



2023

FOOD SECURITY REPORT



@cstudentsinc

Contents

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Executive Summary

Food insecurity is defined within Canada as “the inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.”¹ Overall, food insecurity has been on the rise in Canada: in 2014, over 1 in 10 households were experiencing some level of food insecurity.² By May 2020, this rose to 1 in 7 households experiencing food insecurity.³

While food insecurity is rising nationwide, it does not affect all Canadians equally. Those who rent, rely on social assistance, and/or are low-income are among the most affected by food insecurity.⁴ For many students, they embody, if not all three of those traits, then at least one. Food insecurity’s impact on a student’s quality of life and academic success can be both vast and detrimental. Food insecurity can increase the risk of chronic physical and mental health issues and negatively impact students’ academic performance.

Conestoga Students Incorporated’s (CSI) mission is “To enhance student satisfaction and success by providing a variety of student services at a cost justified by the results,” and as a part of this, CSI has offered the Student Nutritional Access Program (SNAP; originally called CSI’s Food Bank) for over 25 years. Within recent years however, CSI has seen the number of applications to the program increase dramatically: 1068 in 2019-2020,⁵ 1477 in 2020-21, and 2570 in 2021-22.⁶

CSI collected responses from February 17, 2023 – March 3, 2023, via a 26-question survey administered through SurveyMonkey. The survey was based on a pre-existing tool kit by Meal Exchange, a

leader in the sector of post-secondary food insecurity. There were 1080 valid responses, and results were analyzed via three types of survey analysis: food insecurity statistics, student experience statistics, and a comparison of student experience with food insecurity ratings.

Overall, almost 90% of Conestoga students experience some level of food insecurity, significantly higher than national and post-secondary averages, and food insecurity has risen nearly 12% compared to the previous academic year. Focusing on particular demographics within the college, those who are international students, unemployed, and/or those who access food via food banks or unconventional methods are the most likely to experience food insecurity. Those who are white, in apprenticeships, and/or at the Reuter campus are most likely to be food secure.

While not the focus of the survey, students were given the opportunity to share up to 3 things that would be helpful to improve their access to food. Among the top five responses were: grocery cards; the ability to pick up affordable groceries on campus; affordable campus meals/meal plans; greater awareness of SNAP (on-campus food bank); and affordable groceries delivered to their home. Recognizing that the survey was not designed to provide comprehensive recommendations for addressing food insecurity on Conestoga’s campuses, further research focused on developing local and relevant solutions for Conestoga students across all campuses to reduce food insecurity could be completed.

¹ Health Canada. “Government of Canada.” Household food insecurity in Canada: Overview, February 18, 2020. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/food-nutrition-surveillance/health-nutrition-surveys/canadian-community-health-survey-cchs/household-food-insecurity-canada-overview.html>.

² Jasmin Bhawra, Sharon I. Kirkpatrick, and David Hammond, “Food Insecurity among Canadian Youth and Young Adults: Insights from the Canada Food Study,” Canadian Journal of Public Health = Revue Canadienne de Santé Publique 112, no. 4 (February 23, 2021): 664, <https://doi.org/10.17269/s41997-020-00469-1>.

³ Meal Exchange. (2021). 2021 National Student Food Insecurity Report. 5. Retrieved from: www.mealexchange.com/resources

⁴ Bhawra, Kirkpatrick, and Hammond, “Food Insecurity among Canadian Youth and Young Adults.” 664.

⁵ This represents hampers distributed Sept 2019 to March 16, 2020 as the food bank closed from March to August 2020 due to COVID-19.

⁶ Samwelyn Rubi, email to author, May 4, 2023.

Introduction

Food insecurity is defined within Canada as “the inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.”⁷ Overall, food insecurity has been on the rise in Canada: in 2014, over 1 in 10 households were experiencing some level of food insecurity.⁸ By May 2020, this rose to 1 in 7 households experiencing food insecurity.⁹

There are various reasons why food insecurity has been increasing throughout the country. Food insecurity is closely linked to financial resources meaning that those with higher incomes and more financial assets (particularly those who own their home) are less likely to be food insecure.¹⁰ Various studies have looked at the connection between homeownership and food security, meaning that the rising cost of rent and homes are likely to contribute to the increasing rates of food insecurity.¹¹ In the regions with Conestoga campuses specifically, rent prices for 1-bedroom dwellings have increased over 50% in the past 15 years and have a less than 2% vacancy rate.¹²

In addition to housing costs, financial resources, such as wages, can play a key role in mitigating food insecurity.¹³ In the Waterloo Region, the living wage for a full-time worker is just under \$20/hour¹⁴; however, the minimum wage in Ontario is just \$15.50, with a scheduled increase to \$16.55/hour in October 2023.¹⁵ While minimum wage is now being controlled for CPI, this has not always been the case, and as such, it is lagging behind a livable wage. For many students, working part-time on a below-livable wage means prioritizing some essentials over others.

Finally, within the past few years, inflation in general, but food inflation in particular, has been on the rise.¹⁶ This means that while the income students may be taking on remains below what is livable, the cost of items has increased, and companies, particularly grocery stores, have taken in record profits. It is little surprise that local food banks have seen a drastic increase in the number of people accessing them. In the Waterloo Region alone, a collective of local food banks saw an 89% increase in households and a 46% increase in individuals accessing food banks in 2023 compared to 2022.¹⁷

While food insecurity is rising nationwide, it does not affect all Canadians equally. Those who rent, rely on social assistance, and/or are low-income are among the most affected by food insecurity.¹⁸ For many students, they embody, if not all three of those traits, then at least one. This can likely be attributed to factors such as limited income, high tuition and living costs, and reliance on unstable financial resources, such as ever-changing and limited government assistance or credit loans.¹⁹ It is little surprise then that, in 2021, food insecurity affected almost 2/3rds of students, significantly higher than the rest of the Canadian population.²⁰

“
While food insecurity is rising nationwide, it does not affect all Canadians equally. Those who rent, rely on social assistance, and/or are low-income are among the most affected by food insecurity. For many students, they embody, if not all three of those traits, then at least one.
”

A growing body of literature in Canada and the United States looks specifically at the rates of food insecurity for post-secondary students. With each study completed, it is becoming clearer and clearer that food insecurity for students is significantly higher than the national average and that it seems to be increasing as well. One area that is often neglected is Canadian college students specifically. In the existing literature, the variety of studies focus on either one specific university or post-secondary students more broadly. Though college and university students share many characteristics, there are key differences that need to be reflected. For example, college students tend to be from lower-income backgrounds, which has been well-documented to impact food security negatively.²¹ Additionally, the neglect of Canadian college-specific studies is interesting, given the higher rate of college participation, compared to university participation within the province.²² It is essential, then, that there be data that reflect the unique lived experiences and particular demographic characteristics of college students in Ontario.

Beyond just general information regarding food insecurity among college students, it is vital that research such as this report is not simply collected, analyzed, and then ignored. To do so would not only be disrespectful to those who took the time and mental/emotional labour to complete this study but also fails to recognize the critical role advocacy and change plays in research. To make the most impact, there must be an understanding of the local experiences of food insecurity. It is important to make comparisons and understand where Conestoga students compare to other post-secondary students and non-students in Canada. It is more important, however, that information be leveraged to change the overly high rates of food insecurity in our communities. This report signifies the first step in addressing both food insecurity itself and the impacts of food insecurity on students.

Food insecurity’s impact on a student’s quality of life and academic success can be both vast and detrimental. Food insecurity and poor nutrition can increase the risk of numerous diet-focused chronic illnesses, such as diabetes.²³ In addition to the increased risk of diabetes, food insecurity has been linked to poorer management of existing chronic illnesses (including diabetes). Food insecurity not only increases the chance of chronic illnesses but can also increase the severity of said illnesses.²⁴

In terms of mental health, food insecurity has been documented to increase the risk and severity of numerous mental health problems such as overall poor mental health, mood disorders (such as depression, bipolar disorder, etc.), anxiety (including general and OCD), major depression, emotional distress, and suicidal ideation.²⁵ Additionally, further studies have focused on food insecurity as a social determinant of health. It was found that students experiencing food insecurity were more likely to have worse physical and mental health, higher life stress and lower life satisfaction in general, and a lower sense of belonging in their communities.²⁶



⁷ Health Canada. “Government of Canada.” Household food insecurity in Canada: Overview, February 18, 2020. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/food-nutrition-surveillance/health-nutrition-surveys/canadian-community-health-survey-cchs/household-food-insecurity-canada-overview.html>.

⁸ Bhawra, Kirkpatrick, and Hammond, “Food Insecurity among Canadian Youth and Young Adults.” 664.

⁹ Meal Exchange. “National Student Food Insecurity Report.” 5.

¹⁰ Fei Men, Marcelo L. Urquia, and Valerie Tarasuk, “The Role of Provincial Social Policies and Economic Environments in Shaping Food Insecurity among Canadian Families with Children,” *Preventive Medicine* 148 (July 1, 2021): 2, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2021.106558>.

¹¹ Men et al., “The role of provincial social policies in shaping food insecurity” 2.

¹² Conestoga Students Inc. “Supporting and Addressing the Student Housing Experience,” March 30, 2022. 14-15. <https://conestogastudents.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/05/Addressing-and-Supporting-the-Student-Housing-Experience-Report-to-Students.pdf>.

¹³ Men et al., “The role of provincial social policies in shaping food insecurity” 7.

¹⁴ CBC News. “Living Wage in Waterloo Region, Guelph a Positive Increase but Still Tough to Get by, Says Financial Adviser | CBC News,” November 20, 2022. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/kitchener-waterloo/living-wage-kitchener-1.6656328>.

¹⁵ Ontario. “Minimum Wage | Your Guide to the Employment Standards Act | Ontario.ca.” Minimum Wage, March 31, 2023. <http://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0/minimum-wage>.

¹⁶ Sean Boynton, and Craig Lord. “Grocery CEOs Defend ‘Reasonable Profitability’ in Grilling over Soaring Food Costs - National | Globalnews.ca,” April 18, 2023. <https://globalnews.ca/news/9534180/food-prices-canada-grocery-ceos-inflation/>.

¹⁷ Kim Wilhelm. “People Are Accessing Waterloo Region Emergency Food Support at Record-Breaking Numbers.” *Waterloo Chronicle*, April 27, 2023. https://www.waterloochronicle.ca/opinion/people-are-accessing-waterloo-region-emergency-food-support-at-record-breaking-numbers/article_7041d7bd-a09e-59ce-9c96-4623ce32957f.html.

¹⁸ Bhawra, Kirkpatrick, and Hammond, “Food Insecurity among Canadian Youth and Young Adults.” 664.

¹⁹ Bhawra, Kirkpatrick, and Hammond, “Food Insecurity among Canadian Youth and Young Adults.” 670.

²⁰ Meal Exchange. “National Student Food Insecurity Report.” 5.

²¹ Ross Finnie and Richard Mueller, “The Backgrounds of Canadian Youth and Access to Post-Secondary Education: New Evidence from the Youth in Transition Survey,” May 2007, 8 https://d1wtxts1x2le7.cloudfront.net/79312121/finnie.mueller.may.2007-libre.pdf?1642820762=&response-content-disposition=inline%3B+filename%3DThe_Backgrounds_of_Canadian_Youth_and_Ac.pdf

²² Finnie and Mueller, “Backgrounds of Canadian Youth and Access to Post-Secondary Education” 7

²³ Adele Corkum, “Household Food Insecurity in Canada Before and During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Findings from the International Food Policy Study 2018-2020” (University of Waterloo, 2020), 1 https://uwspace.uwaterloo.ca/bitstream/handle/10012/18272/Corkum_Adele.pdf?sequence=5.

²⁴ Jung Sun Lee et al., “Food Insecurity and Health across the Lifespan,” *Advances in Nutrition* 3, no. 5 (September 1, 2012): 745, <https://doi.org/10.3945/an.112.002543>.

Regarding academic consequences, those experiencing food insecurity were more likely to be unable to concentrate during class or an exam and were more likely to fail or withdraw from a course.²⁷ Additionally, it was found that food-insecure students were more likely to have a lower GPA (which can often limit them from accessing merit-based funding), a third did not purchase all of their materials, and almost a third of those with high unmet needs do not return to school in following years.²⁸ Finally, more than half of the food insecure students experienced feelings of exhaustion, loneliness, sadness, and of generally being overwhelmed.²⁹ Finally, it is vital to note that students are very likely aware of how food insecurity impacts their studies, as an American study found that 80% of students indicated their food insecurity affected their academic performance.³⁰ This highlights that food insecurity is not simply an issue of not knowing, of being unaware of what nutritious food is and does for students. Rather, food insecurity is a persistent and devastating reality for most students that must be challenged to ensure that all students are supported and able to live and study meaningfully.

Conestoga Students Incorporated's (CSI) mission is "To enhance student satisfaction and success by providing a variety of student services at a cost justified by the results," and as a part of this, CSI has offered the Student Nutritional Access Program (SNAP; originally called CSI's Food Bank) for over 25 years. Within recent years, CSI has seen the number of applications to the program increase dramatically: 1068 in 2019-2020,³¹ 1477 in 2020-21, and 2570 in 2021-22 - approximately a 3% increase over each year, accounting for student enrollment.³²

As Conestoga College has grown and continues to grow, it may seem logical to assume that the number of applications for SNAP would also grow. What is concerning, however, is that the percentage of students applying for SNAP is outpacing overall student enrollment, as shown in Figure 1. Theoretically, if the increase in SNAP applications was a result of increased student enrollment, the percentage of students applying would remain relevantly steady. Instead, SNAP applications have been increasing by approximately 3% each year – particularly concerning during the 2020-21 academic year, as college enrollment went down by 9%. As will be discussed momentarily, these numbers will likely continue to rise with the rising rates of food insecurity on campus.

| ACADEMIC YEAR | ANNUAL FOOD SUPPORT APPLICATIONS | ENROLLMENT | FOOD SUPPORT APPLICATIONS AS A PERCENTAGE OF ENROLLMENT |
|---------------|----------------------------------|------------|---|
| 2019 - 2020 | 1068 | 19339 | 5.52% ³³ |
| 2020 - 2021 | 1477 | 17596 | 8.39% ³⁴ |
| 2021 - 2022 | 2570 | 23069 | 11.14% ³⁵ |

Figure 1 - Comparative relationship between SNAP applications and enrollment.

Alongside this sharp increase on Conestoga's campuses, CSI is a proud partner of the Canadian Alliance of Student Associations (CASA), where similar themes of food insecurity, increased access to campus food banks, and emergency funds have been discussed by student associations across the nation. Therefore, with both the local increase and national discussions, CSI's Board of Directors tasked the Advocacy Team with conducting further research on the prevalence of food insecurity on Conestoga's campuses to develop a deeper understanding of what food insecurity looks like at Conestoga. Ultimately, this report aims to provide general and demographic information about who is affected by food insecurity and provide a better understanding of how food insecurity affects Conestoga communities.

