

Community Matters

Food and Food Security



September 2023

Fall Edition

Edmonton Social Planning Council





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Community Matters

Welcome to the Fall Edition of our quarterly publication, Community Matters.

Community Matters aims to inform the community about social issues that impact citizens and connect the dots between social issues, evidence, and policy. We aim to use this space to give local agencies, ESPC volunteer writers, and staff members a voice.

Each edition will spotlight a specific social issue and demonstrate the intersectional nature and impact on equality. Our goal is to use evidence as we continue to inform on the issues affecting individuals and families.

For our Fall 2023 issue, we are focusing on Food and Food Security. Food is one of the basic necessities of life – we all need it to stay alive and maintain a healthy lifestyle. In addition to physical health, the act of preparing and cooking food is a boost to one's own mental health by increasing confidence, concentration, and happiness. Beyond that, food is also intertwined with culture and community. It is a way of expressing one's culture and sharing it with others through familiar foods. Newcomer populations often stay connected to their culture by preparing and eating the foods they are accustomed to.

Nevertheless, our community faces great challenges when it comes to food. Food insecurity is rising across Canada, which is being felt acutely within Edmonton. Food banks in Edmonton and other communities across Alberta have all been seeing dramatic increases in food bank visits, as well as challenges in keeping up with the supply needed to serve their clients. Food banks were originally established to be a temporary measure to meet emergency needs, but the demand has not let up in the subsequent years.

This issue seeks to bring the reader up to speed on the situation we as a society are facing, and explores a number of policy options to address rising levels of food insecurity. Inside you will find explorations of school nutrition programs, food access among prison populations, the importance of adequate incomes, the role of community gardens, diet and food security amongst university students as well as dignified food access among newcomer populations. We hope this issue will help guide conversations around food security and the solutions necessary to tackle this social problem.

Susan Morrissey
Executive Director, Edmonton Social Planning Council





Food Security: Terms and Definitions

Written by Brett Lambert

Research Officer (ESPC)

There are a number of terms and concepts that get used frequently within the food security sector and the social service agencies that provide food assistance to low-income and other marginalized communities.

The following terms and their definitions should help inform the reader and build a greater understanding for this issue of Community Matters.

Food Security: “when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food which meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life” (United Nations)

Food Insecurity: when individuals or families lack access to food due to financial, physical, or social barriers. The accessibility of food can occur at community and national levels as well as within individual households. Thus, food security achieved at the community level does not necessarily prevent individuals from experiencing household food insecurity.

Factors to consider when assessing food security include the availability and accessibility of food, alongside adequacy (i.e. nutritious, safe, and environmentally sustainable food) and acceptability (i.e. culturally acceptable food) (Toronto Metropolitan University) .

Food insecurity exists on a spectrum that can be divided into three categories: (Health Canada, 2020)

1. Marginal (concern about running out of food)

2. Moderate (compromise in quality or quantity of food)

3. Severe (missed meals, reduce food intakes, or multiple days without food)

Food sovereignty: “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agricultural systems. It transforms the idea of food as a commodity to food as a public good.”

Food sovereignty is based on seven pillars (People’s Food Policy Project, 2011):

1. Focuses on food for people
2. Values food providers
3. Localizes food systems
4. Puts control locally
5. Builds knowledge and skills
6. Works with Nature
7. Recognizes that food is sacred

Dignified Food Access: “means providing quality food choices, in a respectful way, in welcoming places.” It offers access to quality food on people’s terms and delivering it in a way that is free of stigma and judgment.

Dignified food access is based on three guiding principles: respect and trust (recognizing everyone’s needs are different and a one size fits all approach does not work), care and empathy (building relationships, treating people as human beings, cultural competency), and non-judgmental support (breaking down stigma, checking assumptions and biases) (Roots to Harvest, 2021).

“**Food Justice** seeks to ensure that the benefits and risks of where, what and how food is grown, produced, transported, distributed, accessed and eaten are shared fairly. Food justice represents a transformation of the current food system, including but not limited to eliminating disparities and inequities.” Food justice is about recognizing how power operates at multiple stages of the food system (Food Secure Canada).

Culturally Acceptable Food describes safe and nutritious foods that meet the diverse tastes and needs of customers based on their cultural identity. For example, Jewish and Muslim people would eat foods that adhere to Kosher and Halal practices, respectively. Every culture can have different or varying criteria for what is deemed culturally acceptable from their point of view (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention).

2022)

Types of Food Service Agencies

The following define the major types of food agencies that exist within the social services sector and lists key examples of Edmonton-based organizations.

Food Bank: a charitable organization that collects donated food and other essentials (such as toiletries), inventories and stores it, and distributes it to people as well as agencies – such as food pantries, soup kitchens, and shelters – that provide food directly to individuals in need. [8] Food banks typically rely on donations from the community, corporations, or support from their local United Way and seldom receive funding from governments for their operations (Bechtel, 2013).

The origins of food banks can be traced to the United States when retired businessman John van Hengel established the first food bank, St. Mary's Food Bank, in Phoenix, Arizona in 1967 as a response to hunger. [9] Since then, food banks have been established in cities across America and around the world. The first food bank to operate in Canada was Edmonton's Food Bank in 1981.

In addition to **Edmonton's Food Bank**, other food banks that operate in Edmonton include the **Campus Food Bank** (which serves the University of Alberta community), **The Pantry** (which serves the MacEwan University community), and the **Veterans Food Bank of Alberta** (which serves military veterans). There have also been transformations of the food bank hamper model with the introduction of the C5 Community Market, which allows clients to pick and choose the food items they need similar to shopping at a grocery store. This helps to support dignified food access.

Food Rescue: the practice of collecting fresh, edible food that would have otherwise gone to waste from restaurants, grocers, and other food establishments and distributing it to local social service agencies for people in need. Diverting this food is seen as a way of reducing food waste while addressing hunger (Food Rescue US). In Canada, 58% of food produced is lost each year (Waste Reduction Week Canada, 2012).

Within Edmonton, the Leftovers Foundation and Operation Fruit Rescue Edmonton are some of the major organizations undertaking food rescue work. Nationally, Second Harvest coordinates with partners across the country to undertake this work as well.

Community Gardens: an outdoor space that is used to grow fruits, vegetables, and other plants collaboratively. Community gardens are generally managed by a group of volunteers and can be located in urban, suburban, or rural neighbourhoods and may also be used for educational purposes with local communities and schools. Some community gardens may also support food banks and other charitable organizations (EcoLife, 2023).

In Edmonton, there are at least 73 community gardens on public land. [14] Due to increased interest in community gardens, 83 “pop-up” or temporary community gardens were developed between 2020 and 2022 as part of a City of Edmonton project. An additional 30 pop-up gardens were allocated in 2023 (City of Edmonton).

Sustainable Food Edmonton also supports and provides programming for 98 community gardens, 50 elementary schools, and 8 high schools in Edmonton and the surrounding area.

Community Kitchens (sometimes called collective kitchens) are community-based cooking programs where small groups of people get together to cook. These programs help communities share knowledge, resources, and food skills. They also help participants feel more connected to others in their community, build self-confidence in group settings, and can facilitate learning more about different types of foods, customs, and cultures (Alberta Health Services).

A number of agencies or community groups in Edmonton run community or collective kitchens as part of their programming, including The Mustard Seed, The Salvation Army Edmonton Centre of Hope, C5 Northeast Hub, and the Alberta Avenue Community League. Most recently, the Edmonton Public Library opened The Kitchen, which is a learning and community kitchen facility, in their Stanley A. Milner branch.

