**The impact of COVID-19 on food insecurity**

-The COVID-19 pandemic has increased food insecurity in Canada. As of May 2020, 14.6% of Canadians indicated that they lived in a household where there was food insecurity. This was an increase from the 10.5% of Canadians who reported experiencing food insecurity in 2017/18. [26]

-As of May 2020, 19.2% of households with children reported experiencing food insecurity, compared to 12.2% of households without children. Households with children were more likely to be worried about food running out before there was money to buy more, and to report having difficulty affording to eat balanced meals. [26]

-Low income families continue to experience some of the worst economic impacts resulting from the pandemic. Beginning with the first wave of closures in Spring 2020, many higher-wage workers maintained their income through transitioning to working from home. In contrast, lower-wage jobs often require working outside of the home (e.g., service industry, construction). As a result, food insecurity increased in a sector of the population that was already experiencing challenges in accessing nutritious food prior to the pandemic. [15] [26]

-A special consideration for Manitoba is the above average levels of food insecurity experienced by Indigenous peoples, especially those living in northern communities/on reserve. In 2012, 12.6% of Canadians experienced food insecurity, while 28.2% of Indigenous people experienced food insecurity. School nutrition programs (SNPs) have demonstrated significant benefits for Indigenous children living on and off reserve through providing regular access to nutritious food. [28] [10]

-As a result of these trends, there has been an increase of families and children requiring assistance accessing nutritious food since the beginning of the pandemic. [2] [13] As the pandemic continues, it is likely that requests for access to SNPs will continue to increase. [6] [2] [19]

**SNP adaptations to COVID-19**

-The pandemic has presented significant challenges to SNPs, both locally and nationally. School closures disrupt SNP facilitation through the loss of program space for preparing, packaging and serving meals, as well as a loss of consistent access to students. Furthermore, the SNP volunteer base of parents, teachers, principals, students and other school staff is disrupted through school closures. [6] [19]

-In addition to the above challenges, SNPs in Manitoba reported:

* difficulty adapting to new health and safety guidelines
* an increased numbers of students requiring access to SNPs
* a limited ability to fundraise
* increased food costs [6]

-A common approach taken by schools attempting to alleviate child hunger during school closures was to transition to an emergency food supply system available only to vulnerable children and families. Different approaches include:

* Distributing food through community facilities (community centres, churches, etc.), or delivering food to homes [6] [21] [4] [27] [24] [14] [13]
* Innovating food service to provide more than one meal at a team, such as through replacing single meals with food boxes or hampers, or providing multiple meals per pickup [14] [13] [9] [5] [6] [21]
* Providing financial support through grocery vouchers or gift cards [5] [21] [19] [24] [13] [14]
* Redirecting SNP funding and food resources to food banks in order to increase capacity of other emergency food supply options [21] [1] [19]

-In some cases, a blend of methods helped to ensure families received adequate support. In both Manitoba and Ontario, food programs were adapted to include a combination of in-school meals, food-boxes, and increased partnerships with food banks. [5] [6] [21]

-Also common was a hybrid approach of delivering food to the homes of students doing remote learning, and providing in-school meals to students in attendance. [17] [23] [19] [14] [13] [9]

-While these are short-term measures meant to alleviate an immediate problem, the literature emphasizes the following drawbacks of replacing SNPs with emergency meal distribution programs:

* Moving from a universal SNP model to a targeted hunger relief model can increase stigma associated with accessing food programs [19]
* There is a large gap between the number of meals served in a normal school week versus the number of meals distributed through replacement programs [13]
* For models where food is picked up at a community site, students and/or caregivers can experience challenges securing transportation to these sites, or accessing these sites outside of working hours [7] [12]

**The 2021/22 school year**

-Most provincial back to school plans for 2021/22 advise that SNPs will resume normal operation when schools are open. [8] [3] [25] [11] [20] [16] [18] [22]

-Some provinces have recommended specific precautions for administering food programs in the 2021/22 school year:

* Offering “Grab and go” meals and snacks to be eaten in classrooms rather than in cafeterias
* Delivering food directly to classrooms
* Implementing a “no sharing” policy
* Incorporating nutritious, pre-packaged foods to make following health and safety guidelines easier
* Only permitting use of personal water bottles [5] [6] [11] [20] [18]

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