



# Position Statement and Recommendations on Responses to Food Insecurity: Executive Summary



Ontario Dietitians in Public Health  
Diététistes en santé publique de l'Ontario

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Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH) is the independent and official voice of Registered Dietitians working in Ontario’s public health system. ODPH provides leadership in public health nutrition by promoting and supporting member collaboration to improve the health of Ontario residents through implementation of the Ontario Public Health Standards.

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## Executive summary

Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH) considers food insecurity to be an urgent public health problem and a serious human rights and social justice issue for all levels of government. To effectively reduce food insecurity, ongoing policy interventions are needed that reach low-income households and improve their financial circumstances. The foundation for achieving this involves monitoring the problem through regular measurement of and reporting on the prevalence and severity of food insecurity at both the national and provincial/territorial levels.

We encourage our members, public health units, community partners and municipalities within each public health unit's jurisdiction, as well as First Nation governments\* and provincial and federal governments, to work toward implementation of the following recommendations.

### Federal government

- Commit to regularly measuring, analysing, and reporting the prevalence and severity of food insecurity in all provinces and territories in a timely manner. This process should include ongoing analysis of disaggregated race-based food-insecurity data, including Indigenous and Black Canadians.
- Establish targets for the reduction of household food insecurity and regularly

It is the position of Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH) that food insecurity is an urgent public health problem and a serious human rights and social justice issue for local, provincial, and federal policy agendas.

Food banks and other food-based programs are ineffective responses to food insecurity because they do not address the primary cause: inadequate income. They have been counterproductive because they contribute to enabling governments to abandon their responsibility to ensure income adequacy.

Policies that improve the income of vulnerable households are required to effectively address food insecurity.

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\*In consideration of the advancement of [Indigenous Self-Government](#), ODPH continues to engage and consult with other Indigenous groups on recommendations for their governments.

report on progress toward their achievement as part of *Opportunity for All – Canada’s First Poverty Reduction Strategy*.

- Implement policy interventions that have been shown to effectively reduce food insecurity, such as expansion of the Canada Child Benefit, and implement a basic income guarantee for Canadians aged 18–64 years as part of *Opportunity for All – Canada’s First Poverty Reduction Strategy*.
- Develop a new definition of “affordable housing” that is not based on percentage of total income and considers other basic costs of living.
- Follow through on the commitment to support food security in northern and Indigenous communities as part of the *Food Policy for Canada*, emphasizing Indigenous food self-determination and reconciliation as guiding principles.

### First Nation governments

- Advocate for and bring attention to First Nation-identified needs and assets around food insecurity and food systems.
- Implement First Nation-led strategic direction related to food insecurity and food systems that incorporates a poverty reduction lens.
- Seek support or collaboration as appropriate with other community partner organizations, including public health units.

### Provincial government

- Report on the results of the poverty reduction strategy consultation that closed on April 30, 2020.
- Develop a poverty reduction strategy that includes targets for reduction of food insecurity as well as policy interventions that improve the financial circumstances of very low income households.
- Set a minimum wage rate that more closely aligns with costs of living in Ontario.
- Establish a Social Assistance Research Commission, as recommended in bill 60, to determine evidence-based social assistance rates in communities across the province based on local/regional costs of living, including the cost of food informed by data collected by public health units.

### Municipal governments and local community partners

- Advocate for federal and provincial government policies and programs to ensure an adequate income for all Canadians.
- Facilitate local level initiatives that increase economic resilience for individuals/families living with very low incomes and for groups experiencing systemic racism (i.e., Black,

Indigenous, and People of Colour), such as free income tax filing assistance and targeted support for access to and training for jobs with livable wages and benefits.

### Ontario boards of health

- Monitor and report on the prevalence (provincially and regionally or locally, if possible) and severity of food insecurity, its impact on health and root causes, and effective interventions to build awareness and knowledge about the problem and support for action.
- Encourage and enable all public health unit staff and board of health members to engage in ongoing awareness-raising, education, and training opportunities on causes and implications of structural racism and strategies for dismantling racist systems.
- Collaborate with community partners from various sectors, in particular racialized communities and organizations working to address oppression in racialized communities, to determine local priorities for action to address food insecurity and poverty.
- Support Indigenous cultural safety training offered on an ongoing basis to foster continuous awareness-raising, self-reflection, and learning among all public health unit staff and board of health members.
- Engage meaningfully with local Indigenous communities and organizations to understand what food security and food sovereignty mean to them, learn about diverse local assets and needs, and prioritize support for and collaboration around Indigenous-led food-related initiatives, while respecting the self-determination of each community and organization.