Soup Kitchens are a place where free food (traditionally soup and bread but can be other meals) is served to people in need. Soup kitchens are usually run by charitable or religious organizations. In addition to providing food aid, soup kitchens can also be a place of refuge and community, particularly for people who are experiencing homelessness (Old Father's House Soup Kitchen).

Community Pantries: Similar to the concept of a "little free library," community pantries refer to small structures built in

neighbourhoods retrofitted from discarded newspaper boxes or kitchen cabinets and stocked with non-perishable food. They operate based on a philosophy of "take what you need, give what you can" (Bielski, 2022).

Community pantries have sprung up across Canada and have been spotted in a handful of neighbourhoods in Edmonton, including one set up in the Oliver neighbourhood (Hingston, 2021).

Community fridges: similar to a community pantry, community fridges refer to a refrigerator operating in a public space stocked with free food, which can include fresh produce and home-cooked meals, that anyone can take. They are also operated by volunteers who maintain and restock food with community donations (DiBenedetto, 2021).

Community Fridges started in Europe in 2014 and have since spread throughout the world. Examples of community fridges in Edmonton include a community fridge stocked with meals from local restaurants in the Mill Woods neighbourhood (Wiebe, 2019) as well as a community fridge operated by Food Not Bombs Edmonton, which operates outside of Earth's General Store on Whyte Avenue (Community Fridge in Edmonton).

The provision of the aforementioned food services among established charitable organizations and smaller grassroots efforts can vary widely. Many of these services help to build community by addressing the needs of marginalized, isolated, or otherwise hard to reach populations. Collaboration among all these initiatives is necessary to work towards effective solutions.

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What is known about the current state of food insecurity?

Written by Brett Lambert
Research Officer (ESPC)

Food security has become a particularly pressing issue in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, which challenged global supply chains and fueled record inflation. The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 also contributed to high inflation (Dalhousie University, 2023). While the global public health emergency was lifted by the World Health Organization in May 2023, the lingering effect of inflation means that food prices remain high.

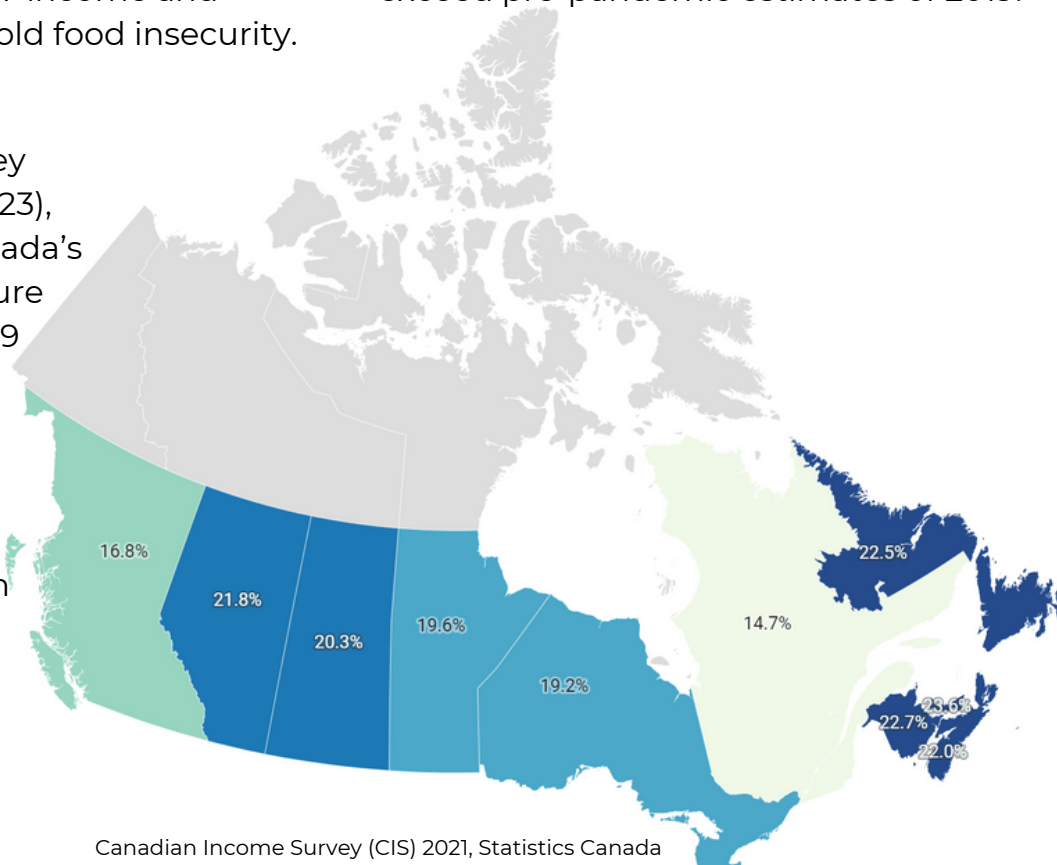
These global conditions have placed challenges on Canada's food security, where low-income and unaffordability fuel most household food insecurity.

According to data from Statistics Canada's Canadian Income Survey (University of Toronto. PROOF 2023), nearly 1 in 5 people (18.4%) in Canada's 10 provinces lived in a food insecure household in 2022. That equals 6.9 million people.

This is an increase from 2021 when it was 15.9% (Tarasuk et al., 2022). In Alberta, 21.8% of households were food insecure in 2022, which equals 954,000 people and is more than three percentage points higher than the national average. .

Alberta is the fifth highest province in prevalence of food insecurity (Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland & Labrador, and New Brunswick rank higher)

Alberta has the highest level of severe food insecurity (e.g. skipped meals, reduced food intake, or going days without food due to a lack of money) at 6.6%. All measures of food insecurity exceed pre-pandemic estimates of 2019.

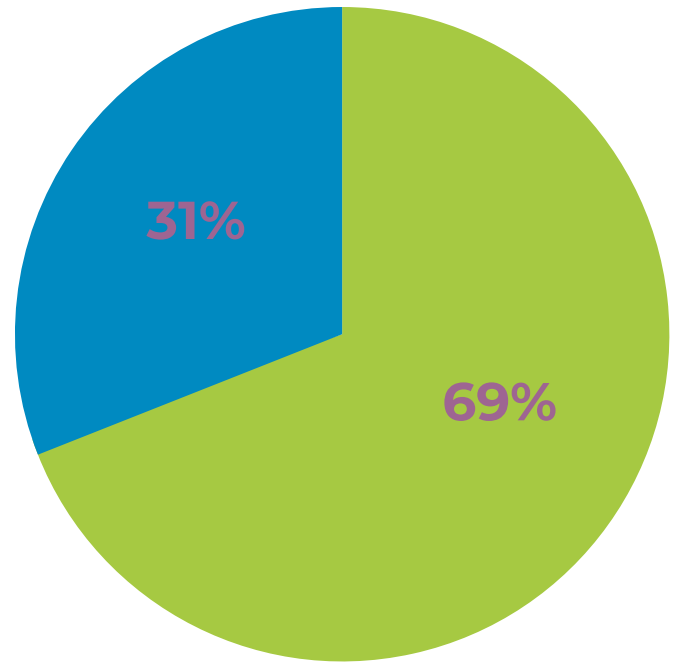


Amongst Children

1 in 4 children (24.3%) under 18 in the ten provinces lived in food insecure households in 2022. This equals 1.8 million children.

