

The Cost of Eating in BC

Low-income families are more desperate than ever

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Dietitians of Canada (DC) is the professional association representing 5000 dietitians in Canada including 700 in BC. Dietitians of Canada speaks out on food and nutrition matters important to the health and well-being of Canadians. BC members of DC have collaborated to bring data and information forward to inform decision makers about the struggles experienced by families on low incomes.

The Community Nutritionists Council (CNC) of BC is made up of registered dietitians/nutritionists who work for Regional Health Authorities. The CNC mission is: *"To enable all British Columbians to achieve and maintain optimal nutritional well-being through access to safe, appropriate and quality food, nutrition information and nutrition services."*

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Executive Summary

Dietitians and their community partners in British Columbia are increasingly concerned about the ability of those on low incomes, especially families on income assistance, to access safe and healthy food in a dignified manner. The situation for many British Columbians is getting worse. Here are the facts:

- ◆ one in six children in BC live in poverty;
- ◆ 20% of the population in BC are low income and 5% are on income assistance;
- ◆ about 12% of the BC population is worried they will not get enough food because of lack of money;
- ◆ food insecurity is significantly associated with poor health, chronic disease, obesity, major depression, distress and food allergies;
- ◆ welfare benefits have declined since the 1990s; food costs have increased;
- ◆ almost 60% of food bank users are welfare recipients;
- ◆ the World Food Summit 2002 recognized the merit of school feeding as a social development program;
- ◆ the demand for school meal programs is not going away. Unless the underlying causes of food insecurity are addressed, children will continue to go hungry, fail to succeed at school, and experience poor growth and development.

To determine the real cost of healthy eating, in June 2003, community nutritionists across the province

priced a nutritious food basket using Health Canada's standardized food costing tool. The monthly cost to feed the reference family of four (two parents, two children) increased by 3% from the previous year—\$629 a month to \$648. Since 2000, the cost of healthy eating has increased by 9% yet the income for the family on income assistance has declined by 6%. Based on the 2003 results, a low income family would need to spend up to 44% of their disposable income on a nutritious diet compared to the average Canadian with one earner spending 17%. The pregnant woman living alone on income assistance would be in the most desperate situation.

Food security is an essential precursor to an active, healthy lifestyle. Since the causes and impacts of food insecurity are multi-factorial, strategies and policies that enable food security, and ultimately healthy eating, span the mandates of many ministries, sectors and jurisdictions. Given the link of food insecurity to population health outcomes and health care costs, health authorities have an integral role to play in promoting and supporting food security. Collaboration among key players, including the BC Ministry of Human Resources, BC Ministry of Children and Family Development, BC Ministry of Health Services, BC Ministry of Health Planning, BC Health Authorities, this report's authors and endorsing agencies, other concerned organizations, and citizens, is needed to determine effective, long-term solutions to poverty and food insecurity.

Food security is an essential precursor to an active, healthy lifestyle

Introduction

Dietitians and their community partners in British Columbia are increasingly concerned about the ability of those on low incomes, especially families on income assistance, to access safe and healthy food in a dignified manner. The situation for many British Columbians is getting worse. Immediate action is paramount. Here's why:

- ◆ Despite the resolution in the House of Commons in 1989 to eliminate child poverty by 2000, one in six children in BC live in poverty with 41% of food bank recipients being children. The early years are critical years for healthy development.^{1,2}
- ◆ According to the 2003 Market Basket Measure report,³ almost 50% of lone female parent families are low income. Twenty per cent of the population in BC are low income and that's equivalent to every person in Victoria, Nanaimo, Kelowna, Vernon, Kamloops, Prince George and Abbotsford living on a low income.⁴ Given 5% of the BC population is on income assistance,⁵ that means 15% are earning a low income.
- ◆ According to the Market Basket Measure, the average food cost is higher in BC than any other Canadian province at \$606 a month for the reference family of four based on 2000 food costs.⁶
- ◆ Since 1989, food costs in BC have increased by approximately 38% yet the income assistance support allowance has declined by 16% (see Appendix A).
- ◆ Statistics Canada's Community Health Profile for BC 2000/01 revealed that almost 12% of the population during the past 12 months were worried that there would not be enough food because of a lack of money.⁷ Over 2% of the population resorts to food bank hand-outs.⁸
- ◆ Individuals from food-insufficient households are more likely to report poor health, multiple chronic conditions (heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure), major depression and distress, and food allergies.⁹ Food insecurity is also associated with obesity and its related health risks.¹⁰
- ◆ Population health evidence points to the increased costs to the health care system, and the decreases in the academic achievements, health and life spans, of those populations at the bottom end of the socio-economic scale. Health problems of poor children begin before birth.¹¹
- ◆ Welfare benefits in British Columbia are not based on any real costs of living. Changes to the income assistance system over the past two years have resulted in more desperate situations for BC families. Eligibility criteria are stricter, support and shelter allowances have declined for some categories of recipients, earnings and child support exemptions are deleted and it is more and more difficult for families to qualify for childcare subsidies.¹²
- ◆ The introduction of the National Child Benefit Supplement in 1998 was meant to relieve the

Individuals from food-insufficient households are more likely to report poor health

financial hardship of low income families. The Ministry of Human Resources reduced the welfare rates accordingly so this supplement has made no difference to families living on assistance.¹³

- ◆ Almost 60% of food bank users are welfare recipients.¹⁴
- ◆ There are reports that school meal programs are being cut back in some school districts and are only available to children who identify themselves as in need. Dignified access to food is key to food security.
- ◆ At the World Food Summit 2002, the merit of school feeding as a social development program was recognized.¹⁵
- ◆ The Ministry of Children and Family Development's own review of school-based programs (SBP)¹⁶ reveals that

vulnerable children, such as children in care and children from families receiving income assistance, on average, have relatively poor academic attainment at school. Schools that receive SBP funding significantly reduce this risk. The greater the risk to the student, the more SBP reduce this risk. The Ministry of Children and Family Development is to be con-

gratulated for responding to a public outcry and deciding not to cut the annual budget for CommunityLINK (Learning Includes Nutrition and Knowledge) for 2003–04. CommunityLINK is the new title for the basket of school-based social equity programs including school meal programs. School Boards can decide how to allocate the CommunityLINK fund.

