

## **Public Affairs News Release**

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### **Food security – it is a basic right for all Canadians, say dietitians**

**TORONTO, ON.** Canada enjoys one of the highest standards of living in the world, yet over 10 percent of our population - approximately 3 million people - cannot count on a healthy diet. They lack the funds to purchase sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active healthy life. In other words these Canadians experience food insecurity. In a position statement released today, Dietitians of Canada calls for improvements in the social safety net in order to address the root cause of individual and household food insecurity – poverty.

While Canada lacks a coordinated, systematic plan for monitoring food insecurity, the data that are available show that the risk of food insecurity, or lack of food, increases with declining income. Households most at risk for food insecurity include one-parent families, especially with children under the age of 13, those receiving social assistance, those who rent their dwellings and Aboriginal people living off reserves. Remote northern Canadian communities face unique food security challenges as food is expensive and often unavailable, of poor quality and typically of poorer nutritional value.

“Research consistently demonstrates that individuals in food-insecure households are at increased nutritional risk and have poorer health,” says Elaine Power, professor at Queens University and author of the DC position paper. “Lack of money makes it more difficult to purchase foods required to manage medical conditions, leading further to poor health.”

Governments, the volunteer and private sectors, as well as public health personnel have responded to food insecurity in various ways – charitable food distribution such as food banks; community kitchens; food skills workshops; school and community feeding programs. While well-meaning, all of these approaches have inherent limitations, since many rely on volunteer labour, donations and good will which are almost always inadequate to meet the demand. Moreover, food banks may be difficult to access by those in need; food may be of poor quality; selection and quantities limited; and the food may not meet nutritional needs or suit dietary modifications required because of health concerns.

Many of the strategies to bring about change to combat poverty are within the reach of dietitians and all Canadians. These include:

- Advocate for public policy that ensures families have adequate financial resources to purchase sufficient, safe and nutritious food. These policies include improving social assistance and minimum wage rates, establishing affordable housing policies, eliminating the Canada Child Tax Benefit claw back for families receiving social assistance, improving employment insurance coverage and benefits and providing accessible and affordable child care. Such policies would strengthen the social safety net and promote better health of the population.

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- Vote and vote wisely. Political parties espousing policies to cut taxes and privatize services invariably cut the social programs on which food-insecure people depend. Ask electoral candidates where they stand on these issues.
- Educate yourself about the issues and processes to achieve food security through social change. Begin by reading the Dietitians of Canada position paper “Individual and Household Food Insecurity in Canada” available at [http://www.dietitians.ca/news/highlights\\_positions.asp](http://www.dietitians.ca/news/highlights_positions.asp)

Dietitians of Canada is the voice of over 5000 dietitians who provide consumers with food and nutrition information they can trust. Visit our award winning website at [www.dietitians.ca](http://www.dietitians.ca) to find more advice on nutrition and healthy eating. Media can register at <http://www.dietitians.ca/news/experts.asp> to access our nationwide database of experts in nutrition and health.

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