



## RECOMMENDATION 5

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## REDUCE NORTHERN FOOD INSECURITY

Northern food insecurity remains a significant concern for Food Banks Canada. While consecutive federal governments have attempted to address this problem with various targeted programs and initiatives - it is clear that the current approach is failing.

Food Banks Canada has worked over the last few years to suggest ways to improve the Nutrition North program and northern food insecurity in general, and we remain concerned that food costs in the North remain largely unchanged since the beginning of the Nutrition North program in 2011.

Recent data released by Statistics Canada shows that the Nutrition North subsidy hasn't had the impact on food costs that many had hoped for when the program was first introduced almost a decade ago.

As shown in the most recent numbers released by Nutrition North Canada, the average cost of the Revised Northern Food Basket in March 2018 was actually higher by over 2% since March of the previous year, and only 1% lower than in March 2011, prior to the launch of the Nutrition North program.<sup>53</sup>

Recent measures announced by the program, such as new supports for traditional hunting and gathering programs (a measure which Food Banks Canada has advocated for), as well as a new Inuit to Crown working group to address future challenges, are welcomed - yet are likely insufficient to address the multiple challenges facing the north, as described in this report.

With household food insecurity levels that remain unacceptably high in the territories, the cost of food barely changing since 2011, and social assistance income that is decreasing when inflation is taken into account, it is time for the government to review its food security strategy in the north.

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Food banks with ties to northern communities across the country are doing what they can to send food to northern and remote areas but they must pay full shipping costs as they are currently not eligible for Nutrition North subsidies that would reduce these costs.

Organizations such as Winnipeg Harvest, the RFDA in Thunder Bay, Ottawa Food Bank and the Community Food Sharing Association in Newfoundland (just to name a few) are doing what they can to support their struggling northern communities, but it is very difficult to stretch scarce financial resources towards high shipping costs.

Ultimately, food prices and food-driven solutions can only do so much. The federal government must also review its entire approach towards the long-term root causes of food insecurity in the north if significant progress is to be achieved.

**We recommend:**

- **That the Nutrition North Canada subsidy immediately be broadened and expanded to become accessible to charities such as food banks who send food and supplies to remote and isolated northern communities.**
- **That the federal government, in collaboration with the newly formed Inuit to Crown Working Group, initiate a comprehensive review of Nutrition North Canada to determine why the program is only minimally achieving its objectives of reducing the cost of food in the North.**
- **That the federal government immediately start working towards a basic income (see recommendation 4) and move away from a broken social assistance system that keeps far too many northern Canadians in a cycle of poverty and food insecurity.**

53 Government of Canada [2019]. *Cost of the Revised Northern Food Basket in 2017-2018*, Nutrition North Canada. Retrieved from <https://www.nutritionnorthcanada.gc.ca/eng/1548078467819/1548078497301>.