The first *Cost of Eating in BC* report was published in October 2000 and subsequently in 2001 and 2002. Knowledge about and utilization of the report's findings is growing—see Appendix B. The Community Nutritionists Council of BC is in the process of publishing another report outlining a proposal for a food security initiative within BC's soon to be established new Public Health Act. An earlier report, *Feed our Future—Secure our Health*,¹⁷ by the Food Security and Nutrition Advocacy Committee, was spear-

headed and supported by Dietitians of Canada, BC Region and community nutritionists across BC.

This report focuses on the cost of healthy eating for British Columbians and outlines the potential and real struggles for many families living on a low earned wage or income assistance.

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Methods

To determine the real cost of healthy eating, in June 2003, community nutritionists across the province priced a nutritious food basket using Health Canada's standardized food costing tool, the *National Nutritious Food Basket 1998*.¹⁸ All health regions were included and 125 grocery stores were surveyed (see Appendix C for details on foods included). The nutritious food basket, also referred to as the healthy food basket (HFB), is the same tool used by Human Resources Development Canada to determine the cost of food for the Market Basket Measure.

The tool "provides a proxy estimate of individual food affordability and accessibility" and can be "used to address these aspects of food security," according to a recent report from Health Canada. This same report concludes that the interpretation of the tool can be further improved by comparing the cost of the HFB to the proportion of the income spent on food.¹⁹

The tool was used in this report to determine the affordability of food for the low income family compared to the average family. The proportion of disposable income (after taxes) spent on food for the low income family was compared to the average family. Disposable income includes other potential sources of income such as federal and provincial child tax benefits and GST rebates. For a number of typical family scenarios, the

funds available after food and shelter costs were paid, was calculated. These remaining monies would need to be used to purchase all other necessities including transportation, utilities, clothing, child care, personal hygiene items, laundry and cleaning supplies, school supplies and fees etc.

The HFB is neither an ideal diet nor the cheapest diet but it represents a nutritious diet that is consistent

with the food purchases of ordinary Canadian households. The food costs do not include take-out or restaurant eating and do not consider the potential availability of emergency food programs as this does not qualify as dignified access to healthy food. The economies of scale factor for a family size smaller or larger than four was applied to the food costs (see Appendix C).

In previous reports, the average rental costs for Metropolitan Vancouver were used. The current report applies the same formula and the same number of bedrooms for the different family compositions as does the Social Planning

and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC) in their 2002 report. SPARC BC used the 25th percentile to calculate shelter costs.²⁰

To bring reality to the struggles of real families living on income assistance or low earned incomes, stories were gathered from clients surviving on low incomes.

To determine the real cost of healthy eating, in June 2003, community nutritionists across the province priced a nutritious food basket using Health Canada's standardized food costing tool

The proportion of disposable income (after taxes) spent on food for the low income family was compared to the average family

Results

The monthly cost to feed a variety of age and gender groups in BC is included in Table 1. The monthly cost to feed the reference family of four (two parents, two children) was \$648 compared to \$629 in 2002—a 3% increase. This translates to an increase of more than \$200 a year the reference family would need to spend on food compared to just one year ago.

Since 2000, when food costing data was first gathered in BC using the nutritious food basket tool, the cost of healthy eating for a family of four has increased by almost 9%. Income assistance rates have declined for the same family unit by 6% (see Appendix A).²¹

To obtain a healthy diet, the family of four on income

assistance would need to spend 44% of their after tax income on food compared to 17% for the average Canadian family with one earner—see Table 2. The same family on income assistance would be spending 58% of their disposable income on rent compared to 27% for the average Canadian family with one earner.

Considering only the cost of shelter (utilities may be additional) and food, the reference family on income assistance (support payment of \$401; shelter payment of \$590) would be in debt by month end with no money to purchase other necessities such as clothing, transportation, telephone, personal hygiene items etc.