CSI's advocacy work is guided by four broad-based principles: Accountability, Affordability, Equity, and Sustainability. For this report, these principles have been applied to food security in the following manner:

Accountability

- *Conestoga students expect and should rely on their institution and local communities to assist in providing basic necessities, including food, in an affordable manner that will allow them to succeed in their educational experiences.*

Affordability

- *Conestoga students should not have to leverage their futures, take on more significant debts, or suffer from food insecurity due to unaffordability.*

Equity

- *Conestoga students of varying backgrounds lived experiences, and cultures have a right to nutritious, culturally relevant, and affordable food.*

Sustainability

- *Policymakers should seek, create, and implement solutions to the ongoing and increasing food insecurity rates that provide long-term, affordable, sustainable, and diverse food options.*

²⁵ Fei Men, Frank J. Elgar, and Valerie Tarasuk, "Food Insecurity Is Associated with Mental Health Problems among Canadian Youth," Google Docs, February 12, 2021: 742 <http://dx.doi.org/10.1136/jech-2021-216938>.

²⁶ Jasmine Farahbakhsh et al., "Food Insecure Student Clients of a University-based Food Bank Have Compromised Health, Dietary Intake and Academic Quality" Nutrition & Dietetics 74, no. 1 (August 2, 2016): 70-71, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1747-0080.12307>.

²⁷ Farahbakhsh et al., "Food Insecure Student Have Compromised Health, Dietary Intake and Academic Quality," 71.

²⁸ Amanda Hege et al., "College Food Insecurity: Implications on Student Success and Applications for Future Practice," Journal of Student Affairs Research and Practice 58, no. 1 (March 9, 3030): 52-56.

²⁹ Hege et al., "College Food Insecurity," 52.

³⁰ Hege et al., "College Food Insecurity," 45.

³¹ This represents hampers distributed Sept 2019 to March 16, 2020 as the food bank closed from March to August 2020 due to COVID-19.

³² Samwelyn Rubi, email to author, May 4, 2023.

³³ Hoover, Janeen., 10 Day Count as of September 16, 2019 Full-Time Post-Secondary Enrolment Count. Kitchener, ON: Conestoga College, September 20, 2019.

³⁴ Hoover, Janeen., 10 Day Count as of September 22, 2020 Full-Time Post-Secondary Enrolment Count. Kitchener, ON: Conestoga College, September 23, 2020.

³⁵ Hoover, Janeen., 10 Day Count as of September 21, 2021 Full-Time Post-Secondary Enrolment Count. Kitchener, ON: Conestoga College, September 21, 2021.

Methodology

Through both increased usage of CSI's food bank and anecdotal evidence from both Conestoga students and in discussions with other student leaders at institutions across Canada, it was identified that a comprehensive review of food insecurity at Conestoga College was necessary. To do so, the advocacy team leveraged Meal Exchange, an organization dedicated to addressing food insecurity for post-secondary students across Canada. Meal Exchange was used for various reasons: existing staff within CSI knew about Meal Exchange from work in the past; being a member of the CASA, many other member schools were also aware of and had used Meal Exchange in the past to run similar surveys on their own campus; and, finally, the organization is known within the post-secondary sector as being a leader for food insecurity research and advocacy. Given these factors, CSI decided to use Meal Exchange's pre-existing tool kit, which clearly outlined the steps for developing, distributing, analyzing, and disseminating the food insecurity survey and its results.

The survey was conducted via SurveyMonkey and sent out through various CSI channels such as direct email (sent to student's @conestogac.on.ca email), various CSI social media accounts, CSI's app and website, as well as targeting CSI staff and volunteers to promote the survey. Though there is no data on exactly how many students accessed the survey in particular ways, by looking at when posts were made or when direct emails were sent, we saw consistent trends: most students completed the survey after receiving a direct email about it; however, there are also small increases after posts and reminders were made on social media accounts. To encourage completion of the survey, students were given the chance to enter a draw to win 1 of 25 \$100 gift cards to the place of their choice. Overall, there were 1403 total responses, which was reduced to 1080 valid responses, controlling for completion and quality.

The survey consists of 26 questions overall, with some changes made to the original tool kit. Some changes were made to reflect the nature of Conestoga College, such as removing meal plan options from some questions as the college does not have a meal plan currently or adding program-type options. Other changes were made to add new dimensions of analysis, such as school of study, to allow us to look at the breakdown across different faculties. Questions and answers regarding COVID-19 specific supports and barriers were also removed to reflect that there are no existing supports in the 2022-23 academic

year, which could lead to skewed results when comparing the two years. Finally, various sociodemographic questions were reformatted in minor ways (such as renaming categories, combining/separating categories and questions, and/or adding/removing specific categories and questions) to reflect CSI's Year-End Survey. This allows for comparison between demographic data addressing considerations regarding over-/under-sampling particular groups and providing consistency for students completing numerous surveys.

The survey also included questions based on the previous academic year (2021-22). Out of the 1080 valid responses, there were 467 valid responses for food security questions regarding the previous academic year. This allowed us to make comparisons across the two years, to make tentative connections about the ongoing presence of food security on campuses.

Results were analyzed via three types of survey analysis: food insecurity statistics, student experience statistics, and a comparison of student experience with food insecurity ratings. First, food insecurity statistics looked at the responses to the six food insecurity questions from the Household Food Security Status Module, found in the Canadian Community Health Survey. Based on answers to these questions, students are given a rank for their household food insecurity. There were then coded, with "never" as 0, and "sometimes," "often," and "always" coded as 1. Scores were then tallied, and participants were given 1 of 3 labels based on their total score: food secure (0-1 score), moderate food insecurity (2-4 score), and severe food insecurity (5-6 score). Within Meal Exchange, there is a 7th question focused on sacrificing buying food to afford other essential expenses, which is scored separately to allow comparison to Canadian national averages.

Next, student experience statistics focused on collecting data from questions about students' experience with different food and general campus resources. This refers to questions such as where students regularly access food and demographic information such as age, race, sexuality, etc.

Finally, the food insecurity statistics and student experience statistics were compared to each other to gain an understanding of how food insecurity impacts different demographic groups differently across Conestoga College.



Results



Demographic Breakdown

MAIN CAMPUS: STUDENTS RESPONDED BASED ON THEIR MAIN CAMPUS

| CATEGORY | PERCENTAGE (2022) | NUMBER COUNT (2022) | PERCENTAGE (2023) | NUMBER COUNT (2023) |
|--|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Brantford | 6.4% | 30 | 7.6% | 82 |
| Cambridge | 9% | 42 | 9.1% | 98 |
| Doon | 42% | 196 | 37.5% | 405 |
| Downtown Kitchener | 11.3% | 53 | 14% | 151 |
| Guelph <small>(Including Riverside Glen)</small> | 5.4% | 25 | 5.7% | 62 |
| Online | 0.6% | 3 | 0.6% | 6 |
| Reuter <small>(Cambridge Skilled Trades Campus)</small> | 6% | 28 | 4.4% | 47 |
| Waterloo <small>(Including University Gates)</small> | 19.3% | 90 | 21.2% | 229 |

ENROLLMENT TYPE: STUDENTS RESPONDED BASED ON THEIR ENROLLMENT TYPE

| | FULL-TIME | PART-TIME | OTHER ³⁶ |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|---------------------|
| PERCENTAGE (2022) | 81.8% | 15% | 3.2% |
| NUMBER COUNT (2022) | 382 | 70 | 15 |
| PERCENTAGE (2023) | 85.2% | 10.9% | 3.9% |
| NUMBER COUNT (2023) | 920 | 118 | 42 |

PROGRAM TYPE: STUDENTS RESPONDED BASED ON WHAT TYPE OF PROGRAM THEY ARE ENROLLED IN

| CATEGORY | PERCENTAGE (2022) | NUMBER COUNT (2022) | PERCENTAGE (2023) | NUMBER COUNT (2023) |
|--|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Apprenticeship | 6.9% | 32 | 4.2% | 45 |
| Certificate | 7.1% | 33 | 9.1% | 98 |
| Diploma | 27.4% | 128 | 25.6% | 276 |
| Advanced Diploma | 12.4% | 58 | 11.6% | 125 |
| Undergraduate Degree <small>(Bachelors)</small> | 5.8% | 27 | 3.2% | 35 |
| Graduate Certificate | 35.8% | 167 | 41.6% | 449 |
| Other ³⁷ | 3.9% | 18 | 3.7% | 40 |
| Unsure | 0.9% | 4 | 1.1% | 12 |

³⁶ Most other responses referred to employment, as opposed to enrollment.
³⁷ Most other responses referred to post-graduate certificates.

SCHOOL OF STUDY: STUDENTS RESPONDED BASED ON WHAT FACULTY/SCHOOL THEIR PROGRAM IS PART OF

| CATEGORY | PERCENTAGE (2022) | NUMBER COUNT (2022) | PERCENTAGE (2023) | NUMBER COUNT (2023) |
|--|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| APPLIED COMPUTER SCIENCE & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY | 12% | 56 | 14.2% | 153 |
| BUSINESS | 24.6% | 115 | 26.5% | 286 |
| COMMUNITY SERVICES | 3.4% | 16 | 2.5% | 27 |
| CREATIVE INDUSTRIES | 3.2% | 15 | 3.2% | 35 |
| ENGINEERING & TECHNOLOGY | 14.1% | 66 | 15.5% | 167 |
| HEALTH & LIFE SCIENCES | 11.6% | 54 | 8.1% | 88 |
| HOSPITALITY & CULINARY ARTS | 6.4% | 30 | 4.4% | 48 |
| INTERDISCIPLINARY STUDIES | 0.4% | 2 | 0.6% | 7 |
| TRADES AND APPRENTICESHIP | 7.9% | 37 | 5.5% | 59 |
| WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT, CONTINUING EDUCATION, & ONLINE LEARNING | 16.3% | 76 | 19.4% | 210 |

DOMESTIC & INTERNATIONAL: STUDENTS RESPONDED BASED ON WHETHER THEY ARE DOMESTIC OR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

| | DOMESTIC STUDENT FROM ONTARIO | DOMESTIC STUDENT FROM OUT OF PROVINCE | INTERNATIONAL STUDENT |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------|
| PERCENTAGE (2022) | 24% | 0.9% | 75.2% |
| NUMBER COUNT (2022) | 112 | 4 | 351 |
| PERCENTAGE (2023) | 15.3% | 0.6% | 84.2% |
| NUMBER COUNT (2023) | 165 | 6 | 842 |

GENDER: STUDENTS RESPONDED BASED ON WHAT THEIR GENDER IS ³⁸

| CATEGORY | PERCENTAGE (2022) | NUMBER COUNT (2022) | PERCENTAGE (2023) | NUMBER COUNT (2023) |
|-------------------|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Female | 50.7% | 237 | 45.2% | 488 |
| Male | 47.5% | 222 | 53.2% | 575 |
| Non - Binary | 0.4% | 2 | 0.6% | 6 |
| Two - Spirit | 0.6% | 3 | 0.3% | 3 |
| Prefer not to say | 0.6% | 3 | 0.7% | 8 |










TRANSGENDER: STUDENTS RESPONDED BASED ON WHETHER THEY ARE TRANSGENDER

| | YES | NO | PREFER NOT TO SAY |
|---------------------|------|-------|-------------------|
| PERCENTAGE (2022) | 2.4% | 93.4% | 4.3% |
| NUMBER COUNT (2022) | 11 | 436 | 20 |
| PERCENTAGE (2023) | 1.3% | 94.5% | 4.2% |
| NUMBER COUNT (2023) | 14 | 1021 | 45 |



³⁸ For analysis purposes, non-binary, Two-Spirit, and prefer not to say have been removed from graphs, as they are mostly covered by the transgender category.

SEXUALITY: STUDENTS RESPONDED BASED ON WHAT THEIR SEXUALITY IS ³⁹

| CATEGORY | PERCENTAGE (2022) | NUMBER COUNT (2022) | PERCENTAGE (2023) | NUMBER COUNT (2023) |
|---|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
|  Asexual | 6.4% | 30 | 6.1% | 66 |
|  Bisexual | 4.9% | 23 | 4.3% | 46 |
|  Gay | 0.4% | 2 | 0.4% | 4 |
|  Lesbian | 0.9% | 4 | 0.8% | 9 |
|  None of the above (Please Specify) ⁴⁰ | 1.1% | 5 | 0.9% | 10 |
|  Pansexual | 0.2% | 1 | 0.1% | 1 |
|  Prefer not to say | 12.4% | 58 | 13% | 140 |
|  Queer | 0.6% | 3 | 0.3% | 3 |
|  Straight (Heterosexual) | 73% | 341 | 74.2% | 801 |

AGE: STUDENTS RESPONDED BASED ON THEIR CURRENT AGE IS

| CATEGORY | PERCENTAGE (2022) | NUMBER COUNT (2022) | PERCENTAGE (2023) | NUMBER COUNT (2023) |
|-------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Under 18 | 0.4% | 2 | 0.3% | 3 |
| 18 - 21 | 19.3% | 90 | 18.1% | 196 |
| 22 - 25 | 36.4% | 170 | 38.8% | 419 |
| 26 - 29 | 23.6% | 110 | 24.4% | 263 |
| 30 - 39 | 16.3% | 76 | 15.4% | 166 |
| 40 - 49 | 3.4% | 16 | 2.7% | 29 |
| 50 - 59 | 0.6% | 3 | 0.4% | 4 |
| 60+ ⁴¹ | 0% | 0 | 0% | 0 |

³⁹ For analysis purposes, all non-straight (heterosexual) reactions have been combined into an "LGBQA+" category (the 2S & T have been removed as Two-Spirit and transgender responses are not included in this category).

⁴⁰ Most specified responses included their gender, not sexuality.

⁴¹ There were not 60+ students, so the category has been removed from the analysis.



RACE: STUDENTS RESPONDED BASED ON THEIR RACE ⁴²

| CATEGORY | PERCENTAGE (2022) | NUMBER COUNT (2022) | PERCENTAGE (2023) | NUMBER COUNT (2023) |
|-------------------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Black or African | 5.6% | 26 | 5.5% | 59 |
| East/Southeast Asian | 5.6% | 26 | 4.9% | 53 |
| Indigenous | 1.5% | 7 | 1% | 11 |
| Latino | 4.1% | 19 | 3.5% | 38 |
| Middle Eastern & West Central Asian | 1.3% | 6 | 1% | 11 |
| Pacific Islander | 0.4% | 2 | 0.2% | 2 |
| South Asian | 61.5% | 288 | 66.9% | 723 |
| White | 17.7% | 83 | 11.6% | 125 |
| I do not know my race or ethnicity | 1.1% | 5 | 1.3% | 14 |
| Self-Describe Below ⁴³ | 3.6% | 5 | 4.6% | 50 |
| Prefer not to say | 1.5% | 7 | 3.1% | 33 |

⁴² Students were able to select multiple options, which will result in a total greater than 100%.

⁴³ Most self-describe responses included country of origin.

