

## FIXING HOLES IN THE SOCIAL SAFETY NET

It is traditional during the holiday season to count blessings. Doing so provides a useful reminder that not everyone is so fortunate.

Our purpose in publishing *Social Policy Trends* is to raise awareness of important matters of social policy. We frequently rely on data provided by others but have also been able to provide bite-sized descriptions of work we are doing at the School of Public Policy.

Over the past 12 months, we have used *Social Policy Trends* to raise awareness of our more in-depth research into developing a better way of evaluating the effectiveness of programs meant to address [homelessness](#), our research into the relationship between [food bank use](#) and a growing risk of homelessness, the impact of inflation on [social assistance](#) recipients, and the possibility of anticipating – and preventing – incidents of [domestic violence](#).

The authors of *Social Policy Trends* recognize their limitations. We work in an academic unit and while we take pains to work with people and organizations working on the frontlines, we know that we will never be as aware of the needs of people experiencing hardship as they are. For that reason, we appreciate the patience shown us in the last year by organizations like the [Calgary Homeless Foundation](#), the [Calgary Food Bank](#), the [Centre for Newcomers](#), [Calgary Catholic Immigration Society](#), and [Calgary Police Service](#) when we ask them how and why they do the things they do to assist people in need.

In a previous issues of *Social Policy Trends*, we have shown how the number of people using [food banks](#) changes during the December holiday season and how there is a disturbing increase in incidents of [domestic violence](#) during this time. Plausible explanations for these observations are the effort of families to redirect limited income to gifts, necessitating extra use of food banks, and the

strains put on relationships by the stretched budgets and heightened expectations that are part of the holidays.

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The social safety net extends far beyond government programs. It includes family and friends, faith-based organizations, and myriads of charitable organizations dependent on your support.

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In past issues we have also reported that during the holiday season, fewer people stay in Calgary's homeless shelters and a there is a reduction in the number of youths entering the shelter system during this time. Though difficult to identify with statistical analysis, as is our wont, our speculation is that generosity of spirit, not otherwise available the rest of the year, finds spaces for people to sleep during the holiday season.

We have been publishing *Social Policy Trends* since 2017 (all previous issues can be accessed [here](#)) and we have addressed some issues of social policy more than once. If we have at times repeated ourselves, it is because the social problems we study are enduring ones. We hope that someday we can erase some of these issues from our list of research topics.

The social safety net contains many holes, and more people would fall through and fall further were it not for the efforts of charitable organizations. Consider supporting them if you are able.

The Social Policy research team at the School of Public Policy wish you the very best for the holidays and for a safe and healthy New Year.