Table 1 — Monthly cost of eating

Age/Gender Groups	Total Monthly Cost	Age/Gender Groups	Total Monthly Cost
FAMILY OF FOUR	\$648.09	WOMAN	
FAMILY OF THREE	\$471.47	19–24 Years	\$151.41
CHILD		25–49 Years	\$143.48
1 Year	\$ 72.97	50–74 Years	\$140.49
2–3 Years	\$ 78.56	75+ Years	\$136.38
4–6 Years	\$104.78	PREGNANCY AND BREASTFEEDING	
BOY		16–18 Trimester1	\$166.96
7–9 Years	\$128.40	16–18 Trimester2	\$178.45
10–12 Years	\$157.13	16–18 Trimester3	\$178.45
13–15 Years	\$183.69	16–18 Breastfeeding	\$183.65
16–18 Years	\$215.93		
GIRL		19–24 Trimester1	\$162.80
7–9 Years	\$121.85	19–24 Trimester2	\$174.90
10–12 Years	\$142.48	19–24 Trimester3	\$174.90
13–15 Years	\$153.62	19–24 Breastfeeding	\$178.45
16–18 Years	\$147.94		
MAN		25–49 Trimester1	\$155.48
19–24 Years	\$206.14	25–49 Trimester2	\$164.93
25–49 Years	\$199.07	25–49 Trimester3	\$164.93
50–74 Years	\$179.23	25–49 Breastfeeding	\$168.70
75+ Years	\$161.29		

Since 2000...the cost of healthy eating for a family of four has increased by almost 9%

The low income wage earner (\$10/hour) would be somewhat better off with just over \$600 a month to purchase all other necessities besides shelter and food but compared to the average Canadian family with one earner their situation would be dismal (see Table 2). With an annual estimated income at just over \$25,000, the low-income wage earner would be more than \$2,500 short by year-end in meeting basic costs according to the 2000 Market Basket Measures for Vancouver. Unlike the family on assist-

ance, this family is responsible for their own dental and medical costs.

The single pregnant woman living alone and on income assistance would be in the most desperate situation of all family scenarios outlined in Table 2 as her welfare cheque would barely cover the cost of bachelor accommodation. It is unlikely she would be able to adequately feed herself and her developing baby nor afford reasonably safe and adequate housing.

Table 2 — What's left after food and shelter are paid: Six family scenarios

Monthly	Family 1 Reference family of 4 with average income	Family 2 Reference family of 4 with low earned income	Family 3 Reference family of 4 on income assistance	Family 4 One parent family— 2 children	Family 5 Two parent family— 3 children	Family 6 Young pregnant woman
Net Income (after taxes)	\$3794	\$1536	\$991*	\$881*	\$1026*	\$545*
GST Credit ⁺	-	55	55	55	65	55
Basic Canada Child Tax Benefit ⁺	99	195	195	195	318	0
Canada Child Benefit Supplement ⁺	0	226	226	226	324	0
BC Family Bonus ⁺	0	15	19	19	43	0
BC Earned Income Benefit ⁺	0	84	-	-	-	-
Disposable Income	3893	2111	1486	1376	1776	600
Cost of Food [§]	648	648	648	471	691	201
% of Income Spent on Food	17	31	44	34	39	34
Approx. Rent [°]	1061 3BR	855 3BR	855 3BR	855 3BR	855 3BR	540 Bachelor
What's Left (after food and shelter costs)	2184	608	-17	50	230	-141

Note: All dollars rounded to the nearest dollar.

Reference Family of 4—Mother and Father, ages 25–49 years; two children—boy 13, girl 7

Family 1 An average Canadian two-parent family with two children, one earner. Before tax income \$56,364.²² After tax annual income \$45,524.

Family 2 Net monthly income based on \$10/hour, 40 hour work week, CPP (4.95%) and EI (2.10%) contributions for 2003, federal (16%) and provincial (6.05%) tax deductions for 2003 (www.ccr-aadrc.gc.ca/tax/business/payroll/t4032jan03/menu-e.html) and a GST credit of \$660/annually.

Family 3 Reference family of 4 on income assistance

Family 4 One parent family on income assistance—Mother age 25-49, two children—boy 13, girl 7

Family 5 Two parent family on income assistance—Mother and Father, ages 25-49 years; three children boy 13, girls 7 and 2

Family 6 Pregnant young woman (Age 19-Trimester 2/3) living alone on income assistance with natal allowance

* Based on Income Assistance Shelter Rates effective July-02/Support allowance effective April-02.²³

§ See Table 1. For families with fewer than 4 members the economies of scale factor is applied.

° See Reference 20 Table 14. Use average rent for Family 1 and 25th percentile for others.

+ Child/Family Tax benefits effective to June 30-04 and calculated based on total income before taxes using the Child and Family Benefits Online Calculator.²⁴

*To obtain a healthy diet,
the family of four on income
assistance would need to
spend 44% of their
after tax income on food*

Real People Tell Their Story

Story 1

Single parent on assistance struggles with costs associated with school

Tiffany is a single mother with 3 children, ages 6, 4 and 2 years. Jasmine, the oldest, is entering grade one at the nearby public school. As the start of school approaches, Tiffany worries about the cost of school supplies, school fees and new runners for Jasmine. She knows that these costs are more than her assistance cheque can handle.

She's thankful that the school has a school lunch program. For \$20 a month, she knows that Jasmine gets a nutritious lunch. She remembers when Jasmine was in kindergarten, the pressure to buy certain foods—convenience foods that her food budget could not handle. She hopes the school lunch program will help.

Story 2

Single parent on income assistance living in a small town

Mary is a single mom with two small children aged six and two years. She has been on and off income assistance for five years. "It [income assistance] works and I'm glad I have it, but...there's

pressure to be good or maybe you won't get your cheque and then what?" states this frustrated mother. Mary's income is approximately \$1400 monthly. "I offer childcare in my home, however all the money I earn is deducted from my allowance," she says.

