



Native Women's Association of Canada
L'Association des femmes autochtones du Canada

POLICY BRIEF

FOOD INSECURITY



POSITIONS:

The Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC) supports Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse (2SLGBTQQAI+) people to make their own informed decisions regarding food security and food sovereignty. NWAC asserts that the Government of Canada must one (1) urgently address systemic problems relating to food, nutrition, and the environment; and two (2) do more to remove barriers in access to traditional food to help address disproportionately high rates of Indigenous food insecurity and chronic disease.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

Indigenous people are disproportionately impacted by food insecurity. Overall, nearly half of all First Nations people have difficulty meeting their daily food needs, and families with children are affected to an even greater degree. Further, food insecurity is disproportionately worse in northern Indigenous communities. First Nations, Inuit, and Métis across the north experience five to six times higher levels of food insecurity than the Canadian national average. Inuit living in Nunavut have the highest documented rate of food insecurity, affecting 70 percent of Indigenous populations in a developed country.¹

Food insecurity is intertwined with health, and a lack of access to healthy food can have severe health implications. High rates of food insecurity in Indigenous communities are associated with higher instances of diabetes, obesity, malnutrition, depression, chronic diseases, and lower rates of self-reported good health among Indigenous Peoples.

A significant contributor to food insecurity in Indigenous communities is related to the high costs of food for areas located outside major urban centres. Healthy food remains out of reach for many, with costs often two to three times higher in places over 50 kilometers away from a major urban centre. Costs are even higher in rural, remote, and/or northern communities. In addition, insufficient employment and wages, environmental contamination, and lack of availability or access to traditional foods are key contributors to food insecurity.



TRADITIONAL FOODS AND FOOD SOVEREIGNTY:

Difficulty accessing traditional food—which is healthier and foundational to the culture and traditions of Indigenous communities—is the core of the food insecurity crisis. When traditional food is present, nutrition and diet quality improve; thus, ensuring food requirements are met and support individual health. However, access to traditional food has been diminished by industry activities. Colonial policies have led to the dispossession of Indigenous Peoples from their land, such as privatization, government regulations, and climate change, to name a few.

Indigenous food sovereignty emphasizes close connections Indigenous Peoples have with their environment, including the work being done by Indigenous communities to revitalize food systems, harvesting of traditional foods (e.g. hunting, fishing, gathering, cultivating), and the transmission of cultural knowledge regarding lands. Food sovereignty is a pre-condition for food security—the revitalization of Indigenous food systems is critical to ensure food security in Indigenous communities.

Current landscapes are dire, with most Indigenous households unable to achieve a healthy diet from traditional food systems or market food systems.



NWAC'S ROLE:

NWAC supports a holistic approach to food and nutrition, which involves addressing social issues and socioeconomic factors, such as poverty, unemployment, and education as contributors to food insecurity. NWAC supports the development a holistic approach to food through current and past projects.

NWAC'S ACTION PLAN:

As part of the [Action Plan to End the Attack Against Indigenous Women, Girls, and Gender-Diverse People](#), NWAC has committed to offering agricultural and food sovereignty programs—including online workshops—to underline the value of, and to revive and preserve, Indigenous agriculture. NWAC has developed plans to construct greenhouses and agricultural knowledge programs to transfer knowledge to subsequent generations, which will also address Call for Justice 7.3—outlined in the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls and Two-Spirit people (MMIWG2S+).

¹ Leblanc-Laurendeau, 2020, pp. 2.



WABANAKI RESILIENCY LODGE:

In direct response to the MMIWG2S+ National Inquiry's Calls for Justice, NWAC developed the Resiliency Lodge model, which seeks to provide critical Elder-led healing programming for Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people. NWAC's pilot Resiliency Lodge, located in Chelsea, QC, provides land-based and arts-based healing programming, offered both online and in-person. Our second Resiliency Lodge, located on Wabanaki Territory, NB, has many of the same features and components as the Chelsea Resiliency Lodge; however, the Wabanaki Lodge has an added concentration on Indigenous agriculture. It offers holistic healing programs, featuring specific programming on regenerative permaculture, and traditional food system methods—including food and medicinal plant teachings. These land-based healing programs allow for large traditional ceremonies and activities, while providing opportunities for hands-on, land-based, cultural teachings and healings. In-person programming at the Wabanaki Resiliency Lodge is expected to begin during the latter months of 2022.



