

Dietitians of Canada (BC) Submission to the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction

Response to BC Government Consultation on Poverty Reduction

MARCH 2018

British Columbian members of Dietitians of Canada applaud the provincial government's commitment to developing and implementing a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy. Dietitians see the effect of poverty on British Columbians' health and well-being. Poverty and income security are directly related to household food insecurity, which is defined as inadequate or insecure access to food because of financial constraints. Food insecure households struggle to afford a healthy diet and household food insecurity affects physical health, mental health and social well-being of individuals and increases the incidence of hospitalization.

Dietitians of Canada recommends that household food insecurity be addressed in BC's first poverty reduction strategy.

In BC, one in 10 households experience food insecurity and one in six children live in food insecure households. These rates are greater in different parts of the province and for different household compositions. For example, more than 40% of Indigenous Peoples living on reserve live in food insecure households; 76% of households receiving income assistance are food insecure and 65% of food insecure households are employed.

Household food insecurity affects physical health, mental health and social well-being of individuals and increases the incidence of hospitalization.

It is the position of Dietitians of Canada that household food insecurity is a serious public health issue with profound effects on physical and mental health and social well-being. All households in Canada must have sufficient income for secure access to nutritious food after paying for other basic necessities.

As representatives of Dietitians of Canada BC region, we recommend that household food insecurity be addressed in BC's first poverty reduction strategy.

SUMMARY OF KEY ACTION POINTS TO REDUCE HOUSEHOLD FOOD INSECURITY:

- Expand, implement and/or pilot policy responses that ensure all households have consistent and **sufficient income** to pay for basic needs, including food.
- Address the additional challenges related to household food insecurity among **Indigenous Peoples**.
- Commit to annual **monitoring** and reporting of the prevalence and severity of household food insecurity in BC.
- Support **research** to address gaps in knowledge about the prevalence and severity of household food insecurity to inform the implementation and evaluation of strategies and policies that will eliminate household food insecurity in BC.

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Key Action Points to Reduce Household Food Insecurity

SUFFICIENT INCOME

Expand, implement and/or pilot comprehensive policy responses that ensure all households have consistent and sufficient income to pay for basic needs, including food. Recommendations include:

- Provide income protection for people in precarious employment.
- Increase social assistance and disability rates that are indexed to inflation and with higher earning exemptions.
- Increase minimum wage to a living wage.
- Provide more affordable and stable housing and affordable public transit.
- Improve benefits to households with children under 18 years, such as BC's new affordable child care benefit.
- Strengthen Nutrition Supplements Programs that provide nutrition over and above a basic diet when medically necessary. Continue to work with Dietitians of Canada for solutions such as streamlining applications, re-evaluating criteria and increasing benefit amounts based on "Food Costing in BC" data.
- Undertake a Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) pilot - Dietitians of Canada and academics recognize that a comprehensive basic income initiative in conjunction with supportive social policies and programs can improve household food insecurity. A BIG initiative needs to be developed in partnership with academics and experts in the field.

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Address the additional challenges related to household food insecurity among Indigenous Peoples, including physical and financial access to Indigenous treaty lands, waters and traditional foods. In addition to policies that ensure consistent and sufficient income, recommendations include:

- Ensure fair resolution of disputes over access to lands and resources recognized by Indigenous and Treaty rights, to ensure food sovereignty and access to traditional foods by Indigenous Peoples.
- Provide sufficient supports and remove barriers for hunting, fishing or gathering/cultivating traditional foods. This includes support for Elders and knowledge keepers who are integral to Indigenous culture.
- Ensure sufficient supports and removal of barriers to include traditional foods in facilities such as hospitals, childcare centres and schools.
- Provide the opportunity to participate in and to influence policies and practices that affect their access to, and availability of cultural foods and traditions.

ANNUAL MONITORING

Create a system of monitoring and reporting the prevalence and severity of household food insecurity in BC. Results from regular measuring and monitoring of household food insecurity can inform policies and initiatives to eliminate household food insecurity. Recommendations include:

- Commit to mandatory annual data collection using standardized tools. Monitor marginal, moderate and severe food insecurity and include sufficient sample size, geographic representation and inclusion of vulnerable populations. Ensure household food insecurity is used as an indicator for the poverty reduction strategy.
- Support “Food Costing in BC”, which monitors the cost of a National Nutritious Food Basket as a proportion of household income. Use the finding to help ensure food insecure households have enough money to afford a healthy diet after meeting basic needs such as housing.
- Evaluate the impact of poverty reduction and other strategies to reduce household food insecurity and improve selected population health indicators, with adjustments in policy to maximize reach and impact.
- Use screening protocols across the full continuum of the healthcare system to identify household food insecurity, poverty and malnutrition among individual health system users.