LIVING ARRANGEMENT: STUDENTS RESPONDED BASED ON THEIR LIVING ARRANGEMENTS DURING THEIR ACADEMIC YEAR

| CATEGORY | PERCENTAGE (2022) | NUMBER COUNT (2022) | PERCENTAGE (2023) | NUMBER COUNT (2023) |
|--|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Alone in a house or apartment | 11.8% | 55 | 12% | 130 |
| Precarious/ Temporarily Housed (Couch Surfing, Shelters, etc.) | 0.4% | 2 | 0.8% | 9 |
| Single with Dependent(s) | 2.1% | 10 | 1.7% | 18 |
| With Family | 16.9% | 79 | 13.1% | 141 |
| With partner, and dependent(s) | 4.5% | 21 | 3.8% | 41 |
| With partner, no dependent(s) | 6.9% | 32 | 5.3% | 57 |
| With roommates | 55.2% | 258 | 60.9% | 658 |
| Prefer not to answer | 1.1% | 5 | 1.1% | 12 |
| Other (please specify) | 1.1% | 5 | 1.3% | 14 |



FINANCIAL RESOURCES: STUDENTS RESPONDED BASED ON THE FINANCIAL RESOURCE/S THEY USE TO PAY FOR TUITION AND BASIC NECESSITIES ⁴⁴

| CATEGORY | PERCENTAGE (2022) | NUMBER COUNT (2022) | PERCENTAGE (2023) | NUMBER COUNT (2023) |
|--|----------------------|------------------------|----------------------|------------------------|
| Income from Employment | 54.4% | 254 | 39.6% | 428 |
| Personal Savings (ie. Savings Account, TFSA, RESPs, RRSPs, etc.) | 30.2% | 141 | 31.5% | 340 |
| Non-repayable money from Family, Friends, or Partner | 16.7% | 78 | 19.7% | 213 |
| Private Loan from Family, Friends, or Partner | 21.4% | 100 | 25.1% | 271 |
| Bank Loan or Line of Credit | 17.8% | 83 | 22.8% | 246 |
| Credit Card | 25.1% | 117 | 23.4% | 253 |
| Bursaries, Awards, & Scholarships | 4.5% | 21 | 2.9% | 31 |
| Government Student Assistance (ie. OSAP) | 7.9% | 37 | 5.8% | 63 |
| Other Government Programs (ie. Second Career, Employment Insurance, ODSP) | 3.2% | 15 | 1.9% | 20 |
| Employer Tuition Assistance Program | 0.6% | 3 | 0.6% | 7 |
| Other (Please Specify) ⁴⁵ | 2.6% | 12 | 4.7% | 51 |

⁴⁴ Students were able to select multiple responses, resulting in a total greater than 100%.

⁴⁵ Most other responses referenced a Guaranteed Investment Certificate (GIC) or help from family, friends, and/or partner(s).












EMPLOYMENT: STUDENTS RESPONDED BASED ON THEIR EMPLOYMENT STATUS

| CATEGORY | PERCENTAGE (2022) | NUMBER COUNT (2022) | PERCENTAGE (2023) | NUMBER COUNT (2023) |
|--|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
| Employed, working full-time | 8.4% | 39 | 5.6% | 61 |
| Employed working part-time | 54% | 252 | 35.7% | 386 |
| Not employed, looking for full-time work | 10.9% | 51 | 13.3% | 144 |
| Not employed, looking for part-time work | 20.1% | 94 | 39.7% | 429 |
| Not employed, NOT looking for work | 4.5% | 21 | 3.2% | 35 |
| Self-employed, working full-time | 0.2% | 1 | 0.3% | 3 |
| Self-employed, working part-time | 0.6% | 3 | 0.6% | 6 |
| Other (Please Specify) ⁴⁶ | 1.3% | 6 | 1.5% | 16 |

ON CAMPUS FREQUENCY: STUDENTS RESPONDED BASED ON HOW FREQUENTLY THEY ARE ON CAMPUS

| | ALWAYS (4-5 DAYS PER WEEK) | OFTEN (2-3 DAYS PER WEEK) | SOMETIMES (1 DAY PER WEEK) | NEVER |
|---------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------|-------|
| PERCENTAGE (2022) | 47.8% | 41.1% | 9% | 2.1% |
| NUMBER COUNT (2022) | 223 | 192 | 42 | 10 |
| PERCENTAGE (2023) | 47.9% | 36.8% | 11.9% | 3.4% |
| NUMBER COUNT (2023) | 517 | 397 | 129 | 37 |

HOW FOOD IS ACCESSED: STUDENTS RESPONDED BASED ON HOW THEY REGULARLY ACCESSED FOOD DURING THE SEMESTER ⁴⁷

| CATEGORY | PERCENTAGE (2022) | NUMBER COUNT (2022) | PERCENTAGE (2023) | NUMBER COUNT (2023) |
|--|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|---------------------|
|  Campus cafeteria or restaurant | 34.3% | 160 | 29.5% | 319 |
|  Student Nutritional Access Program (Previously known as the CSI Food Bank) | 8.6% | 40 | 7.9% | 85 |
|  Food Bank (In local community) | 17.3% | 81 | 20.5% | 221 |
|  Grocery store/delivery | 65.3% | 305 | 69.3% | 748 |
|  Farmers market/CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) | 13.5% | 63 | 12% | 130 |
|  Meal Kits | 4.9% | 23 | 4.3% | 46 |
|  Restaurant/Cafe/Takeout | 32.1% | 150 | 29.1% | 314 |
|  Friends/Family/Partner | 30.6% | 143 | 31.4% | 339 |
|  Unconventional Methods (Dumpster Diving) | 1.1% | 5 | 1% | 11 |
|  Harvested/Grown (Gardening, hunting, gathering) | 2.1% | 10 | 1% | 11 |
|  Other (Please Specify) | 3.4% | 16 | 1.8% | 19 |

⁴⁶ Other responses included: unable to work, on a leave of absence, co-op/apprenticeship, and seasonal employment.

⁴⁷ Students were allowed to select multiple options, resulting in a total greater than 100%.

Overall

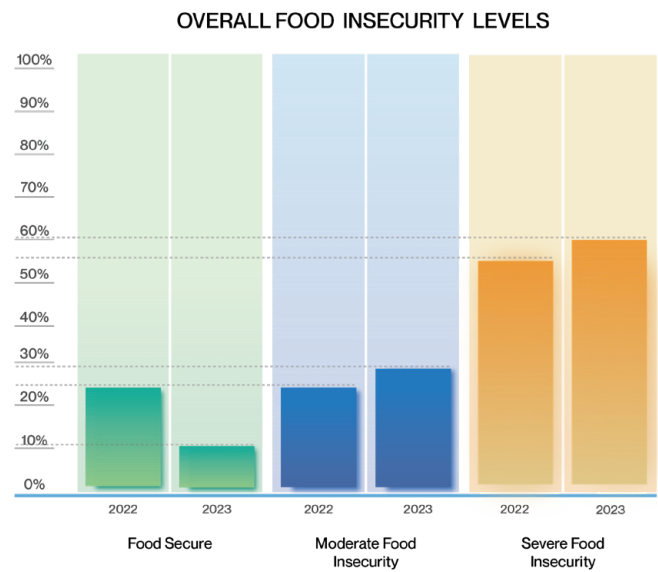


Figure 2: Overall Food Insecurity Levels

With almost 90% of Conestoga students experiencing some level of food insecurity (28.9% moderate food insecurity, 60.7% severe food insecurity, figure 2), it is abundantly clear that food insecurity is a common experience for students.

Perhaps even more concerning is the fact that food insecurity appears to be on the rise. In the 2021-22 academic year, just over 77% of students were experiencing some form of food insecurity (21.2% moderate food insecurity, 56.6% severe food insecurity). This indicates an almost 12% increase overall (a 7.7% increase for moderate food insecurity and a 4.1% increase for severe food insecurity).

In addition to the 6 questions used to develop the food insecurity scores, we also asked how often individuals had to sacrifice buying food to pay for other essential expenses. Examples given included tuition, rent, textbooks, etc. As with food insecurity, cases where students have had to sacrifice food for other essentials are on the rise, with over 76% of students sacrificing food at least sometimes in the 2022-23 academic year (20.6% always, 21.5% often, and 34.4% sometimes, figure 3). This is a 7.5% increase from the previous academic year.

The overwhelming presence and rise in food insecurity are cause enough for concern, but knowing that students often have to choose between essential expenses is particularly concerning. Often, youth are described as frivolous, as unknowing how to manage their funds to “properly” spend them. This data highlights that it is not simply a lack of knowledge of what is essential but rather that they simply do not have the funds to address the rising cost of living and education.

Simply looking at the food insecurity levels among Conestoga College, it is clear that students here are facing much higher rates of food insecurity, not just compared nationally (1 in 7 households facing food insecurity), but to post-secondary students (2/3rds of students facing food insecurity).⁴⁸ While it is important to highlight how prevalent food insecurity is across Conestoga campuses and therefore requires, at least in part, a college-wide effort to address, it is also vital to acknowledge that particular groups within the college feel the effects of food insecurity more than others.

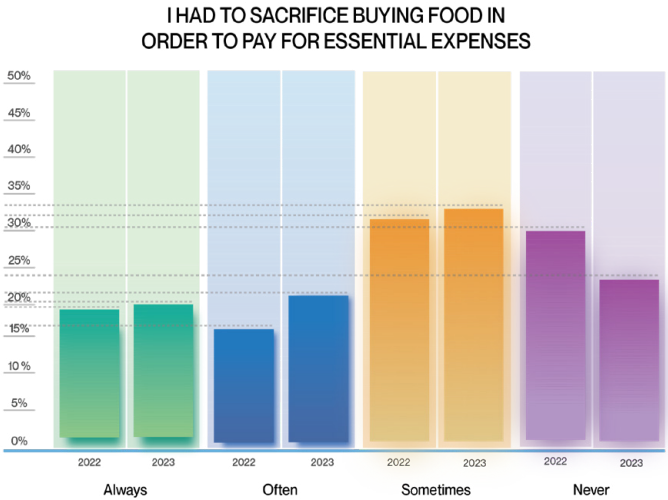


Figure 3: I had to sacrifice buying food in order to pay for essential expenses



⁴⁸ Meal Exchange. “National Student Food Insecurity Report.” 5.

Main Campus

Overall, the breakdown based on the main campus of students mimics the overall trend (decrease in food security and increase in moderate and severe food insecurity), with a few noted exceptions. In Brantford, severe food insecurity went down approximately 6%; in Downtown Kitchener, moderate food insecurity went down by just over 2% (though we have no way of knowing if this is due to becoming food secure or severe food insecurity); for online students, moderate food insecurity went down by just over 16% (again, it is impossible to know if this is due to increase food insecurity or becoming food secure); and severe food insecurity went down on the Reuter campus by almost 4%. Overall, the Reuter campus is the most food-secure campus. This is likely due to the other demographics: they are more likely to be domestic students, working or in a paid apprenticeship, and therefore have increased support and resources.

Though a small population (n=6), online students seem most at risk of experiencing food insecurity. Part of this may be due to being less likely to access on-campus supports, such as SNAP.⁴⁹ There is limited research on the impact of online vs. in-person education on food insecurity, and it is difficult to draw conclusions from such a small sample size.

In addition to online students, students at the Cambridge campus face higher rates of food insecurity. A potentially interesting demographic breakdown of the results from Cambridge students is that the vast majority (over 80%) are students in engineering and technology faculties. Programs such as engineering often have higher tuition costs associated with them, which may lead to increased food insecurity due to these tuition costs.

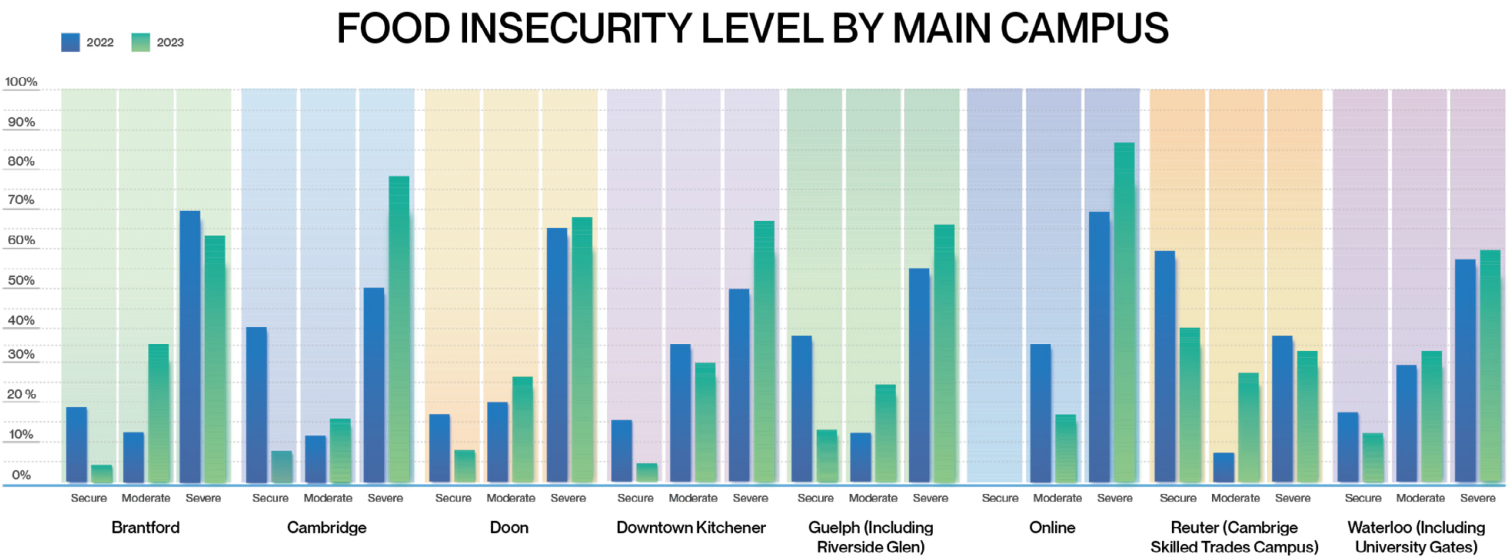


Figure 4: Food Insecurity Level by Main Campus

⁴⁹ Jessica Soldavini, Hazael Andrew, and Maureen Berner, “Characteristics Associated with Changes in Food Security Status among College Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic,” Translational Behavioral Medicine 11, no. 2 (February 1, 2021): 303, <https://doi.org/10.1093/tbm/ibaa110>.

