

# Food Where I Live Research Project

## Executive Summary

2017



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**United Way**  
Lower Mainland

Funded by Vancouver Coastal Health and

# Food Where I Live Research Project

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## Executive Summary

### The Research Focus

DABC conducted an environmental scan of various food security/food justice programs and projects across Canada with an emphasis on the Vancouver and BC regions. The intent and purpose of the research was to gain an understanding of the ways in which food security projects were specifically targeting people with disabilities, with an emphasis on exploring programs at social housing sites and/or community food program models that could be implemented at social housing sites.

We also explored ways that the food security and food access needs of people with disabilities who are residents of social/low-income housing can be met and what resources and supports would be needed to implement food program activities to improve social connectedness.

DABC sought to find social housing providers willing to work with local food networks and the disability community to explore ideas such as mobile/curbside produce markets at social housing sites and to see if there was interest in collaborating on a pilot to test the viability of some of these ideas.

### The Research Methods

1. Literature review and internet search
2. Key informant interviews with housing providers, the food security/food justice sector, and people with disabilities
3. Site visits at social housing and community food programs
4. SurveyMonkey survey with people with disabilities living in social housing
5. Participation in the 2017 Vancouver Food Summit

## Why the Research Was Needed

Many people with disabilities live below the poverty line and are experiencing food insecurity. Most reports on food security examine the relationship between poverty and food insecurity. However, most reports do not fully examine the relationship between disability and food insecurity.

Independent Living Canada's 2009 Fact Sheet: *Health and Wellness: Persons with Disabilities and Access to (Healthy) Food*, which draws on information from a number of reports, states that people with disabilities are more likely to experience food insecurity than persons without disabilities. It further states that:

- Over 50% of Canadian food bank users report having a disability
- 21% of people living in food-insecure households in Canada report having three or more chronic conditions
- Even when persons with disabilities have access to enough food, they may not have access to enough *nutritious* food; this creates a higher risk of developing [nutritional] deficiencies and for the onset of preventable secondary conditions

*A Study of Food Security Programs at Metro Vancouver Housing Corporation*, 2012, states that "Households most likely to be experiencing significant food insecurity earned under 20,000 annually." A single person on provincial disability benefits in BC receives less than \$11,000 annually.

Access to community food programs and resources is critical to the health and well-being of people with disabilities. Too often, the general public thinks of accessibility in narrow terms, such as wheelchair accessibility only. A broader definition of accessibility is required and should include all the things that help or support a person with a disability in their daily life to be independent and participate fully in their community. Inclusion is the outcome of accessibility; if people with disabilities have full access to programs and services, then they are included.

The Canadian Policy Research Networks' 2008 report, *Towards Food Security Policy for Canada's Social Housing Sector*, looks at the "rent-food dichotomy", whereby, for people living on low-income, housing payments often have priority over food purchases. Even with subsidized rents in social housing, many people with disabilities struggle to afford food.

The following are quotes from people with disabilities; these quotes are from the document, *Sharing Our Realities: Life on Disability Assistance in British Columbia*:

"There is not an hour in the day when I am not wondering how I am going to afford housing, food, medications and all my essentials." (Terrance)

"I do budgeting where I only eat a meal and a half to two meals a day. I am still alive, but I wish I could eat more properly." (Terry)

"Hell is having to decide between eating today and paying your rent or maybe your utility bill. I had to rely on food banks...most of the food had very little food value (empty calories) or healthy choices (plenty of starch, sugar, and carbs). [There was] enough to survive on for no more than a couple of days." (Ryan)

Through Disability Alliance BC's *Let's Talk Food Access* project in 2016, we heard how people have difficulty, because of their disability, getting to stores to purchase food, having enough money to buy good quality food, preparing and cooking food and about the barriers they experience accessing local food programs in their communities. As one project participant put it, "Chasing after low-cost meals and food is exhausting." Furthermore, people with disabilities told us that the meals and food at various food programs are often of low nutritional value and that frequently they are given food that is expired.

The local food program organizers we spoke with in Vancouver were also concerned about food quality. This was further confirmed at our *Let's Talk Food Access* presentation at Inclusion BC's annual conference in June 2016 in Prince George. Participants with disabilities at our session were

from across BC; they told us that, in many of their communities, larger grocery store chains are the only grocery store and very often they are not located near social/low-income housing. This means that people with disabilities have to travel by transit to get food, which adds to their cost and it is also difficult to carry too many groceries on the bus. Some larger grocery chains deliver groceries, but there is usually a cost for delivery that people with disabilities cannot afford.

