example there may be less money to spend on extracurricular or recreational programs. Of respondents with children under 18, 81.3% said they did not have any income left at the

end of the month for recreational activities, which are important for healthy emotional and social development in children.¹⁷

Survey respondents who are parents frequently identified having to skip meals to ensure their children had enough food to eat.

“The cost of food is going up; a 50 cent or dollar increase on almost everything. It makes me have to pick between essentials. Sometimes I can’t afford to buy toothpaste or soap if it means I want to have food in the fridge. Sometimes I need to borrow from friends or family.”

Food is essential for a brighter future — it is the fuel for student success. Harvest Manitoba knows how integral food is for child health. Since 2018, Harvest has been providing K to 8 students in Manitoba schools with access to food through our Meals2Go program. This program provides kids with a bag of healthy food items including fruit, milk, cheese and cereal, helping kids stay on top of their nutrition over the weekend so they’ll be ready to learn on Monday morning.



Experiences with Poverty, Income and Employment

Respondents of the survey are only turning to the food bank once they had exhausted all other options such as borrowing money from friends or family **(31.35%)**, using credit cards **(11.88%)**, selling property **(13.53%)**, and cashing in their savings **(6.27%)** to pay their bills.

73%
*of food bank
survey respondents
earn less than
\$20,000 annually.*

Figure 2. Respondents' methods for securing income to pay expenses in the last 12 months (%)

Borrow from friends or family	31.35
Sell property	13.53
Use a credit card	11.88
Use a pay day lender	10.56
Use line of credit	6.77
Use savings	6.27
Other	19.64

Manitoba's EIA and the Poverty Line

Most respondents (72.83%) reported having an annual income of under \$20,000, with the primary source coming from Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) or Disability Programs. This is followed by the Canadian Child Benefit (CCB), Canada Pension Plans (CPP), and Old Age Security (OAS).

EIA, also known as social assistance or welfare, provides financial support to individuals who have exhausted all other means. Research shows that the amounts provided are well below what is required to sustain a modest standard of living in Manitoba.¹⁸ Between 2020-2021, there were a total of 67,400 Manitobans receiving EIA support.¹⁹

Canada measures poverty using the Market Basket Measure (MBM). The MBM calculates the cost of a modest basket of goods and services that would be required to attain a basic standard of living and varies based on the cost of living for each province. The basket includes items like food, clothing, shelter, transportation, and other items such as medications, dental and eye care, as well as costs related to leisure and engagement in the community.

EIA rates in Manitoba have remained relatively unchanged for the past two decades. Meanwhile, the cost of living has increased steadily. In September of 2022, the provincial government announced a Family Affordability Package that included a raise to the EIA Basic Needs Benefit.²⁰ This would be the first increase to EIA in nearly 20 years. EIA general assistance recipients without dependent children will receive an additional \$50 per adult each month, and EIA disability recipients will receive an extra \$25 per household each month.

Figure 3. Comparison of EIA and MBM

EIA & MBM	Single Person Employable	Single Person Disability	Single Parent, One Child	Couple, Two Children
EIA Income - Manitoba	\$10,079	\$13,727	\$24,379	\$33,289
MBM Threshold (Winnipeg)	\$22,714	\$22,714	\$32,123	\$45,429
Variance	-\$12,635	-\$8,987	-\$7,744	-\$12,140
EIA Income % of MBM	44%	60%	76%	73%

Source: <https://maytree.com/welfare-in-canada/manitoba/>

People left furthest behind are individuals on general assistance without dependents. The \$50 increase will bring general assistance recipients up to 47% of the poverty line, where their incomes were previously at 44% of the poverty line, or an annual income of \$10,079. While this increase is a step towards offering sufficient supports to people in poverty, the increase falls short and leaves individuals struggling to afford food, clothing and rent.²¹

Employment and Income Assistance in Manitoba

The average amount of EIA for a family of four is \$2,774/month. Food bank clients reported that their average monthly bills excluding food were \$1,501.81. This included rent, utilities, cable/internet, phone, and childcare. The average cost of food for that same family is \$930/month in Manitoba.²² This leaves about \$342.19 a month for any other items that might need to be purchased during the month including medications and other health related costs, household repairs, recreation, and transportation costs, leaving very little for savings or a cushion for emergencies.

