

Household Food Insecurity 101

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**We recommend using official definitions from the sources below rather than these definitions for any academic or public resource.*

This handout covers key terms and resources for understanding household food insecurity in a Canadian context, and then introduces the Collective Impact framework to help guide shared action. Inaccurate use of terms related to food insecurity can negatively impact:

- How we frame the issues
- What we understand as the root causes
- Policy and program responses

Definitions & Language

Insecure	Not firmly fixed; liable to give way or break <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If referring to a person: not confident or assured; uncertain and anxious
3 Main Types of Insecurity ¹	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Personal Insecurity – when we are overly critical of our weaknesses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Usually connected to body image, performance, talents... 2. Relationship Insecurity – not having supportive, trusting relationships <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Related to a specific relationship <u>or</u> a feeling about all our relationships • Uncertainty about being loved, trusted, protected, valued 3. Domain-Specific Insecurity – insecure about a specific aspect or resource in our life <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often food, finances, health, or physical safety • A problem of access and resources (not personal failures)

Food Security	The <u>right to</u> and the <u>measure of</u> the availability of food which is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Affordable • Culturally appropriate • Meets dietary needs + preferences • Nutritious • Obtained with dignity • Sustainably grown
Food Insecurity	The state of being without reliable access to sufficient, affordable, nutritious, appropriate food.
Community Food Security	The measure of food access and availability at the community level – considering community self-reliance, social justice, and sustainability.
Hunger	Desire to eat to alleviate discomfort or weakness caused by lack of food.
Food Charity	Free or highly subsidized food (often meals or groceries), given to individuals who cannot afford adequate food. It rarely meets the criteria above to ensure food security.
Food Desert	Neighbourhoods without a grocery store in walking distance. These areas have limited access to nutritious and affordable foods.
Food Swamp	Neighbourhoods where the only nearby options for food are corner stores, fast foods, or drugstores, which stock limited fresh food.
Food Mirage	Neighbourhoods where the only nearby options for food are expensive. Food is available but not affordable, and therefore inaccessible.
Rescued Food	Food that would otherwise go to waste is “rescued,” recovered, or diverted to charitable programs. Quality is often poor, thus not a solution to food insecurity.
Food Sovereignty	People’s right to a food system in which those who produce, distribute, and consume food also control the mechanisms and policies of production and distribution.

¹ Brown, B. (2022). Atlas of the heart: Mapping meaningful connection and the language of human experience.

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Food Justice	A holistic view of the food system that sees healthy food as a human right and addresses structural barriers to that right.
Food Apartheid	Racist and oppressive systems that create inequitable food environments.
Food System	The processes and infrastructure involved in feeding a community, including the inputs needed for growing, harvesting, processing, packaging, transporting, marketing, consumption, distribution, and disposal of food.
Food Culture	Beliefs, values, customs, social norms, laws, practices (including storytelling and art-making), institutions, and habits related to how and what we eat. Food shapes our experiences of the world and of ourselves and each other.
Food Literacy	The knowledge, skills, and attitudes necessary to choose, prepare and enjoy food that supports one's health, community, and the environment. This may also include knowledge of food systems and food sovereignty.
Sustainability	The ability to continue over a long period of time, meeting our present needs without compromising future settings.
Social Determinants of Health ²	Conditions in the environments where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks (i.e., water quality, access to food, schools, neighbourhood...).
Household Food Insecurity (HFI) ³	<p>Inadequate access to food because of financial constraints.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Low-income households struggle to afford adequate healthy food • Affects physical health, mental health, and social well-being <p>Three Levels:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Marginal food insecurity: worry about running out of food &/or limited food selection due to a lack of money for food • Moderate food insecurity: compromise in quality &/or quantity of food due to a lack of money for food • Severe food insecurity: Miss meals, reduce food intake, and at the most extreme go day(s) without food
Basic Income ⁴	Unconditional cash transfer from government to individuals to enable everyone to meet their basic needs, participate in society, and live with dignity, regardless of work status.
Universal Programming	Programs that promote inclusion and ensure resources are spent on systems that benefit all people, at all income levels. Particular focus is given to the challenges minority groups face that may be otherwise hidden from the general public.
Food Charter or Philosophy	A concise statement of values and principles related to all aspects of food (listed above) that guide decisions (personal or corporate).

