

# FOOD SECURITY

*in Guelph*



**GUELPH  
WELLBEING**

REPORT

September 2014



All Guelph residents will have access to healthy, culturally relevant food in a manner that maintains dignity, so that no one will go hungry.

**OUR GOAL**

When we have a healthy population, we all benefit. Despite current support and success stories there are still people in our community who experience food insecurity.

Addressing food insecurity means we need to address the financial and physical means to acquire culturally relevant food in a socially acceptable manner.

The mission of Guelph Wellbeing is to help organizations collaborate to provide the most effective and efficient services

to our community. In some areas, there are overlapping services and in others, there is still tremendous need. By working together, we can address the issues around food insecurity more effectively and provide the services that will have the most impact.



## Food security

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have both physical and economic access to sufficient, safe, and nutritious food to meet dietary needs and food preferences for an active, and healthy life.<sup>1</sup>

### Food availability

Having sufficient quantities of food available on a consistent basis.



### Food use

Appropriate use based on knowledge of basic nutrition and care, as well as adequate water and sanitation.



### Food access

Having sufficient resources to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet.



**GUELPH WELLBEING**

*Working together for the best possible quality of life*

## About Guelph Wellbeing

Guelph Wellbeing is a project guided by a Community Leadership Team working together to address our community's needs to create a happy, healthy and resilient community.

Our work is based on the Canadian Index of Wellbeing, a globally-recognized index that takes a comprehensive approach to measuring quality of life. Through extensive community engagement, Guelph Wellbeing has identified three key issues in our community: food security, social and physical connectivity, and affordable housing.

This report is one of four published in 2014 about Guelph Wellbeing. We hope this information about social connectivity brings awareness to the issues around the sense of belonging and inclusion in Guelph and provides you with opportunities to make a difference in our community. We will continue to gather data, take action, measure impact and prepare an impact report in 2015.

**Our journey starts here...working together for the best possible quality of life.**

# Facts about food security



**16.4%**

of Guelph households are food insecure.<sup>2</sup>

This includes marginal, moderate and severe levels of food insecurity.

This is up from **10.8%** in **2008**.<sup>3</sup>

Surveys completed by the member agencies of the Ontario Food Bank Association showed a **112.5%** increase in the number of individuals served in Guelph from **2005 to 2012** during the month of **March**.



Despite the increase in costs of food over a 5-year period, the percentage of income required from a median Ontario family of four to pay for rent and food in 2013 is relatively affordable.



For example, a reference **family of four** with a median Ontario income spends **17% of its income on rent** and **11% to purchase healthy food**.

As a comparison, a family of four on Ontario Works (OW) may spend more than three times the amount of its income on rent and food compared to the median Ontario family of four. A family of four on OW is estimated to spend about **55% of its income on rent** and would need to spend about **37% to purchase healthy food**.

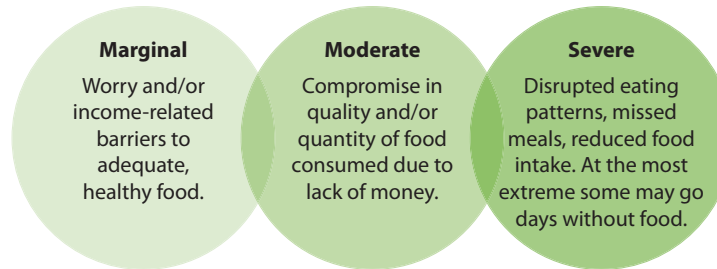


A **single person** on OW is in the most difficult situation, having only enough money to cover rent (**92% of income may go to rent**) leaving insufficient money (**8% of income**) left over to purchase any food or cover basic expenses. After paying rent, a single person on OW would require an extra quarter of their income to afford healthy food, let alone pay for other basic living expenses.<sup>7</sup>

# Food insecurity

Food insecurity has been defined as the inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so.<sup>4</sup>

Being food insecure goes beyond hunger. The experience of food insecurity can range from anxiety about running out of food before there is money to buy more, to reduced nutritional quality of food intake, to not having enough to eat. It may also have other effects like social exclusion.<sup>5</sup> Looking at the root causes is critical to have an impact on food security. Food insecurity can be measured in degrees: marginal, moderate and severe.<sup>6</sup>



Canada's Food Action Plan for Food Security 1998.