Many of the ideas that came out of the *Let's Talk Food Access* project were about bringing healthy, quality, affordable food to where people with disabilities live. Some of the suggestions from project participants were: mobile/curbside produce markets, bulk buying clubs, and community gardens on social housing sites.

## **The Research Findings**

We examined two streams of food security programs:

*Food programming at the community level*, which appears to be similar in all of the jurisdictions that we examined across Canada and the USA: community gardens, community kitchens, bulk buy programs/good food box, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), farmers' markets, mobile markets, and food education/skills.

*Food programming at social/low-income housing sites* often includes community gardens and, occasionally community kitchens and food skills, but also includes programming such as: the supply of meals for residents (in supported housing), and receipt and distribution of donated foods from local grocery stores.

### **Community Food Programming:**

Our research looked at a range of food security projects including bulk buying clubs, community gardens, mobile markets, food boxes, and food education programming. The research focus was on community centres, neighbourhood houses and food security organizations.

The wider food security movement is still very dominated by eating local, community gardens, urban agriculture and growing organic food, educational food classes, food banks and/or community meals. Although there are many reports addressing the importance of food security for people with disabilities, there is still a lack of on-the-ground food programming specifically focused on people with disabilities. The vast majority of programs for people living on low-incomes are community kitchens, community gardens, food box deliveries or meals-on-wheels types of deliveries, food banks, and cooking and nutrition classes.

Our research revealed that food security projects, while often targeted for people living on low-incomes, do not specifically target people with disabilities and their wide variety of access issues. There is a deep passion for food security issues in our communities, but also a lack of time, funding skills, and knowledge on how to transfer that into making programs accessible for a wide range of people with disabilities.

In interviews with community workers and service providers about DABC's interest in food programming at social housing sites, the response was deep enthusiasm and a sense of urgency. There was an overall recognition that their programming was not reaching enough people with disabilities and that this was a gap that needed to be addressed. Some attributed this gap to issues of funding streams that targeted youth, families and/or seniors, but left singles, in particular those with disabilities between the ages of 25-60, out of the picture. They also talked about the immense workloads of juggling their wide variety of food security programming, often on part-time hours, that left little time for implementing more programs for people with disabilities.

In all cases, when talking about the barriers people with disabilities face in accessing programs that require them to leave their homes, there was complete agreement and comments like "Standing in line-ups is so hard on people," and "It's hard for people to get out to programs."

### *Issues Identified:*

Whether it is community gardens, bulk buy programs, community kitchens, mobile markets or Little Free Pantries, all of these kinds of programming rely heavily on volunteerism for success.

All of the food programs at community locations (neighbourhood houses, community centres) require people with disabilities to travel to the location and carry their food/groceries home.

There is an ongoing struggle for programs to find solutions to keep food costs low.

**Community Gardens:** even if they are accessible, gardening is a labour intensive activity that many people with disabilities cannot participate in; to be successful they need to have one-to-one supports in place; the shared gardening/shared harvesting model would help facilitate more involvement of people with disabilities by sharing the workload required to maintain a garden plot.

**Bulk Buy Programs:** can offer considerable savings for participants. However, people with disabilities still have to pick up their bag of groceries; pre-bagged food does not allow for choice of items and what people with disabilities can or can't eat may vary depending on their disability.

**Community Kitchens:** located at community locations are generally not accessible; the social attitudes of other participants create barriers for people with disabilities – there is a lack of understanding that each participant should be able to contribute to the best of their ability.

**Mobile Markets:** only provide produce; people with disabilities have to travel to the locations and carry groceries home.

**Little Free Pantries:** they are small so maintaining them can be problematic; there are food safe issues; pest control is an issue; they do provide anonymity because it is open for a person to come and go and no one knows if they are putting food in the pantry or taking food out; neighbours are taking local action; local gardeners can easily share their harvest with neighbours.

Community Supported Agriculture Food Boxes: the shares are too expensive for people with disabilities living on low-income; members can share the cost of the shares and share the food box; members of the program have to pick up their food boxes at designated locations.

### **Social Housing Food Programming:**

We looked at several low-income and social housing providers in the Lower Mainland, Vancouver Island, the interior of BC, Toronto, New York City, and Seattle. Community gardens appear to be one of the main forms of food programming at low-income housing sites. We examined housing provider programs through literature review, interviews, and some site visits.