Enrollment Type

Once more, broadly speaking, enrollment type mimics the overall trends of increasing food insecurity. While food security increased for both part-time and other enrollment types, so did moderate and severe food insecurity. One potential explanation for this increase is the number of responses for the 2021-22 academic year (n=467) compared to the total responses for the 2023-24 academic year (n=1080). Full-time students are slightly more likely to experience food insecurity overall (90.1% full-time vs. 89% part-time). However, part-time students are more likely to experience severe food insecurity (60% full-time vs. 65.3% part-time). Some potential explanations for this likely have to do with both logistics and demographics. Full-time students have higher

education costs and are less likely to have employment than part-time students (as found in our study, part-time students were significantly more likely to have part-time employment, compared to full-time students (59.3% of part-time students working part-time, compared to 34% of full-time students). However, part-time students are more likely to have dependent(s), be older, and have less access to student-gearred supports (i.e., summer jobs are usually restricted to those under 30).⁵⁰ As most other responses referred to employment, as opposed to enrollment, it is difficult to make connections on how their enrollment type is influenced by, and influences, their level of food insecurity.

FOOD INSECURITY LEVEL BY ENROLLMENT TYPE

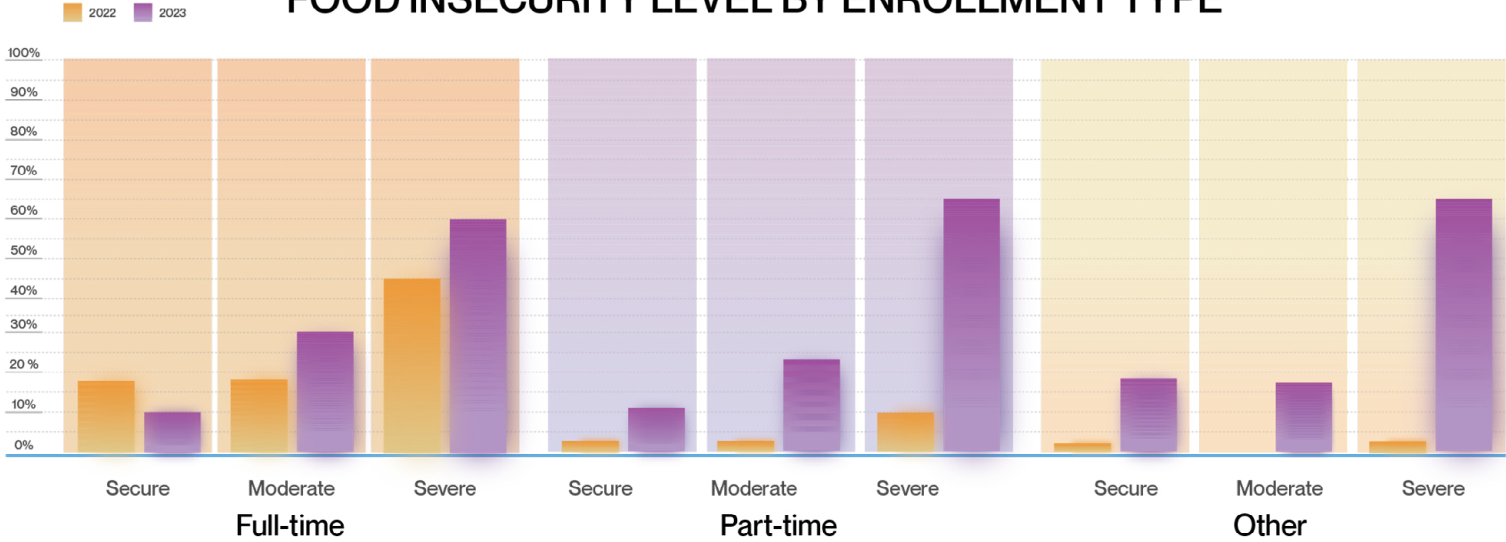


Figure 5: Food Insecurity Level by Enrollment Type

⁵⁰ Xianglei Chen and C. Dennis Carroll, "Part-Time Undergraduates in Postsecondary Education: 2003-04" (U.S. Department of Education, June 2007): iv, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED497213.pdf>.

Type of Program

With the exception of apprenticeship programs and (to a lesser degree) undergraduate degree programs, food insecurity is also increasing across the board for the type of program. As mentioned previously, those in paid apprenticeships are less likely to be food insecure, as reflected here. As income is a key factor in food insecurity, those in apprenticeship programs, who are being paid for their work, have a higher and more stable income when compared to those in other programs. Regarding those enrolled in undergraduate degrees, they are more likely to be domestic

students as well, meaning they have access to programs like OSAP and are more likely to have more robust support systems (both financially and socially). For those enrolled in graduate certificate programs, moderate food insecurity decreased by under 5%. While it is impossible to say whether that is because they became more food secure or not, they likely became more food insecure, as food security decreased by almost 37% and severe food insecurity increased by 42.5%.

FOOD INSECURITY LEVEL BY TYPE OF PROGRAM

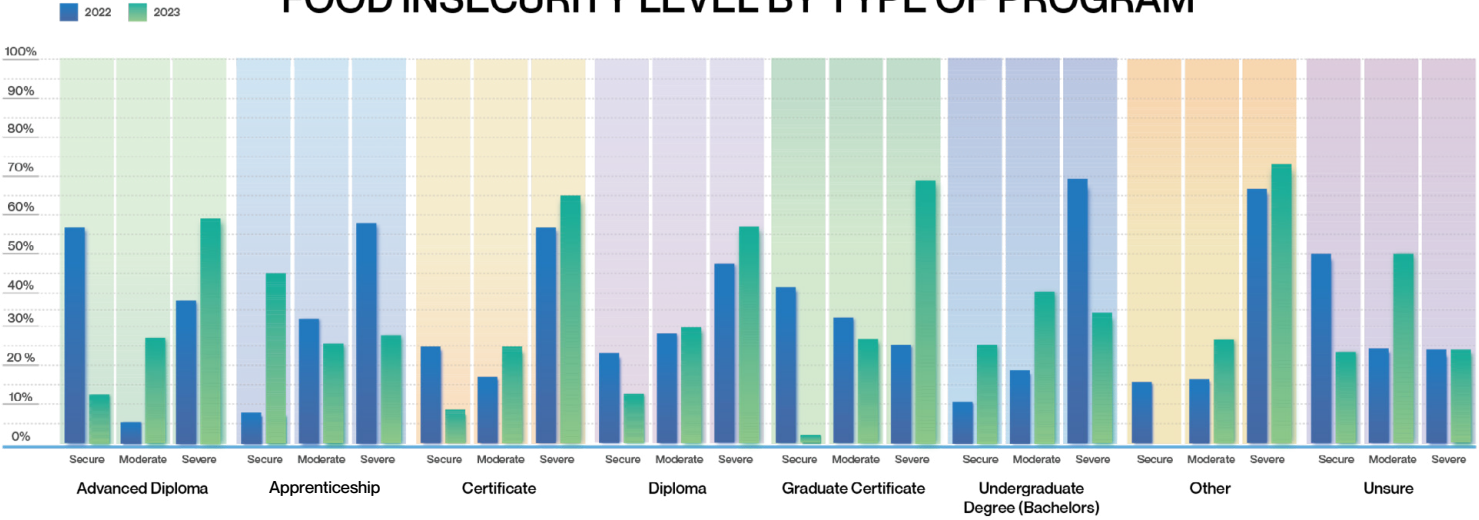


Figure 6: Food Insecurity Level by Type of Program

School of Study

Food security decreased across all faculties/schools of study, and moderate food insecurity increased. With the exception of community services, hospitality, and trades, all faculties also saw an increase in severe food insecurity. Looking at students enrolled in trades programs, this is likely due to the increased presence of paid work compared to students in other programs. Both community services and hospitality students still experience extremely high levels of severe food insecurity, with hospitality students having the third highest rate overall. This decrease is important and hopeful, however, it should be taken in context to say that students enrolled in these programs do not face food insecurity or even face it less so than their peers in other faculties.

Looking at some of the programs facing the highest rates of food insecurity, this includes business students (67.5% experiencing severe food insecurity), engineering and technology students (63.5%

experiencing severe food insecurity), hospitality students (62.5% experiencing severe food insecurity), workforce development, continuing education, and online learning (61.9% experiencing severe food insecurity), and health and life sciences (60.2% experiencing severe food insecurity). Looking at these programs, some, such as engineering and technology, as well as health and life sciences, are faculties with programs that typically have higher costs. Compared to their peers, these increased education costs likely negatively impact students' financial resources, thus decreasing their overall food security. Additionally, some faculties, such as workforce development, continuing education, and online learning, are significantly more likely to be populated with older (above 25) and/or international students. As we will discuss momentarily, both age and international status can create barriers to food security.

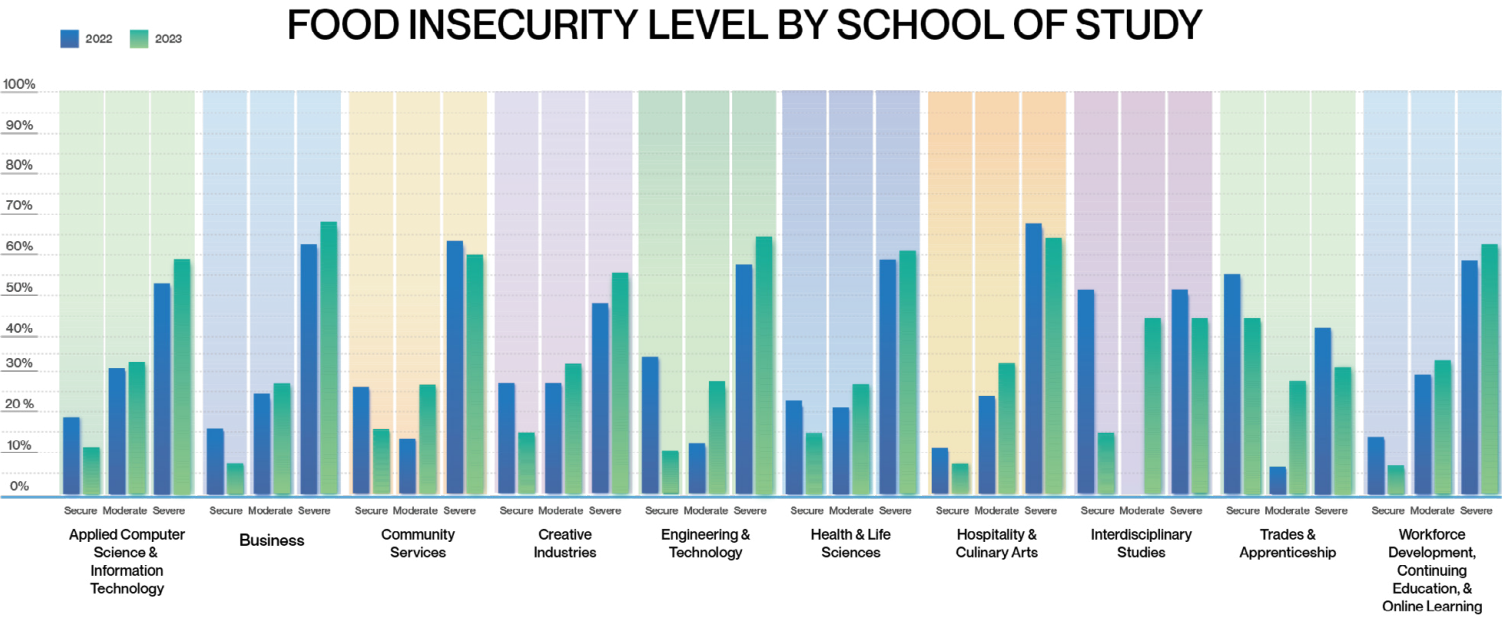


Figure 7: Food Insecurity Level by School of Study

Domestic & International Students

“
Domestic students were more likely to be food secure (37.6%) than their international counterparts (5.4%).
”

With the exception of domestic, out-of-province students (which can likely be explained via the low response rate, n=4 for the 2021-22 academic year and n=6 for the 2022-23 academic year), food insecurity across the board increased for domestic and international

students. However, domestic students were more likely to be food secure (37.6%) than their international counterparts (5.4%). Some potential rationales for why international students are more likely to experience food insecurity have to do with their significantly higher tuition fees, receiving minimal financial support from the institution (compared to their domestic counterparts), insufficient funding if they do receive any, and credit card debt (likely due to the previously mentioned factors).⁵¹ Additionally, international students are less likely to have strategies to cope with food insecurity, and if they do have strategies, they are more likely to have fewer strategies than their domestic counterparts.⁵² Before November 2022, international students were restricted in how much they could work, capped at 20 hours per week.⁵³ All of these pieces together paint a picture where international students face more cost-related barriers and less support.

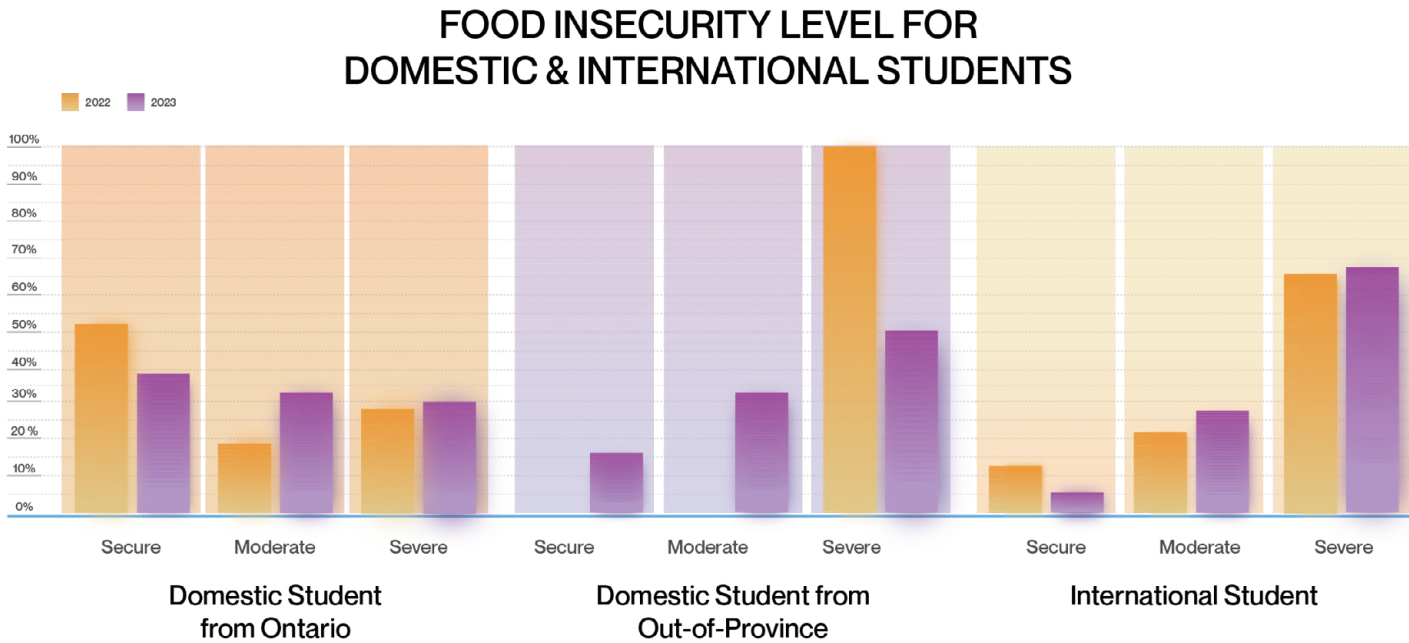


Figure 8: Food Insecurity Level for Domestic & International Students

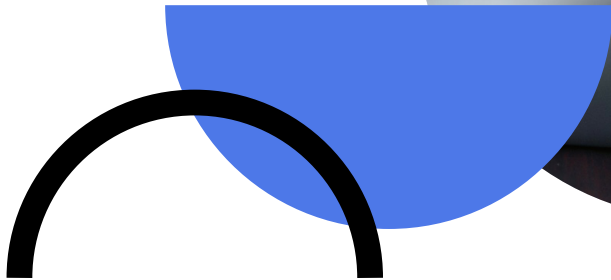
⁵¹ Mahitab Hanbazaza et al., "Food Insecurity Among International Post-Secondary Students Studying on a Canadian Campus: A Qualitative Description Study," Canadian Journal of Higher Education 51, no. 2 (August 8, 2021): 34, <https://doi.org/10.47678/cjhe.vi0.188977>.

