

## **ALTERNATIVE PROVINCIAL BUDGET 2019: FOOD SECURITY BACKGROUNDER**

### Household Food Insecurity

Household food insecurity is not being able to afford enough food. It is a social equity and public health crisis associated with negative physical and mental health outcomes and great costs to our healthcare system.<sup>i,ii</sup>

Household food insecurity affects 1 in 8 Manitoba households and 1 in 5 children.

- 3.4% Manitoba households are skipping meals and too many are going whole days without eating because they cannot afford food.
- Another 5.9% of Manitoba households are compromising the quality and quantity of their food because they do not have enough money.<sup>iii</sup>
- Food bank use has increased 58% since 2008, more than in any other province. Two of every five people who use a food bank in Manitoba are children, the second highest provincial rate.<sup>iv</sup>

Northern communities, Indigenous people, people of colour, recent newcomers, single mothers, those on social assistance, and those with low-paid and unstable work are more likely to be food insecure. Nearly two-thirds of food insecure households rely on employment as their main source of income. Having a job does not always mean having enough money for food.<sup>v</sup>

Household food insecurity is not an issue of food skills or budgeting. Food insecure households are just as likely as others to know how to cook and how to budget, and growing one's own food is not necessarily a solution.<sup>vi</sup>

The issue is financial. Minimum waged employment is not enough to meet basic needs, particularly in households with children.<sup>vii</sup> Someone who works full time at minimum wage takes home a little more than \$1625 per month after taxes. Feeding a family of four a sufficiently nutritious diet costs \$880 per month.

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

When they have even just a little more money, food insecure households use it on basic needs like food, housing, and clothing.<sup>x</sup>

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### Regional Inequity

Because of distribution challenges and regional inequity, the cost of healthy eating for a family of four is 46% higher in Northern Manitoba than in Winnipeg, and 15% higher in some parts of Southwestern Manitoba than in Winnipeg, according to the most recent provincial Nutritious Food Basket report.<sup>xi</sup> Although more recent data were collected in 2017, they have yet to be made public.

Colonization has caused great harm to Indigenous peoples, lands, and food systems. Even so, many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities and Indigenous people across Turtle Island are reclaiming their food traditions. There is a long way to go in reconciliation and healing, and Indigenous people continue to face legal and policy barriers to accessing, sharing, and consuming traditional and country foods.<sup>xii</sup>

Looking to address this regional inequity and the gaps left by Nutrition North Canada's food subsidy program, the province of Manitoba and partner organizations established the Northern Healthy Foods Initiative (NHFI) in 2004. NHFI seeks to increase food security in Manitoba by encouraging local food production and self-sufficiency through funding projects that respond to community needs and conditions. In the past, projects have included building greenhouses, establishing community gardens, and freezer loan programs. These projects increase the accessibility of affordable, nutritious food that is produced and consumed locally. NHFI is administered by the government of Manitoba's department of Indigenous and Northern Relations, with programming being provided through five community organizations in the province.<sup>xiii</sup> The government of Manitoba allocated 1.247 million dollars to NHFI in the 2019/2020 budget.<sup>xiv</sup>

The provincial government has also introduced the Affordable Foods in Remote Manitoba (AFFIRM) program in order to reduce costs of nutritious foods in communities without year round road access that are not eligible for the federal government's Nutrition North Canada (NNC) subsidy. The AFFIRM subsidy is provided to retailers and is passed along to northern consumers through reduced prices for milk, and fresh fruit and vegetables. At present, there are two Manitoban communities eligible for this subsidy (Churchill and Pukatawagan).<sup>xv</sup>

Building capacity for more self-sufficient food systems in remote, isolated, and resurging communities requires a significant commitment of time and resources. Despite considerable investment by the province, plenty of opportunities still exist and many needs remain unmet.

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### Nutrition Security and Diet-Related Disease

Diet-related disease is escalating due to changes in what and how we eat. This costs the Province of Manitoba billions of dollars annually. The Cost of Diabetes in Manitoba alone was estimated to be \$498 million in 2010 and is expected to reach \$639 million by 2020. Diabetes disproportionately affects low-income, Northern and indigenous people.<sup>xvi</sup>

Preliminary research suggests that Manitoba youth, in particular, are not getting the food they need. As many as ninety percent are not eating enough vegetables and fruit. In general, Manitoba youth are not getting enough calcium, vitamin D, and fibre, and they are consuming more than double the recommended level of sodium.<sup>xvii</sup>

In the 2017-2018 school year, the Manitoba government provided the Child Nutrition Council of Manitoba (CNCM) with approximately \$1,000,000 to deliver over 4.5 million meals and snacks to approximately 28,000 students in 259 nourishment programs. However, this funding covered only a fraction of the meal program costs of Manitoba schools and only about half of what was requested of the CNCM. In the absence of a more robust program, many schools rely on existing staff, volunteers, and the charitable sector to deliver meal and snack programs to hungry children.<sup>xviii</sup>

Indigenous people in Manitoba continue to experience a “nutrition transition” away from traditional diets. This transition is rooted in colonization and the residential school system and reflects modern inequities in the food system, as well as the dynamic and contemporary preferences of Indigenous peoples themselves (See also regional inequity).

Dietary acculturation is when newcomers take on the eating habits of a new place. Many newcomers to Canada, although quite healthy when they arrive, experience a decline in health after only a few years. This can happen, in part, because of changes in diet and pressure to adopt new eating habits.<sup>xix</sup>

While peer-led and culturally appropriate programs can improve knowledge of healthy eating<sup>xx</sup>, there are significant gaps in existing programs aimed at supporting healthy eating among Indigenous people, newcomers, and youth. For example, traditional Indigenous land-based learning opportunities (see Northern Healthy Foods Initiative) are resource intensive and often out of reach, particularly for urban Indigenous people. Newcomer-specific food and nutrition security programs tend to be centred in Winnipeg, especially in the North End<sup>xxi</sup>, and are not adequately funded by government.

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