People living with disabilities are nearly twice as likely to live with low income and may struggle to meet their basic needs.²³ Individuals managing chronic health conditions are often required to pay out of pocket for medications, transportation to appointments, dietary requirements, or other services. Those unable to work or working part-time do not always have sufficient benefits to cover the costs of these items and services, requiring individuals and families to seek out more resources and ways to stay afloat, like going to a food bank.²⁴

Over sixty percent (62.56%) of Harvest Voices respondents indicated having a disability or health condition and that it prevented them from working (59.7%). They stated their disability or health condition was the reason for visiting a food bank (34.3%).

Manitoba Minimum Wage

The minimum annual salary in Manitoba for an individual working 40 hours a week at \$13.50 is approximately \$28,080, which is still below the poverty line.

Figure 4. Respondent Average Monthly Household Expenses

Rent	\$968.02
Hydro	\$166.32
Water	\$92.3
Phone bills	\$98.17
TV/Internet	\$94.82
Childcare	\$82.18

"I've tried to get a job but what always ends up happening is they take that money off of my EIA cheque and I have less than what I would've had if I just stayed on EIA. It's like they want me to stay in this box, because anytime I try to get out of my situation, they take money away and it feels like I can never get ahead."

Figure 5. Are you currently employed?

No	75.96%
Yes	24.04%

24% of respondents are currently working and accessing the food bank. In the survey, respondents disclosed that their professions were in fields such as the hospitality industry (servers, cooks, etc.), childcare workers, health care aids, and retail workers. Research shows that low-income workers are more likely to have less stable work, unpredictable work hours, fewer benefits, and more health problems.²⁵ Those in low-paying jobs have poor job security, which was seen throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. In fact, all of the jobs lost in Canada in 2020 were among workers who earned below average wages. Approximately 52% of jobs lost in 2020 were temporary positions.²⁶

The strain from low-income employment not only creates material deprivation but also erodes self-confidence and creates a sense of isolation and marginalization.²⁷

“It’s to the point where we get what we can from the food bank and the only things we buy is eggs, milk, and bread. That’s all we can afford, sometimes we can’t even afford that.”

Income and Food Bank Use

Current EIA rates and low minimum wages paired with rising food prices and housing costs have resulted in an increase of food bank use over time. In the past year, Harvest Manitoba has seen a 50% increase in food bank use, indicating that more and more low-income Manitobans require food assistance as inflation continues to rise.

76% of respondents stated they were unemployed, and those who are employed are still required to supplement their income with food banks because their income is simply not enough to cover their basic needs.

Food support from Harvest can help to stretch budgets and divert funds to non-food related expenses like medications or rent, but it cannot fill the gap left by inadequate income.

Barriers to Employment

Employment is one path out of poverty. It not only provides income and opportunities for health benefits, but it also creates daily structure and routine. Employment may help establish social supports such as friendships and connections which can lead to positive self-image and confidence.²⁸ However, barriers to employment such as fear of stigma and rejection may undermine one’s confidence in the job market.²⁹

Harvest clients who are not employed were asked what prevented them from working. 32.86% identified illness or disability, 26.45% identified child or family caregiver responsibilities, and 11.78% identified age. Respondents also cited barriers such as lack of transportation and loss of EIA benefits as factors.

For an individual already living in poverty, additional costs for professional clothing, transportation, phone, Internet, and printing for resumes and other paperwork can present an additional barrier.

The EIA claw back rate is 70% after the first \$200 earned through employment. Many other benefits such as health and dental are tied to EIA programs, which are not guaranteed at a job, resulting in some individuals and families no choice but to continue accessing such programs.³⁰

Empowering people with employment training can be a valuable tool to break the cycle of poverty. For years Harvest has delivered on-site training programs and in conjunction with partner organizations. We learned many how to deliver successful programs effectively, and work with the challenges that prevent individuals from moving forward and into employment.