RESEARCH

Support continued research to address gaps in knowledge about populations experiencing greater prevalence and severity of household food insecurity. Research results can inform the implementation and evaluation of strategies and policies that will eliminate household food insecurity in BC. Recommendations include:

- Complete outcome evaluation following implementation of public policy and poverty reduction strategies in BC, especially the measured impacts on household food insecurity and health of individuals within the population.
- Assess the costs and benefits of different policy responses.
- Identify factors contributing to increased vulnerability amongst populations experiencing disproportionately more food insecurity within their households.
- Support research to close the gaps in health outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities.

Addressing Household Food Insecurity

Household food insecurity has severe consequences on physical and mental health and individuals who are food insecure use up significantly more health care dollars (up to 121%). The most common response to food insecurity is to provide food-based solutions such as community gardens, coupon programs, meal programs and cooking programs. While these initiatives may benefit the end-users by teaching new skills and improving social connections, they do not address the root cause of household food insecurity. To address household food insecurity, households need enough income to maintain adequate and secure access to food. The only way to address household food insecurity is through comprehensive policy solutions.

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Dietitians bring a unique lens and can make significant contributions to BC's first poverty reduction strategy.

Household food insecurity is a serious public health issue and the prevalence of household food insecurity in BC has not improved since monitoring began in 2005. The current government has the opportunity to reduce rates of household food insecurity through a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy that includes income-based policy solutions. Dietitians with expertise in household food insecurity and health inequities bring a unique lens to poverty reduction and can make significant contributions to developing BC's first poverty reduction strategy.

Dietitians of Canada members from the BC region are grateful for the opportunity to provide input into the BC poverty reduction strategy and look forward to continuing to work collaboratively with Honourable Shane Simpson and the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction to address household food insecurity.

Dietitians of Canada is the national professional association for dietitians, representing over 5,000 members at the local, provincial and national level. Dietitians have the education and training to understand the complexities related to people's health and social needs. Dietitians are the only nutrition professionals regulated by the BC Health Professions Act. As the voice of the profession, Dietitians of Canada strives for excellence in advancing health through food and nutrition. We shape the future of eating and healthy living for all Canadians.

Resources

BC household food insecurity resources:

- [Infographic on rates of food insecurity](#): Provincial Health Services Authority. (2016). *BC household food insecurity in 2011-2012*. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2DXChIW>
- [Report](#): PROOF and Provincial Health Services Authority. (2016). *Priority health equity indicators for BC: household food insecurity report*. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2uiBtOY>
- [Report](#): Provincial Health Services Authority. (2016). *Food Costing in BC 2015*. Retrieved from: <https://bit.ly/2I5tqqR>
- Dietitians of Canada, BC Region (September 2017). *Submission to the Ministry of Social Development and Poverty Reduction*. Available on request.
- Dietitians of Canada (September 2017). *BC Nutritional Supplement Programs: Survey Results*. Available on request.
- Dietitians of Canada BC Region (May 2016). *Submission to the Ministry of Social Development and Social Innovation*. <https://bit.ly/2GsCjO6>
- Dietitians of Canada, BC Region (2013). *Submission to Auditor General*. <https://bit.ly/2pGfEDA>

Canadian household food insecurity resources:

- PROOF, Food Insecurity Policy Research University of Toronto. Infographics:
 1. Public Policy and Food Insecurity. Retrieved: <https://bit.ly/2bUT96d>
 2. The Impact of Food Insecurity on Health. Retrieved: <https://bit.ly/2boYZv4>
 3. Food Insecurity and Mental Health. Retrieved: <https://bit.ly/2Gb6Pge>
 4. Food Procurement, Food Skills & Food Insecurity. Retrieved: <https://bit.ly/2uncudt>
- Dietitians of Canada. (2016):
 1. Addressing Household Food Insecurity in Canada: Position Statement and Recommendations. Retrieved: <https://bit.ly/2Gd44eo>
 2. Addressing Household Food Insecurity in Canada, Executive Summary. Retrieved: <https://bit.ly/2I6ZURy>
 3. Addressing Household Food Insecurity in Canada, Background Paper. Retrieved: <https://bit.ly/2pHM55s>

For further information:

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