Mary's monthly fixed expenses take a huge bite out of her low income. Each month she spends \$650

to rent a three-bedroom apartment (she has concerns about the drugs, alcohol and violence present in the building) and \$120 on phone and an internet connection. "My whole support system exists outside of my community and to stay sane I need access to the outside world...It's hard to meet moms here with no money or childcare." Loan repayments are \$120 a month and the little remaining is used for food, clothing and household items. Within

two or three days after the cheque is received and the bills are paid, very little money is left. Mary is concerned about her ability to feed her family healthy food. "My kids are supposed to grow up healthy yet I can't even afford to buy them food. I rock them and tell them it's OK when they say they are hungry. How do you explain that to a six year old...sometimes they get plain pasta or crackers, etc. I ration the food so they are often hungry...if we miss out on anything, it's usually fruits, vegetables and meat." Mary admits to not eating very well either, she usually has the leftovers (if any) after the children are fed.

Mary is concerned about the two-year rule for

"My kids are supposed to grow up healthy yet I can't even afford to buy them food. I rock them and tell them it's OK when they say they are hungry."

She's thankful that the school has a school lunch program

Real People Tell Their Story

income assistance. She feels she will continue to offer childcare. Mary wants to return to school, though she doesn't know how she's going to afford childcare for her children. "It's well over \$300 (a month) for my two kids for childcare and that includes full subsidy from the government." Despite her challenges, Mary says "I'm determined that my children will live a normal life..."

Story 3

Low income earner living in Vancouver

John lives in Vancouver with his wife and four year old daughter and they have another one on the way. He attended university in Ontario for one year and now has a \$10,000 debt. He is very distraught about his life as he tries to make ends meet. They live in BC housing but still have many expenses. He runs from his day job to his evening job, working a total of 44 hours a week. He makes about \$10 an hour at one place and \$11 at another, before taxes. He gets home at midnight and wakes up early with

little time to spend with this daughter and wife. He feels that his relationship with his wife and child is going downhill and there is not anything that he can do differently at the moment. His wife has a history of depression and counts on him to spend more time with his daughter and clean up around the house. The remainder of his time he is at the food bank getting food. They go to a soup kitchen three times a week and any other place where they can get some free items. He really hates living where they live as there are criminals that live in the complex who are on drugs and alcohol and steal from one place and try to sell to another, within the complex. John is too afraid to report this crime. The daughter has no friends in the complex and she cannot be a child any longer as she deals with the family stresses that they cope with on a daily basis. They would like to send her to preschool but cannot afford to and do not qualify for a subsidy with the policy changes implemented by the government. He fears that at this early age of 4, his daughter is messed up. He is worn out and tired as he tries to cope with his grave situation.

Mary wants to return to school, though she doesn't know how she's going to afford childcare for her children

Conclusions

While the average Canadian family with one income spends about 17% of their disposable income on food, those on income assistance or with a low earned income living and buying food in BC would need to spend over 30% of their income on food (see Table 2). Furthermore, they would need to spend over 40% and, in the case of the pregnant woman on assistance who lives alone, almost all of their income on rent based on approximate rents in Greater Vancouver at the 25 percentile of the rental market in 2001 (see Table 2). Thirty percent of income spent on shelter is considered reasonable.²⁵ To survive, families would be forced to seek out poor housing in unsafe neighbourhoods, line up at food banks and soup kitchens, leave their children in unsafe child care situations due to the high cost of child care and go without the basic necessities of life, including healthy food.

Poverty remains a persistent problem in British Columbia²⁶ with more and more citizens experiencing food insecurity. Charity food programs or hand-outs are not the answer. Food bank line-ups continue to grow and the demand for school meal pro-

grams is not going away. Unless the underlying causes of food insecurity are addressed, children will continue to go hungry, not succeed at school, and experience poor growth and development. Child-feeding programs, that do not stigmatize children, must continue until such time as poverty and food insecurity are addressed.

Food security is an essential precursor to an active, healthy lifestyle. Since the causes and impacts of food insecurity are multi-factorial, strategies, policies and legislation (including the provincial Public Health Act) that enable food security, and ultimately healthy eating, span the mandates of many ministries, sectors and jurisdictions. Given the link of food insecurity to population health outcomes and health care costs, health authorities have an inte-

gral role to play in promoting and supporting food security. Poor people's participation in policy and program development and implementation is key. Appendix D outlines how two BC communities have taken action to address food insecurity in their communities.

Unless the underlying causes of food insecurity are addressed, children will continue to go hungry, not succeed at school, and experience poor growth and development

Child-feeding programs, that do not stigmatize children, must continue until such time as poverty and food insecurity are addressed

Call To Action

All British Columbians should work together to support food security actions initiated in their community and become more informed about hunger and its impact on the community.

Individually you can:

- ◆ start by educating yourself about poverty issues in your community. You can connect with local poverty groups, social planning committees and local agencies working with those on low incomes;
- ◆ write a letter to your local Member of the Legislative Assembly and/or the Minister responsible for the policies and programs of concern to you. Those who are experiencing poverty and food insecurity are the best advocates for change. See Appendix E, which offers some tips on writing a letter to government officials. A sample letter is included;
- ◆ make a personal decision to purchase local foods when available and encourage local institutions to do likewise. Buying local boosts the local economy;
- ◆ work with your local food bank supporting them to offer a variety of healthy foods;
- ◆ continue to support community food programs e.g. local food bank, community kitchens.

*Collaboration
among key players is needed
to determine effective,
long-term solutions to poverty
and food insecurity*

- ◆ make a list of individuals and organizations you can share *The Cost of Eating in BC* report with and then get them together to brainstorm local action;

In your community you can:

- ◆ help build capacity for food security by supporting self help programs such as community kitchens, community gardens, gleaning and food box programs. Contact your local community nutritionist in your health authority for information on how to connect with these programs;
- ◆ offer your skills to set up workshops on budget food preparation or food processing such as canning, freezing and drying.