Key Sources

Canada Wide	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proof - interdisciplinary research team investigating HFI in Canada <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ "How to tackle food insecurity in Canada" (short video) ◦ HFI in Canada 2021 Report • Food Secure Canada – alliance of organizations and individuals working together to advance food security and food sovereignty through 3 goals: zero hunger, healthy and safe food, and sustainable food systems
First Nations,	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous Food Systems Network (4 principles of food sovereignty) • Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy

² <https://www.canada.ca/en/public-health/services/health-promotion/population-health/what-determines-health.html>

³ <https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/>

⁴ https://basicincomecanada.org/what_is_basic_income/

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Inuit & Metis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthy Food Guidelines for First Nations Communities • Planning for Food Security • Indigenous Food Safety and Security: Community Adaptations in the Wake of Climate Pressures • Serving Country Food in Government Funded Programs and Community Facilities
British Columbia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BC Food Security Gateway – [map of key food security networks] • Food Costing in BC (2017) by BCCDC & PHSA <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Infographic Summary • BCCDC Defining Food Security & Food Insecurity in BC (2022)
Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maple Leaf Centre for Action on Food Security collaborates with organizations and individuals to advance food security. Working across civil society and the public and private sectors, our goal is to reduce food insecurity by 50% by 2030.

Note: this is not an exhaustive list. Many other good sources exist.

What We Can Do

Collective Impact⁵ (CI) happens when a group of people from different sectors use a structured form of collaboration for solving a specific social problem.

- Isolated interventions from individual organizations are less effective
- Changes needs collaboration from non-profits, government, health care, businesses, faith communities, media, and the public

5 Conditions of Collective Impact



⁵ https://ssir.org/articles/entry/collective_impact#

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Condition	Definition & Examples
A Common Agenda	All participants have a shared vision for change that includes a common understanding of the problem and a joint approach to solving it.
	The Mt Pleasant Food Network (MPFN) is dedicated to supporting the health and well-being of all residents living in Mount Pleasant and nearby neighborhoods by promoting an accessible, just and sustainable food system for our community.
Shared Measurement System	The indicators of success need to be consistently measured and reported using validated tools and a shared vocabulary.
	Proof: Household food insecurity in Canada is measured by Statistics Canada using the Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM) on the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS)
Mutually Reinforcing Activities	Each organization focuses on specific activities which they can excel in a way that supports the cause/issue and is coordinated with other's actions.
	<p>The issues need to be addressed from different organizations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Direct support for people struggling with HFI (food hampers, gift cards, highlighting their experiences, training, transportation, elder + childcare...) ● Clinical care, mental health care, addictions treatment, housing support ● Government Advocacy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Template letter for political leaders⁶ ○ Eat-Think-Vote⁷ before elections (Food Secure Canada) ● Research and Data Collecting ● Business and Industry (i.e., ensure they pay a living wage) ● Non-profits + networks ● Media to share stats and stories (watch the language used)
Continuous Communication	Participants need regular connections to build up enough trust to recognize the common motivation behind their different efforts.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Facilitate gatherings of key players (ideally in person, or virtually) ● When relationships and trust exist, programs can shift faster
Backbone Support Organization	An organization to coordinate the work, the key players, and other stakeholders.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Logistical and administrative tasks of scheduling meetings, communications, conflict mediation, mobilize funding... ● Frontline staff cannot do this off the side of their desks.

⁶ <https://www.odph.ca/what-can-you-do>

⁷ <https://www.eatthinkvote.ca/>