#### *Issues Identified:*

Community Gardens at Housing Sites: most use the model of individual plots and waitlists; some housing sites and food programs we looked at have a shared gardening/shared harvesting model which enables people with disabilities more opportunities for engagement since the workload is distributed; the intensity of activity required to garden successfully prevents many people with disabilities from taking part; programming that has volunteers and staff that support people with disabilities to garden is required on an ongoing basis for full access and inclusion; even gardens that have accessible raised garden beds provide limited engagement opportunities for people with disabilities because of functional limitations and physical capability.

Community Kitchens: Our research found that community kitchens at housing sites are limited, primarily, to supportive housing, but there are exceptions. Supportive housing sites often have food programming that includes cooking skills classes, but with limited uptake by residents.

Mobile Produce Markets at Social Housing Sites: bring healthy, fresh produce to the places where many people with disabilities are living; this means that there are no extra transit costs and people do not have to carry groceries; it provides residents with the opportunity to socialize with their

neighbours in the building; options other than produce would be good to add to the mobile markets, like grains.

**Donated Food:** A number of low-income and supportive housing sites receive donated food from local grocery chains. This is usually a weekly donation of bread and/or produce delivered to the housing site.

While this helps people with disabilities, and others living on low-income to supplement their diet at no cost, many of the foods are near their expiry date or already expired; this is also labour intensive for volunteers and/or staff that have to sort through donated food to weed out the food that is no longer good; if expired food isn't good enough to sell to the grocery store's customers, the question needs to be asked, why is it good enough for people with disabilities and people living on low-incomes with compromised health conditions?

**For-Profit Food Delivery:** is generally too expensive and is frequently frozen food. For example, Better Meals is \$7.00 a meal – if a person is purchasing one meal a day x 30 days, that comes to \$210 they have to spend just for one meal a day. Fresh Prep, which delivers all the food/ingredients prepared and the recipe for people to cook it themselves, costs \$9.00 a meal x 30 days = \$270 for just one meal a day. While Fresh Prep is a good idea, it is too expensive.

Non-profit community services that have a kitchen and people trained in Food Safe, could provide a service like this that would cost less.

**In-House Food Stores:** In-house food stores that offer food at cost to residents (no mark-up) was found at only one low-income housing site, but DABC would like to see this built into every low-income housing site. Staff of the housing site purchase food in bulk. The in-house store is run by volunteer residents who are paid an honorarium.

- An in-house store enables residents to purchase all their grocery and household basics right on site for the same price they would pay at discount grocery stores like No Frills. This is especially important, if expensive grocery stores are the only options located nearby.
- People can buy small portions for one person.

- It provides residents with the opportunity to make extra money working in the store.
- It provides residents with the opportunity to interact with each other regularly.
- It requires about four hours of staff time a week.

### **Other Areas of Research that Require Further Inquiry**

There are two areas that require more research: culturally appropriate food access and Indigenous food security. This area is underdeveloped in our research as it was not the primary focus of our project, but it became clear during our environmental scan and our interviews that these are significant areas to explore further. People with disabilities cross all cultures, and approximately 30% of the Indigenous population in Canada has a disability or chronic illness, which is twice the rate of the rest of Canadians.

### **Research Conclusions**

In general, current community food programs and projects are not designed and implemented by those actually experiencing food insecurity and food access issues, such as people with disabilities, and this is reflected in the barriers that the current food movement presents to this population and other populations experiencing food insecurity, such as Indigenous people.

Food programs at social housing sites show more promise when it comes to reducing barriers to food access for people with disabilities living in this housing type, but these food programs need to be expanded. Supportive housing for people with mental illness and addictions tend to have more food programming in place for their residents.

Our research revealed that initiatives are underway by Food Networks in Vancouver to try and address the gaps in food programs for people experiencing barriers to access. Innovative models, such as mobile markets at social housing sites, need to be expanded and a number of food programs and social housing staff that were part of our environmental scan were interested in exploring this idea further. One of our goals was to develop these potential partnerships. We conducted individual interviews

with key people from each of these two sectors. A next step would be to bring these two sectors together to partner to create solutions to the barriers people with disabilities face in accessing affordable, healthy food in order to improve their health and well-being.

Another of our goals was to examine the feasibility of piloting a mobile/curbside food market at a social housing site in Metro Vancouver to increase food security and social connectedness among residents/neighbours, especially those who may be isolated because of their disability. Through our research we discovered that Gordon Neighbourhood House (GNH) was already piloting such a program. Therefore, we see a better role for DABC would be to support GNH to expand its mobile market to other housing sites and to support other Food Networks to create their own mobile markets or expand their current mobile markets to visit social housing sites.