*Those who are
experiencing poverty
and food insecurity are
the best advocates
for change*

To help address food insecurity in the long term, work together to:

- ◆ advocate for fair income assistance rates and core food security programs (see Appendix E for a sample letter to your Minister);
- ◆ create policies and environments that support sustainable food systems and dignified access to food for all;
- ◆ support breastfeeding by creating environments and policies that allow mothers to feed their infants in comfort at work or in the community;
- ◆ support co-operative and low cost housing projects;
- ◆ create or work with local food policy councils.

Your efforts are important as food insecurity affects the whole community through increased health care costs, decreased learning capacity for children and impaired health of the growing child.

Recommendations

1. BC Ministries, regional health authorities and municipal governments must partner with community organizations and those on low incomes to achieve food security* for all British Columbians, specifically:
 - The BC Ministry of Human Resources must establish a clear, fair and transparent process for determining income assistance rates that is based on the actual cost of shelter and support. More specifically, the food allowance should be based on the actual cost of a nutritious food basket considering the *age and number of children and adults* in the home.
 - The BC Ministry of Children and Family Development must continue to fund school-based social equity programs and work with school boards to ensure School Meal Programs are available to all children in need in a dignified manner.
 - The BC Ministries of Health must recognize that food insecurity is a public health concern (e.g. Provincial Health Officer's Annual Report on food security) and that core programs within the new Public Health Act must include food security.
 - BC Health Authorities should establish comprehensive core food security programs and policies and fund these in a sustainable way.
2. All British Columbians should work together to support food security actions initiated in their community and become more informed about hunger and its impact on the community.

* *The 1996 World Food Summit agreed that: "Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life."*

APPENDIX A

— Income assistance rates and food costs 1989 to 2003

	% change since 1989	2003	2000	1996	1989
Provincial monthly shelter allowance for reference family*	5% increase	\$590	\$650	\$650	\$560
Provincial monthly support allowance for the reference family*	16% decrease	\$401	\$401	\$383	\$479
Monthly cost for healthy food for the reference family§	approx. 38% increase	\$648	\$596	N/A	\$468

* Reference family is a two-parent family with two children. Income assistance rates were determined from the Social Planning and Research Council (SPARC) of BC's reports—December 2002, *Falling Further Behind*; May 1997, *Widening the Gap*; April 1990, *Closing the Gap* and *The Cost of Eating in BC* 2000 report.

§ Food costs were determined for the reference family using the current report and *The Cost of Eating in BC* 2000 report. The 1989 food costs were based on Agriculture Canada's Retail Food Price Report for Vancouver for January 1989 as reported in the SPARC *Closing the Gap* 1990 report. The basket of foods used by Agriculture Canada for monthly costing was different than the current tool used in this report therefore the comparison of food costs from 1989 to 2003 is approximate.

APPENDIX B

—Impact of *The Cost of Eating in BC* reports

Since *The Cost of Eating* report was first published in 2000 a number of successes have been reported and are worth noting for our readers and endorsers.

On November 25, 2002 a meeting was held with four provincial Ministers (Human Resources, Health Services, Health Planning, Children and Family Development) to discuss the report and its recommendations. All four Ministers attended the meeting together—see photo. The report was endorsed by eight provincial agencies and referenced in many provincial and national reports including *Falling Further Behind* by SPARC BC. The report was listed on many web sites including the Canadian Social Research Links, First Call-BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition, BC Association of Social Workers, Public Health Association of BC, PovNet, UBC Faculty of Education—Curriculum Studies and Food Bank-Greater Vancouver. The press release was picked up by many community papers including the Nanaimo Daily, Kelowna Courier, Langley Times and Surrey Leader. Leading experts have quoted from the report including Clyde Hertzman at the Nanaimo Prevention Forum. The report development process and results were presented to well over 100 UBC students in the Faculty of Agricultural Sciences in 2002 and 2001 and an abstract was submitted to the International Congress of Dietetic Associations 2004. For the first time since the report was published, several clients impacted by food insecurity contacted Dietitians of Canada to congratulate the publishers on producing a report that spoke to their real needs.

The 2001 report was endorsed by two provincial agencies and posted and referenced on several web sites including Woman for Women Needing Welfare in BC, First Call- BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coal-

ition, Food Bank-Greater Vancouver, SPARC BC and Kootenaycuts.com. SPARC BC also began using the food costing data from this report for their own annual report on the comparison of living costs to in-



come assistance rates in BC. A meeting was secured with the Minister of Human Resources and with the Minister of Health Planning. The report was presented at the annual Dietitians of Canada 2001 conference in Saint John, NB and to the Health Association of BC Health Promotion Conference in Vancouver. The news release announcing the 2001 report was picked up by the Times Columnist (Victoria) as well as a number of community papers (Trail Times, Williams Lake Tribune, Daily News-Kamloops) and Shared Vision magazine—May 2002. The CBC Radio Noon News also featured the report as did CICI News Vernon.

Left to Right: Jeri Manley, Community Nutritionist, Vancouver Island Health Authority; Janice Macdonald, Regional Executive Director, Dietitians of Canada, BC Region; Hon. Murray Coell, Minister of Human Resources; Hon. Colin Hansen, Minister of Health Services; Hon. Gordon Hogg, Minister of Children and Family Development; Hon. Sindi Hawkins, Minister of Health Planning; Dr. Richard Stanwick, Medical Health Officer, Vancouver Island Health Authority; Shefali Raja, Community Nutritionist, Vancouver Coastal Health Authority.

