



RECOMMENDATION 5

ENHANCE MEASURES TO REDUCE NORTHERN FOOD INSECURITY

Northern food insecurity remains a significant concern for Food Banks Canada. The issue will likely worsen because of the effects of the pandemic over the coming months and years unless some of the minimum income reforms mentioned in this report are quickly enacted. 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. We are encouraged that the federal government has adopted one of our recommendations from our 2019 HungerCount report and now includes charities in the Nutrition North program on a pilot basis.

However, we remain concerned that food costs in the North have remained largely unchanged since the beginning of the Nutrition North program in 2011. For example, in Iqaluit, Nunavut, the cost of a nutritious food basket to feed a family of four in March 2018 was approximately \$1,721.56. The same basket of food would cost about \$868 in Ottawa.⁷⁸ Recent data released by Statistics Canada shows that the Nutrition North subsidy has not had the impact on food costs that many 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 over 2 per cent higher than it was in March of the previous year, and only 1 per cent lower than in March 2011, prior to the launch of the Nutrition North program.⁷⁹

⁷⁸ Government of Canada. (2019). *Cost of the revised Northern food basket in 2017–2018*.

<https://www.nutritionnorthcanada.gc.ca/eng/1548078467819/1548078497301/>
Ottawa Public Health. (2018). *Nutritious food basket*.

https://www.ottawapublichealth.ca/en/public-health-topics/resources/Documents/2018_NFB-Report_EN.pdf

⁷⁹ Government of Canada. (2019). *Cost of the revised Northern food basket*.



Measures announced by the program in 2018, such as new supports for traditional hunting and gathering programs (a measure that Food Banks Canada has advocated for), and a new Inuit to Crown working group to address future challenges, are welcomed, but they are unlikely to be adequate to address the multiple challenges facing the North, especially in light of a pandemic that has already affected food supply chains issues in Northern communities.

With household food insecurity levels still unacceptably high in the territories, the cost of food barely changing since 2011, and social assistance income that has decreased in real terms, it is time for the federal government, in collaboration with the territories, to review their food security strategies in the North.

Organizations such as Food Banks Canada, the RFDA in Thunder Bay, Winnipeg Harvest, the Ottawa Food Bank, and the Community Food Sharing Association in Newfoundland (to name only a few) are doing what they can to support struggling Northern communities, but high shipping costs are stretching already limited funding to its limit.

Federal funding that flowed through Food Banks Canada during the early months of the pandemic helped many Northern food banks purchase food over the first year of the pandemic, but an already precarious situation is at risk of worsening over the coming months and years.

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

Our recommendations

- **Immediately start working towards a Minimum Income Floor (see recommendation #3) and away from the current broken social assistance system that keeps far too many Northern Canadians in a cycle of poverty and food insecurity.**
- **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.**
- **Working in partnership with local groups, create a Canada-wide Northern Development and Revitalization Plan that is focused on the research and development of regional programs that aim to train workers and grow business in strategic economic sectors.**