PAST PROJECTS:

NWAC has previously provided feedback on the National Food Guide (2019), to ensure the guide reflects the needs of Indigenous women, girls, Two-Spirit, transgender, and gender-diverse people. Additionally, NWAC has worked on two projects to support food security on sovereignty.

Through the Greenhouse Grown Traditional Foods pilot project, NWAC created a rooftop garden at the Social and Economic Innovation Centre. Through recommendations made by Indigenous women, 2SLGBTQQAI+ people, and Elders, NWAC will address food insecurity and share Indigenous cultures and teachings on growing food by providing opportunities for engagement in traditional food knowledge. The rooftop garden uses traditional growing methods. Locally grown plants will be used to host ceremonies, teachings, and provide traditional agricultural knowledge.

Through the Agri-Diversity Pilot Project, NWAC conducted an online survey of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQAI+ people on food insecurity. One major finding of the survey was that current access to Western food options is unreliable and unsustainable. Additionally, the pilot project found barriers to food security in Indigenous communities have further been contributed to by a lack of access to healthy food options, seasonal shortages, lack of locally sourced goods, violence at food banks, and families experiencing hunger.

CANADA'S ROLE:

Indigenous Services Canada has been working with Indigenous partners and will continue to provide support and services to address socioeconomic inequalities exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. In May 2021, the Government of Canada reported that since December 2020, approximately \$30 million in funding has been allocated to increase Indigenous Peoples' access to nutritious and traditional foods. Through this fund, \$8 million was provided to Inuit organizations to help end food insecurity in the north. This funding is in addition to other food security initiatives supported by the Indigenous Community Support Fund.

With the aim of offsetting food insecurity and mitigating high costs of food in remote Indigenous communities, the Government of Canada has also launched other programs. Among them, "Nutrition North" was introduced in 2011 to provide subsidies for several perishable and nutritious food items, and commercially processed traditional foods to remote Indigenous communities. Regrettably, the program has been ineffective in reducing food insecurity, as remote fly-in First Nations and Inuit communities eligible for this program continue to experience the highest level of food insecurity in Canada, and in parts of the developed world.

Many Canadian organizations, such as Food Secure Canada, Food Banks Canada, and Community Food Centres of Canada, are working toward tackling food insecurity and call for increased government involvement.

Food banks have been a direct response to problems of food security in Canada, yet still struggled to meet the food needs of its users due to limited capacity. In many circumstances, food banks are inaccessible to Indigenous Peoples, especially those in remote and northern locations.



INTERNATIONAL:

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Unit is responsible for promoting the Right to Food, as set out in Article 11 of the International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (1966). According to the United Nations, the right to food means every person is in an economic, political, and social environment that will allow for food security, and those who are prevented from accessing food due to having a limited capacity should have food provided to them. All states who signed on to implement the right to food, including Canada, were mandated to include this measure in future legislation.

The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, adopted in September 2007, is a comprehensive statement addressing human rights of Indigenous Peoples. It emphasizes the rights of Indigenous Peoples to live with dignity, to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures, and traditions, and to pursue their self-determined development. The Declaration contains provisions on land, natural resources, and subsistence activities, which are highly relevant for the realization of the right to food. The United Nations affirms that the right to food is an important tool for Indigenous Peoples to bring about real change in their lives, and to negotiate power structures.

The Declaration of Atitlán, drafted at the First Indigenous Peoples' Global Consultation on the Right to Food, in April 2002, stated that the denial of the Right to Food for Indigenous Peoples is a denial of their collective Indigenous existence. It goes on to explain how a denial of food not only denies one's physical survival, but also one's social organization, cultures, traditions, languages, spirituality, sovereignty, and total identity.



