

# **Food Security for All:**

## North Shore Food System Assessment and Community Food Action Plan

### **Executive Summary**

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(Social Planning & Research Council of British Columbia)

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## ***Introduction***

This report addresses a number of questions around food security and those at risk of food insecurity on the North Shore. The report examines what it means to be food insecure, who is most vulnerable to food insecurity, how food insecurity affects residents of the North Shore, and what can be done to increase the food security of North Shore residents, especially those who are marginalized. The purpose of the project was to develop a three year action plan that will assist the North Shore in deciding how to allocate food security funding and advocacy efforts in a way that fills existing gaps and best serves vulnerable populations in the region. In order for the plan to be flexible to meet changing needs, the primary focus this year is to develop a prioritized decision making process, which can be implemented as community needs change and develop. The plan also includes an outcome measurement framework, which will help quantify the success of the plan.

## ***Background***

The North Shore has a reputation for being relatively wealthy, which means that the community's food security needs are at risk of being overlooked. The reality is that some North Shore residents with extremely high incomes drive the overall average incomes up to levels far higher than the GVRD and BC averages. This high average masks the fact that there is actually a substantial proportion of the population living below the poverty line. In fact, over one third of unattached individuals and one fifth of families living in the City of North Vancouver are living on incomes below the poverty line.

While the average cost of food on the North Shore is slightly below the average cost of food for BC as a whole (\$635.58 for the North Shore, compared to \$654.46 for BC), North Shore residents still find themselves at risk of food insecurity because the cost of housing is much higher than the provincial average. Housing is a fixed cost every month, and with average rents and mortgage payments of over \$1000 per month in the Districts of North and West Vancouver, many North Shore residents do not have enough money to cover other food costs such, especially in the case residents who have a low income or receive Income Assistance. When residents are spending a large proportion of their income on housing, they must cut costs in other ways. In some cases, they must reduce the amount or quality of the food they eat.

## ***Vulnerable Populations***

There are particular populations on the North Shore that are at a high risk of experiencing poverty and food insecurity.

### **Children and Lone-Parent Families**

Children are at high risk of food insecurity if their family's income falls below the poverty line. Food insecurity for children can lead to severe consequences. Children who are food insecure have poorer educational outcomes and are often more obese, which in turn leads to health problems. Food insecurity can also be a source of family stress, as families may argue about how to afford food and the best way to access it and people who are hungry tend to become more easily agitated. Parents in low-income families may also skip meals to ensure that their children have enough to eat. The family poverty rate for families with children under the age of 18 is lower for the municipalities on the North Shore than the average family poverty rates for BC and the GVRD. However, lone-parent families on the North Shore still have high poverty rates, ranging from 26% in the West Vancouver to almost 40% in the City of North Vancouver, placing children from such families at risk of food insecurity. Even where poverty is not an issue, children may not have the necessary cooking skills to put together nutritious snacks or meals. Instead, they often opt for fast food choices, which are less healthy and can be more expensive.

### **Seniors**

A growing number of seniors live on the North Shore. Many seniors live on a fixed income, and often face limited mobility issues. Over the next 20 years, the senior population will increase from the 2005 population of 27,933 by 54%, to an estimated 43,051 individuals, representing approximately 22% of the population. Unattached seniors on the North Shore experience far higher poverty rates than seniors who live with family. The poverty rate for seniors in the City of North Vancouver is a staggering 51%, and one third of West Vancouver's seniors living in poverty. With the number of seniors on the North Shore increasing, the poverty rate for unattached seniors on the North Shore is of concern in the context of food security.

### **Recent Immigrants**

In addition to requiring culturally appropriate foods, recent immigrant populations tend to experience higher poverty rates, placing them at greater risk of experiencing food insecurity. While the overall poverty rates for families on the North Shore are quite low, over one third of recent immigrant families are poor. West Vancouver's recent immigrant population is the least well-off, with 43% of recent immigrant families having low incomes.

## **Concentrations of Vulnerable Populations**

The Lonsdale area of the City of North Vancouver and the densely populated southern area of West Vancouver, with its large number of apartment buildings, have the highest concentrations of vulnerable populations for the North Shore. Seniors in poverty are the most highly concentrated vulnerable population on the North Shore. Recent immigrants living in poverty on the North Shore tend to be less concentrated than the seniors population. There is a high concentration of recent immigrants living in poverty in the City of North Vancouver's Lower Lonsdale area. School-age children in poverty are also concentrated in some of the same census tracts as recent immigrants and seniors in poverty, but there are more census tracts with high concentrations of school-age children in poverty spread out across the North Shore.

## **Food System Assessment**

### ***Location Specific Gaps***

Throughout the consultation process, a number of areas or neighbourhoods on the North Shore were identified as having poor access to food. The areas mentioned included: Horseshoe Bay, Lower Lonsdale, the Tsleil Waututh First Nation lands, Upper Capilano, Deep Cove, Mount Seymour, Lions Bay, Bowen Island, some areas in Lynn Valley, Premier Street, and the neighbourhoods around 15<sup>th</sup> and Esquimalt and 21<sup>st</sup> Avenue in West Vancouver. Residents in each of these neighbourhoods or municipalities experience some barriers to accessing adequate nutritious foods, especially where individuals are living in poverty and lack access to a vehicle, or have a mobility challenge. These and other neighbourhoods have poor access to groceries because the stores on the North Shore tend to be large scale and concentrated in certain areas, making it difficult to access groceries from other neighbourhoods without a car.