Harvest Manitoba has started its Warehouse Training Program, which is designed to teach warehouse industry standard skills needed for entry-level employment in distribution centers and warehouses. It helps the participants to develop a good understanding and abilities in topics related to warehouse activities such as shipping and receiving procedures, safe operation of warehouse equipment (theory portion), product quality control, inventory, and order filling (picking).

The course combines in-class and virtual presentations (lecture), with hands-on practical skills at the Harvest Manitoba warehouse and at other facilities partnered with Harvest Manitoba.

Ensuring there are equitable employment opportunities for all and looking beyond traditional employment systems are strategies that the current labour market could utilize to allow more people to enter the workforce.



Income and Education

Experiences with poverty are inextricably linked to education. Those with higher education generally earn more than those with a lower education, and those with lower incomes are at a greater risk of experiencing food insecurity.³¹ Education can lead to meaningful employment, economic self-sufficiency, and provide a path out of poverty. However, a multitude of barriers make getting an education more difficult for those living in poverty.

The rising cost of living and high tuition fees coupled with a low income can pose large barriers to people finishing or continuing their education. Additionally, acquiring a diploma or degree does not guarantee a life without poverty or food insecurity.^{32, 33} In fact, research shows that large numbers of university students experience hunger and food insecurity. Individuals in higher education institutions were at least three times more likely to experience food insecurity than the general population.³⁴ As a result, most post-secondary institutions in Manitoba have food banks on-site.

The financial obligations that students take on (i.e., tuition, housing, textbooks, computers, food, bills, etc.), disproportionately impact students of lower socioeconomic status. Students with disabilities, certain minorities, and recent immigrants are also among those underrepresented in post-secondary institutions.³⁵ More needs to be done to ensure equitable access to higher education.

Ensuring that educational institutions understand and value the lived experience of students and respect their vulnerabilities will increase their opportunities for success.

Figure 6. Education Level Completed

Elementary/Grade School or Less	6.43%
Some HS	26.22%
Graduated HS	29.56%
Some College/University	14.65%
College Diploma	9.77%
Trade Certificate/ Professional Accreditation	4.63%
BA/MA/Phd	8.74%



Health and Daily Life



Individuals and families in food insecure households have poorer physical and mental health and higher rates of health conditions, including depression, diabetes, and heart disease.³⁶ With added stress and navigating services such as food banks, people are often left without the desire or the income to prepare healthy meals, resulting in eating cheaper, more processed foods.

Most Harvest food bank clients indicated that they had at least one chronic health problem or disability – 45% physical disability, 30% mental health issues, 8% hearing/visual issues, 7% learning disability and 10% other. They spoke about anxiety, depression, chronic pain, and mobility issues, and some indicated that they are living with coexisting conditions.

85% of respondents indicated that their disability or health condition limited their ability to perform daily activities which can be exacerbated in high stress and socially isolated environments.

Health Care

82% of respondents said they had a family doctor. 51% of respondents said they had not seen a dentist in the past year. Some remarked on the cost, the lack of coverage through benefit plans, and their inability to pay out-of-pocket for appointments.

For those who do have income to spare or who have some dental coverage, children often came first. 67% of Harvest food bank clients stated that their children had seen a dentist in the past year.

Recreation and Lifestyle

Recreation is often limited among low-income groups as they have to prioritize their resources for food, housing, and other necessities. This leaves them limited opportunities to participate in recreation which can improve physical, social, and emotional health.³⁷ When respondents were asked if they had any income leftover at the end of the month to participate in recreational activities, 83% of Harvest food bank clients said no. They tried to find recreational

activities that were free or inexpensive, but many individuals disclosed feeling stigmatized and uncomfortable sharing their financial status, making subsidized programs inaccessible.

Supportive networks help individuals cope with the negative effects and stressors that are associated with living in poverty. Social networks can help balance the risks associated with poverty and help individuals and families cope with personal crises, unemployment, financial crises, childcare, housing and transportation.

Recreational programming such as cooking classes and gardening were of interest to respondents, as well as access to services through community-based organizations like access to counselling, groups working with addictions, and free education and training programs. Respondents spoke about the benefits of community connection and feeling welcomed when accessing programs such as these.

Figure 7. Do you have leftover income to participate in recreational activities at the end of the month?