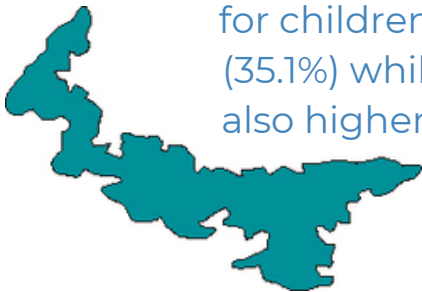


Over two thirds of these children were in moderately or severely food-insecure households.



This is an increase from 1.4 million children who lived in a food insecure household in 2021.

The highest prevalence of food insecurity for children was in Prince Edward Island (35.1%) while Alberta is at 27.2%, which is also higher than the national average of 24.3%.



Food Insecurity is also racialized

Black and Indigenous people experience food insecurity at rates of **39.2%** and **33.4%** respectively.

This is more than **double** the white population (i.e. non-Indigenous and non-visible minority), which is at 15.3%.



Food bank use is on the rise

Just as food insecurity on a national scale is high, food bank usage within Edmonton has also been on the rise. According to Edmonton's Food Bank 2022 Annual Report, they helped an average of 30,787 people per month in 2022 (Edmonton Food Bank, 2023). This is a 45% increase in food bank usage between 2020 and 2022. About 40% of those served were children.

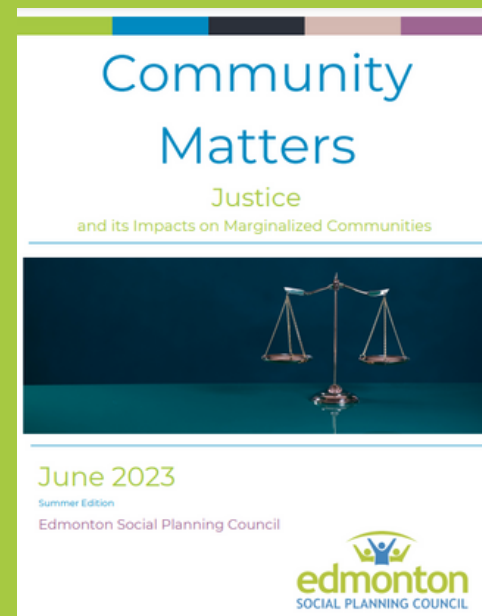
The first half of 2023 shows food bank usage has continued this upward trend. Between January to May 2023, they have seen a 26% average increase during this time period when compared to January to May 2022, serving an average of close to 35,000 per month (Edmonton Food Bank, 2023).

Would you or your agency like to get involved in Community Matters?

There are multiple ways that you or your organization can contribute to our upcoming publication in December, which will focus on the Social Safety Net.

Our planning for the December edition will be starting soon!

For more information or to express your interest please contact:
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Growing Community Through Community Gardens

Written by Cassandra Sperling (Canada Summer Jobs ESPC Student)

Imagine a widely varied group of people coming together regularly to work together towards a common goal. They are of different ages, careers, backgrounds, abilities, and do not share political or religious values. Still, they spend time together each week, working, sharing food, and volunteering towards a goal bigger than themselves. The result is that they now say, “we’re all friends here” and share stories of supporting and celebrating each other through the challenging and beautiful seasons of life. Can you imagine such a space? It sounds like a utopia, yet this is a snapshot of one such community in Edmonton: the Green and Gold Community Garden located on the University of Alberta’s South Campus.

The Green and Gold Garden was founded on a simple premise: a volunteer-powered organic garden that sells produce to raise funds for a global cause. While the overarching mandate is to support women through the [Tubahumurize](#)

[Association](#) in Rwanda, the local fruit of this labour is the growth of a thriving community and gathering space.

Volunteers have a plethora of reasons for getting involved in the garden space: for their physical, social, mental wellbeing, as an opportunity to give back, as a way to learn about organic farming practices (mulching, succession planting, no or low-till planting, etc.), to share knowledge with others, to connect with children or seniors, to access growing space for organic, nutritious food, as an antidote to social isolation, to remember lost loved ones, or to connect with the soil and mother earth. Ultimately, the underlying threads that draw people in are the connections they make, both with others in the community and with the land.

Land-based community is built on the foundation of an open, central gathering space. Many volunteers talk about the sense of well-being at the garden, as well as the support they have received from the volunteer gardener community. Gardeners of different ages have heart to heart conversations while picking peas or weeding the tomatoes.

Gardeners who have lost a loved one come to the garden to mourn, rest, and be supported by others and the land.

Participating in the garden community offers a rich texture and routine to people's lives through the seasonality of the garden and land: the thrill of spring, the hard work and consistency of summer, the joy of harvesting in fall, followed by a winter season for much needed rest. It is a place where intergenerational relationships thrive: one volunteer discussed how she gets to be like a grandmother to the herds of children who run around, play, and help work in the garden. In addition to relationships with the seniors and other gardeners, these children will grow up with a connection to the land and an appreciation and knowledge of where their food comes from. How many 4-year-olds do you know who can name almost every plant in the garden?

Of course, not everything is perfect in the garden; the volunteers hope to build a gazebo one day that would help those who might need more rest (such as seniors) enjoy the garden more easily. There are other challenges as well, such as accessibility in the garden, both for those with limited mobility and for those who cannot bike or drive to the garden (transit routes can be tricky and include a longer walk). Thus, the gardeners continue to work towards the

vision of an expanding inclusivity and access to the land in this particularly special land-based community.

At the garden, volunteers share their abilities, backgrounds, experiences, and can experiment together with which foods might grow and thrive. One of the highlights for those involved in the garden are the community potlucks, where community members bring a wide variety of tasty dishes made with the organic produce grown in the garden. As a result, some of the volunteers have taught each other how to make cultural dishes they hold close to their hearts, like samosas and rice wraps.

Gardeners also influence the food that is grown in the garden: one volunteer from Hong Kong suggested they grow a plant familiar to her called shark fin melon. Thanks to volunteers from India, the garden now has fenugreek and red carrot varieties. With such a diverse knowledge base, sharing wisdom happens naturally: for example, a Japanese volunteer offered her knowledge in how to string tomato plants, which has greatly increased the tomato harvest. One University of Alberta professor, Dr. Elizabeth Onyango, has begun to welcome newcomers from Kenya and other African countries into the garden to experiment with which culturally familiar foods can be grown here, such as amaranth and sagaa (a nightshade).



Especially for refugees and newcomers who may not feel a sense of home and familiarity with the land, gardening can be a powerful way of putting down roots, both symbolically and tangibly. Simultaneously, growing culturally familiar foods can help people honor and continue their own traditions, norms, and ways of eating. While a community garden may not be the answer to food insecurity, it is an approach that creates heartfelt connections between the gardeners and the land: this is one building block of food dignity.

As Margaret, one of the volunteers said,

“we feed the land and the land feeds us.”

She described learning from Indigenous worldviews on relationship and reciprocity, for example, through Robin Wall Kimmerer’s book, *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

“Action on behalf of life transforms. Because the relationship between self and the world is reciprocal, it is not a question of first getting enlightened or saved and then acting. As we work to heal the earth, the earth heals us.”

— Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*

When you step onto the land around the garden, it will change you if you let it: you might notice yourself walking a little slower, breathing a little deeper, observing the bees and pollinators dancing in flight around fragrant flowers. The land conveys a sense of peace and invitation: it is a welcoming place for people to simply exist as they are. One of the underlying themes of the garden is the way that connection to the land can heal and enliven us.

In the garden, the land itself is the teacher. The abundance of food grown is a gift and an expression of love: the love of volunteers caring for the land, as well as for each other and others globally, and an expression of the land’s love for us.



photos in this article were taken by Cassandra during their visit to the garden

The following short story inspired Cassandra to write the poem on the next page.



Once upon a time, I had a friend who was 7. Let's call him Tony. Now Tony was a normal kid, always full of life and smiles and about a million and a half questions. He and his sister often played at the park. As I became friends with him, he sometimes told me stories about how he had moved from Europe. One day, we said he wanted to thank me for being his friend. He brought me a plateful of homemade pastries. Unable to refuse or persuade him that I didn't need such a thoughtful gift, I accepted. As we sat there, eating these pastries together, little Tony said that he and his mom had made them especially for me. Then he oh-so-innocently shattered my world and mentioned that they had gotten the package from the foodbank.

Honestly, I shouldn't have been shocked. Intellectually, I know that hunger is widespread across demographics, locations, and people groups. One in 5 children in Canada face food insecurity. And yet, I was so caught off guard that it was also a reality for my little friend. When you consider the overwhelming, impersonal issue of 'food insecurity', do you see the 'issue' with a human face? From that point on, I consider my friend Tony whenever I am tempted to see "issues" impersonally. Despite his circumstances, Tony shared with me, and that kind of generosity is heartwarming and beautiful.

Access to culturally honoring and nutritious food is not a privilege, it is a human right. Isn't it natural to respond to wonderful things like food with gratitude and generosity? Food is cultural, social and relational: beyond traditional food security notions of access to food, food dignity goes further and includes the ability to connect and share food with others. Tony's act of sharing pastries is a generous demonstration of food dignity and abundance.

Ode to Food: a meditation for eating

Written by Cassandra Sperling

a million flavours, textures, aromas surround us
from beets to basil to beans to bright berries,
just pause for a second and appreciate what it is like to enjoy food,
to feel nourished,
to savour the infinite chorus of flavours,
to enjoy connecting with others over a good meal

take a bite
with awe and wonder

use your imagination now
picture all the connections, the energy it took
from seed to plate, first from
sun - plant - animal - life- death - fungi - plant again
knitting a web of energy that welcomes us to eat and embrace
A web that every living thing will eventually nourish, when it rests and returns to dust
In this miracle, death is absorbed into new life and the cycle continues

take a step back from what we grow & realize
the earth has also conspired to grow you
that you were formed in the dust of this place
life breathed into you
against all probability and owing to a million complex relationships
& isn't that miracle enough?

lose yourself awhile
in the vast interconnectedness of this place: its waters, forests, mountains and ocean depths
and stars
& let the anxious, rapid ways of humankind seem small
see yourself as part of something bigger
a part of the interconnected web of life perhaps

Food Security and Income Security are Deeply Intertwined

Written by Brett Lambert
Research Officer (ESPC)

In wealthy countries like Canada where food is usually widely available and well-stocked on grocery store shelves, the existence of food insecurity experienced among households is directly tied to income insecurity (Ripley, 2023). Whether the source of income a household relies on is from employment, social assistance, or other types of government benefits, an inadequate income that does not cover the cost of living – especially food – means that food insecurity is more likely to occur.

In a time of high inflation where the cost of living is putting pressure on household budgets, living on low and stagnant incomes means being able to afford groceries becomes that much more of a challenge.

Knowing that being unable to afford food is a main driver of food insecurity in Canada, a crucial tool to address food security is to boost household incomes by giving people money so they can purchase the food they need to feed themselves and their loved ones.

The Government of Canada seems to be cognizant of this reality when they introduced a temporary boost to the GST rebate in July 2023 called the Grocery Rebate (Government of Canada, 2023). The same was true for the Government of Alberta with the unveiling of \$600 affordability payments to eligible Albertans over the age of 65, children



under the age of 18, and recipients of provincial income support programs like AISH between January and June 2023 (Government of Alberta, 2023). While these measures are welcome and no doubt provided necessary relief for households struggling financially, the temporary nature of these cash transfers does not meaningfully address systemic issues related to income security and policies that could improve the situation for the future. This article will touch upon a number of areas where an adequate income can make a difference.

Employment Income

For too long, wages earned from employment, especially for low-income workers, have not kept pace with the cost of living. The minimum wage in Alberta is \$15 per hour and has been frozen at this rate since 2018. Meanwhile, the living wage in

Edmonton – which is the full-time hourly wage that a primary income earner must make to provide for themselves, their families, and reach basic financial security – has risen from \$16.48 per hour in 2018 to \$21.40 per hour by 2022 (Edmonton Social Planning Council, 2022).

This widening gap between the minimum wage and the living wage results in a significant number of low-wage workers – including those who work full-time – having challenges affording groceries. Research from the University of Toronto’s PROOF research institute shows that a higher minimum wage is linked with reductions in food insecurity. For every one dollar increase in the minimum wage, the odds of experiencing food insecurity was lowered by 5% (University of Toronto, PROOF 2022).

Child Benefits

Child benefits are a pivotal policy intervention for reducing not only poverty, but the prevalence of food insecurity. The Canada Child Benefit (CCB) – which provides monthly payments to families for each child under the age of 18 – has been an effective program for improving educational outcomes, building stronger social cohesion, and reducing food insecurity.

Currently, the CCB provides more money to families with children under 6 years of age (those with children who are 6 years old and up receive a lower amount). Research from the University of Toronto’s PROOF shows the impact of this extra money resulted in a reduction in the probability of food insecurity by nearly 3 percentage points, from 24.3% to 21.4%. This impact was particularly noticeable amongst families with low incomes, renters, and lone-parent families. For lone parent families, there was a 6 percentage point lower probability of food insecurity. Their findings suggest that a more generous CCB which targets families with the lowest incomes –

regardless of the age of their children – would further reduce their risk of food insecurity (University of Toronto PROOF, 2023).

Seniors Benefits

Just as robust child benefits have been proven to reduce food insecurity among children, the same findings extend to the prevalence of food insecurity among seniors when they become eligible for benefits upon turning 65 years of age

The University of Toronto’s PROOF’s own research outlines the stark differences in levels of food insecurity when older adults become eligible to receive Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS). They are key drivers in substantially decreasing food insecurity among the poorest seniors in Canada. In their analysis of the prevalence of food insecurity amongst low-income single-person households between the ages of 55 and 74 (those making less than \$20,000 per year), turning 65 and being eligible for these programs has shown a 15 percentage point drop in food insecurity (University of Toronto PROOF, 2016).

Single Working-Age Adults

A major gap in our social safety gap are benefits for single working-age adults who are unattached adults aged 18 to 64 living alone without children or a spouse. While a number of benefits exist for children and seniors, for example, government benefits for single adults are limited apart from GST rebates or the Climate Action Incentive.

Research from Community Food Centres Canada (CFCC) shows that single working-age adults experience the highest and

deepest level of poverty in Canada, with over 1 in 5 (22%) single adults living below the poverty line (three times higher than the national average). In addition to limited social safety, they are making ends meet in a precarious labour market relying on low-wage, part-time, temporary jobs without benefits or stability.