STATISTICS:

- ✎ According to the First Nations Food, Nutrition, and Environment Study, 48 percent of Indigenous households have difficulty putting enough food on the table and are considered food insecure.
- ✎ The highest rates of food insecurity (60 percent) have been reported in Alberta and its remote communities.
- ✎ According to the 2017 Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 76 percent of Inuit over the age of 15 and living in Inuit Nunangat experience food insecurity.
- ✎ Indigenous Peoples experience three-to-five times higher rates of food insecurity than the general Canadian population (12 percent).
- ✎ Eighty-two percent of Indigenous adults are overweight or obese, and one in five have diabetes—rates that are double and triple the national averages, respectively.

CONSULTED / RECOMMENDED RESOURCES:

- **Batel, M. et al. (January 28, 2021).** "First Nations households living on-reserve experience food insecurity: prevalence and predictors among ninety-two First Nations communities across Canada." *Canadian Journal of Public Health* vol. 112, no. 1, pp.52-63. Retrieved from: <https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.17269/s41997-021-00491-x.pdf>.
- **Centre for Indigenous Conservation and Development Alternatives. (2020).** *Livelihoods, food sovereignty and coping with neoliberal growth.* Retrieved from: <http://cicada.world/research/themes/livelihoods-food-sovereigntyand-coping-with-neoliberal-growth/>.
- **First Nations Food, Nutrition, and Environment Study. (October 2021).** "Summary of Findings and Recommendations for 8 Assembly of First Nations Regions: 2008-2018." Retrieved from: [FNFNES_Report_Summary_Oct_20_2021_FINAL.pdf](https://www.fnfnes.ca/Assets/FNFNES_Report_Summary_Oct_20_2021_FINAL.pdf).
- **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2008).** "The Right to Food and Indigenous People." Retrieved from: https://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/Right_to_food.pdf.
- **Food Secure Canada. (n.d.)** "Affordable Food in the North." Retrieved from: <https://foodsecurecanada.org/resources-news/news-media/we-want-affordable-food-north>.
- **Government of Canada. (May 26, 2021).** "Government of Canada works with communities and organizations to support food security for Indigenous Peoples during COVID-19." Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/indigenous-services-canada/news/2021/05/government-of-canada-works-with-communities-and-organizations-to-support-food-security-for-indigenous-peoples-during-covid-19.html>.
- **Government of Canada. (February 18, 2020).** "Household Food Insecurity in Canada: An Overview." Retrieved from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/food-nutrition-surveillance/health-nutrition-surveys/canadian-community-health-survey-cchs/household-food-insecurity-canada-overview.html>.
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- **Leblanc-Laurendeau, Olivier. (April 1, 2020).** "Food Insecurity in Northern Canada: An Overview." Library of Parliament, 2020-47-E. Retrieved from: <https://lop.parl.ca/staticfiles/PublicWebsite/Home/ResearchPublications/BackgroundPapers/PDF/2020-47-E.pdf>.
- **Native Women's Association of Canada. (2021).** The AgriDiversity Pilot Project: Report on Findings Related to Best Practices and Investment Opportunities for Indigenous Women. Retrieved From: [THE AGRI-DIVERSITY PILOT PROJECT · Native Women's Association of Canada \(nwac.ca\)](https://www.nwac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/AgriDiversity-Pilot-Project-Report-Findings-Related-to-Best-Practices-and-Investment-Opportunities-for-Indigenous-Women.pdf).
- **Native Women's Association of Canada. (2020).** ECCCCO Greenhouse Grown Traditional Foods: An NWAC Pilot Project. Retrieved from: [ECCCCO Greenhouse Grown Traditional Foods: An NWAC Pilot Project · Native Women's Association of Canada](https://www.nwac.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/ECCCCO-Greenhouse-Grown-Traditional-Foods-An-NWAC-Pilot-Project.pdf).
- **Statistics Canada. (2018).** Aboriginal Peoples Survey, 2017. Statistics Canada.





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