### **Next Phase of DABC's Food Security Work**

DABC's key role over the past 40 years has always been systemic advocacy for change to improve the lives of people with disabilities and support them to more fully participate in their communities. One of our strengths is our ability to collaborate with groups across sectors in order to make change happen.

Through our *Food Where I Live* research project, DABC has identified six key action areas to continue our work on food security and people with disabilities.

1. **Develop** an access and inclusion “How-to” guide of best/emerging practices, specifically focusing on mobile produce markets, in-house stores, bulk buy programs, and non-profit lunch peddler programs at social housing sites. Promotion would need to be multi-pronged: social media, DABC networks, food networks, community events, and BC Non-Profit Housing Association.
2. **Convene** community food networks/programs, people with disabilities and social housing providers together at a forum specifically to talk about “Food Where I Live” for people with disabilities and the findings of our research. As well as to identify potential projects to expand the

identified best/emerging practices, to develop action steps of how we can all work together for food security for all. Also, realistically identify systemic barriers that will need to be overcome to achieve success. The best/emerging practices “How-to” guide DABC creates can guide the forum discussions.

3. **Facilitate** new and ongoing connections between community food networks/programs, people with disabilities and social housing sites in order to develop food programming that better meets the needs of people with disabilities. This would entail follow up work from the forum.
4. **Explore** further the new ideas that came out of our research, such as building sponsorships for people with disabilities into CSA food box programs. Also, explore ongoing sustainability of projects and programs.
5. **Advocate** for income security for people with disabilities. DABC has a long history of working collaboratively across sectors around poverty reduction and economic supports and well-being for people with disabilities. We will continue to advocate for systemic economic changes to improve the lives of people with disabilities, which will improve their ability to access healthy, affordable food. DABC currently sits on the province’s Poverty Reduction Advisory Committee.
6. **Encourage** community members to start their own Little Free Pantries in their neighbourhoods and to get actively involved in food security solutions. And encourage them to apply for the City of Vancouver’s Neighbourhood Small Grants of up to \$500.

## Future Partnerships

Implementing food security projects at social housing sites will provide opportunities for housing managers, residents, food security programmers, local farmers, businesses, government, health services, and community members to come together, share their resources and knowledge and, thereby increase community capacity.

*Who Needs to be Involved:*

- People with disabilities/residents
- Disability groups

- Social housing providers/managers
- Community Food Networks
- Community Services and organizations, such as: faith-based groups, Native Friendship Centres, clubs, and foundations
- Health Sector: community health nurses, nutritionists
- Local businesses/food suppliers
- Urban farms

## **Research References**

### ***Community Projects/programs:***

Riley Park Garden

<https://www.rileyparkgarden.org/>

Food security: Organizing for Change

<https://www.sfu.ca/continuing-studies/about/program-units/community-education-program/projects/past-projects/food-security-effecting-positive-change.html>

FoodShare Toronto - The Mobile Good Food Market and Grab Some Good projects

<http://foodshare.net/program/mobile/>

<http://foodshare.net/custom/uploads/2015/11/MGFMbooklet-web-1.pdf>

[http://foodshare.net/annual\\_report/annual\\_report2016/](http://foodshare.net/annual_report/annual_report2016/)

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/grab-some-good-1.3600756>

The Little Free Pantry Project (Arkansas)

<http://www.littlefreepantry.org/>

Vancouver Indigenous Food Security

<http://ifs-indigenous.sites.olt.ubc.ca/discover-research-initiatives/food-security-mapping/>

The Crisis of Chronic Disease Among Aboriginal Peoples

<http://cahr.uvic.ca/nearbc/documents/2009/CAHR-B2-Chronic-Disease.pdf>

Tu'wusht Garden Project – Vancouver Native Health Society

<http://lfs-indigenous.sites.olt.ubc.ca/tuwusht-garden-project-vancouver-native-health-society/>

**Reports:**

A Study of Food Security Projects at Metro Vancouver Housing Corporation

[http://bcnpha.ca/wp\\_bcnpha/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/3-FinalReport\\_FoodSecurity\\_120822.pdf](http://bcnpha.ca/wp_bcnpha/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/3-FinalReport_FoodSecurity_120822.pdf)

Food Security in Social Housing Action Framework and Resource Guide,  
Lianne Carley, Vancouver Coastal Health (2013)

Inclusive Community Gardens: Planning for Inclusive and Welcoming  
Spaces in Vancouver

