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Principles

Access to good affordable food is essential

Food is essential for post-secondary students during their educational careers. Access to high-quality, nutritious, affordable food is vital for physical and mental health, academic performance, social inclusion and well-being. However, many students lack food security during post-secondary education and suffer negative impacts on their quality of life.

A lack of food can lead to malnutrition, poor health, and chronic illnesses such as diabetes and heart disease.¹ Food insecurity can also lead to stress, anxiety, and depression, impacting a student's mental health and overall well-being. Academics can also suffer from increased rates of absenteeism, decreased attention and focus, and low motivation.² Since access to food is a basic need, students who do not have access to adequate food may experience stigma, shame, and social isolation.³

Students are heavily impacted by food insecurity


In the 2021/22 academic year, fifty-seven per cent (57%) of students surveyed by *Meal Exchange* faced moderate to severe food insecurity, which has increased from forty-two per cent (42%) of students who reported food insecurity in the 2020/21 academic year.⁴

¹ Jason M Nagata, Palar Kartika , Holly C Gooding, Andrea K Garber, Kirsten Bibbins-Domingo, and Sheri D Weiser. "Food Insecurity and Chronic Disease in US Young Adults," in *Journal of General Internal Medicine* 34, no. 12 (December 2019): 2756–62. doi:10.1007/s11606-019-05317-8, Page 1

² N Hattangadi, E Vogel, LJ Carroll, and P. Côté. "Is Food Insecurity Associated with Psychological Distress in Undergraduate University Students? A Cross Sectional Study." in *Journal of Hunger & Environmental Nutrition* 16, no. 1 (January 2021): 133–48. doi:10.1080/19320248.2019.1658679, Page 2

³ Hamelin, A. M., Habicht, J. P., & Beaudry, M. (1999). Food insecurity: Consequences for the household and broader social implications. *The Journal of Nutrition*, 129(2), 525S–528S. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jn/129.2.525s>

⁴ Meal Exchange. "[2021 NATIONAL STUDENT FOOD INSECURITY REPORT.](#)", 9.

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Students also face higher levels of food insecurity than the general population. In 2016, almost two (2) in five (5) students experienced food insecurity compared to one (1) in seven (7) Canadian households.⁵

Sixty per cent (60%) of students couldn't afford to eat balanced or nutritious meals, while fifty-five per cent (55%) relied on low-cost foods to avoid running out of money. Thirty-two per cent (32%) skipped meals because they didn't have enough money.⁶

Food insecurity also impacts some demographic groups at a disproportionate rate, with the following students impacted more than average: seventy-three per cent (73%) of those aged 30-34, sixty-nine per cent (69%) of those identifying as queer, ninety-three per cent (93%) of those identifying as Two-Spirit, seventy-six per cent (76%) of Indigenous students, seventy-five per cent (75%) of international students and eighty-three per cent (83%) of students who are single parents.


Students were also surveyed on policy changes that would help improve food access, with greater food affordability and increasing financial stability as the most common. Twenty-two per cent (22%) of students said they want increased tuition support, twenty per cent (20%) said they would like more affordable food and meals on campus, thirteen (13%) answered that higher wages would be most helpful, twelve per cent (12%) said increased rental supports and nine per cent (9%) wanted an expansion of financial aid.

Rising prices and excess profits contribute to food insecurity

Food insecurity in students has been further exacerbated by rising food prices in Canada. According to StatsCan, food prices have increased faster than the overall consumer inflation rate for thirteen consecutive months. In September 2022, the

⁵ Drew Silverthorn. "Hungry for knowledge: Assessing the prevalence of student food insecurity on five Canadian campuses." Meal Exchange (2016). Accessed February 3, 2023. <https://mealexchange.com/resources>

⁶ Meal Exchange. "[2021 NATIONAL STUDENT FOOD INSECURITY REPORT](#).", 9.

