

# Researching Food Insecurity in York Region

PROOF Conference  
November 18, 2016

Authors: Tracy Woloshyn, Jeff Tong, Rachel Morgan,  
Richard Gould, Rita Foscarini, Shelley Stalker



# Agenda

- Definition of food insecurity used for the project
- York Region statistics
- Food responses and income responses
- Methods for Data Collection
- Data Collection Overview of Results
- Next Steps

# Food Insecurity Definition

The project was guided by this definition of household food insecurity:

“inadequate or insecure access to food because of financial constraints”

From Tarasuk, Mitchell, and Dachner, 2014

# Statistics on food insecurity and poverty in York Region

- The number of people living on low income is increasing just above population growth
- 15.0% of York Region residents live with a low income (2013)
- 7% +/- 1% of York Region households, or 24,700 households, were food insecure (2009 – 2014)

# Food responses

- Include charitable (e.g., food banks, meal programs) and community-based responses (e.g., community gardens, student nutrition programs, community kitchens)
- Community responses have shown health, educational, and social benefits
- Neither charitable nor community food responses have been shown to reduce food insecurity

# Income responses

- Poverty is identified as the root cause of food insecurity
- Income responses as proposed by researchers and organizations
  - Decrease precarious employment
  - Living wage
  - Increase social assistance rates
  - Basic income
  - Increase affordable housing

# Methods for Data Collection

- Internal (CHS) programs and staff
  - Focus groups with CHS frontline staff
  - Online survey with CHS teams
- Community agencies
  - Focus groups
  - Follow-up online survey
- Clients
  - Focus groups
  - Online or paper survey



# Perceived factors for food insecurity

CHS staff	CHS teams	Community agencies	Clients
Transportation	Inadequate income	Income issues	Food prices
Housing costs	Housing costs	Housing issues	Inadequate income
Inadequate income	Inadequate income from social assistance	Lack of support provided to YR communities	Housing costs (renting)
Lack knowledge of food-related topics	Food prices	Employment issues	Housing costs (buying)





# Activities for CHS consideration

CHS staff	CHS teams	Community agencies	Clients
Food education to clients	Food education to clients	Education/skill building to clients	More food programs
Access to food-related programs and services	Community kitchens	Collaborative model	More income
Gift cards or funds for food	Advocate for discounts from food vendors/stores	Community awareness of food insecurity	Lower food prices
Address root causes	Community gardens	Adequate income	Improve food banks

# Ranking of approaches

Rank	CHS teams	Community agencies	Food Systems Work Group
1	Advocacy for income	Public and political awareness	Advocacy for poverty issues
2	Food literacy workshops	Subsidized housing	Secure employment, living wage, etc.
3	Advocacy for food programs	Secure employment, living wage, etc.	Increase income
4	Housing stability programs	Address root causes	Increase employment

"There is not enough information for any of this stuff, people are not aware...it is hard to find...it is confusing"

"Housing only helps with getting into low income housing. But the list is so long for that too. I've been on it for almost 2 years. But there is nothing else that I know of that you can get help from other than the food bank. And I think we need something."

“Transportation too. It’s high. The fee for the buses it’s too high. It’s way higher than Toronto, than other places.”

“Too many low income jobs, not enough high paying ones in the Region”

“Doesn’t give you enough money for anything (referring to Ontario Works). Only shelter and basic needs. It’s not enough to survive, it’s nothing.”

## Next Steps

- Drafting a report with recommendations for Community and Health Services (CHS) Department Management Team
- Linking with CHS (e.g., Human Services Planning Board) and Regional strategies (e.g., Housing First)
- Exploring possible partnerships with community agencies and advocacy with an emphasis on income issues based on feedback from community partners



# Questions?

