EVERYBODY NEEDS TO EAT

FOOD SECURITY MYTHBUSTERS©

MYTH #1

Household food insecurity exists because food is too expensive



TRUTH

Research shows that household income, not the price of food, is the main reason for food insecurity[1]. As a household's income declines, the risk of food insecurity increases[2]. Canadians spend very little on food (9% of their spending) compared to other countries. Of 86 major countries worldwide, only 3 (US, UK, Singapore) spend less on food than Canada[3]. The solution isn't to make food cheaper, because farmers need to make a living wage as well.

Household food insecurity exists because people do not have enough money to spend on food, not because food is too expensive.

[1] *http://www.bccdc.ca/pop-public-health/Documents/food-costing-BC-2017.pdf*

[2] *https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity*

[3] *https://ourworldindata.org/food-prices – Food expenditure as a share of total consumer expenditure (2015)*

New Westminster Homeless Coalition Society

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The series wouldn't have been possible without the guidance of the ***Community Voices Food Security Working Group***; an incredible group of community members who live with food insecurity in their daily lives.

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MYTH #2

Food recovery programs will solve household food insecurity



TRUTH

Food recovery programs are important for a variety of reasons, such as reducing food waste, and depending on how they are set up, they can provide job training opportunities or become social enterprises. While reducing food waste is important, food recovery programs do not address the root cause of household food insecurity. Like all food programs, while necessary to address immediate hunger, they aren't long term solutions. Using food waste is a form of food charity, and a charity model only addresses the symptoms, not the cause.

Efforts to promote food recovery should not replace efforts to address the real cause of food insecurity, which is a lack of income. Household food insecurity is an income issue; therefore, solutions need to work towards increasing household income.

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MYTH #3

People just need to learn better budgeting and cooking skills and they wouldn't be food insecure



TRUTH



Having good cooking and budgeting skills is important to help people eat healthy. However, it doesn't put food on the table when income is the problem. Research shows that food insecurity is not associated with food preparation and cooking skills. In fact, food preparation and cooking skill levels aren't much different between those who are food insecure and those who are not. And, adults who are food insecure use a budget while shopping (84%) more than those who aren't food insecure (only 43% use a budget). This suggests that ***programs to improve food and budgeting skills should be supported to promote healthy eating, but other solutions are needed to impact food insecurity.***

[4] *https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity*

[5] *https://proof.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/food-procurement-food-skills-food-insecurity-factsheet.pdf*

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MYTH #4

If people worked more, they'd have enough money for food



TRUTH

In British Columbia in 2015, there were 65 occupations that fell below the before-tax poverty measure ($36,084/year) for full-time (30+ hrs/wk.), full-year (49+ wks./yr.) workers.[6] In that same year in New Westminster, there were 850 residents who worked full-time, full-year and were still classified as poor.[7] In 2016, to keep a roof over their head, 21% of New Westminster renter households spent 50% or more of their before-tax household income on shelter costs; with 30% considered to be affordable[8]. With current rental costs ranging from $1,522 (one bedroom) to $2,791 (3 bedroom)[9] it is highly likely that the number of households with unaffordable rents has increased. This has had a direct impact on their ability to purchase other necessities like clothing, transportation, additional health care and food. To put that in perspective, in Fraser North (which includes New Westminster), the average monthly food costs for a family of four is $ 985 [10]. So ***even working full-time, many households do not have enough money to spend on food.***

[6] *Statistics Canada 2016 Census*

[7] *Statistics Canada 2016 Census*

[8] *2018 Canadian Rental Housing Index http://www.rentalhousingindex.ca/en/#comp_csd*

[9] *https://www.rentboard.ca/rentals/rental_rates.aspx?locid=904*

[10] *https://www.bccdc.ca/pop-public-health/Documents/food-costing-BC-2017.pdf*

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MYTH #5

Food is not safe to eat after the "Best Before" date



TRUTH

Only foods with "Expiry dates" should never be eaten once the date has passed. Other common terms such as "Best Before", "Sell By" or "Packaged On" are not indicators of food safety. ***Whether a food is safe depends on many factors, such as how it has been stored or if the packaging has been opened or is badly damaged.*** Whether it is still safe to eat must be decided on a case-by-case basis. "Best Before Dates" are meant to indicate maximum quality, not safety. For example, yogurt, kept refrigerated, may be used up to two weeks past the "Best Before Date". But if in doubt – throw it out! Whenever possible, make sure it goes in your green waste bin or your compost, so it doesn't end up in the landfill.

For more information please visit: Providing Nutritious and Safe Food: Guidelines for Food Distribution Organizations with Grocery or Meal Programs by BC Centre for Disease Control https://www.inspection.gc.ca/food-safety-for-industry/information-for-consumers/fact-sheets-and-infographics/date-labelling/eng/1332357469487/1332357545633

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MYTH #6

If you don't "look" needy, you're probably just abusing the system



TRUTH

With a desire to help others, some people "police" or "judge" those in need. You can have a cell phone (a necessity these days), or wear nice clothes, and still have trouble getting food. You might even be working but still need help to make ends meet.

People often have a stereotype of what someone in need looks like.

Maybe you recently lost your job or fell ill and couldn't work. What if your cheque did not come through? Maybe, all you own is a nice car, but you live in it! What if you had to stop work to care for a sick child or an elderly parent – would you "look poor"? It can be very difficult to ask for support. Just try to imagine what it might be like if you had to seek unexpected help.

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MYTH #7

If you are poor you should be willing to accept anything you are offered



TRUTH

Food is a basic human right. We all need access to food that can help us live our best life. Many people living in poverty have chronic illnesses and dietary restrictions. Access to healthy food is important. Did you know the Greater Vancouver Food Bank (GVFB) has nutrition guidelines to encourage healthy donations? The GVFB also closely tracks food waste and for one sample year, more than 96,500 pounds of food deemed unsafe and spoiled had to be thrown out[11].

Everyone deserves healthy food. Receiving food that is spoiled can make people feel disrespected. The golden rule is, if you wouldn't eat don't expect someone else to. It is also important not to view people as being "picky" when they refuse a food item. They may not want it because they know they won't or can't eat it and would rather it go to someone else. Or, perhaps they are in more dire need of something else. It is important to listen, and not challenge them.

[11] *Greater Vancouver Food Bank 2019*

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