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year-over-year increase in the prices of food purchased from grocery stores was at 11.4%; the highest since 1981, and in October 2022, it remained high at 11%.⁷

StatsCan reports on multiple factors that have influenced higher food prices in grocery stores: including disruptions to the supply chain, labour shortages, shifts in consumer buying habits, unfavorable weather in certain agricultural areas, higher tariffs, increased costs for raw materials, and higher wages. In contrast to past increases, these price conditions and pressures are all happening concurrently or more intensely, leading to widespread rises in food prices.⁸

However, at the same time, large Canadian grocery store corporations have all reported a higher increase in their 2022 gross profits compared to their average historical performance. For example, Loblaws' gross profit in 2022 exceeded its highest performance in the previous five years by a margin of \$180 million.⁹

In October 2022, the Competition Bureau announced it was conducting a study of grocery store competition in Canada to investigate whether higher grocery prices were a result of a lack of competition and how to increase competition within the sector.¹⁰ In the same month, the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Agriculture announced it would examine food prices and any potential abuse by major grocery store corporations.¹¹

⁷ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/62f0014m/62f0014m2022014-eng.htm>

⁸ Ibid.


⁹ <https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/sites/agri-food/Greedflation%203%20EN.pdf>

¹⁰

<https://www.canada.ca/en/competition-bureau/news/2022/10/competition-bureau-to-study-competition-in-canadas-grocery-sector.html>

¹¹

https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/sites/agri-food/Canada%27s%20Food%20Price%20Report%202023_Digital.pdf page 12

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Improving food security by increasing financial support

A lack of financial resources is one of the leading drivers of food insecurity for post-secondary students. While the highest percentage of food insecurity was reported by students that were unemployed and actively seeking work at sixty-nine per cent (69%); sixty-five per cent (65%) of students who were employed full time, and sixty per cent (60%) of students working part-time also reported food insecurity, suggesting they weren't able to earn enough to cover their necessary living expenses.¹²

Furthermore, students relying on government loans, bank loans and financial aid to fund their education all experienced higher levels of food insecurity, with sixty-four per cent (64%), seventy-five per cent (75%) and sixty-six per cent (66%), reporting moderate to severe food insecurity respectively.¹³ There is a large disparity between the financial resources available to students and their actual living costs.¹⁴

A 2021 research study of 123,300 Canadians examined how certain government policies, such as raising the minimum wage, increasing welfare benefits, and reducing income taxes for low-income households, could decrease the likelihood of food insecurity.¹⁵ The study showed that when yearly welfare benefits were increased by \$1,000 or the minimum wage by \$1 per hour, the likelihood of severe food insecurity was reduced by 5%. Conversely, if the income tax rate for low-income households was increased by 1%, the likelihood of food insecurity increased by 9%.¹⁶


¹² Ibid. 15.

¹³ Ibid. 16.

¹⁴ Maynard, M., Meyer, S., Perlman, C. & Kirkpatrick, S. (2018a). Experiences of Food Insecurity Among Undergraduate Students: "You Can't Starve Yourself Through School". *Canadian Journal for Higher Education*, 48(2): 130-148. Retrieved from: <https://journals.sfu.ca/cjhe/index.php/cjhe/article/download/188121/pdf/>

¹⁵ Men F, Urquia ML, Tarasuk V. The role of provincial social policies and economic environment in shaping household food insecurity among families with children in Canada. *Preventive Medicine*. 2021;148:106558. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ypmed.2021.106558>

¹⁶ Ibid.

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Reducing barriers to food access at Capilano University

In 2021, the Capilano Students' Union developed a Food Security Strategy that identified barriers that prevent students from accessing affordable and nutritious food on campus.¹⁷ Barriers to food access can put a student at risk for food insecurity and compound hardships in attempting to acquire healthy, affordable, culturally relevant foods.

Barriers identified in the strategy include limited access to facilities and equipment for food preparation, limited access to traditional and culturally appropriate food, limited knowledge and skills related to food, limited physical access to food, and limited time to prepare food. Additionally, the over-availability of processed foods can contribute to chronic health conditions and do not provide the necessary nutrients, which can negatively impact students' academic success and well-being.