APPENDIX C

—Foods included in the National Nutritious Food Basket

The objective of a nutritious food basket is to identify foods that reflect average food purchase patterns, meet nutrient requirements, and are palatable and economical. Nutrient needs are met by adjusting food group quantities. Palatability and consumer acceptability are addressed by using foods that are commonly purchased. Costs are kept low by including sale priced items and by excluding expensive foods, like some higher priced convenience foods, take-out and restaurant foods, and foods with little nutritional value. Because of the exclusion of these more expensive types of foods, the cost of the nutritious food basket is generally lower than that which would be purchased by average Canadians. The foods included in the nutritious food basket are as follows:

- ◆ 2% milk, fruit-flavoured yogurt, medium cheddar cheese, processed cheddar cheese slices, partly skim mozzarella cheese, vanilla ice cream;
- ◆ round steak, stewing beef, regular ground beef, pork loin chops, chicken legs (no back), sliced cooked ham, frozen fish fillets (cod, haddock, sole, Boston blue fish or Alaskan pollock depending on availability), canned pink salmon, canned flaked light water packed tuna, large eggs—one dozen, canned baked beans in tomato sauce, dried navy beans, white pea beans, peanut butter;
- ◆ white bread, whole wheat bread, hot dog/hamburger buns, all-purpose flour, whole wheat flour, dry macaroni or spaghetti, long grain white rice, macaroni and cheese dinner, regular cooking oatmeal, salted soda crackers, social tea cookies, Corn Flakes® and Shreddies® cereal;
- ◆ oranges, canned unsweetened apple juice, frozen orange juice concentrate, tomatoes, canned whole tomatoes, tomato juice, potatoes, frozen French fried potatoes, pears, green grapes, canned fruit cocktail, bananas, Macintosh apples, Sultana raisins, iceberg (head) lettuce, romaine lettuce, frozen mixed vegetables, canned corn, canned peas, broccoli, cabbage, carrots, celery, field cucumber, onions, green pepper, rutabagas;
- ◆ a margarine in which the grams of mono and polyunsaturated fats add up to 6 g or more in a 10 g serving (as shown on the nutrition label), butter, canola oil, mayonnaise-type salad dressing, white sugar, strawberry jam.

Economies of scale factor for families larger and smaller than the reference family

Use the following adjustment for family size:²⁷

- 1 person: increase food costs by 15%
(multiply by 1.15)
- 2 people: increase food costs by 10%
(multiply by 1.10)
- 3 people: increase food costs by 5%
(multiply by 1.05)
- 4 people: make no change
- 5 people: decrease food costs by 5%
(multiply by 0.95)
- 6 people: decrease food costs by 10%
(multiply by 0.90)

APPENDIX D

Strategies targeted to the poor must recognize that education alone is of limited value to those who simply cannot afford to purchase enough food. Food security strategies such as community gardens and school food programs provide opportunities to introduce education and to model healthy behaviours while also providing participants with some food. However, this is only the first stage in developing long term and meaningful relationships with those suffering food insecurity in a community.²⁸

Below two communities tell how they are working together to build community food security. Community food security is said to exist when “all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice.”²⁹

Food security initiatives in Kamloops

(Excerpt from CBC National Coverage as printed in the Interior Health news)

According to Sharon Hartline, Executive Director, of the Kamloops Food Bank, the people requiring emergency food hampers have been steadily dropping since 1999. A CBC news crew was recently in Kamloops covering the story as Kamloops Food Bank is the only food bank in Canada where numbers are decreasing. Hartline attributes the 32 percent drop to people coming together, at the grassroots level to make food security a priority. By working in partner-

Kamloops Food Bank is the only food bank in Canada where numbers are decreasing

ship with Laura Kalina, Community Nutritionist with the Interior Health Authority and the Kamloops Food Policy Council we have developed programs and services that make nutritious food more available. “Over the last decade we have been working on building community capacity around food security,” says

Kalina. Partnerships with the Salvation Army, church groups and community agencies have created programs such as community kitchens and gardens, the Good Food Box and the Gardengate Training Centre, a horticultural training centre for

marginalized groups. According to Kalina, the Gardengate Training Centre, produced 20,000 pounds of food on one acre of land last year. “This is land owned by the health region and now it is not only producing fresh organic produce but people are being trained in the area of horticulture.”

Interestingly enough, Kamloops City Council is one of the first municipalities in British Columbia to adopt a food and nutrition policy framework. The old Thompson Health Region had previously adopted a food policy framework which facilitated improving the food security programs in the region. According to Sharon Hartline, our goal is to provide “good food for all people not poor food for poor people.” Food Security is a population health issue and community nutritionists have become the leaders within Interior Health.

For more information, Kalina has written a book which has received national recognition called *Building Food Security in Canada: From Hunger to Sustainable Food Systems*. Contact Kalina at laura.kalina@interiorhealth.ca for more information.

— Community food security:
Two communities demonstrate that change is possible

HEAL —Healthy Eating & Active Living in Northern British Columbia

All around northern BC, communities are planting the seeds of HEALth. They are sprouting in a storefront project in Masset and a youth-built greenhouse in Bella Coola. They are taking root in a community garden in Burns Lake and blossoming along a hiking trail in Telkwa.