Yes	17.4
No	82.8

Transportation

56% of Harvest food bank clients identified bussing and walking as their predominant means of transportation. They did not use a bus pass (86%) or bus tickets (60%), but instead used cash when available or walked.

Building Northern Partnerships



41% of food bank recipients are Indigenous people living in Winnipeg and rural and northern First Nations. Indigenous people in Manitoba continue to face significant challenges with health outcomes, including issues like diabetes. These health challenges speak to the more substantial injustice and intergenerational trauma experienced by Indigenous people in Manitoba including food insecurity, food affordability and the availability of nutritious foods.

Harvest Manitoba is working with First Nations leaders in communities around Manitoba to listen and understand how Harvest can support local needs. Access to healthy and affordable food is not something that we will solve alone, but Harvest Manitoba must be a part of the overall solution to this chronic challenge. Harvest is beginning to organize regular shipments of food to northern and remote communities to support First Nations in their unique challenges related to food.

Various Indigenous-led organizations have discovered innovative solutions to address food security needs in Manitoba and its growing Indigenous population, and by working with Indigenous-led partners, Harvest Manitoba can ensure that supports those efforts. Already, Harvest has begun work with Indigenous-led organizations to support new pathways to food security and employment training.

"Access to healthy and affordable food is not something that we will solve alone, but Harvest Manitoba must be a part of the overall solution to this chronic challenge."

-Vince Barletta



The face of those who use food banks across our province is changing. Not only are people using food banks in record numbers – twice as many today as in 2019 – but their circumstances are changing too.

Today a quarter of food bank users are people with jobs, 50% more than just one year ago. An ever-growing number of food bank users are Indigenous - now over 40% of Harvest clients. This is set to increase due to rates of poverty, particularly child poverty, which is much higher than the general population. We are also seeing a record number of children using food banks in Manitoba – 15,000 every month who are in both single parent and dual parent households.

As much as the face of food bank use is changing, some things have not changed. People are using food banks because they can't make ends meet. Whether their income comes from income assistance, disability benefits, pensions, or a pay cheque, a record number of Manitobans are finding that their income is not enough to meet the basic needs for themselves or their families. Another common thread is that the challenge of inflation has pushed even more people toward food banks to make their budget last to the end of the month in the face of record high food costs.

The long-term solutions to these challenges will not be found in opening more food banks –

although more families are relying on them more than ever before. The long-term solutions will be built on foundations like training and employment opportunities, improved daycare and childcare benefits that allow families the flexibility to pursue new job opportunities and raise their incomes. Recent increases to the minimum wage and income assistance benefits will help some food insecure Manitobans but these too must be regular and sustained to ensure that low-income Manitobans don't fall further behind. At the same time, supports for Manitobans with disabilities, increased benefits, increased opportunities for employment income, training, along with timely access to healthcare and mental health support will help others improve their quality of life and ability to participate in the community.

These Harvest Voices are just some of the stories of hunger and poverty in Manitoba. Each one is unique and there is no one-size fits all approach to the challenges. Just by taking the time to listen to these stories, we are taking a first step to helping build a healthier future for all where no Manitoban goes hungry.

Methodology

Harvest staff and volunteers surveyed adult Manitobans who registered to receive food support from one of the food banks within the Harvest Community Food Network.

The survey consisted of sixty-seven questions on demographics, education, income, health and wellness, and food insecurity. Food bank clients were invited to participate in the survey by phone, in-person or online. Information about the survey was communicated on flyers that were inserted into food bank hampers, promotional posters were displayed at member Food Banks, and social media posts on Harvest platforms.

The survey was conducted from August to October 2022, resulting in 395 surveys successfully completed and included in the analysis. Results and analysis were generated using an online tool called Survey Sparrow. The data was cleaned to remove any invalid responses. Final analysis was completed by Harvest Manitoba in consultation with community partners. Our findings are reflected in this report. Any percentages referenced in this report that do not add up to 100% are due to rounding if not otherwise specified.

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Food. Time. Funds.

On behalf of all of us at Harvest, we want to thank the thousands of Manitobans who help us work toward a healthier future for all where no Manitoban goes hungry.

Thank You!

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