These single adults make up to 38% of all food-insecure households in Canada, with 61% of them severely disabled living alone below the poverty rate.

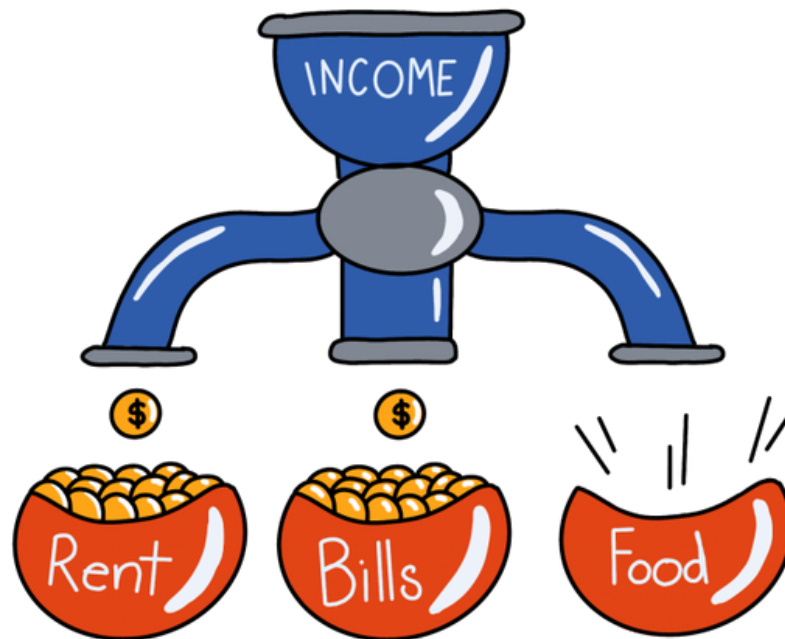
In order to address food insecurity and the wider living conditions of single working-age adults, CFCC recommends that the existing Canada Workers Benefit be expanded and enhanced into a refundable tax credit called the Canada Working-Age Supplement, which would allow working-age single adults living in poverty to receive the supplement whether they are attached to the labour market or not (Community Food Centres Canada, 2023).

The Need for Sustainable and Long-Term Solutions

The overwhelming body of evidence shows that having a low-income greatly increases the risk of household food insecurity and that providing adequate incomes is an important measure towards reducing food insecurity. Emergency food assistance such as food banks, community kitchens, and other initiatives are obviously important

measures towards addressing immediate and pressing needs, but adequate incomes are a long-term solution and is crucial when it comes to strengthening the social safety net.

The positive effects of benefits targeted towards children and seniors need to be acknowledged and applied similarly to other groups if we are to meaningfully address the alarming rise of food insecurity in recent years.



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When Tables are Bare... Edmonton's Multicultural Health Brokers are there

Written by Celia Jingyi Luo &
Mary Pat Barry (MCHB)

As fall approaches, farmers and gardeners around Edmonton start to reap what has been sown. And yet, in a place of relative 'plenty', the tables of many families are tragically bare.

Edmonton's not alone. Unprecedented inflation has caused food insecurity rates to increase across Canada in 2022. It's estimated 21.8% - one-in-five Albertans - live in food-insecure households (PROOF, 2023). Alberta has one of the highest rates of food insecurity in Canada, second only to the Atlantic provinces. Moreover, food insecurity is racialized, disproportionately affecting newcomers and refugee ethnocultural families.

Our Approach to Food Security

For more than 25 years, Multicultural Health Brokers Cooperative (MCHB) has worked to enhance the health and wellbeing of ethnocultural families.

Many of our cultural brokers (community health workers) have, themselves, lived through the immigrant and refugee experience. Consequently, they have firsthand knowledge of the social, economic, and language difficulties immigrants and refugees face. Based on this understanding, we deliver trauma-informed, culturally supportive, holistic, and person-centric services. We strive to meet people where they are, providing what they need.

While addressing immediate, short-term needs is a priority, the vision of universal food security is what drives the MCHB. Our philosophy is simple: all people, regardless of circumstances, should have access to good food and welcoming spaces. Moreover, the right to food is not about charity; it's about enabling the capacity for people to feed themselves with dignity.



In pursuit of this community-enhancing vision, the MCHB is pursuing four actionable focus areas:

 <p>FEED</p>	 <p>GROW</p>	 <p>KHAIR FOR ALL INNOVATE</p>	 <p>The PERSIMMON Project ADVOCATE</p>
<p>Grocery Run- Responding to urgent community priorities and needs</p>	<p>Growing Opportunities- Food access. Cultural foodways. Community.</p>	<p>Co-creating food security strategies grounded in community strengths & aspirations.</p>	<p>Knowledge mobilization, research, tools, reports and more.</p>

Respond to urgent needs and community priorities via The Grocery Run.

Support food access and cultural foodways by connecting families to growing spaces.

Use food to co-create social enterprise pilots built on community strengths and aspirations.

Share awareness, understanding, knowledge mobilization, research, and policy support.

Feed First: The Grocery Run

Started as an emergency food access program in 2017 by the MCHB, the **Grocery Run** addresses the food insecurity needs of newcomer and refugee families – particularly expectant mothers (Quintanilha et al., 2019) The Grocery Run is a University of Alberta Community-University Partnership and a research-informed effort. The program initially focused on the African community and has since expanded to other immigrant populations due to the prevalence of food insecurity within this demographic (Wakefield, 2017)

To optimize the power of the community collective, partnerships were formed between the **Multicultural Family Resource Society, Edmonton's Food Bank, the Leftovers**

Foundation and the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights.

Designed to complement rather than compete with other initiatives, the Grocery Run uses a combination of food rescue and local food procurement to provide primarily fresh food. It sorts and packages hampers which are picked up or delivered to families and individuals served by the MCHB. Culturally appropriate and nutritious fruits, vegetables, and other perishable foods are provided to support those suffering with chronic poverty and who are often further challenged in accessing free food due to language barriers.

Grow What You Know

The opportunity to grow the food you know, enjoy and use is food dignity in practice. While many newcomer families have experience in agriculture, farming, animal husbandry and food-related businesses from their home country, the previously strong connection to the land is often something they miss in their new homes. Food security in this population means being able to grow, share, produce, and prepare culturally appropriate foods. Growing in urban farms or community gardens contributes to knowledge and cultural exchange, and the successful settlement of newcomers (Brady et al., 2020).

Strength-Based Innovation

The ability of food to bring people together, share cultural wealth and reflect pride can be a basis for social and economic benefit. Khair for All, a food box social enterprise pilot that ran from November 2021 to October 2022, is an example of a potential business opportunity designed to provide affordable food options and improved food access for families with a tight food budget.

Advocating for Systemic Change

While addressing urgent and immediate needs is essential, effectively addressing chronic poverty and food insecurity is a complex pursuit requiring long-term commitment. Understanding the need to work together, in 2023 we became a member of the Good Food Organizations working with the Community Food Center Canada. Connecting with other like-minded organizations, we are positioned as part of a national movement fighting food insecurity and poverty across Canada.

The Need for Dignified Food Access

No one wants a handout. Unfortunately, stigma and deep feelings of shame are often provoked when accessing emergency food. How we offer help affects the feelings of those receiving support. For example, stigmatization and shame can be magnified if people are forced to line up or prove their needs.

