

Food Security

All Manitobans should have consistent access to the resources and knowledge necessary to enjoy a healthy diet, and have the right to purchase, grow, harvest, and eat food that is sustainable, ethically produced and culturally appropriate.

Household Food Insecurity

Household food insecurity means not having enough food to eat. People who experience food insecurity are more likely to experience malnutrition, infection, chronic disease, difficulty learning, social exclusion, and mental illness and depression.^{1,2}

There is a high incidence of food insecurity in Manitoba:

- Nearly 1 in 7 households in Manitoba experience household food insecurity³
- More than 1 in 5 Manitoba children experience household food insecurity⁴
- Since 2008 there has been a 58% increase in food bank use⁵

Household food insecurity data are collected through the Statistics Canada Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS). This survey excludes individuals experiencing homelessness as

well as individuals living on-reserve in Canada where it has been estimated that an average of 47 per cent of households with children are experiencing food insecurity.⁶ Indigenous people, people of colour, recent newcomers, lone-parent households, people with disabilities, those on social assistance, and those with low-paid and unstable work are more likely than others to be food insecure.⁷

Nearly two-thirds of food insecure households rely on employment as their main source of income.⁸ Minimum waged employment does not pay enough to meet basic needs, particularly in households with children.⁹ Someone who works full time at minimum wage takes home little more than \$1625 per month after taxes. Feeding a family of four a sufficiently nutritious diet costs \$880 per month.

Manitoba Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) benefits only cover about half the cost of recipients' food needs. A family of four receives \$480 for food through EIA, well below the \$880 needed. A single EIA participant receives \$117 per month for food, far short of the \$296 needed to eat well.^{10,11}

Individuals experiencing food insecurity do not have poor budgeting or food skills compared



Newcomer nutrition



Grow North Event – Food Matters Manitoba

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to food secure households: the issue is financial,¹² so increasing food or budgeting skills will not reduce food insecurity.¹³ However, when food insecure households have more money, they use it on basic needs like food, housing and clothing.¹⁴

Recommendations

Federal income benefits such as Old Age Security and the Canada Child Benefit have had positive, if limited, impacts on food household security.^{15,16,17} These federal programs demonstrate how important government transfers are, especially when they are augmented with provincial supports. The recommendations in the EIA and K-12 Education chapters will improve food security for hundreds of Manitoba families and individuals.

Regional Inequity

The high cost of food in Northern communities and gaps in the federal Nutrition North subsidy program led to the establishment of Manitoba's Northern Healthy Foods Initiative (NHFI) in 2004. NHFI seeks to increase food security in Manitoba's North by encouraging local food production and self-sufficiency. Local initiatives

include building greenhouses, establishing community gardens and freezer loan programs.¹⁸ The provincial government has also introduced the Affordable Foods in Remote Manitoba (AFFIRM) program to provide reduce costs of milk, fresh fruits and vegetables for retailers which is then passed along to community members. There are two Manitoban communities eligible for this subsidy (Churchill and Pukatawagan).¹⁹

Despite these investments, much more needs to be done. Colonization has caused great harm to Indigenous peoples, lands and food systems. Indigenous communities are continuing to be challenged by environmental contamination of the food supply, changes in animal migratory patterns, decreased density of species and lack of resources to cover hunting and fishing expenses as well as legal and policy barriers to accessing, sharing and consuming traditional and country foods.²⁰

The cost of healthy eating for a family of four is 46 per cent higher in Northern Manitoba than in Winnipeg, while in some parts of Southwestern Manitoba food costs are 15 per cent higher than in Winnipeg.²¹ The most recent Nutritious Food Basket data from 2017 has yet to be made available to the public.



Northern Greenhouse

An increase in resources, changes in legislation, and local leadership are needed to enhance access to and availability of nutritious, culturally appropriate foods in Northern and Indigenous communities.^{22 23}

Recommendations

- Increase funding for the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative from 1.247 million²⁴ to 5.45 million dollars in order to provide adequate resources needed to enhance the capacity of Northern communities to produce, harvest and process more foods locally,²⁵ increase land-based learning, and initiate economic development opportunities.
- Work with the federal government to remove policy barriers that limit the ability of Indigenous people to harvest and distribute country foods.
- Survey the cost of food throughout the province every two years and make these

data available to the public. Commit \$50,000 every two year to collecting and publishing these data.

Expenditure:

Northern Healthy Foods Initiative Increase: \$4.203M

Food Cost Survey: \$.05M

Nutrition and Diet-Related Disease

Changes to how we eat have led to increased diet-related disease costing the province billions of dollars annually. The cost of diabetes — considered to be a largely preventable disease — was estimated to be \$498 million in 2010 and is expected to reach \$639 million by 2020.²⁶

Although many Indigenous people in Manitoba are reclaiming traditional diets and cultural practices, there is much work to do to address environmental racism and policies that restrict the harvesting and sharing of country foods.²⁷

Newcomers experience dietary acculturation when they begin to take on the diet and

eating habits of their new place of residence and many also experience pressure to do so. This leads to a decline in health after only a few years of arriving.²⁸

Peer-led and culturally appropriate programs can improve knowledge of healthy eating but they are not adequately funded and there exist many gaps and barriers to their use. For example, traditional Indigenous land-based learning opportunities are resource intensive and out of reach for urban Indigenous people, while Newcomer food and nutrition programs tend to be centred in Winnipeg, especially in the North End.²⁹

According to preliminary research, young people in Manitoba are consuming less calcium, vitamin D and fibre than recommended, and are they are consuming more than double the recommended level of sodium. Approximately 90 per cent of youth may not be eating enough vegetables and fruit.³⁰

The Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba (CNCM) delivers over 4.5 million meals and snacks to approximately 28,000 students across 259 programs with funding from the Manitoba government. However, the approximately \$1,000,000 funding only covers a fraction of the needs and was only about half of what was requested by the CNCM. Many schools rely on existing staff, volunteers and the charitable sector to deliver meal and snack programs to hungry children.³¹

Recommendations

- Work with the federal government and the other provinces to create a universal K–12 school food and nutrition program, as per the recently created Food Policy for Canada. The cost of delivering this program in the province of Manitoba should be shared between the federal and provincial governments.³² This program should teach food growing, nutritious food preparation and provide culturally relevant and land-based learning opportunities for

youth in northern, urban, and rural areas such as in the Farm to School model.³³ This program would provide every student with good nutrition and ensure food literacy competencies are included in the school curricula.³⁴ See the APB chapter on K–12 Education for more details and increased expenditures.

- Contribute \$500,000 per year to developing programs and investing in infrastructure that enhances community members opportunities to grow, prepare, store and share traditional and country foods.

Increased Capital Expenditure: \$.5M

Generating Revenue

Recommendations

- Implement a tax on all sugar-sweetened beverages. Using the city of Philadelphia — with a population size similar to that of Manitoba, as an example, the province could generate over 75 million annually by implementing a sugar sweetened beverage tax.³⁵ Sugar sweetened beverage taxes have also reduce consumption of these products³⁶ and are expected to reduce the prevalence and cost of diseases like Type 2 diabetes.³⁷ Because sales taxes have a greater negative impact on people with low incomes, the revenue generated should be used to subsidize northern food prices and other programs such as the universal meal program highlighted in the Education K–12 chapter.

Please see Poverty Paper D for more on the health and financial impacts of poverty reduction measures.

Increased Revenue: \$75M

Total Operating Expenditures: \$4.25M

Total Capital Expenditures: \$.5M

Total Revenues: \$75M

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