



Source: National Dairy Council

Nutrition Update Newsletter

April
2018

A NEWSLETTER FOR PROFESSIONALS

REGISTERED DIETITIAN CONTRIBUTORS

Stacey Wiens
Melanie Warke
Tracy Sanden
Cathryn Abrametz

Food Insecurity: Changing the Conversation

The latest findings suggest we should be changing how we talk about food insecurity. Food insecurity has been defined 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 Food insecurity definitions typically focus on the financial inadequacy to buy food for the home.²

Most definitions of **food security** focus on population-level access to food, a sustainable food system and the ability to attain food in a safe and dignified manner. Thus, the two terms can have varied context and meaning, and may not simply be the opposite of each other.

The strong financial link between household income and food insecurity has brought forward the term **household food insecurity**, which is the insecure access to nutritious food due to insufficient financial resources. New findings now suggest household income is also the strongest predictor of food insecurity.³

Four million Canadians are affected by food insecurity in Canada, or 1 in 8 households. Those who are most vulnerable to experiencing food insecurity can include Indigenous Peoples, single parent households,

recent immigrants, and those with chronic health conditions.²

For many households there is not enough money to buy food after paying rent, utilities, and other living expenses. Over 60% of food insecure households are those which rely on wages or inconsistent employment as the main source of income.³

Household food insecurity is a serious public health problem in Canada. It impacts physical and mental health, and costs billions of dollars to our healthcare system. Health care costs of adults increase with greater severity of food insecurity when compared to adults in food secure households.²

Food insecurity is more than just feeling hungry.

The discussion of household food insecurity has a systemic focus and elimination requires adequate income to pay for housing, food and other basic necessities. Community kitchens, good food boxes, food banks and other feeding programs are important for those who participate. However, they do not address household food insecurity.

New research shows public policies and government programs can relieve food insecurity. Government programs that

provide consistent income have a positive impact on food insecurity for populations such as seniors who benefit from Canada's pension programs.³

However, when the main source of income in a household is from a government source such as social assistance, the risk of food insecurity increases by six times compared to the average salaried household.³

Changing the conversation about food insecurity to a household perspective changes the focus of potential solutions. Expanding research on policies that affect household income can inform government supported strategies in the future. Monitoring household food insecurity across Canada can help to ensure long term solutions are successful.²

PUBLIC HEALTH NUTRITIONISTS OF SASKATCHEWAN WORKING GROUP

Public Health Nutritionists in the Saskatchewan Health Authority are available for more information or to discuss any of the topics in this newsletter. Contact information for Public Health Offices can be found at:

saskatchewan.ca

Public Health Nutritionists
of Saskatchewan



Ask A

NUTRITION

Expert



I used to think only people without a job would need help from a food bank, but I've recently learned that both working and unemployed people use food banks. Less than half are on social assistance.⁴ What other myths are there about people living with food insecurity?

There are several misunderstandings about food insecurity in Canada:

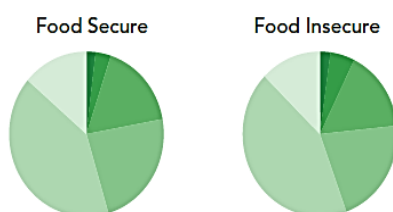
Myth: If people are having trouble getting enough food on the table they go to the food bank for help.

Truth: A study from 2011 found that only 1 in 5 people who need help go to a food bank.⁶

Myth: People who live with food insecurity have fewer food preparation and cooking skills.

Truth: Based on recent evidence, "adults in food insecure households do not report having lower food preparation skills than those in food secure households".⁵

Self-rated cooking ability by household food insecurity status



- Don't know where to start when it comes to cooking
- Can do things such as boil an egg or cook a grilled cheese sandwich
- Can prepare simple meals but nothing too complicated
- Can cook more dishes if I have a recipe
- Can prepare most dishes
- Frequently prepare sophisticated dishes

Myth: Those living with food insecurity need some help with budgeting.

Truth: 84% of those living in food insecure households go grocery

shopping with a clear budget in mind, compared to only 43% of those in food secure households.⁵

If income is the solution to food insecurity, is there still a role for programs such as cooking classes and budgeting classes?

Yes. All Canadians can benefit from improved food skills. Regardless of income, Canadians are not eating enough vegetables and fruit as per nutrition guidelines. While such interventions are unlikely to impact food insecurity rates in Canada, "interventions designed to increase food skills and promote gardening for food are important in reaching other public health goals such as increased vegetable and fruit consumption."⁷ These programs also have a great benefit towards decreasing social isolation and building mental wealth.⁸ Food skills programs and gardening can also improve coping skills, health behaviours and diet quality.⁸



PROOF – PROOF hosts current research on food insecurity including infographics on both the health and economic impacts associated with household food insecurity. They work to identify effective policy approaches that reduce household food insecurity. <http://proof.utoronto.ca/>

Dietitians of Canada (DC) – In 2016, DC released 3 documents addressing household food insecurity in Canada, including a background paper summarizing the current research in the area, a position statement and recommendations, and an executive summary highlighting research and policy interventions. www.dietitians.ca/Dietitians-Views/Food-Security/Household-Food-Insecurity.aspx

National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health (NCCDH) – In 2017, NCCDH published *Public Health Speaks: Upstream action on food insecurity*. This resource can be used to facilitate discussion on action for day-to-day practice, and interventions that address the root causes of food insecurity. <http://nccdh.ca/resources/entry/public-health-speaks-upstream-action-on-food-insecurity>

Upstream - is an independent organization based out of Saskatoon and Toronto that supports movement towards healthy societies through evidence-based, people-centred ideas. They focus on solutions that impact basic human needs such as adequate housing, nutritious food and support for early childhood development. www.thinkupstream.net/at_home

References:

1. Davis B, Tarasuk V (1994). Hunger in Canada. *Agriculture and Human Values* 11(4):50-57.
2. Dietitians of Canada. (2016). Prevalence, Severity and Impact of Household Food Insecurity: A Serious Public Health Issue. Retrieved from: <https://www.dietitians.ca/Downloads/Public/HFI-Background-DC-FINAL.aspx>
3. PROOF. (2018). Household Food Insecurity in Canada. Retrieved from: <http://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/>
4. Food Banks Canada (2016). *Hunger Count 2016*. Toronto: Food Banks Canada.
5. Huisken, A; Orr, S K.; Tarasuk, V. (2017). Adults' food skills and use of gardens are not associated with household food insecurity in Canada. *Can J Public Health*, [S.I.], v. 107, n. 6, p. e526-e532. ISSN 1920-7476. Available at: <http://journal.cpha.ca/index.php/cjph/article/view/5692>. Date accessed: 15 Mar. 2018.
6. University of Toronto. (2011) Do Food Banks Work? Retrieved from: <http://www.research.utoronto.ca/do-food-banks-work/>
7. PROOF. (2017). Food procurement, food skills and food insecurity. Retrieved on De 15, 2017 from: <http://proof.utoronto.ca/>
8. Provincial Health Services Authority. (2014). Healthy Built Environment Linkages. Toolkit for design, planning, health. British Columbia. Retrieved from: http://www.phsa.ca/Documents/linkagestoolkitrevisedoct16_2014_full.pdf