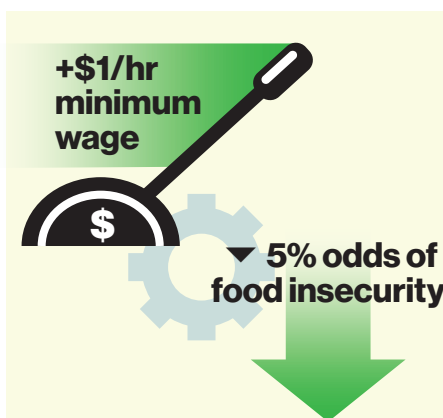


Provincial Policy Levers to Reduce Household Food Insecurity

Food insecurity - the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints - is monitored by Statistics Canada through the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS). Based on the most recent national estimates from 2017-2018, 4.4 million Canadians, including 1.2 million children, live in food-insecure households.¹

Rates of food insecurity vary considerably across the provinces and territories. Food insecurity is not just a lack of food, but rather an experience of pervasive material deprivation due to financial constraints. Provincial policy decisions play an important role in determining the food insecurity rates of provinces because many of these decisions directly impact households' financial circumstances.

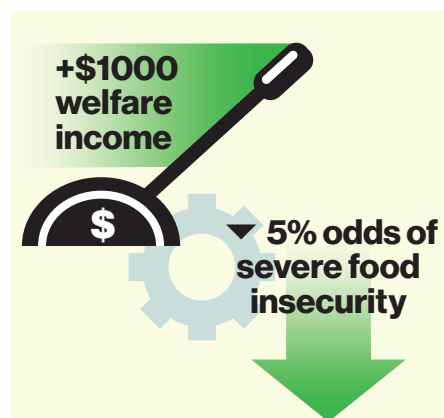
Our new study, published in *Preventive Medicine*, examines the effects of provincial policies and economic environments on food insecurity among households with children under 18 years of age, using data from the CCHS 2005-2018.² We identified three policy levers that provincial governments can use to reduce the rate of food insecurity in their jurisdictions – increased minimum wage, increased welfare income, and lower income tax rates for the lowest income bracket.



A one-dollar increase in minimum wage was associated with 5% lower odds of experiencing food insecurity.

Increasing minimum wage can help reduce food insecurity among workers who make up the majority for the food-insecure in Canada (65% in 2017-2018).¹ Racialized workers and those relying on low-wage, short-term, part-time, or precarious work are most vulnerable.³

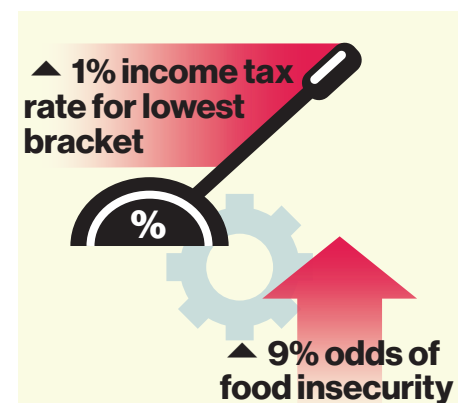
This finding is consistent with international research showing that employed adults are less likely to be food-insecure in countries with more generous minimum wages or collective bargaining.⁴



A \$1000 increase in annual welfare income was associated with 5% lower odds of severe food insecurity.

Severe food insecurity is far more prevalent among households relying on social assistance¹ and is associated with the greatest negative health outcomes,^{5,6} greatest increased risk of premature death,^{7,8} and greatest increased healthcare costs.⁹

Increasing social assistance rates can help protect families from the most toxic level of food insecurity.

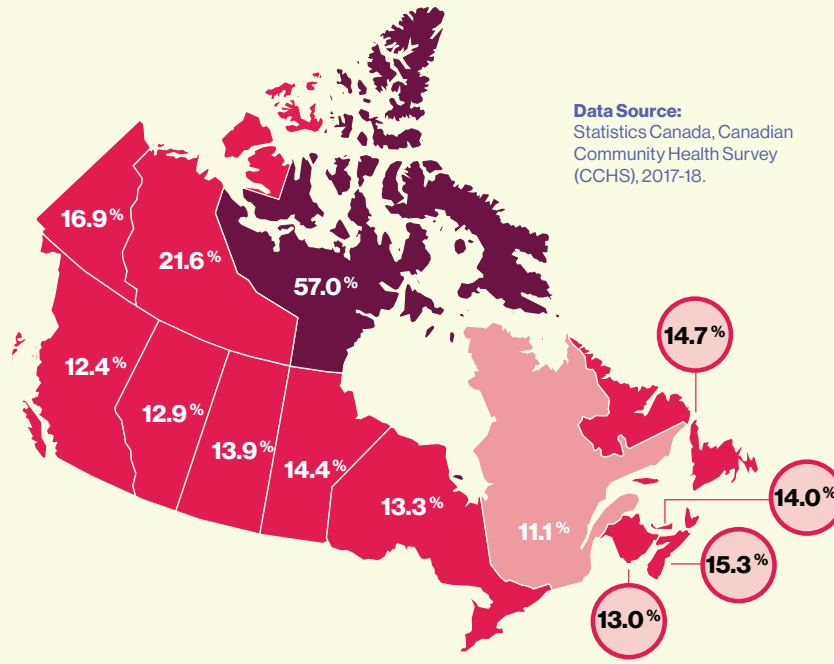


A one-percentage-point increase in the income tax rate for the lowest-income households was associated with 9% higher odds of food insecurity.

Lowering the income tax rate for the lowest-income households can reduce food insecurity by improving their financial circumstances.

Food insecurity in Canada is tightly linked to income. Households with the lowest incomes are the most likely to be food-insecure and more severely so.

Household Food Insecurity BY PROVINCE & TERRITORY



In addition to provincial policies related to income redistribution, labour market conditions also affect food insecurity rates.² A one-percentage-point increase in unemployment was associated with 5% higher odds of experiencing food insecurity. We found no association between food insecurity and changes in the price of food or energy or the percentage of children with childcare space available to them.

Not only do food insecurity rates vary across provinces, but so do government commitments towards addressing this serious public health problem. Prince Edward Island is the only jurisdiction to have set explicit targets for food insecurity reduction.¹⁰ Some provinces have opted out of monitoring food insecurity in the years when it was optional.

Given the tremendous burden on people's health and the healthcare needs, food insecurity is a drain on provincial health care budgets.⁹ Provincial governments should make food insecurity reduction a priority and recognize that their decisions about minimum wage, welfare benefits, and income tax rates for the lowest income households are food security policies.

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