⁵² Hanbazaza et al., "Food Insecurity Among International Post-Secondary Students." 34.

⁵³ Sanjay Maru, "After Feds Lift 20-Hour Work Rule for International Students, Immigration Consultant Calls Move 'Short-Sighted,'" CTV News, October 7, 2022, <https://windsor.ctvnews.ca/after-feds-lift-20-hour-work-rule-for-international-students-immigration-consultant-calls-move-short-sighted-1.6101352>.

Gender⁵⁴

While neither men nor women experience high rates of food security (10% for both), men tend to experience severe food insecurity more than women (65% of men experience severe food insecurity compared to 56.6% of women). This is surprising, as women experience food insecurity at higher rates in most research than men. Some potential explanations for this are that women who responded to our survey were more likely to be domestic students (5.5% more likely), white (5.5% more likely), and were less likely to answer always or often to having to sacrifice buying food to afford other essential expenses (5.5% and 5.3% respectively). Recognizing these differences in demographics, they likely play a role in mitigating the effects of food insecurity.



FOOD INSECURITY LEVEL BY GENDER

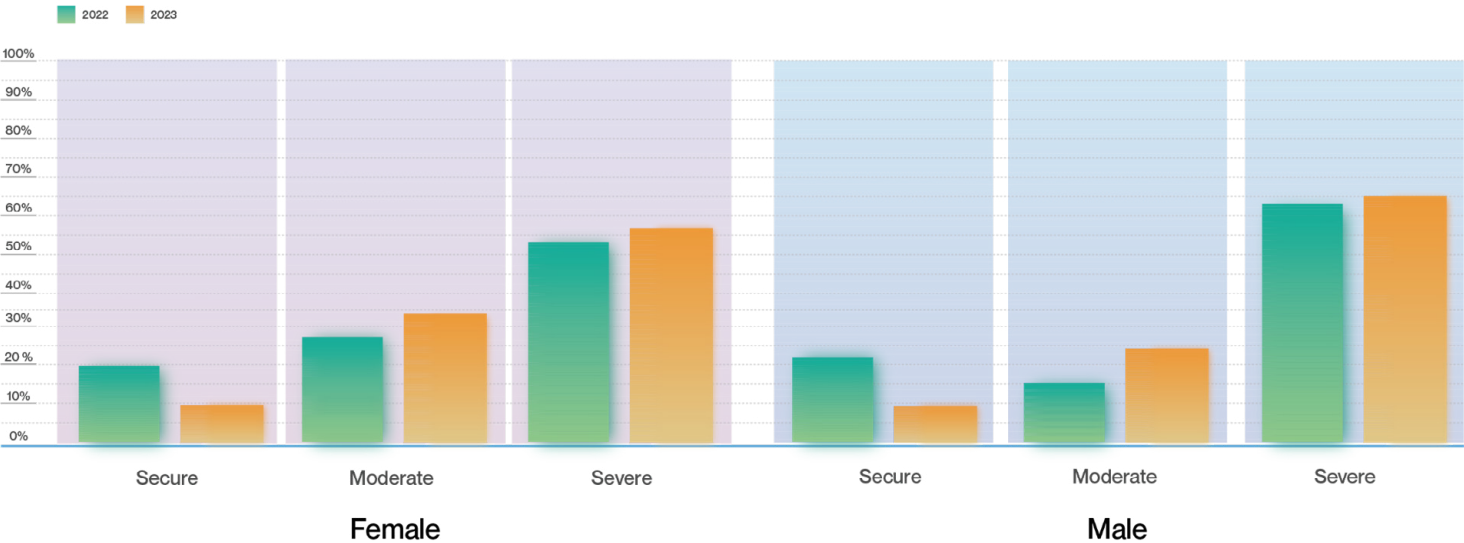


Figure 9: Food Insecurity Level by Gender

⁵⁴ This analysis only includes those who selected female or male. Most students who are non-binary and Two-Spirit are reflected in those who have lived experience as a transgender person. Therefore, due to the low total response to non-binary, Two-Spirit, and prefer not to say (n=17), and the question regarding transgender lived experience, non-binary, Two-Spirit, and prefer not to say were removed from the analysis of the gender question.

Transgender

As only 14 respondents confirmed they were transgender, compared to 1021 cisgender participants, it is difficult to make conclusions. Both transgender and cisgender students show increasing levels of food insecurity, with cisgender students facing slightly higher rates of food insecurity. This is interesting, as transgender individuals are much more likely to live below the poverty line, in precarious housing, and face more barriers to employment.⁵⁵ Given how close the data is (less than 5% between each category), this discrepancy is likely due to the limited responses from transgender individuals. Another potential factor that could lead to this discrepancy is that the vast majority of respondents to this survey are international students (84.2%), who are more likely to face food insecurity than the domestic students. This is not to say that transgender individuals are often food secure or that international students and transgender students should be pitted against each other to gain support. Rather, between the limited data on transgender students and the increased risk factors for the majority of participants, our data highlights both the need for increased, targeted efforts to reach transgender student communities and broad, college-wide efforts to address food insecurity.



FOOD INSECURITY LEVEL FOR TRANSGENDER STUDENTS

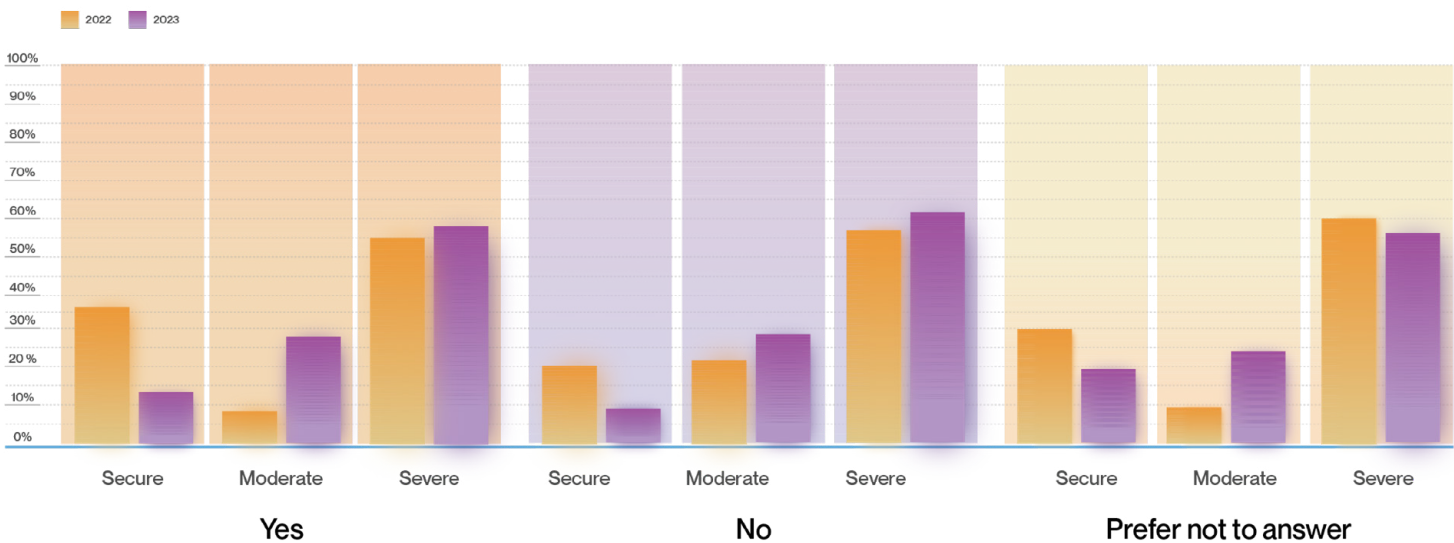


Figure 10: Food Insecurity Level for Transgender Students

⁵⁵ Greta Bauer et al., "Who Are Trans People in Ontario? - The Trans PULSE Project," Trans PULSE (blog), July 26, 2010, <https://transpulseproject.ca/research/who-are-trans-people-in-ontario/>.

Sexuality

While very similar in rates of food insecurity, LGBQA+ students are slightly more likely to experience food insecurity than their heterosexual peers. This mimics other research identifying LGBQA+ individuals at higher risk for food insecurity. Some of the reasons that LGBQA+ individuals face higher rates of food insecurity are related to other factors of marginalization: they are less likely to be employed and more likely to experience discrimination, loneliness, social exclusion, and have adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), all of which increase the risk of food insecurity.⁵⁶ Additionally, as many food banks are religiously affiliated, many LGBQA+ students may be reluctant to access these supports due to fear of discrimination and violence.⁵⁷ While CSI does operate an on-campus food bank that is not religiously affiliated, most students accessing a food bank do so off campus.⁵⁸ As a result, LGBQA+ students are not only more likely to experience food insecurity but also less likely to access various forms of support.

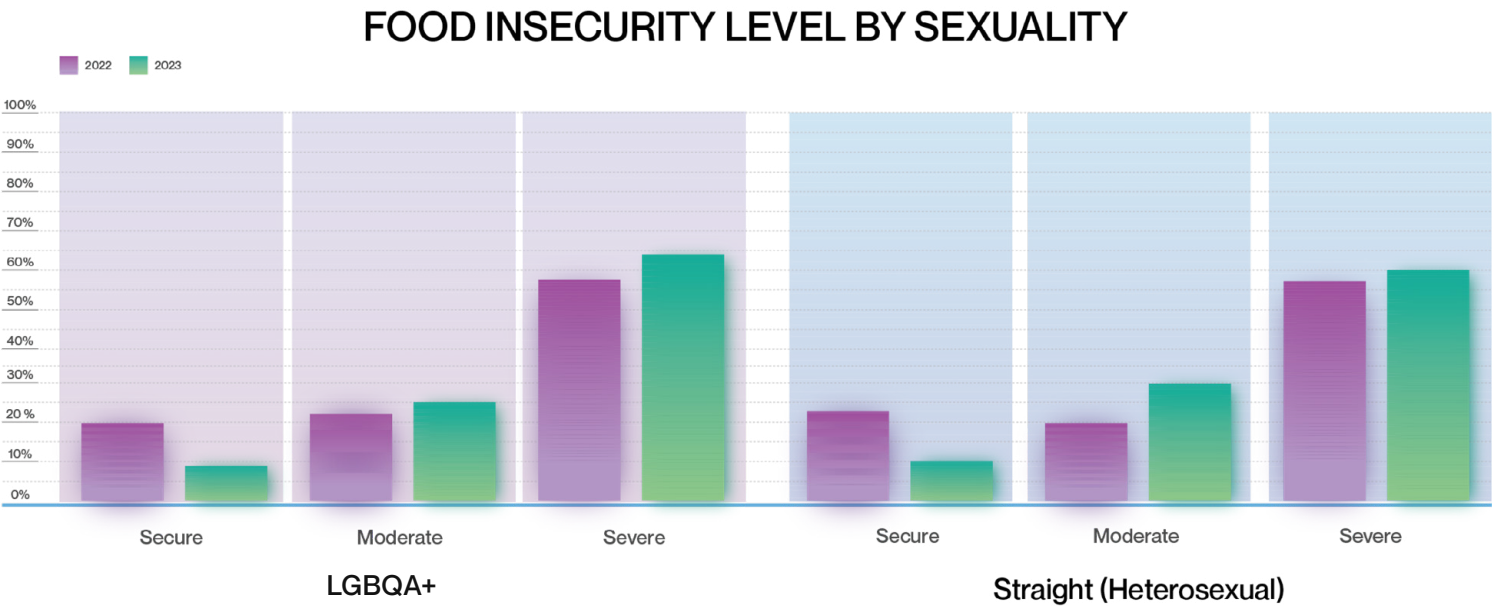


Figure 11: Food Insecurity Level by Sexuality

⁵⁶ Alexander Testa and Dylan B. Jackson, "Sexual Orientation and Food Insecurity: Findings from the New York City Community Health Survey," Public Health Nutrition 24, no. 17 (December 2021): 5660, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1368980020005157>.

⁵⁷ Testa and Jackson, "Sexual Orientation and Food Insecurity." 5660.

⁵⁸ As found in our survey results, just under 8% of students accessed food via SNAP, whereas 20.5% of students regularly access food via an off-campus food bank.