**16.7%**  
increase

# Food cost for a family of four

Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health has determined the cost to feed healthy food to a family of four for one week in **2013 was \$194.99**. This cost has increased by **16.7%** from **\$167.02 in 2009**.

# Food insecurity in our community

There are many negative health outcomes associated with being food insecure.

Examples include: an increased risk of nutritional deficiencies; adverse pregnancy outcomes; chronic diseases, such as diabetes, obesity, depression, anxiety and poor academic performance; impaired social skills, such as feeling embarrassed and socially isolated due to the stigma associated with being food insecure.<sup>8</sup>

According to the Guelph Community Wellbeing survey, **29.5%** of lower income households in Guelph eat less because there is not enough money available for food. Poverty is a major cause of food insecurity. By focusing on eliminating poverty we are addressing the root causes of food insecurity.<sup>9</sup> While the Guelph-Wellington Taskforce for Poverty Elimination advocates for adequate incomes and works on other root causes, other community agencies are working hard improve local community supports that increase access to healthy food.

## Food deserts

Some people live in areas that are termed “food deserts” where nutritious food is not easily available. In some neighbourhoods there may only be one variety store and for those with limited income, transportation can be a barrier to grocery stores, markets and emergency food services. Eating healthy food becomes increasingly challenging.

## Children and youth

Children and youth who experience food insecurity are more likely to have a range of health problems throughout their life, including increased behavioural and learning problems, even if their socioeconomic status changes later in life.<sup>10</sup> In a study of youth ages 15 to 16, food insecurity was associated with depression, thoughts of death and suicide attempts.<sup>11</sup>

## Seniors

Our conversations with the community found that many seniors rely on food support programs. Many are isolated from family and friends, making them dependent on multiple community services – which they may or may not know how to access. Research from the Guelph Wellington Seniors Association shows **57%** of seniors eat three or fewer fruits and vegetables each day and **27%** have difficulties with cooking.<sup>12</sup>

“Many seniors can’t find the energy and motivation to buy and prepare food to eat well on a limited budget. This is especially true for those who live on their own.”

Marg Hedley, Guelph Wellington Seniors Association.



## What it means to be food insecure

Jacintha is a single mom living in Guelph with two small children. A year ago, she was laid off from a well-paying job and her employment insurance has run out. Jacintha recently took a minimum wage position to make ends meet.

With the significant drop in income, Jacintha has had to sell her car, as she could no longer afford the gas, insurance and car payments. She has been able to hold on to her apartment but the rent and childcare take the majority of her pay leaving little left for bills and food – let alone activities and clothes for her two growing children.

Jacintha visits the food bank and another neighbourhood food pantry regularly. She gets her children’s clothes at second hand stores or from donations. Jacintha feels embarrassed by her situation and has become socially isolated. She continues to look for work in her field but without a car or computer it is increasingly difficult to find a decent paying job.



# What our community is doing about food insecurity

There are many organizations in Guelph working to help with food access by providing food and opportunities to develop food skills such as:

- food pantries in neighbourhoods
- breakfast and snack programs for children
- community gardens
- collective kitchens
- mobile markets
- Guelph Community Health Centre's Garden Fresh Box
- food distribution through the Guelph Food bank, Hope House and Chalmers Community Service Centre

Some groups such as the Guelph Wellington Food Roundtable, the Poverty Elimination Task Force, the Food Accessibility Working Group, Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health, and The Seed Community Food Centre Committee provide advocacy on poverty elimination and other factors that impede individuals and families from purchasing healthy food, since food insecurity is rooted in not having enough financial resources to purchase healthy food.

