UPSTREAM ACTION ON FOOD INSECURITY: A CURATED LIST

Food insecurity is the inadequate or insufficient access to food due to financial constraints. It is a concept closely linked to household income – the lower the household income, the higher the risk of food insecurity.¹ As there are physical, mental, and social consequences, food insecurity is not only an indicator of the economic well-being of both adults and children, it is also a direct social determinant of health.

This list presents tools and resources that facilitate public health practitioners’ action on policy solutions to food insecurity. The resources are organized around the National Collaborating Centre for Determinants of Health’s Public health roles for improving health equity.² Additional resources that support or describe action related to the Public health roles for improving health equity are included at the end of each section. A final section addresses unique issues with northern food insecurity. This curated list points to key resources; it is not intended to be comprehensive.

Check out our two additional resources related to food insecurity - Learning from Practice: Advocacy for health equity – Food security and Public Health Speaks: Upstream action on food insecurity

PUBLIC HEALTH ROLE - ASSESS & REPORT

Assess and report on the existence and impact of health inequities and effective strategies to reduce these inequities.

Evaluating outcomes of community food actions: A guide
Public Health Agency of Canada. [2010].

This guide offers tools and resources for individuals and groups to evaluate the impact of direct community food actions for individuals and groups as well as systems and policy change initiatives to address food insecurity. Along with case illustrations of various programs, a food security framework for evaluation is offered which outlines identifying the target of change, activities to achieve specific outcomes, and whether a particular community food action is achieving the desired outcomes. While several examples relate to charitable food and food skills programs, this guide will be useful to practitioners looking to orient community food actions to address the root causes of food insecurity through identifying the strengths and limitations of various approaches.

¹ As defined by PROOF http://proof.utoronto.ca
Monitoring food insecurity in Canada

PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research. [date unknown].

This fact sheet highlights the collection, monitoring, and reporting of food insecurity data as a population health indicator. As food insecurity is a major public health issue in Canada, the monitoring of food insecurity rates over time is critical to identifying trends and defining the impact on health equity. Data on marginal, moderate, and severe food insecurity collected through the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) shows no drop in rates of food insecurity, and there is some indication of an upward trend in northern regions. PROOF has produced a series of annual reports titled Household Food Insecurity in Canada for 2011-2014, and provides a number of links to relevant research and resources related to monitoring food insecurity trends.

Priority health equity indicators for British Columbia: Household food insecurity indicator report

Provincial Health Services Authority of British Columbia and PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research. [2016].

This report presents food insecurity data for British Columbia in support of planning and policy development as part of the province’s prioritization process for health equity. Data report on the prevalence of food insecurity over time, relative levels of severity (marginal, moderate, and severe), comparison of rates by geography and health service delivery area, and family composition of affected households. In addition, the relationships of food insecurity to other social determinants of health (education, employment, income, race, immigration status) and selected outcome indicators of mental and physical health are also offered. Findings describe how social determinants of health and food insecurity intersect to affect health equity. Further, the importance of policy changes that improve a household’s financial circumstances are highlighted as the actions required to reduce food insecurity.

OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES


PUBLIC HEALTH ROLE - MODIFY & ORIENT INTERVENTIONS

Modify and orient interventions and services to reduce inequities, with an understanding of the unique needs of populations that experience marginalization.

Position statement on responses to food insecurity

Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health. [2015].

This position statement outlines food insecurity as a human rights and social justice issue requiring an income-related policy response to address the root cause of poverty. Background information and literature on food insecurity, charitable food programs, societal perceptions, and traditional public health approaches are presented. Calls to action are directed at boards of health, public health units, community organizations, media, and all levels of government to view income security as a means to respond to food insecurity. Practitioners can use this position statement to support a shift in practice towards upstream policy solutions to food insecurity.

Addressing household food insecurity in Canada: Position statement and recommendations

Dietitians of Canada. [2016].

This position statement places low household income as the strongest predictor of household food insecurity, and touches on the bidirectional relationship between negative health outcomes and food insecurity, including economic consequences to the health care system.

Income protection for precarious employment, improved benefits for low income workers, increased social assistance rates, basic income guarantee, affordable housing, and addressing high food costs in northern and remote areas are discussed. Recommendations include a pan-Canadian strategy to address the root causes of food insecurity with attention to Indigenous Peoples, regular monitoring of household food insecurity on a national level, and further research to understand differing vulnerability to household food insecurity. Evaluation of the impact of policies designed to address food insecurity is also recommended.

OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES


PUBLIC HEALTH ROLE - PARTNER WITH OTHER SECTORS

Partner with other government and community organizations to identify ways to improve health outcomes for populations that experience marginalization.

Make Food Matter

FoodARC - Food Action Research Centre. [2015].

This online resource is designed to support moving knowledge into action to build food security at the community level. The site includes a toolkit organized under five action streams: building community dialogue, developing policy action, social innovation approaches, advocacy strategies, and effective communication. In addition, citizens from across Nova Scotia share what is important to them about food through engaging and interactive photos, videos, and quotes. Evidence on a range of community food security measures, including the results of community-based participatory research projects and reports from organizations doing similar work, is also included. Users can register as a member of the Make Food Matter community to be kept up to date on new resource additions, and build a personalized action portfolio of bookmarked resources on how to support community action.