Age

Again, food insecurity is increasing across the board, regardless of age. However, those over 40 are more likely to be food secure than those under 40. Some potential reasons include that older students may be more likely to attend Conestoga to upgrade their education, meaning they are likely to either have a job or have personal savings from previous jobs that help offset the cost of food. Interestingly, the next highest food-secure group is aged 18-21, with just under 20% of students being food secure in 2023. As this age group is generally considered "student aged," this may reflect their access to programs that are restricted for older students, such as federal student jobs. At comparable rates, those aged 22-39 experience the least food security, which confirms other research that focuses on age: young adults are more likely to experience food insecurity. This is likely because young adults are less likely to have deep financial resources and more likely to have debt and other higher living costs, such as rent, without having a steady and sufficient income.⁵⁹

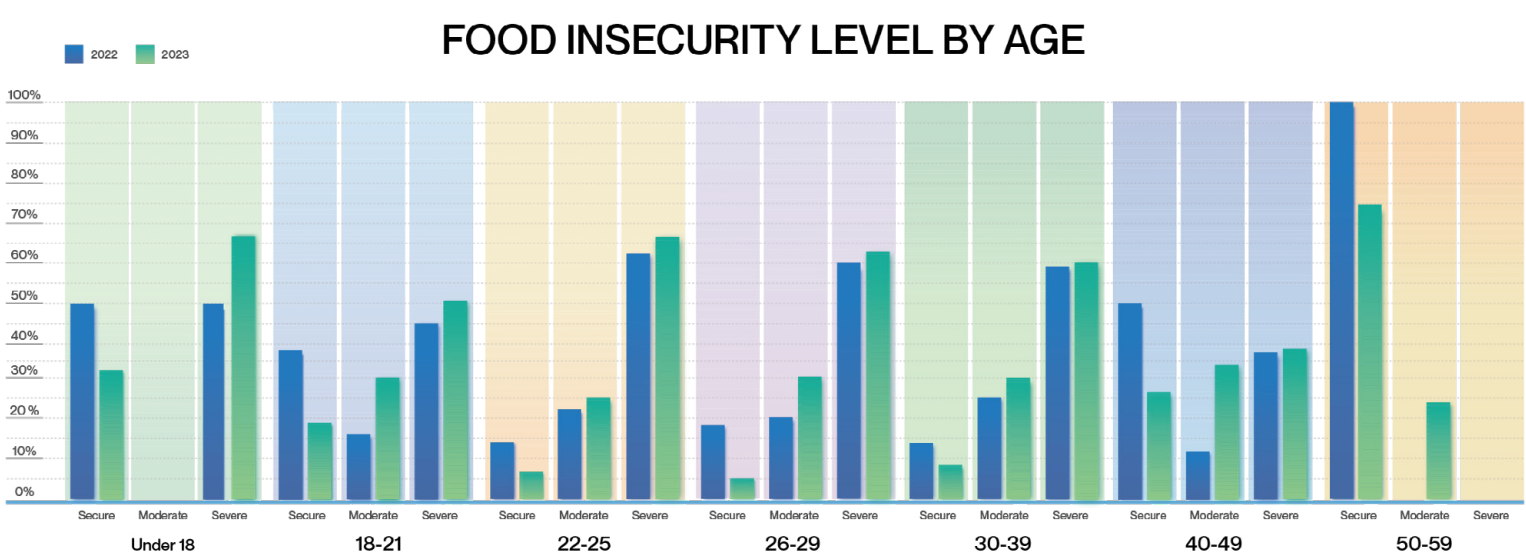


Figure 12: Food Insecurity Level by Age

⁵⁹ Bhawra, Kirkpatrick, and Hammond, "Food Insecurity among Canadian Youth and Young Adults." 670.

Race

While increasing across all racial categories, it is important to note that white students, by far, experience the most food security in the 2022-23 academic year.⁶⁰ This is likely due to numerous factors: white students are more likely to be domestic students (and therefore have more robust support systems), be enrolled in a paid trades/apprenticeship program, and overall benefit from white supremacy, which makes accessing support and employment easier than it is for their racialized peers. This is not to say that white students do not face food insecurity: just over 60% of white students experience some level of food insecurity. Rather, it is important to highlight that their experiences of privilege as white students create protective factors that racialized students do not have.

What is interesting is the higher rate of food security among Indigenous students (27.3% in 2022-23). This may be due to the low response rate (n= 11) of Indigenous students, as Indigenous students are typically more likely to experience food insecurity than settlers.⁶¹ Food insecurity for Indigenous students also seems to be rapidly increasing: food security decreased by over 44% between the 2021-22 academic year and the 2022-23 academic year; moderate food insecurity rose by 27.3%; and severe food insecurity increased by almost 17%.

The highest level of severe food insecurity is felt by those who do not know their race or ethnicity (92.9%). Though a small group (n=14), this could be a result of needing to know how or where to access supports that are culturally relevant for them. Many community groups and organizations, such as charities, churches, etc., are based around a particular ethnic group. Joining these groups can provide students with tangible resources, such as food, and intangible resources, such as relationships. For those who do not know their race or ethnicity, this may pose a barrier to accessing these informal and formal supports by self-selecting out.

The next two groups that face the highest levels of food insecurity are Black or African students and South Asian students (67.8% severe food insecurity for both). Many of these students, both those who are Black or African and those who are South Asian, are international students. As previously discussed, international students are more likely to face barriers to accessing support and are less likely to have a robust and diverse support system. These groups are also less likely to be employed, and if they are employed, it is likely only to be part-time, meaning they are less likely to have stable or sufficient income.

Looking at both East/Southeast Asian and Middle Eastern and West Central Asian students, while both groups saw a decrease in food security (6.1% for East/Southeast Asian students and 6% for Middle Eastern and West Central Asian students), they also both saw a decrease in severe food insecurity (14.5% for East/Southeast Asian students and 3.1% for Middle Eastern and West Central Asian students). While any food insecurity is something to combat, it is encouraging to see that severe food insecurity is dropping for these groups.

Finally, while Latino students did not see an increase in moderate food insecurity, they did see a 7.9% decrease in food security and a 7.9% increase in severe food insecurity. As opposed to East/Southeast Asian and Middle Eastern and West Central Asian students, we can see an increased presence of food insecurity worsening for Latino students.



⁶⁰ This is ignoring Pacific Islanders, as only 2 individuals responded as such, making a comparison difficult
⁶¹ Caitlin Olouson et al., "Student Food Insecurity: Examining Barriers to Higher Education at the University of Saskatchewan," *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition* 13, no. 1 (January 2018): 24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19320248.2017.1393365>.

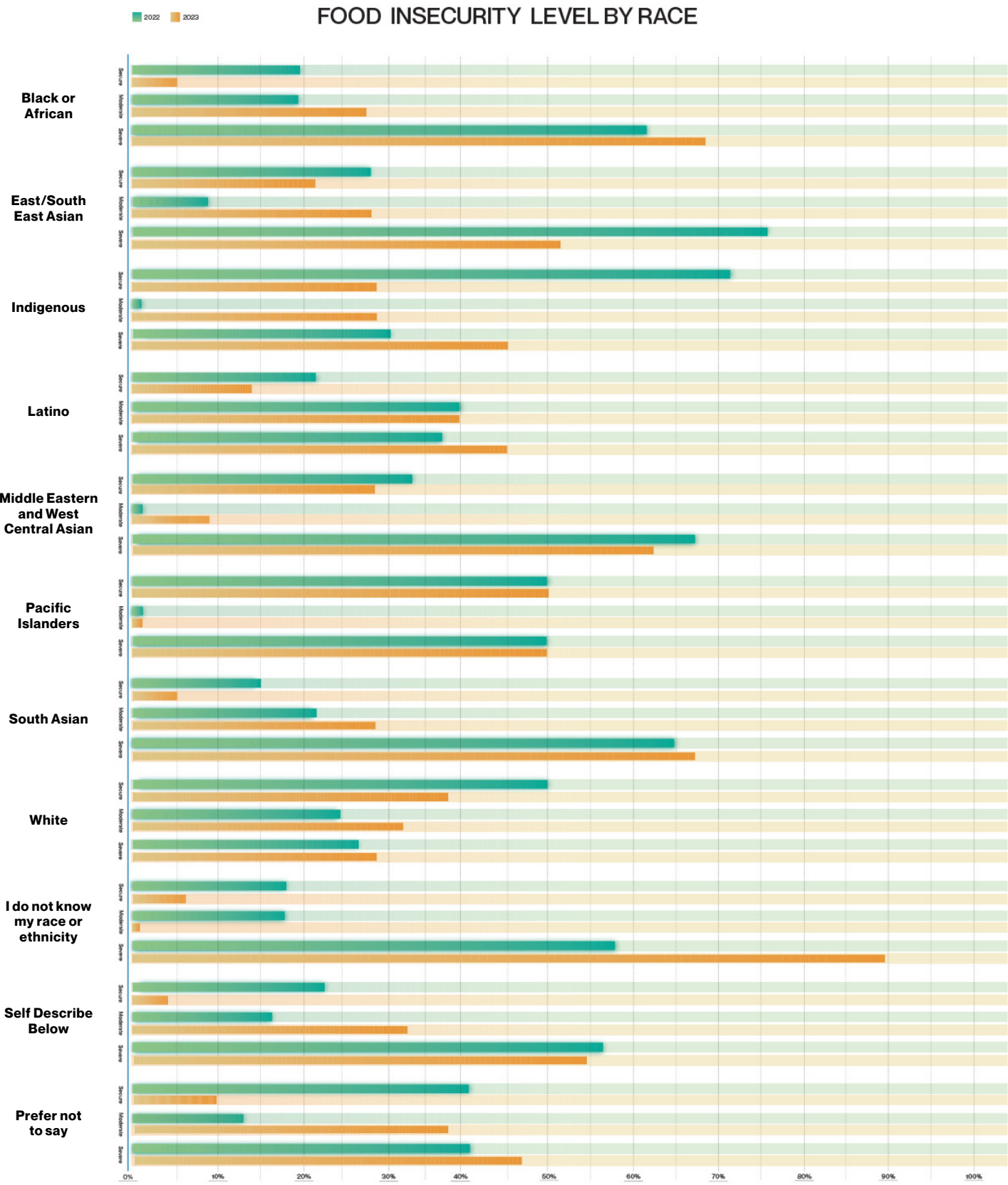


Figure 13: Food Insecurity Level by Race

Living Arrangement

For most living arrangements, the trend of increased food insecurity continues. One interesting exception is those precariously housed – though it is vital to acknowledge that this group still experiences food insecurity at much higher rates than their peers. Some potential explanations for this may include the increase in total respondents over the years (n=2 in 2021-22, n=9 in 2022-23) or may reflect a shifting of priorities. They may accept that their housing situation will be unable to change and focus efforts on ensuring they are fed instead. Ultimately, it is impossible to know why, but precariously housed people are still more likely to experience food insecurity than others, even with this minimal decrease.

The other living arrangements with high food insecurity are those living alone, those living with roommates, and those who are single with dependent(s). This is somewhat unsurprising, as people in these scenarios are often solely responsible for their own food security (or their own and others). They are more likely to have a higher cost of living when compared to other living arrangements, such as those living with family. These costs often include rent/mortgage payments, utilities, and the costs associated with being a student. They are also less likely to have support, particularly international students and students who have moved further away from their families. For many students, post-secondary education is their first time living away from those support systems, and they may need to be equipped with the financial and food literacy needed to support themselves. This can include knowing how, where, and when to grocery shop for the best deals and products, preparing all parts of food, and properly storing food.⁶² This is not to suggest that individuals simply need to be educated on grocery shopping and cooking; rather, this is one part of an explanation. For many, food is becoming increasingly expensive when they do not have the adequate financial resources to purchase the necessary amount of food.

Conversely, those experiencing the most food security are those living with family. This is to be expected, as these students often have fewer costs, such as no rent or utility bills (though not always), and are able to access food and other resources that are provided by others in their family – meaning they are

not alone in providing. Additionally, buying in bulk can often be cheaper in the long term, but those living or cooking on their own often struggle with food waste when buying in bulk. However, these students still face concerns with food insecurity as only 28.4% of students living with their families are food secure, an over 13% decrease from the previous year.

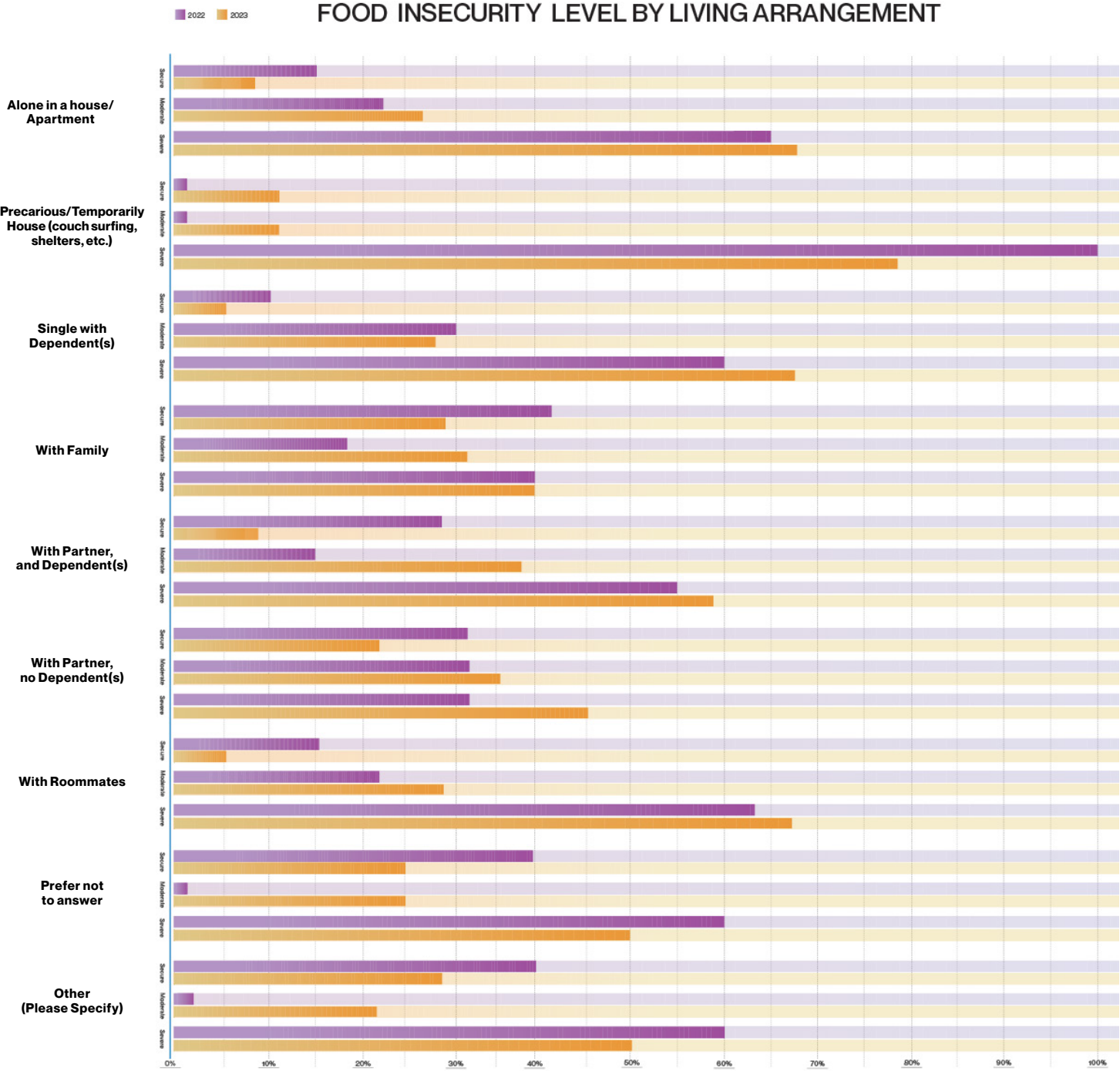


Figure 14: Food Insecurity Level by Living Arrangement

⁶² Beth Armstrong et al., "Food Insecurity, Food Waste, Food Behaviours and Cooking Confidence of UK Citizens at the Start of the COVID-19 Lockdown," British Food Journal 123, no. 9 (September 30, 2021): 21, <https://doi.org/10.1108/BFJ-10-2020-0917>.