Avoidable food loss in the supply chain

Addressing food waste and loss in the supply chain can play a significant role in promoting food security. Based on 2019 data, 24.6 billion lbs (11.2 million metric tonnes) of potentially avoidable food loss and waste occurs in Canada each year, valued at \$49.5 billion.¹⁸


Much of this wasted food is edible and could be redistributed to food banks or hunger relief organisations. The national shortfall between community food organizations' supply and demand was 162 million lbs, showing that surplus food should be put

¹⁷

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1j0AZW40chuGC_y-wQgo1axfwcQlpT6fWr1RH2T4EQGw/edit#heading=h.v0c4xy6k8x1l

¹⁸ Gooch, M., Bucknell, D., LaPlain, D., Dent, B., Whitehead, P., Felfel, A., Nikkel, L., Maguire, M. 2019. The Avoidable Crisis of Food Waste: Technical Report; Value Chain Management International and Second Harvest; Ontario, Canada. Accessible from:

<https://secondharvest.ca/research/the-avoidable-crisis-of-food-waste/>

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salvaged and put to use to address food insecurity.¹⁹ Reducing food waste and facilitating the redistribution of surplus food to those in need can improve access to nutritious food and promote food security in students. This approach also has the potential to reduce the environmental impact of food waste and disposal, creating a more sustainable and equitable food system.

Food banks are not a long-term solution to food insecurity

Food banks are a very important short-term and emergency solution to food insecurity. However, food banks on their own are unable to address the long-term and systemic problems that cause students to be food insecure. Food banks do not move people out of food insecurity, with research showing most people who use food banks continue to remain food insecure despite repeated usage.²⁰


Many food-insecure households do not see food banks as an effective solution. A 2019 study discovered that food bank usage was one of the least utilised solutions by food-insecure households when facing financial hardship.²¹ Instead, these households were more likely to seek financial assistance from their social networks and delay paying their bills.

Furthermore, despite a recent increase in the number of non-profit food providers, food insecurity data indicates that there has been little to no meaningful progress in reducing

¹⁹ NATIONAL IDENTIFICATION OF COMMUNITY FOOD ORGANIZATIONS NEEDS AND SHORTFALLS IN SUPPLY VERSUS DEMAND 2019 TO 2021
<https://www.secondharvest.ca/getmedia/ea0ea5d3-b647-4b8c-a3d5-f83bbc82ff63/National-Identification-of-Community-Food-Organizations.pdf>

²⁰ Holmes E, Black J, Heckelman A, et al. "Nothing is going to change three months from now": a mixed methods characterization of food bank use in Greater Vancouver. *Social Science & Medicine*. 2018;200:129-36. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2018.01.029>

²¹ Tarasuk V, Fafard St-Germain AA, Loopstra R. The relationship between food banks and food insecurity: insights from Canada. *Voluntas: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*. 2019;31(5):841-52. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-019-00092-w>

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household food insecurity.²² Moreover, statistics from the Canadian Income Survey show that only a small proportion of those experiencing food insecurity are accessing food banks.²³

Rationale

The Capilano Students' Union has adopted these policy principles because:


- Food is essential for physical and mental health, academic performance, social inclusion and overall well-being of post-secondary students.
- Students face higher levels of food insecurity than the general population.
- In Fall 2021, 57% of students reported facing moderate to severe food insecurity.
- Food insecurity impacts some students disproportionately, with those identifying as queer, Two-Spirit, Indigenous, international, mature and single-parents reporting higher than average levels of food insecurity.
- A lack of financial resources and access to affordable food are the leading drivers of food insecurity for post-secondary students.

Principles

1. The Capilano Students' Union is in favour of:
 - a. Low- and no-profit grocery store models.
 - b. Local, community-based food systems.

²² Nikkel L, Summerhill V, Gooch M, et al. Canada's Invisible Food Network. Ontario, Canada: Second Harvest and Value Chain Management International; 2021 2021. <https://www.secondharvest.ca/getmedia/b8cf1995-ec2a-4a13-9c3d-0a9d9b97beb0/Canada-s-Invisible-Food-Network.pdf>

²³ <https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/what-can-be-done-to-reduce-food-insecurity-in-canada/#>

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- c. Financial supports provided by the provincial and federal government to help students afford food.
 - d. Reducing barriers to food access on Capilano University's campuses.
2. The Capilano Students' Union opposes:
- a. Price gouging by grocery companies.
 - b. Avoidable food loss and waste in the supply chain and at point-of-sale.
 - c. Food banks as the only long-term solution to student food insecurity.