

Winnipeg Regional Health Authority's Position Statement on Food Security

Food Security Defined

Several valuable definitions of food security have been proposed that range in focus. Food security is defined most broadly as “a situation in which all community residents obtain a safe, culturally acceptable, nutritionally adequate diet through a sustainable food system that maximizes community self-reliance and social justice” (Hamm & Bellows, 2003, p. 37). Using this definition, some degree of food insecurity affects a large proportion of the Winnipeg Health Region population, and the need for greater food security is population-wide.

Using a more narrow definition, food security has been determined to exist 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” (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, adopted by Canada at the 1996 World Food Summit).

From a health equity perspective, food security focuses on the inadequate or insecure access to food due to a barrier, or multiple barriers, that involve financial constraints.

Context

Food insecurity is often thought to present itself as hunger, illness, and disease. However, food insecurity is represented in many different forms including obesity and diet-related medical conditions (The Community Nutritionists Council of BC, 2004). According to the World Health Organization (Marmot & Wilkenson, Eds., 2003, p. 26):

A good diet and adequate food supply are central for promoting health and well-being. A shortage of food and a lack of variety cause malnutrition and deficiency diseases. Excess intake (also a form of malnutrition) contributes to cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, cancer, degenerative eye disease, obesity and dental caries. Food poverty exists side by side with food plenty. The important public health issue is the availability and cost of healthy and nutritious food. Access to good, affordable food makes more difference to what people eat than health education.

The experience of food insecurity spans a range of factors, including concerns about running out of food before there is more money to buy more, the inability to afford a balanced diet, going hungry, missing meals, and in extreme cases, not eating for a whole day because of a lack of food or money for food. Stress arising from food insecurity can be severe and all consuming. Stress activates emotional and physiological pathways causing significant health effects (e.g. hormonal, inflammatory, cognitive) which are separate from, and add to, the impact of poor nutrition arising from food insecurity. Stress also influences behaviors involving food, which can be unhealthy.

According to the Canadian Community Health Survey (2007-2008), 7.7% of Canadian households are food insecure. In Manitoba, household food insecurity is above the national average at 9.3% (Statistics Canada, 2010).

While the WRHA recognizes and supports population-wide healthy eating and food security promotion, the WRHA's food security efforts focus on the inadequate or insecure access to food due to one or more barriers where at least one barrier is due to financial constraints.

The WRHA recognizes that:

- Food security enables healthy eating, which is fundamental to the overall health of individuals, families and communities.
- Food insecurity negatively impacts health, and is something that can be changed.
- Issues within the food system are complex and food security is connected to all other determinants of health.
- A variety of strategies that span the full range of health determinants are needed to provide more effective approaches to addressing food security at a population level.
- Community food security interventions and strategies can play a role in positive health outcomes such as: local food self-sufficiency, improved local economies, improved performance of children in schools, increased social cohesion, increased knowledge of healthy eating, increased consumption of healthy foods, and decreased food bank use.
- Food insecurity due to barriers related to financial constraints is a concerning public health issue that affects a considerable proportion of the population.
- Numerous groups at many levels are working hard to address food security, and many initiatives are already underway in Winnipeg and Manitoba.
- Promoting food security is an important component of chronic disease prevention and management and health equity action.

The WRHA Commitment

The WRHA is committed to support collaborative efforts to promote food security and reduce food insecurity and its root causes. Specifically, we commit to:

- Develop and expand partnerships that contribute to reducing food insecurity and its root causes within and beyond the health sector.
- Participate in the identification of environments and activities that will promote food security and support ongoing activities in our communities.
- Promote the right of all to achieve healthy eating within a food secure environment and advocate for policy in support of access to healthy food.
- Promote a comprehensive approach to food security that considers nutrition, food, eating competence (positive attitudes towards eating where needs and wants are in harmony), local economics, local food systems, food access and skills, pleasure and traditions, and how these factors intersect to effect food security.
- Collaborate with external partners and policy/decision makers to support community level, systemic change to enable the development and maintenance of sustainable food systems and healthy eating environments where people live, learn, work and play.

Links:

WRHA Position Statement on Health Equity

<http://www.wrha.mb.ca/about/healthequity/statement.php>

Health for All: Building Winnipeg's Health Equity Action Plan

<http://www.wrha.mb.ca/about/healthequity/HealthEquityActionPlan.php>

References:

Food and Agriculture Organization [of the United Nations] (1996). "Rome Declaration on Food Security and World Food Summit Plan of Action". Retrieved October 2014, from

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Marmot, M. G., & Wilkenson, R. G. (Eds.) (2003). *Social Determinants of Health: The Solid Facts*. 2nd Ed. Copenhagen: World Health Organization. Retrieved October 2014, from

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The Community Nutritionists Council of BC. (2004). *Making the Connection – Food Security and Public Health*. Victoria, BC: Ministry of Health Services and the Health Authorities of British Columbia.