Food dignity is based on trust – and devoting time and energy to developing trusting relationships is something we strive to achieve (Roos to Harvest, 2021). Ensuring people feel safe and respected when they access services is our goal. As many MCHB clients arrived in Canada as refugees and from war-torn countries, understanding the implications of trauma is essential. Under duress, protective instincts might be triggered resulting in unusual flight, fight, and freeze behaviours that may be misunderstood and end up increasing tensions. Adopting trauma-informed approaches throughout the process is essential to dignified service (The Persimmon Project, 2021).



Help us realize food security in Edmonton

The right to food is not about charity. Food security is about enabling the capacity of people to feed themselves with dignity. We have a plan; we're taking action; and we would be grateful for your help to achieve our vision. There's lots you can do:

- Donate fresh and perishable foods from your store, garden or business on Thursday mornings and Friday afternoons. Drop off at: 9538-107 Avenue, NW, Edmonton or call Grocery Run at 825-333-4255.
- Volunteer – call 825-333-4255 to discuss.
- Donate financially. Support our [GoFundMe Campaign](#). Donations are gratefully accepted.
- Learn more: Check us out at <https://mchb.org/food-dignity/>
- Open doors and help us grow awareness. We'd love to make a presentation to your organization.

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School Nutrition Program and its Benefits and Limitations

Written by Brett Lambert
Research Officer (ESPC)

A crucial way of addressing hunger for school-aged children is through school nutrition programs. These programs provide nutritious snacks and/or meals to students in need while they are attending school. Without access to a healthy meal, students do not have the ability to focus and learn. According to dietitians, students learn best when they eat every two or three hours during the hours they are awake (Rutherford, 2022). Students enrolled in schools with a universal breakfast program had fewer discipline problems, better attendance, and improved psychosocial well-being (Food Research & Action Center).

The delivery of these programs to schools in need across Canada is a patchwork and Alberta is no exception. Student participation rates vary

widely, and Alberta has some of the lowest with only 18% of Alberta's schools having access to a government-funded school food program, one of the lowest participation rates in the nation as only 5% of all students participate in a school food program (Ruetz, 2022). To address these inequities, calls for a national school food program have been increasing. The Government of Canada announced in its 2022 federal budget a plan to create and implement a national school food program. Public consultation with stakeholders has been ongoing and seeks to consider the local and regional needs so the program is not a cookie cutter, or one size fits all approach (Aziz, 2023).

The Government of Alberta's School Nutrition Program currently helps about 40,000 students in schools with a daily meal (Government of Alberta). The program started as a pilot in 2016 and has steadily expanded through the years (Gilligan & de Castillo, 2016) (CBC News, 2018) (French, 2023). For the 2022/23 school year, the province allocated \$20 million to the program (Maimann, 2019). While students who are part of the program receive a daily meal from the government-funded program, other meal programs provided by non-profits, service clubs, or private funding may only be available two or three times a week or to a limited number of students within a school (Babych, 2022). With rising food costs and increasing demand for school breakfast programs being felt across the province, it is crucial that robust and predictable funding is set aside to ensure students thrive in an optimal learning environment (Zielinski 2022) (Johnson 2022).

Working towards a national school food program has the potential to reach more students than the current system and could improve educational outcomes for children who are hungry while attending school. In fact, the program polls high among the general public, with 84% of Canadians saying the federal government should make good on their promise and follow through with the program as soon as possible (Breakfast Club of Canada, 2023).

Nevertheless, even with the successful implementation of a universal school nutrition program, household food security challenges would persist. Programs of this nature feed children for the days schools are in session, but their food needs would still persist during times where kids are not in school, such as evenings after school, weekends, holiday school closures, and summer breaks. These food needs would also extend to the rest of their families, such as parents or older siblings. Adequate incomes for households also need to be taken into account to meaningfully address food insecurity, which is the subject of our income security article on page 20.



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Higher Education, Lower Quality Diets

Written by Janell Uden

Research Services and Capacity Building Coordinator (ESPC)

Attending college or university to receive higher education is a dedication many young adults make once graduating high school. Making this transition from adolescence into young adulthood is not seamless for most. This is due to a hard learning curve of increased workload, lack of time, increased independence, and for the focus of this article, overseeing their own dietary choices

Some foods are more nutritional than others, and there is extensive literature that assesses the nutrients consumed in a student's diet influences academic achievement either positively, or negatively depending on the food choices made (Farahbakhsh et al., 2017). Knowing this, one would think that ideally many university students would aim to consume a well-balanced diet to support their educational aspirations.

However, for many university students, nutrition is not at the forefront of their minds when making food choices. When making decisions on what to eat, students are primarily focused on convenience, taste and cost (Marquis et al., 2018). There are two different sides that predominantly affect student's abilities to consume adequately nutritional meals and snacks. The first is income security, with rising costs of tuition and cost of living, university students often do not have the budget to purchase fresh fruits, vegetables, or meats to consume under their tight budgets. The second is a lack of knowledge and time for food preparation.



The number of students who are experiencing food insecurity continue to rise.

The University of Alberta food bank used to give out about 40-60 food hampers a week before 2019, which rose to 150-200 per week by 2022 and reported in 2023 are serving up to 1,000 students monthly (Wong, 2022; Chacon, 2022; Ali, 2023).

While many campuses across Canada have food banks, they are not a permanent solution as the demand for food bank services continues to increase as the cost of both living and education rise. The eating patterns amongst university students who are experiencing food insecurity often lack variety, nutrients and some of these students skip meals entirely to save money (Marquis et al., 2018). Many studies reviewed for this article reported that nearly all students were only eating about 1-2 servings of fruits and vegetables per day, rather than the 7 that the Canada Food Guide recommends. Students who experience food insecurity do not have the means to be able to purchase the fruits and vegetables necessary to maintain a healthy diet and not all food banks are able to always provide enough or even any to them. Food insecurity amongst university students has many effects, including the previously stated effect on academic performance and obvious undernourishment, it is linked to obesity, mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression and aggression and poor self-image (Marquis et al., 2018).

For students who live in residence, although they do not have to spend time preparing or shopping for food, meals are typically served buffet style which presents challenges such as overeating and making unhealthy food choices, despite having healthier options available (LaCaille et al., 2011). Even when convenient and healthy foods are available, they are not always chosen. Dining halls provide a variety of choices, but students may still not find foods they like within these choices that would make their meals nutritionally balanced. This is not even addressing cultural food needs for many students from a variety of ethnocultural backgrounds. Additionally, some residences require students to return to their residence for each meal which are typically on the outskirts of campus. When a student must make a choice between spending time walking to and from their residence (especially in the cold winter months) or using some of their meal credit money, or actual money, on a nearby fast-food joint in a campus building closer to their classes or study space, many will choose the latter. One previous residence advisor at the University of Alberta said that some students she knew also opted for the 5 day a week dining program, to save money. This dining program was intended for those who return home on the weekends; however, some students use it to cut costs and either skip meals entirely or will purchase small snacks or one meal to sustain themselves on the weekend.