HEAL (Healthy Eating and Active Living) in Northern BC is a three-year initiative of the Northern Health Authority and community partners from 100 Mile House to the Yukon border. Funded by Health Canada, the HEAL network of grassroots projects is building community capacity around the primary prevention of Type 2 Diabetes through:

- ◆ Expanding and maintaining a web of connections, healbc.ca;
- ◆ Acting as a catalyst for change—from the creation of alternatives (gardens, walking trails, community kitchens, local food markets) to the redesigning or HEALing of systems (the development of school food and nutrition policies and municipal food policies);
- ◆ Providing educational opportunities (members of HEAL have attended sessions on fundraising, participatory research, creating personal policies, gardening, green mapping, Youth HEAL theatre and more);
- ◆ Creating a public awareness campaign.

In its first year HEAL provided seed funding for 15 community projects that encompassed all age groups. These included community gardens, community kitchens, trails and recreation for low-income families. HEAL also began to create a network of people and organizations who recognize the problems of food insecurity, nutritional deficits and sedentary lifestyles and want to do something about it.

In its second year, HEAL supported three multiple-point projects, focusing on policy and long-term solutions. These included:

- ◆ **Youth Forum**—A leadership training workshop focused on healthy eating and active living. Designed by The Learning Shop in Hazelton, this project is expanding throughout northern BC and will take a lead in HEAL's plan to map healthy eating and active living throughout the north;
- ◆ **WorkWell**—A coalition of five service agencies that have made healthy eating and active living a part of everything they do, whether as staff or with their clients;
- ◆ **HEAL School Food and Nutrition Policy**—The goal was to create supportive environments for healthy food choices to improve the nutritional intake of elementary children. Four schools in the Cariboo Chilcotin School District designed their own policies to make healthy choices the easy choices.

Now in its third year, HEAL is a network of northern citizens who are meaningfully participating in the shaping of the systems that impact their access to food, their opportunity for activity, and their health and well-being. For more information contact info@healbc.ca or call Project Coordinator Cathryn Wellner, (250) 296-4432.

APPENDIX E

— Tips for writing an effective letter to government officials³⁰

When writing a letter to a government official, use your own words and share your personal story. Do not send a form letter and take the time to carefully review the content and grammar of your letter. More specifics follow:

- ◆ **Date your letter**—Aim to write your letter within three months of the release of the 2003 *The Cost of Eating in BC* Report.
- ◆ **Inside address**—Place the name of the your Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) with their appropriate title (use Honourable if they are also a Minister) followed by their address at the beginning of the letter. You can search for MLAs by name, Constituency and even by your postal code at this web address: www.legis.gov.bc.ca/mla/3-1-1.htm or check the Blue pages in your telephone book. E-mail addresses are listed on the above web site too if you would prefer to e-mail your MLA.
- ◆ **Salutation**—Dear Mr. (Madam)... This greeting should appropriately address the individual you wish to receive the letter. If you are writing the Minister then use the salutation Dear Minister....
- ◆ **Introduce yourself** (one paragraph)—Use the first two or three lines of the letter to tell the MLA or Minister who you are. Use first person (e.g. I am the mother of two children and we live on income assistance in the community of...). Provide a brief statement of why you are writing (e.g. income assistance rates are too low for you to provide decent food and shelter for your children) and what action you expect (e.g. income assistance rates must be based on a reasonable cost of shelter and food plus other necessities). Use your own words.
- ◆ **Introduce the problem** (one paragraph)—Explain the nature of the problem in your own words and how it impacts you and your family. Stick to the facts about your experiences. **Examples:** *I do not have enough money from income assistance to buy fresh fruits and vegetables for my family. My children must either go to the share table at school to get their lunch or go without. I take three hours once a week to visit the food bank. I'd rather focus this energy on preparing myself to return to work. I feel....*
- ◆ **State clearly the action you expect**—Explain in your own words what action you expect the official to take. You can use the Recommendations on page 11 of this report but state the action in your own words.
- ◆ **Closing** (one paragraph)—Close the letter with a quick review of the problem and your expectation of what action you expect. Thank the official for his or her attention to this matter. Close the letter with *Sincerely yours* and sign your name legibly. Indicate your mailing address so the MLA knows you live in their constituency. Print your name below your signature if it is not clear. Indicate if you are sending the letter to other officials such as a related Minister (e.g. Minister of Human Resources) and copy Dietitians of Canada, BC Region, Box 34175, Station D, Vancouver, BC V6J4N1.

APPENDIX E

— Sample letter
for an individual to
send to their MLA

Date
John Doe
MLA (insert Constituency)
888 Front Street
Victoria, BC
Y6Y 3J3

Dear Mr. Doe:

My name is Mary Smith. I am a single parent living on income assistance. I have been on assistance for three years. My husband left us three years ago and is out-of-the-country so we are unable to obtain support payments. I support two children, ages 11, and 6. I have no family here to help me out. Although I have few skills right now to offer to a potential employer, I would prefer working to being on income assistance. However, I am so stressed trying to put food on the table and living in this unsafe apartment and neighbourhood that it is impossible for me to focus on looking for work. If the total monthly income I had from assistance would provide me with safe housing for my family and a reasonable variety of food and other necessities I could focus on creating a better future for my family.

Currently I receive from assistance \$881 a month for both shelter and support but my two bedroom apartment costs me \$700 plus utilities so there is next to nothing left for food. I am not comfortable with the area of the city I have to live in to find a cheap apartment. I have no one I can leave my children with while I shop for bargains or line up at the food bank. I feel trapped and desperate.

