

## Opinions - Food banks need help now

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Greater Hamilton is in the midst of a food crisis, and every one of us who can afford to needs to make a commitment today, right now, to do our part to help out.

Food banks across the city are reporting shortages and downright empty shelves, not due to a drop-off in donations, but rather to a marked increase in the number of people who rely on food banks to feed their families.

This should come as no surprise. The skyrocketing price of fuel, utilities and food means more and more people are having to decide between paying for food, shelter and bills. If you don't pay rent, you get evicted. If you don't pay your bills, your utilities get cut off and credit agencies hound you.

Given these unpleasant realities, many people decide cutting food spending is the only choice they have.

This is a horrible indictment of our society, and one that we should not tolerate. We should join the Hamilton Round Table for Poverty Reduction and declare that our community's rate of poverty is simply "unacceptable."

We should support and applaud the efforts of groups such as the Affordable Housing Flagship and the Campaign for Adequate Welfare and Disability Benefits which advocate an all-out attack on the root causes of poverty.

We should demand that our elected officials catch up to community grassroots in trying to find the right balance between poverty intervention and alleviation, and outright prevention.

And we must educate ourselves. Consider the true story of the business owner who donated generously to the local food bank, blissfully unaware that minimum-wage earners in his own store were being forced to use that same food bank -- working yes, but living below the poverty line because he wasn't paying a living wage.

Many fighting the war on poverty will argue that food banks are, at best, a necessary evil.

There's some truth in that. Food banks and similar interventionist tools don't attack the root causes of poverty. They can further stigmatize consumers. They offer an all-too-convenient excuse for many people to argue they're doing their part in the war by making donations.

Make no mistake: Food banks and other alleviation and intervention measures are not so much tackling the problem as they are mitigating the symptoms of the illness. A cure is what we need.

But right now, community food banks and the growing number of people who rely on them need our help.

Let's make like Hamiltonians and step up. To learn more, contact Hamilton Food Share, [hamiltonfoodshare.org](http://hamiltonfoodshare.org), 905-664-9065.