



February 19, 2021

Government of Canada

Re: Let's Talk Budget 2021 – Pre-budget Consultations

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ODPH is the independent and official voice of Registered Dietitians (RDs) working in Ontario's public health system. ODPH provides leadership in public health nutrition by promoting and supporting member collaboration to improve the health of Ontario residents through the implementation of the Ontario Public Health Standards.

[Ontario Dietitians in Public Health \(ODPH\)](#) is pleased to have the opportunity to provide input for the federal pre-budget consultations. The focus of our submission is related to addressing food insecurity in Canada.

The scope of our members' work within Ontario's public health system includes monitoring food affordability. Year after year, data from across the province show that low income households struggle to afford the costs of living, including food.^{1,2,3,4,5,6} Food insecurity is defined as inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints.⁷ It is a highly sensitive measure of material deprivation and is closely correlated with poor physical and mental health,⁷ which is why we are so concerned about this problem from a public health perspective. The cost of food insecurity is significant; there is a strong association of greater health care utilization by those who are food insecure compared to those who are food secure.⁸

The magnitude of this problem is particularly concerning. In 2017-2018, 12.7% (1 in 8) of households in Canada experienced food insecurity, which translates to over 4.4 million people, including 1.2 million children and youth.⁷ Recent national estimates report that food insecurity rates have increased in Canada during the COVID-19 pandemic to approximately 1 in 7 households,⁹ as a result of the widespread labour disruptions due to COVID-19. When COVID-19 is under control and Canada's economy is ready to rebound, it will be essential to invest in strategies that address the root causes of food insecurity. By doing so, it will help address pre-existing issues that have been amplified by the pandemic and help the country work towards an inclusive economic recovery.

ODPH recently released an updated [Position Statement and Recommendations on Responses to Food Insecurity](#). It summarizes the evidence to date about food insecurity in Canada and Ontario, including effective income-related policy interventions to address this problem on a population level. It also provides recommendations for the federal government, which are in line with existing commitments that have been made through [Opportunity for All – Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy](#) and the



[*Food Policy for Canada*](#). We would specifically like to highlight the following recommendations that pertain to the 2021 budget, and would support achieving an inclusive recovery that leaves no Canadian behind:

- **Commit to regularly measuring, analysing, and reporting on the prevalence and severity of food insecurity in all provinces and territories in a timely manner. This process should include ongoing analysis of disaggregated race-based food-insecurity data, including Indigenous and Black Canadians.** Ongoing food insecurity data collection across Canada and associated analysis is critical to understand trends related to this issue, and to effectively establish targets for its reduction. As food insecurity is much higher among Black and Indigenous households in Canada, analysis of disaggregated race-based will allow for raising awareness about and addressing the health inequities these households experience as a result of systemic racism and colonization.
- **Implement income-related policy interventions that have been shown to effectively reduce food insecurity, such as expansion of the Canada Child Benefit, and implementation of a basic income guarantee for Canadians aged 18–64 years as part of [*Opportunity for All – Canada’s First Poverty Reduction Strategy*](#).** The introduction of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) early in the pandemic demonstrated an acknowledgement by the federal government that there are significant gaps in our federal income support system that need to be addressed to ensure a broader range of households have the income support they need, should they experience a sudden loss of income. Those gaps still exist, and more must be done to ensure that all Canadians are able to live with dignity and have enough money for the costs of living, including food. Income-related policy solutions can effectively reduce food insecurity on a population level, as demonstrated by the following evidence:
 - Data analysis associated with low income seniors in Canada who receive the Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement shows that when they turn 65 and begin receiving payments, food insecurity rates drop by half among these households.¹⁰
 - The rate of severe food insecurity dropped by one-third among low-income families following the introduction of the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) in 2016.¹¹ While the CCB did little to affect food insecurity overall, it disproportionately benefited families most susceptible to food insecurity.¹¹ Other research has demonstrated that income supplements provided to the lowest income families allow them to spend more on necessities such as food.¹²
 - Data collected from participants of the Ontario Basic Income Pilot Project showed significant impacts related to food insecurity as a result of receiving a basic income. Participants reported positive dietary outcomes such as decreased reliance on food charity programs,



and overall improved diet quality, including increased consumption of vegetables and fruit, than when they were not receiving a basic income.¹³

These examples provide strong evidence that a basic income would be effective at reducing food insecurity on a population level, which would result in positive health outcomes, reduced health inequities and lower health care costs, while working toward a more inclusive and resilient Canada.

Follow through on the commitment to support food security in northern and Indigenous communities as part of the [Food Policy for Canada](#), emphasizing Indigenous food self-determination and reconciliation as guiding principles. ODPH recognizes that COVID-19 has been the most pressing priority over the past year, and that little progress has been made with the *Food Policy for Canada*. However, the high rates of food insecurity among northern and Indigenous communities cannot be ignored. Indigenous peoples in Canada experience disproportionately high rates of food insecurity as a result of historical and ongoing colonization.¹⁴ As previously noted, the physical and mental health consequences of food insecurity are significant, and in the spirit of reconciliation, meaningfully addressing food insecurity and other health inequities experienced by Indigenous households in Canada must be prioritized.

ODPH strongly urges the government of Canada to consider the evidence-based recommendations provided above from our [position statement](#), as part of the 2021 budget and as important aspects of building an inclusive economic recovery that leaves no Canadian behind. Thank you for taking the time to review this information and we look forward to reviewing the results of the pre-budget consultation.

Sincerely,

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