For students who live on their own, they are less likely to have the time, effort or knowledge to prepare properly nutritious meals. Oberne et al. (2020) assessed the relationship between health literacy and dietary practices among college students and found that knowledge and understanding of the importance of maintaining a healthy, well-balanced diet was a predictor of fruit and vegetable consumption among college students. Studies do show that young adults have much stronger food skills if they regularly participated in food-related activities before leaving their parental home (Seabrook et al., 2019). Even if students make the time to cook, and have budgeted for groceries accordingly, many students do not own vehicles which makes purchasing groceries difficult or expensive. The University of Alberta has buses that take students to cheaper grocery stores further away from campus, as all the ones close by are significantly more expensive than others (Stillger, 2023). Typically, the term “food apartheid” is used to define areas where those who reside there have low incomes, as well as restricted access to grocery stores. For students living on campus at the U of A or in the nearby communities, this means that even when students living on campus don’t have an easy way to get groceries to begin with, the prices of the grocery stores in their neighbourhood may make them feel as if they are living in a food apartheid economically.

Students are focused on achieving their academic goals and will be some of the brightest young minds in future generations. Getting an education shouldn’t mean adding the additional health risks from lacking a proper diet such as diabetes, heart disease, stroke and cancer (WHO 2015). This disparity is much more of a risk than anyone is paying

attention to, and action is needed to help fix this issue amongst the student population.

Some recommendations from Drexel University (2021) include a four-level approach.

Level 1: Emergency Food

Level 2: Access to Assistance Programs and Resources

Level 3: Community Based Support (Mutual Aid)

Level 4: Address Systemic Issues (Economic Justice)

Level 1 is addressing immediate tactics to solve hunger in the student population. This includes ready to eat healthy meals in a fresh food pantry, ensuring a cultural diversity of foods available on campus, fresh produce, healthy options with low sodium, no added sugar and whole wheat choices, an online sign-up for these programs to reduce stigma, as well as no means testing. No means testing is not requiring proof of need for accessing these services.

Level 2 is to proactively address students who may need help and include strategies such as information sharing, this could appear either as a university course teaching about food preparation, budgeting, and nutrition which could be taken for university credit. Another strategy in level 2 is public assistance application support by faculty.

Additionally, ensuring there are places to shop for healthy and affordable food on campus, as well as offering spaces for food preparation on campus could further support these proactive measures.

Level 3 focuses on community based, mutual support. This means both giving and support are reciprocal and a few ways to incorporate this into solving food security are free or low-cost childcare for students with children, community gardens and garden education, community refrigerators that are provided, maintained and promoted by universities so students can take or leave food as needed, and supporting local food systems which can include holding farmers markets on campus or supporting local food producers and campus meal spaces to reduce food costs.

The last suggestion given by Drexel University for level 3 surrounds student organization events. Addressing the changes that can be made in this section include providing better funding for student organizations so healthier food options can be provided at gatherings, fix event policies and restrict to healthier foods being served, offer to go boxes (reusable or compostable) as well as having free food alerts which let students know there is left over food from an event before it is just disposed.

Level 4 addresses the larger systemic issues that need to be addressed to make an impact on food security. This includes affordable tuition, affordable housing, affordable food, living wage employment, adequate graduate and practicum student wages, policy changes regarding mandatory meal plans and student athlete compensation, and lastly addressing discriminatory systems and policies that perpetuate food insecurity amongst students.

In conclusion, although a well balanced, nutritional diet is needed for university students to fuel their academic aspirations and safeguard their health, it is not always accessible both economically or in terms of health literacy. There are some actions that can be taken to improve student's consumption of healthy foods, and both universities and governments should take steps to implement some of the changes highlighted.



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Who Deserves Food Justice? An Interrogation of Food Within Canadian Prisons

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Introduction

Food justice “seeks to ensure that the benefits and risks of where, what and how food is grown, produced, transported, distributed, accessed and eaten are shared fairly” (Food Secure Canada, n.d.). Power dynamics within the food system both creates and shapes marginalization. Power is evident in who produces food and what type of food is produced, who has access to land and means of production, who has access to healthy, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food and who does not, and who makes decisions about food (Food Secure Canada, n.d.).

Food justice is a powerful lens to interrogate food within the prison system. Pre-determined menus mean incarcerated people have a notable lack of control over what they eat, and the proliferation of low-quality meals means they cannot access healthy, nutritious, and culturally appropriate foods. Food is more than just fuel for our bodies, it holds a lot of meaning. Food may be associated with cherished memories, from the everyday rituals of life to special celebrations. It brings comfort when we are sick or sad. It is social and can be a site of connection between people (Impact Justice, 2020). Food justice affects not only our physical health, but also our mental health, relationships, sense of self, and well-being.

Power dynamics within food systems in Canadian prisons raises an important question: **who deserves food justice?** One may argue that poor food is part of the “punishment” of being incarcerated. In other words, incarcerated people do not deserve good food because of the choices they have made. However, healthy food is a human right. A lack of good food within prisons is dehumanizing, perpetuates injustice in already marginalized communities, and inhibits incarcerated peoples’ ability to integrate back into the community.

What do people eat in prison?

Food in federal prisons is prepared through a “cook-chill” method, which means food is cooked elsewhere, chilled, and then re-heated in the institution. Incarcerated individuals have limited say over what is placed on their tray (Wilson, 2023). A formerly incarcerated person described food in Canadian prisons as “mediocre at best” (John Howard Society of Edmonton, 2020). This person described that meals had few or low variety of fresh vegetables. Food was often bland and overcooked. In some cases, they were even served spoiled food. Incarcerated individuals never went hungry, but the food was undesirable (John Howard Society of Edmonton, 2020). Wilson (2023), who surveyed 43 formerly incarcerated individuals, found respondents described food as “slop” that was bland and lacked nutrition.

In 2019, federal auditors found several alarming practices in Canadian correctional institution’s food practices. It found that the Correctional Service Canada was failing to meet Canada Food Guide's nutrition guideline (Harris, 2019). For instance, it was found that prison menus exceeded recommended salt intake (Wilson, 2019)

Many institutions were not performing checks on deliveries to send back spoiled perishables, leaking canned goods, or thawing frozen food. It also found spoiled food in storage rooms, fridges, and freezers (Harris, 2019).

The environment in which incarcerated people eat matters as well. Meal time in prisons can be a very isolating experience. Some incarcerated people in Canada eat pre-prepared meals alone in their cells. Others eat communally in a cafeteria (Wilson, 2019), but the institutional environment is grim, violent, and makes meal time unenjoyable (Impact Justice, 2020).

Racialized communities face higher rates of food insecurity and they are also overrepresented in the criminal justice system. Thus, prisons mirror and perpetuate pre-existing food insecurity and contribute to worsening health outcomes in racialized communities (Impact Justice, 2020). Poor nutrition has long-term health effects and makes incarcerated individuals more vulnerable to a number of diseases, contributes to mental health issues, and even leads to violent behaviour (Impact Justice, 2020). As Impact Justice (2020) argues, “most food served in prison sends a clear message that the people eating it don’t matter” (p.9).



Resisting food injustice

There are some ways that incarcerated individuals try to resist the injustice they face. The canteen, a store within correctional institutions, [BL1] [SM2] plays a large role in this. Here one can order ramen, tins of tuna, and treats such as potato chips, chocolate, and candy. While these foods are not nutritious, and tend to be expensive, they do hold meaning to those incarcerated (John Howard Society of Edmonton, 2020). They taste good and allow incarcerated individuals to exert some agency over what they eat.

Cultural food nights and holidays are valued events in which incarcerated individuals can get better food. Often, incarcerated individuals would organize these events themselves, sharing food they had collected with one another and cooking together. These events foster relationships and community among incarcerated individuals, and give them agency over their menu. However, these events came with the risk that guards may shut them down (Wilson, 2023).