Financial Resources

Though all categories are continuing to experience increased food insecurity, the levels at which they do vary. For example, those with employer tuition assistance funding are much more likely than their peers to be food secure, with just over 70% of these students being food secure in the 2022-23 academic year. This likely reflects their support, both from an employer who can help offset a portion of their education costs, and the fact that these students have a job with this kind of benefit likely provides insight into other benefits, including a more stable/sufficient salary. This is not to say these students do not experience any food insecurity, but rather that they have a more robust support system to combat food insecurity. However, it is also important to note that students with access to this kind of support are quite low, with only 7 students in the 2022-23 academic year noting employer tuition assistance as a financial resource.

The following highest groups of food security include those with bursaries, scholarships and/or awards, receiving OSAP, and/or receiving another type of government assistance. While this may contradict existing data on food insecurity and social services, this likely acts as a combative factor within an education setting such as Conestoga. This may be because to be eligible to receive most forms of government assistance or financial support from the college, they must be domestic students. As previously outlined, domestic students are more likely to have support, both financially and otherwise, that helps to combat food insecurity.

Looking at those who are most likely to face food insecurity, the top three groups are those who are using private loans from support systems (73.4% experiencing severe food insecurity, 22.5% experiencing moderate food insecurity), those who are using a bank loan or line of credit (72.8% experiencing severe food insecurity, 24.4% experiencing moderate food insecurity); and, those who are using credit cards (61.3% experiencing severe food insecurity, 30% experiencing moderate food insecurity). This may reflect the precarious nature of this funding. Students may be wary of taking too much money (either from support systems or banks) with little confirmation of how the loan and its interest will be paid off in the future. However, for many students, particularly international students, this may be the only solution to fund their education and living costs.

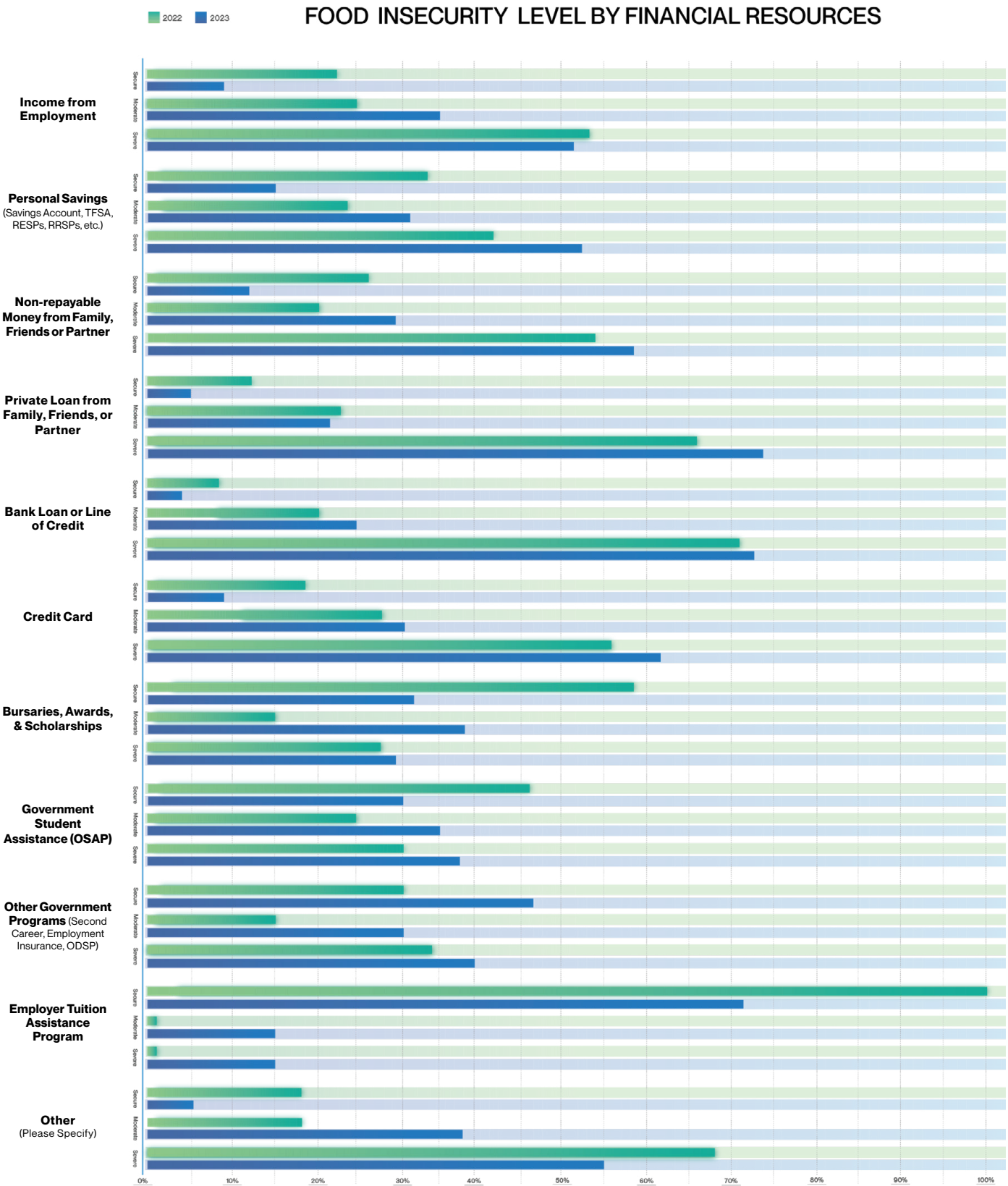
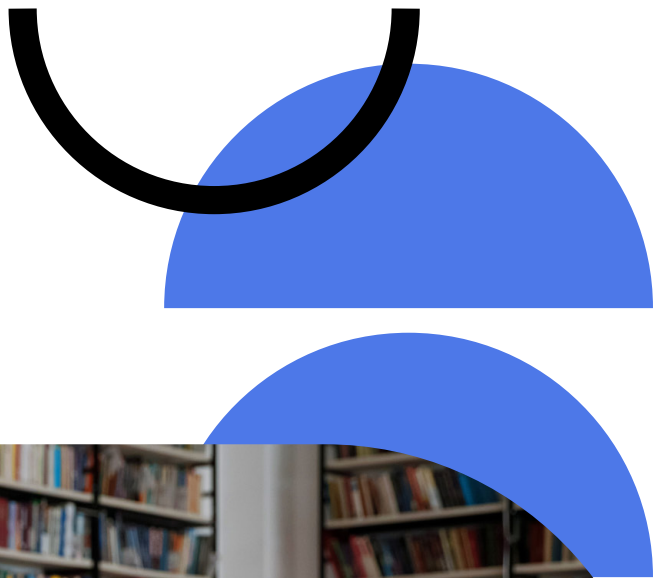


Figure 15: Food Insecurity Level by Financial Resources

Employment

Looking at those most food secure, it is those who are not employed but also not looking for work. As these individuals are not looking for work, they are more likely to have the resources they need to support themselves. A potential caveat to that that is not reflected in this data is those who are not employed and not looking for work because they are unable to work. This most commonly includes those who are disabled, those who have other responsibilities (such as caregiving) alongside their studies, and those who feel unable to balance work and studies simultaneously. As we did not collect data regarding disability or why individuals may not be looking for work, it is impossible to tell the breakdown within this category. Some of this data is reflected in the “other” category, as many responses referenced being unable to work for various reasons. Though a small number of respondents (n=16), this group has experienced a large increase in food insecurity between the 2021-22 and 2022-23 academic years.

One area where food security has improved is among those who are self-employed, both full-time and part-time. This could be partly due to an increased number of participants between the two academic years. However, another reason could be self-employed workers being able to set their rates and ensure a sufficient salary. It is important to note that for many, self-employment can be precarious work with many unforeseen costs that can impact someone’s finances in a way that typical employment does not.

Among those facing the most food insecurity are those who are not employed but looking for work, both full-time (70.1% experiencing severe food insecurity, 22.2% experiencing moderate food insecurity) and part-time (66.7% experiencing severe food insecurity, and 27% experiencing moderate food insecurity). This is to be expected as they are looking for work; they are likely either unemployed or underpaid with their current employment, resulting in less sufficient/stable financial resources to deal with the increasing cost of food.

Comparing full-time and part-time work, students who were employed full-time were more likely to be food secure (29.5%) when compared to their part-time employed peers (9.6%). This makes sense as full-time work means more hours, resulting in higher pay. It can also have other benefits that help offset the cost of groceries or other necessities through programs such as employer tuition assistance. For many students, though, full-time employment while still completing their studies is impractical – it can lead to increased stress due to workloads and some workplaces and/or courses may be unaccommodating for employed students.

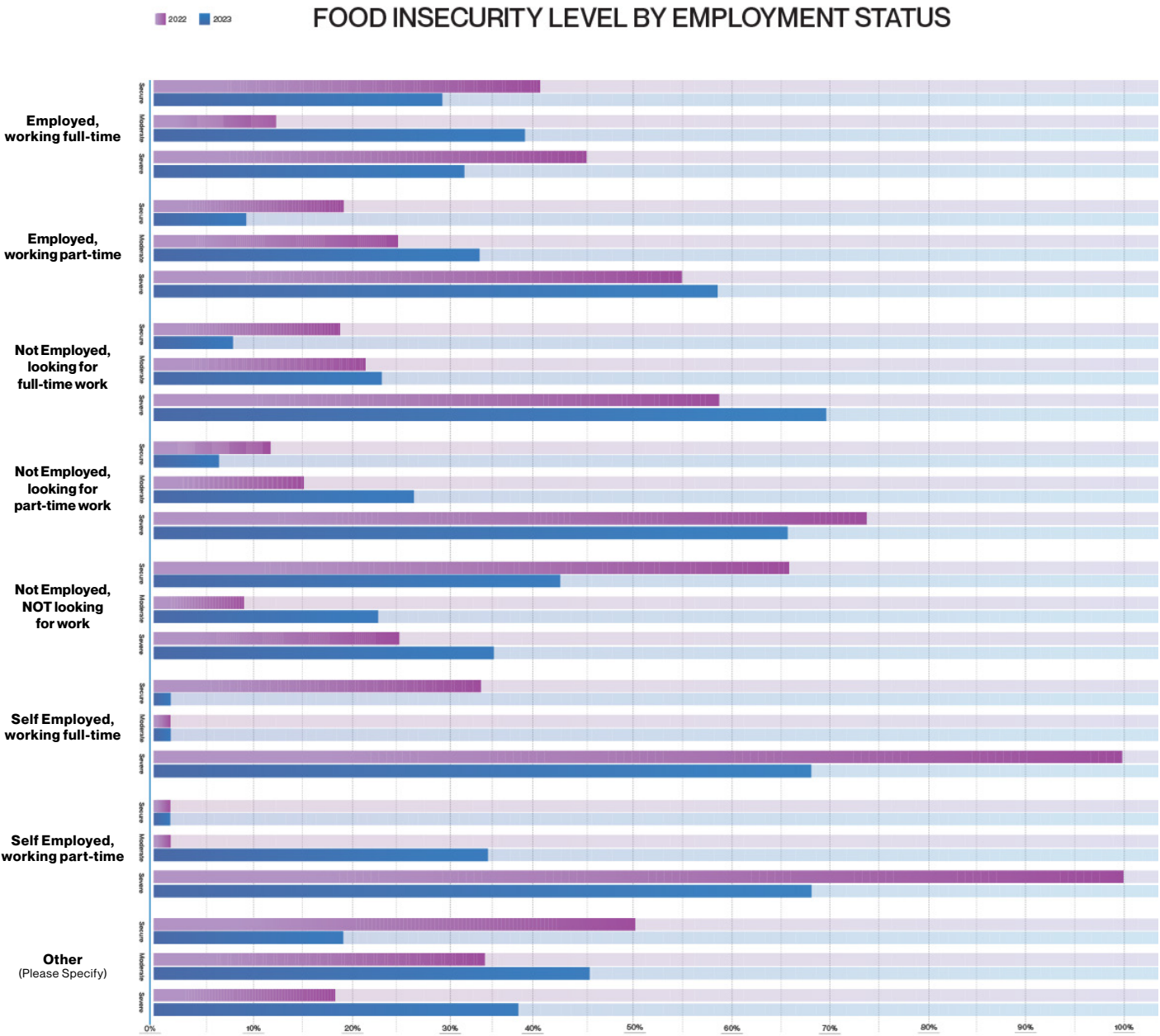


Figure 16: Food Insecurity Level by Employment Status

On Campus Frequency

Interestingly, the two most food insecure groups by on-campus frequency are those who are always on campus and those who are never on campus. Given that these are on opposite ends, they might be expected to contrast each other, as opposed to parallel. Some potential reasons may be due to needing help accessing on-campus

resources, such as SNAP or free food at various events.⁶³ Looking at those who are on campus, they may be forced to spend additional money on food more often, depending on how long and what times they are on campus.



⁶³ Soldavini, Andrew, and Berner, "Characteristics Associated with Changes in Food Security Status among College Students during the COVID-19 Pandemic." 303.