Similarly, food security programs (such as the Food Bank) tend to be concentrated in the City and District of North Vancouver, and to a lesser extent West Vancouver. While many programs do serve Lions Bay and Bowen Island, accessing these programs can be difficult, especially without transportation.

## ***Program and Policy Gaps***

The consultation process worked to identify program and policy gaps on the North Shore:

- Participants made recommendations to improve the quality of food bank and crisis food provision on the North Shore, regarding the quality of food and access to crisis food.
- Participants indicated that the cost of food on the North Shore is a major concern, especially for people with health related dietary restrictions where food choices can be more expensive.
- Nutrition education, awareness and counseling were identified as important programming areas to improve for the North Shore. Many people have limited nutritional knowledge, and may lack the cooking and shopping skills to eat well. This is an issue for youths, young parents, seniors and new Canadians learning how to use and cook food available in Canada.
- Participants also recognize the important influence of provincial policies that may not be directly related to food security, but do have an impact, such as the need for more affordable housing and better access to adequate social assistance levels.
- Participants also noted the shortage of funding for food security programming and initiatives.
- There are many areas on the North Shore with poor access to groceries. Many participants expressed concern over the poor accessibility of groceries for certain communities and those with mobility limitations or who lack transportation.
- Food safety is a particular concern for all communities, and can affect anyone. Consultation participants identified several possible hazards, including a possible lack of trained food handlers in food delivery and provision programs.

Participants also discussed several priority programming areas that are promising strategies for increasing food security on the North Shore. These include:

- Community kitchens to help teach cooking skills in a community atmosphere
- Providing hot meal programs, especially for vulnerable populations, through social programs and community centres to promote the community atmosphere
- School meal programs to ensure that children are well nourished so that they can perform as best they can academically
- Community and school gardens to increase the amount of affordable fresh fruits and vegetables available on the North Shore
- Farmer's Markets to support local farmers and increase amount of fresh fruits and vegetables available on the North Shore
- Urban agriculture projects to increase access to local food on the North Shore

## **Action Plan**

The Community Food Action Plan for the North Shore outlines the indicators that the North Shore Advisory Committee identified as appropriate for measuring the success of the Community Food Action Initiative. These indicators are applied, directly and indirectly, to a set of short, medium and long-term goals for the Initiative. The goals and indicators inform the prioritized decision making recommendations at the end of the section.

### ***Indicators and Measurements of Success***

The advisory group for the North Shore CFAI developed a set of indicators and measurements of success to be used when determining how to spend future CFAI funding in the North Shore community:

- Participants felt that it is important that the funding is used in a manner that promotes partnerships.
- The funding should also be used to leverage additional funding into food security initiatives for the community. The Advisory Committee suggests identifying the number of new partnerships that lead from the action plan could provide a useful measure of success for the Action Plan, particularly if the partnerships expand into new areas.
- Regarding the impact of the funding, the advisory members indicated that is important to ensure that the funding is used to raise public awareness about food security issues in the community. An indicator of this success might be the number of community councils and government policymakers that explicitly recognize food security as an issue by adopting policies or making public statements to that effect or the number of organizations represented on the North Shore CFAI advisory committee.
- It was also suggested that the number of local media stories relating to food security be tracked as a means of measuring public awareness of food security issues on the North Shore.
- In order to measure the impact of the funding on local policies, participants suggested tracking the number of small grocery stores and farmers markets and keeping the inventory current.
- Participants feel that a follow-up to the food system assessment should be conducted at the end of the three year period to see if there have been any positive changes as a result of this initiative.
- Participants also suggested that long term indicators of success could include improvements community health and educational outcomes.

The advisory suggested several short, medium, and long-term actions related to public awareness, policy, partnerships, capacity building, and program development:

- The primary short-term goal is to do advocacy to advance food security concerns, such as promoting school meal programs and gaining support for food recovery programs. Another important short-term goal is to create awareness among North Shore residents about hunger and food security issues, with an emphasis on calling people to action.
- Medium-term goals include continued advocacy and awareness-building, but with additional goals of beginning to build capacity in the community to increase food security by setting up the necessary partnerships and build and expand programs to address hunger and ensure access to nutritious and affordable food in the community.
- The long-term goals are optimistic, touching on the desire to eliminate the need for crisis food and tying the concept of food security into the 2010 Olympic plans.

## ***Considerations for Funding Decisions***

The Plan outlines recommendations for allocating future CFAI and other food security related funding.

### **High Priority Actions**

- Improving the type and quality of crisis food provision programs to address the needs of new and/or single parents, people with dietary restrictions, and individuals who have limited transportation options and cannot attend food programs.
- Developing or supporting transportation and/or food delivery programs for seniors and persons with disabilities who face difficulties in purchasing groceries
- Expand nutrition awareness, cooking and ‘shopping on a budget’ programs, with a particular focus on youths, pregnant and new parents, seniors and new immigrants

### **Medium Priority Actions**

- Expand food provision at other community services, such as employment programs
- Expand breakfast and hot meal programs, particularly for seniors
- Develop outreach and public awareness programs to increase public support for food security on the North Shore

Firstly, the funding should emphasize partnerships, especially to assist smaller programs or new programs in expanding. Funding should also allow for advocacy around food security initiatives.

## ***Promising Developments***

There are a number of food security programs already underway on the North Shore:

- A pilot program is underway to set up a seniors' bus to assist seniors with grocery shopping.
- Vancouver Coastal Health has developed a draft policy regulating the content of food vending machines in Health Authority facilities.
- Hot meal programs for seniors are also being expanded to new locations to serve more seniors.
- The local food bank is starting a new program to ensure that its clients are receiving the food they require for particular health conditions.