Some prisons do have better food practices. Small Group Meal Preparation (SGMP) is a system in which individuals living in pod-style living quarters receive an allowance to order food which they then cook. While tight budgets make it difficult to purchase fresh fruits and vegetables, incarcerated individuals get to decide what they eat and be active in the preparation of their food (Wilson, 2023). Programs in the United States allow incarcerated individuals to garden, which increases their access to fresh produce, and has been shown to improve mental health, reduce violence, foster self-esteem, and teach employable skills (Impact Justice, 2020).

Conclusion

Food that tastes good and is good for you is essential to one's wellbeing and sense of dignity. Being incarcerated should not take away one's right to access good food. There is a need for reforms to food systems within carceral institutions, including better oversight to ensure menus meet the nutritional needs of incarcerated individuals and taste good, and opportunities for incarcerated individuals to become involved in the preparation of their food and to have a say over what is served.

However, even if reforms are made, can food justice be achieved in an inherently unjust system? Food justice is deeply tied to all other systems Canadians interact with, including labour, health, land ownership, and the criminal justice system. Addressing food justice goes beyond food, it requires widespread systemic change that breaks down unequal power dynamics. Within the criminal justice system, this means addressing mass incarceration, poverty, trauma and access to mental health care, the overrepresentation of racialized people in the criminal justice system, and the dominant attitudes we hold about those incarcerated. Achieving food justice is a big task, the least we can do is make sure incarcerated individuals eat well in the meantime.

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Cultural Food Security for Immigrant Populations in Canada

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The aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic and recent increase in cost of living have greatly intensified food insecurity in Canada, especially among Indigenous and immigrant communities. Indigenous and immigrant households are disproportionately affected by different forms of food insecurity such as reduced access to nutritious and culturally familiar foods.

The recently released findings from the Canadian Income Survey (CIS) revealed that in 2022, about one in three (33.4%) off-reserve Indigenous peoples and nearly one in four

(39.3%) Black identifying immigrants were living in food insecure households (Tarasuk, et al., 2023). Overall, immigrants in Canada experience a higher prevalence of food insecurity as compared to non-immigrants. With record inflation registered over the past years and limited local production of culturally familiar foods, most immigrant households are bound to experience cultural food insecurity in Canada.

Cultural food security, that is “being able to acquire, afford, and eat traditional foods of one’s ethnic origin” (Moffat et al., 2017) is an important aspect of integration, acculturation, and meeting the health needs of oneself and/or one’s family.

This is because enabling one to continue to practice their food traditions and customs fosters cultural identity. Doing so creates spaces for learning and building cultural competency not only for immigrants, but also for the mainstream population which aids in successful integration of newcomers.

Despite the central role of cultural food security in supporting the integration and wellbeing of immigrants, the food security initiatives in Canada consistently focus on meeting the immediate food needs through charitable and food rescue initiatives that do not represent the diversity of Canada’s population. This is not to say that the immediate charitable food initiatives are unneeded, but rather to acknowledge the barriers to making these services more culturally diverse.

To address the food insecurity challenge in Canada, the governments – federal, provincial, and municipal levels have tended to invest more in charitable and food rescue initiatives. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the federal government announced \$100 million through the [Emergency Food Security Fund](#) to food banks and other community-based organizations. Provincially, \$5 million was also released to food banks across Alberta including those in Edmonton (Edmonton Community Foundation, 2023).

The role of food banks and community-based food programs in responding to food insecurity has been criticized extensively in the literature as an ill-used short-term solution to a complex issue, stemming from the negligence of policymakers to address food security’s core problem of inadequate income that differentially affects vulnerable and racialized peoples (Tarasuk et al. 2022). Furthermore, even where policies to address food insecurity exist, they are often formulated with limited engagement of the most vulnerable communities to food insecurity.

However, the value of these charitable and community-based food programs need not be dismissed in their entirety, as they can serve the additional function of addressing needs for culturally appropriate food (Regnier-Davies et al. 2022). In Edmonton for example, grassroots organizations such as [Sinkunia Community Development Organization](#) and the [Multicultural Health Brokers Coop](#) have devised innovative ways to collaborate with the [Edmonton Food Bank](#) and other agencies to customize their food distribution to the needs of the population they serve. Nevertheless, several barriers exist in relation to accessing culturally familiar foods through these initiatives.

The lack, or limited availability, of cultural foods to be supplied through the community foods programs and services have been highlighted in academic and gray literature. This is closely linked to the limited green spaces to grow fresh food in a personal or community garden (Ramasahoi et al. 2019, Regnier-Davies et al. 2022). While such barriers are connected to the tight linkages between immigrants' lower socio-economic

status and tendency to reside in impoverished neighborhoods, that are characterised by overcrowding, the inability to grow fresh food is marked by geographical and structural racism (Ramasahoi et al. 2019, Regnier-Davies et al. 2022).

Furthermore, the limited diversity in Canada's food production system, which does not seem to be keeping pace with the diversifying population, is limiting the ability of the food security interventions to meet the cultural food needs of immigrants. The lack of scientific evidence on the alternative food produces that can thrive in Canadian weather and soil is a potential barrier to the diversification of the food system. Additionally, limited social relationships and networks that compliment economic capital, especially for immigrants interested in venturing in local production of culturally familiar foods is another prevailing barrier to the diversification of Canada's food system.

Among community food programs who are committed to serving diverse populations and fostering cultural food security, key barriers may include financial and logistical constraint and uncertain funding environment. A recent study by the John Humphrey Centre for Peace and Human Rights found that marginalized Edmontonians living in food insecure households who sought food from community programs were unable to have their food needs sufficiently met due to the dwindling financial support for such programs and limited access to other resources including access to information about the existing services. In addition, the ongoing fear and stigma around accessing food supports among marginalized communities is a major gap that the community organizations must learn how to navigate.

Despite the many challenges and barriers, the charity and community-based initiatives are adorned with several strengths and benefits to the health and wellbeing of immigrant populations. While high rates of food insecurity affect immigrant and Indigenous communities due to long lasting structural inequalities, immigrant-serving community-based organizations can play a vital role in bringing about change. They can leverage their power and strength in meeting the food needs of these vulnerable communities. Such organizations can also act as social and cultural hubs that could enable minority communities to create their own culturally appropriate food-based systems and food infrastructure that cater to the needs of the people they serve.

As Canada's population continues to diversify with a growing share of immigrants who are expected to account for 1 in 3 of Canada's population by 2030 (StatsCan, 2022), governments' response to food insecurity must address the cultural food security of its emerging populations by fostering cultural identity and belonging surrounding food to facilitate successful newcomer integration.



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About the Edmonton Social Planning Council

The Edmonton Social Planning Council is an independent, non-profit, non-partisan social research organization, with registered charitable status. Our focus is social research, particularly in the areas of low-income and poverty. ESPC is a source of knowledge and expertise on social issues within our community.

We are dedicated to encouraging the adoption of equitable social policy, supporting the work of other organizations who are striving to improve the lives of Edmontonians, and educating the public regarding the social issues that impact them on a daily basis.

Our Vision: A community in which all people are full and valued participants.

Our Mission: Through rigorous research, detailed analysis, and community engagement, we deepen community understanding of social planning issues, influence policy, and spark collaborative actions that lead to positive social change.

We thank you for your continued support.

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