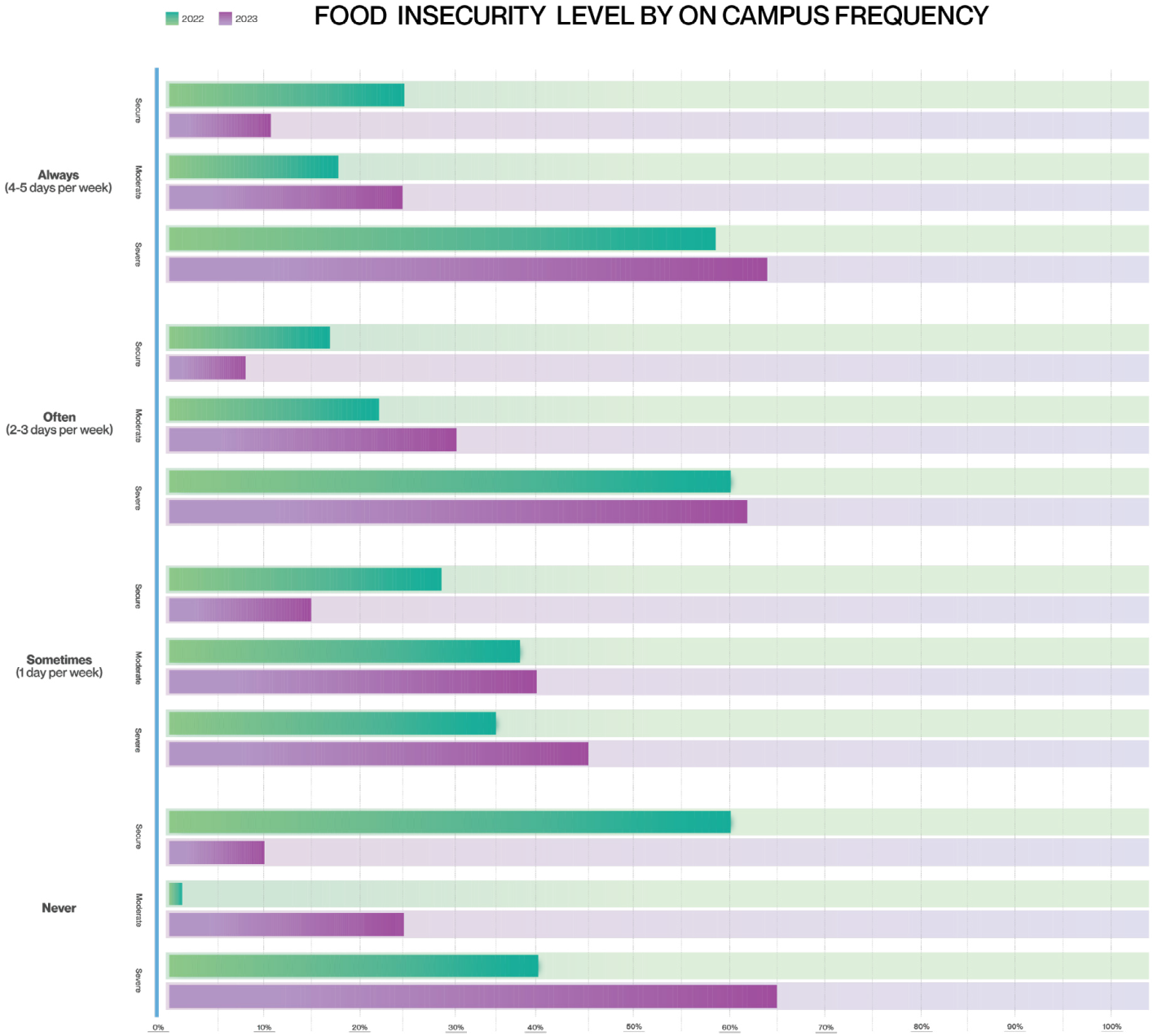


Figure 17: Food Insecurity Level by On-Campus Frequency

How Food is Accessed

SNAP, local food banks, and unconventional methods have the highest rates of food insecurity (83.5%, 79.6%, and 81.8%, respectively), which is unsurprising. Given that these ways often involve accessing food for free, those with the least financial resources and other supports are more likely to need to access food in a way that is as low cost as possible. Additionally, given that nearly a third of all respondents access food at least one of these three ways demonstrates the high necessity of programming to address and support food insecurity in the Conestoga community.

The highest levels of food security are with those who harvest/grow their own food, with 21.1% of these students being food secure. This may reflect the low-cost nature of harvest/growing food, but it is important to note the amount of resources, such as space, knowledge, skill, and time, needed for someone to grow their own food creates many barriers for a population that is typically made up of renters, with minimal time (due to being enrolled in school and many having/searching for employment). So, while it is encouraging to see harvesting/growing food as a potential solution for food insecurity, it is only feasible for some, and ultimately, most students who are harvesting/growing their food still experience some level of food insecurity.

One of the highest rates of food security (18.8%) is among those who regularly access restaurants/takeout for food. Those who commonly access restaurants/takeout for their food likely are those with a higher degree of financial resources, thus representing a higher degree of food security among these persons. Given that the question's wording asked about how students regularly accessed food and the price of restaurants and takeouts, it could be inferred that these students have more financial resources.

Campus cafeterias or restaurants are among the highest in terms of food security, with 17.6% of students being food secure. Part of this may reflect the efforts made on campus to ensure food is affordable, such as the affordable meal prices at on-campus restaurants such as The Venue. Still, given that food security is felt by less than 20% of students, most students who are accessing food on campus experience some level of food insecurity.

Given that the highest level of food security is just over 20%, these results may be more indicative of the rising cost of food above all else. Most students are experiencing some level of food insecurity, regardless of how they access food. While some efforts can be made to address this via the food access point, such as expanding affordable options on campus or promoting local and on-campus food banks, it is clear that students need assistance in accessing food in reliable and affordable ways that meet their cultural and dietary needs.

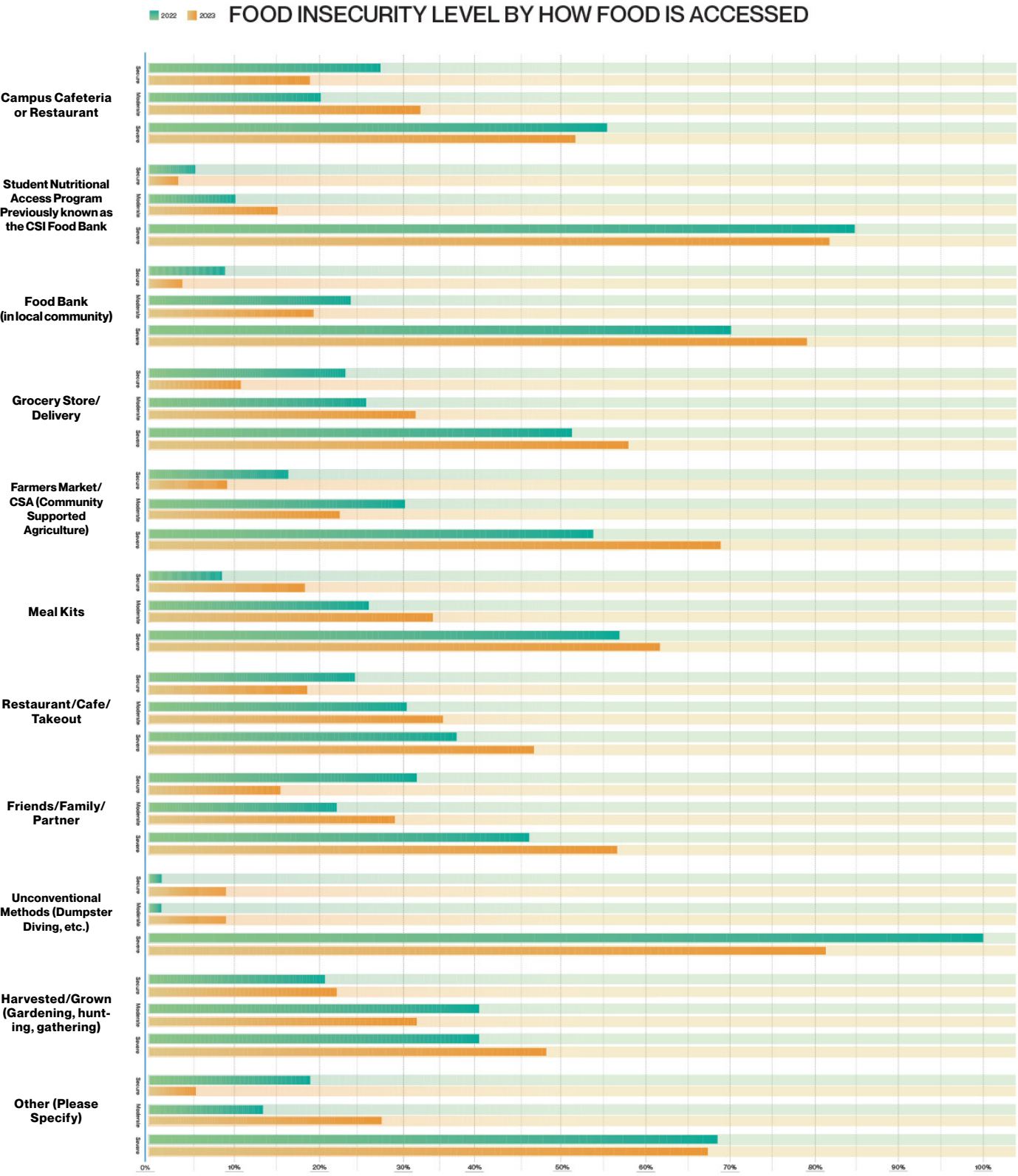


Figure 18: Food Insecurity Level by How Food is Accessed

Recommendations

Though not the focus of our survey, students were given the opportunity to share up to 3 things that would be helpful to improve their access to food (figure 18). For most students, grocery gift cards would help improve access to food. This aligns with preliminary data from SNAP, where almost 2000 students have accessed gift cards in the 2022-23 academic year. Gift cards provide a unique (yet temporary) solution to food insecurity, allowing individuals to purchase the food they need instead of what is currently in stock at a food bank. Because of the nature of gift cards (i.e., they can be done virtually), it can also help to reduce the effects of stigma as a barrier to accessing food banks.

The next highest requested improvement would be the ability to pick up affordable groceries on campus. Though the distance between each Conestoga campus and the nearest grocery store varies, most students access public transportation – meaning, transporting large grocery orders can be inconvenient and add to lengthy commutes. By providing the option to pick up on campus, students can reduce both their time spent travelling and their environmental footprint.

Following that, more affordable on-campus meal options, including a meal plan, is another way to improve student access to food. Conestoga is one of a few post-secondary institutions that does not offer a meal plan, even for students living on campus. Though often overly expensive, meal plans often help students plan their financial commitment for the year as the brunt of the cost of food is felt up front and usually included in a student's financial calculations.

Next is improving student awareness of SNAP. Consistently, awareness of initiatives is a constant barrier for students and student associations across programs and different institutions. Student associations are inherently wary of overloading students, at risk of being tuned out altogether. However, this results in some students being unaware of various programs they may qualify for and even need. Potential solutions vary but can include targeted and universal advertising, class visits, online and in-person promotion, and more.

Rounding out the top 5 responses is affordable groceries delivered to students' homes. Similarly, being able to pick up affordable groceries on campus can likely help reduce the amount of time, energy, and cost (via gas and/or bus tickets) associated with going to the grocery store.

Finally, recognizing that the survey was not designed to provide comprehensive recommendations for addressing food insecurity on Conestoga's campuses, further research focused on developing local and relevant solutions for Conestoga students across all campuses to reduce food insecurity could be completed.

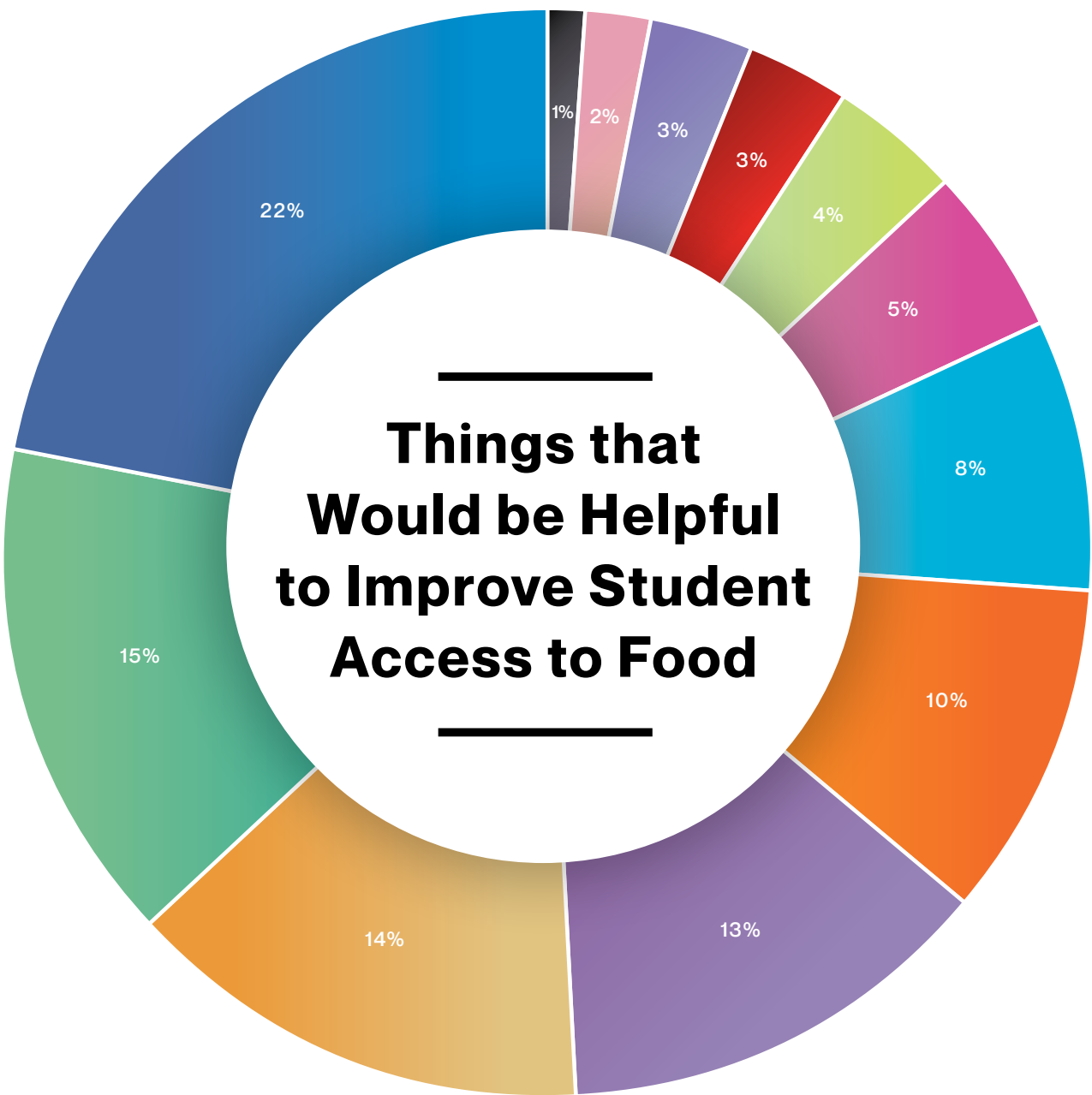


Figure 19 - Things that would be helpful to improve student access to food.

- | | | |
|--|--|---|
| 22% Grocery Gift Cards | 10% Affordable groceries delivered to your home (fresh, frozen, bulk or canned goods) | 3% Educational information on food and cooking |
| 15% Affordable groceries picked up on campus (fresh, frozen, bulk or canned goods) | 8% Greater Awareness of local resources (example: Off-Campus Food Banks) | 3% Access to facilities/ equipment to prepare food (freezer space, community kitchens, etc.) |
| 14% Affordable on campus meals/meal plan | 5% More options on campus that meet your dietary needs | 2% I do not have any difficulty accessing food |
| 13% Great awareness of the Student Nutritional Access Program (On-Campus Food Bank and other food supports) | 4% Affordable prepared meals delivered to your home | 1% Space/resources to grow food |

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FOR MORE INFORMATION



**Inquiries About Student Nutritional
Access Program (SNAP)**

Tel: 519 748 5131 ext. 3575

Email: csifoodbank@conestogac.on.ca

Justin McLaughlin
he/him

Senior Manager, Advocacy
Conestoga Students Inc.

Tel: 548 889 2641

Email: jmclaughlin2@conestogac.on.ca

Nathan R. G. Barnett
he/him

Advocacy Research Coordinator
Conestoga Students Inc.

Tel: 548 889 2764

Email: nbarnett@conestogac.on.ca