The Guelph Wellington Food Round Table is a group of committed stakeholders that created a **food charter** that has received broad endorsement. The food charter addresses health, education, sustainable economic development, culture and social justice as it relates to food. [gwfrt.com](http://gwfrt.com)

**84,000 lbs**



**Chalmers Community Services Centre** served **5,704 guests** with **84,000 pounds** of food



**Hope House's CROP** (Community Resource Outreach Program) distributed **11,500 pounds** of food



**11,500 lbs**

**17,000**



**Children's Foundation** provided more than **17,000 children** with snacks, breakfasts and lunch programs

**Guelph CHC's Garden Fresh Box** program distributes over **48,000 pounds** of food annually to more than twenty host sites



When it comes to food security we aren't dealing with the root causes. We provide people with food when they need it, but we don't address why they're there in the first place.

**Ishan Angra**  
Guelph Wellington Food Roundtable

There is a sense of urgency around having enough volunteers and enough resources to continue to provide for the increasing demand for food and services.

Anita MacFarlane, Children's Foundation



# Our collective call to action

## 1 Coordinate all actions

The many groups in our community that help alleviate food insecurity often operate in isolation from one another. They manage administration, food distribution and data collection independently – all of which can be a strain on resources and result in overlapping efforts.

### Recommendation

In all of the actions below, pool resources and collaborate to share and coordinate: administration including communications, data and evaluation, resource attraction and food distribution functions.

## 2 Grow The Seed Community Food Centre

Through the Poverty Elimination Task Force, an active committee of local community partners has come together with a mission to create a community food hub in Guelph – The Seed Community Food Centre. The vision for The Seed moves beyond feeding the hungry; it aims to be a thriving community centre where people connect with each other around local food. The Seed aims to collaborate with other community groups and organizations to provide emergency food to those in need, and work towards increasing reliable access to healthy and fresh foods locally. It will also provide education and build skills around healthy eating, cooking, gardening and healthy lifestyles. The Seed is positioned to become a centralized, driving force to help address food insecurity in Guelph. In addition, the Seed will reduce social isolation and advocate for local solutions to issues like housing, health and poverty by providing a space for people to get involved and coordinate action together.

### Recommendation

Seek and secure community, business and stakeholder support to find a home and sustainable resources for The Seed to grow and thrive. A location that is accessible by transit near land that can be used to support a garden. Support a local social awareness campaign to attract resources, skills and expertise.

## 3 Increase access to fresh food

Access to fresh, nutritious food is a primary concern. Many organizations are only able to provide non-perishable (canned and boxed) foods which, although helpful, are not always the most nutritious option. Those organizations that do successfully produce and provide fresh food, such as the North End Market, often find they have no means of storing and distributing excess produce that could sustain those in need throughout the winter. The primary limitation to providing more fresh food (fruits and vegetables) year round is the lack of cold storage and efficient distribution networks.

### Recommendation

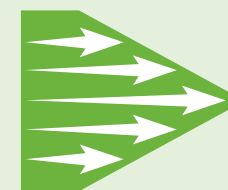
Develop an efficient, collaborative fresh food storage and distribution system.

## 4 Get good local data

Inconsistent data collection affects our ability to clearly assess the issues and costs of food insecurity in our community. It also limits our ability to learn from our actions and focus investment on what works.

### Recommendation

Pilot new research and evaluation tools to obtain baseline data and track the community impact of Recommendations 2 (The Seed) and 3 (improved fresh food storage and distribution) over the short, medium and long term.



## Acting together through collective impact

Collective impact is the commitment of a group of people from different sectors that form a common agenda for solving a complex social problem. To achieve large scale, lasting solutions for social problems sectors such as government, civil society, and business need to coordinate their efforts and work together toward a clearly defined goal.

The City of Guelph and the United Way distribute funds to groups who provide emergency food to individuals and families. Through collective action we can increase the reach of these funds.

“We must work together – it is the only way we can make change.”

**Lisa Needham**  
Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph  
Public Health Unit



## Conclusion

Guelph Wellbeing is committed to working together to have the greatest positive impact on food security for all in our community. We will continue to promote awareness of the root causes of food insecurity. We will share our resources in data collection, and work together in distributing food and getting the Seed up and running.

# Acknowledgements

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## Endnotes

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