British Columbia Food Security Gateway

Provincial Health Services Authority and Public Health Association of British Columbia. [2016].

This website provides food security information and resources to connect people and organizations across the province who are interested in solutions to community food security issues. Links to projects, programs, publications, and resources are provided, allowing users to access tools they can apply to their own food security work. A map of food security networks, listing of food policy councils and food security agencies, and searchable food security resource catalogue are provided to facilitate access to partnership opportunities and up to date information. Links to news stories highlighting multi-sectoral partnership work are provided, and a search for the term "collaboration" will produce links to stories of partnership collaborations for policy development.

OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES


PUBLIC HEALTH ROLE - PARTICIPATE IN POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Lead, support, and participate with other organizations in policy analysis and development, and in advocacy for improvement in health determinants and inequities.

Public policy and food insecurity

PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research. [date unknown].

This fact sheet highlights the impact of public policy on food insecurity through changing the circumstances of material deprivation. An overview of the prevalence of marginal, moderate, and severe food insecurity by source of income in Canada is provided, showing an increased risk of food insecurity when the main source of income is social assistance. As low income is the strongest predictor of food insecurity, social policies that increase people’s income have the potential to address poverty, as a root cause of food insecurity. As well, the case of Newfoundland and Labrador is highlighted as an example of the ability to tackle poverty through policy shift as part of a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy.

Income related policy recommendations to address food insecurity

Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health. [2015].

This paper discusses food insecurity as the result of poverty and policies that create inequities. Referring to the rising cost of nutritious food, the link is made between household food insecurity and poor health outcomes, including increased risk of infections and chronic diseases. Commentary on the limitations of a charitable food response are also included. Recommendations for policy development are offered in three areas to address poverty as the root cause of food insecurity, including investigation into guaranteed annual income as a policy option for reducing poverty, changes to social assistance rates to reflect costs of adequate food and housing as well as inflation, and changes related to precarious employment including provision of basic employment standards and health benefits to a broader sector of the working population.
Prevalence, severity, and impact of household food insecurity: A serious public health issue (background paper)

Dietitians of Canada. [2016].

This report highlights literature and expert commentary on household food insecurity in Canada, including definitions of key terms and measurement of incidence. The prevalence of food insecurity in Canada is presented along with literature on the relationship between household food insecurity, income amount and source of income. Physical and mental health consequences of food insecurity are described. Factors that impact the vulnerability of some populations are highlighted, including gender, racialization, household composition, life stage, housing, chronic health conditions, and Indigenous status. Coping strategies utilized within food insecure households are described, and additional information on health care costs is included.

OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES


NORTHERN FOOD INSECURITY

The issue of food insecurity in Canada’s remote north is complex, and warrants an approach that is distinct to addressing the specific needs of the areas affected that make them extraordinarily vulnerable to food insecurity.

Aboriginal food security in northern Canada: An assessment of the state of knowledge

Council of Canadian Academies. [2014].

This report presents the findings of an expert panel appointed to assess the knowledge of factors influencing food security in the Canadian North and the health implications of food insecurity for northern Aboriginal populations. A conceptual framework was developed to understand the issues of food security and food sovereignty in the North, balancing nutrition and food safety with knowledge/preferences, availability, and human rights. Rates of food insecurity in the North and influences on health of Aboriginal peoples are addressed in the context of demographics, geography, and culture. Traditional and market food systems in the North are explored along with a focus on the impacts of environmental change on food insecurity and the role of Northern governance and food sovereignty. Approaches to food insecurity that are multi-sectoral, multidisciplinary, and multilevel collaborations are suggested.

Paying for nutrition: A report on food costing in the North

Food Secure Canada. [2016].

This report provides an analysis of food costing in five Northern communities of Ontario, citing the lack of comprehensive data on the cost of a healthy diet in rural and northern on-reserve Indigenous households. Consequences of food insecurity in First Nations communities are explored, and a comparison of food costing tools available for use is presented. Key findings include that the cost of feeding a family of four in the North is twice as much as similar expenditures in the rest of Canada, and that the Nutrition North Canada subsidy program is ineffective in lowering the price of food to affordable levels. The report is accompanied by a methodology guide that is intended to help others conduct food costing research in Indigenous, on-reserve, and/or northern communities.
Pointing to the acuteness of hunger and malnutrition in Aboriginal households, several contributing factors are explored as a risk to food security in northern communities including poverty, declining animal and plant populations, food contaminants, population increase, and cost increases of hunting supplies and transportation. Strategies and programs to address food insecurity at a federal and regional level are presented, along with lessons learned from roundtable discussions involving leaders from communities, organizations, and various levels of government. Recommendations for engagement and collaboration are offered, acknowledging the tailored and holistic approach necessary for addressing food insecurity in the North.

OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES


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