<https://sustain.ubc.ca/sites/sustain.ubc.ca/files/Sustainability%20Scholars/GCS%20reports%202014/More%20than%20vibrant%20green%20spaces%3A%20Improving%20access%20to%20community%20gardens%20as%20a%20source%20of%20healthy%2C%20fresh%2C%20and%20low-cost%20food%20for%20under-represented%20residents.pdf>

Improving Access: Stories from the Good Food Mobile Market

<http://foodshare.net/custom/uploads/2015/11/MGFMbooklet-web-1.pdf>

The Crisis of Chronic Disease Among Aboriginal Peoples (UVIC)

<http://cahr.uvic.ca/nearbc/documents/2009/CAHR-B2-Chronic-Disease.pdf>

The Good Food Box: A Manual

<http://foodshare.net/custom/uploads/2015/11/GFBManual-2ed-1.pdf>

<https://www.straight.com/life/716486/aboriginal-herbalist-lori-snyder-harvests-wild-foods-and-medicines-around-vancouver>

Vancouver Food Strategy, 2013

<http://vancouver.ca/files/cov/vancouver-food-strategy-final.PDF>

Towards Food Security Policy for Canada's Social Housing Sector,  
Canadian Policy Research Networks, 2008

Let's Talk Food Access: A Toolkit for Food Program Organizers, Disability  
Alliance BC, 2016

North End Assessment 2010, North End Food Network, Winnipeg,  
Manitoba

Sharing Our Realities: Life on Disability Assistance in British Columbia,  
Citizens for Accessible Neighbourhoods and the BC Poverty Reduction  
Coalition, April 2017

### ***Literature Review, Interviews and Site Visits: Community Food Programs/Projects:***

- Grandview Woodland Food Connections, Vancouver
- Little Mountain Riley Park (LMRP) Neighbourhood Food Network, Vancouver
- Gordon Neighbourhood House, Vancouver
- Kiwassa Neighbourhood House Food Programs, Vancouver
- Vancouver Second Mile Society Neighbourhood Helpers, Vancouver
- Cedar Cottage Mobile Food market, Vancouver
- The Good Food Box: Food Action Society of the North Okanagan
- Good Food Box: Fernwood Neighbourhood Resource Group
- Greater Vancouver Food Bank: Food Hub program
- The Little Free Pantry project, Arkansas, USA
- Alberta Food Matters
- Food Secure Saskatchewan
- The Good Food Mobile Market, Toronto
- FoodShare Toronto
- Nanaimo Foodshare
- Kitsilano Neighbourhood House – Fruit and Veggie Deal, Vancouver
- Vancouver Native Health Society
- Tu'wusht Garden Project, Vancouver
- Sweet Digz Farm, Richmond, BC
- Farmer's on 57<sup>th</sup>, CSA, Vancouver
- Harvest Co-op Bulk Buy Program, Vancouver
- Mole Hill Community Garden, Vancouver

### ***Literature Review, Interviews and Site Visits: Low income housing:***

- **The Society of Hope** has 640 rental homes, seniors and family housing, on 15 sites in Peachland, Westbank, Kelowna, and Lake Country.
- **The Kettle on Burrard** – supportive housing in Vancouver.
- **Metro Vancouver Housing**
- **McLaren House Society** on Howe Street is 110 units of supportive housing.

- **BC Housing, People Plants and Homes program**, which is community gardens on 40 of their housing sites in the Lower Mainland and Vancouver Island.
- **Mole Hill Housing community gardens and residents' gardens.** There are 80 plots at Mole Hill – 40 for residents and 40 for community members-at-large.
- **Atira Housing**
- **127 Housing Society** has 3 low-income housing sites in the downtown south: 415 Nelson, 540 Helmken, and Jubilee House at Richards and Helmken.
- **PHS Community Services Society** has 18 housing projects with 1,211 rental units in Vancouver and Victoria. They have both social housing and supported housing
- **Crescent Housing Society** in partnership with the Alexandra Neighbourhood House have a one-acre community garden at Crescent Beach with 56 plots – 10 are accessible.
- **Pacifica Housing Advisory Association** has 26 subsidized, reduced market, and supportive housing sites with 170 units in Victoria and Nanaimo.
- **George Pearson long-term care facility** in Vancouver has its Garden Club.
- **Toronto Community Housing**, run by the municipal government, has 350 high and low-rise buildings for seniors and families. They have a community garden strategy.
- **The New York City Housing Authority** has over 600 gardens at its housing sites.
- **The Seattle Housing Authority** provides gardening and income producing opportunities to low-income refugees in four public housing sites.