In closing, I would like to thank you for taking the time to read my letter. Please carefully consider my circumstances. I need a reasonable income from assistance so I can stop worrying about the health and safety of my family every moment of the day. As my representative, I need you to make sure the Ministry of Human Resources sets fair and reasonable assistance rates. Please support me in building a better future for my children.

Sincerely yours,
(sign your name legibly)

Your Name
Your address

cc: Janice Macdonald, Dietitians of Canada, Box 34175, Stn D, Vancouver, BC V6J 4N1
Honourable Murray Coell, Minister of Human Resources, Parliament Buildings, Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

APPENDIX E

— Sample letter for an organization to send to the Minister of Human Resources

Date
Honourable Murray Coell
Minister of Human Resources
Parliament Buildings
Victoria, BC V8V 1X4

Dear Minister Coell:

I am writing on behalf of ... (name of your organization) representing ... We are alarmed at the increasing levels of poverty in BC and the resulting struggles for families on low incomes to access safe and healthy food in a dignified manner. Currently one in six children live in poverty in BC and over 20% of the population in BC is considered low income. We are seeing increasing numbers of people depending on food banks and emergency food programs to feed their families. Although about 2% of the population must resort to obtaining food this way, it is not a dignified way to access food.

Our clients are constantly worried about the impact of not having enough money to purchase nourishing food for their children. When children don't get enough healthy food they don't grow and develop to their potential, they don't learn as well and are away from school because they are ill more often. When families don't have enough food it is well known that they have a higher incidence of poor health, multiple chronic conditions, and suffer more from depression and stress. Current studies link food insecurity to obesity and chronic illnesses such as diabetes and heart disease. Food insecurity is linked to increasing health care costs and reduced productivity and it impacts on individual and community health.

Food Banks and emergency food programs are not the answer to this issue. These programs are only short-term solutions. We need to establish policies now to eliminate poverty and food insecurity in BC. As the representative of many British Columbians and the Minister responsible for the currently inadequate income assistance rates, we ask you to take immediate steps to ensure your Ministry establishes rates that are based both on a reasonable and fair process and on the real costs of shelter and support. What it actually costs to feed a family a healthy diet must be considered in the rate calculations. I encourage you to work with other Ministries and regional authorities to identify long-term solutions to poverty in BC. *(If you are writing the Minister of Children and Family Development, Minister Gordon Hogg, then focus on continued support for school meal programs and if you are addressing the Minister of Health then focus on the impact of poverty and food insecurity on health and the importance of the Ministry working with Health Authorities to make food security for all a priority. Refer to The Cost of Eating in BC report for details.)*

Thank you for taking the time to consider the impact of poverty and inadequate income assistance rates on the health and well being of British Columbians.

Sincerely yours,

Your Name

Your address

Cc Janice Macdonald, Dietitians of Canada, Box 34175 Stn. D, Vancouver, BC V6J 4N1

APPENDIX F

— Endorsing agencies

The **BC Association of Social Workers** is a professional association for social workers in British Columbia. They are the collective voice for the profession and advocate for clients and for a compassionate and just society. www.bcasw.org

It is the mission of the **BC Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance** to improve the health of British Columbians through leadership that enhances collaborative action to promote physical activity, healthy eating and living smoke-free.

The **Canadian Association of Food Banks, BC Branch** provides support and leadership to member food banks in BC in their efforts to provide short term food relief while working on long term solutions to hunger and poverty.

Directorate of Agencies for School Health (DASH)/BREAKFAST FOR LEARNING partnership was formed in 2001 to provide ongoing support and further develop meal programs in BC. Their vision is that every child in Canada attends school well nourished and ready to learn. www.dasbbc.org

www.breakfastforlearning.ca

End Legislated Poverty is a coalition of 37 organizations in BC—including anti-poverty groups, welfare advocates, unions, women’s groups and churches—working together to ensure that governments reduce and end poverty. www.endlegislatedpoverty.ca

FarmFolk/CityFolk is a non-profit society that wants one simple thing: for people to eat local, fresh, seasonal foods, grown using farming practices that contribute to the health of the planet. FarmFolk/CityFolk is open to any group or individual whose efforts lead toward food security for everyone. www.ffcf.bc.ca

www.ffcf.bc.ca

First Call, BC Child and Youth Advocacy Coalition is a BC coalition of organizations, local child, youth and family networks, and individuals, whose purpose is to create greater understanding of and advocacy for legislation, policy, and practice to ensure that all children and youth have the opportunities and resources required to achieve their full potential and to participate in the challenge of creating a better society. Every year, First Call produces a report card on child poverty in the province of BC. www.firstcallbc.org

Health Officers’ Council of BC is a Society consisting of all the Medical Health Officers in BC as well as physicians such as academics and public health practitioners at the BC Centre for Disease Control.

Public Health Association of BC (PHABC) is a voluntary, non-profit, non-governmental organization whose mission is to preserve and promote the public’s health in BC. PHABC is an affiliate of the Canadian Public Health Association. More information can be found at their Web site. www.phabc.org

www.phabc.org

The Social Planning and Research Council of BC (SPARC BC) was formed in 1966 and works with communities in building a just and healthy society for all. In December 2002, SPARC BC released *Falling Further Behind: A Comparison of Living Costs and Employment and Assistance Rates in BC*. It is available on their web site. www.sparc.bc.ca

www.sparc.bc.ca

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