



# FOOD FOR ALL

Seniors' Food Security in Vancouver's Westside  
Community Dialogue Report  
2023



**United Way**  
British Columbia



**KITSILANO**  
Neighbourhood House



**WESTSIDE FOOD**  
COLLABORATIVE

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

### Food for All: Seniors' Food Security in Vancouver's Westside Community Dialogue

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## INTRODUCTION

The rates of food insecurity across Canada are rising <sup>1</sup> and despite the perceived affluence in the westside of Vancouver, British Columbia (referred to as *the Westside* in this report), food is a concern for many in this neighbourhood. Food insecurity is a significant public health issue that disproportionately impacts marginalized and vulnerable groups – and we know, from professional and community experience, that **food insecurity is a growing concern for older adults in the Westside**. However, no studies have been done to gather seniors' first-hand perspectives on the issue in this part of Vancouver. **Engaging populations directly impacted** is key to understanding the unique experience of food insecurity among seniors and developing effective **evidence-based program and policy responses**.

*Food For All: Seniors' Food Security in Vancouver's Westside* community dialogue aimed to better understand how different dimensions of food security, including **food availability, access, utilization, and stability** are experienced by older adults in the community. Co-facilitated by Ksenia Stepkina, Community Food Developer with Westside Food Collaborative of Kitsilano Neighbourhood House, and Karen Giesbrecht, Registered Dietitian, the conversation revealed **strengths, gaps, and opportunities** across these four dimensions. Building on earlier studies<sup>2,3</sup> that captured the perspectives of the community service providers, this community dialogue report provides the summary of the findings as well as recommended actions to help support seniors' food security in the Westside. For the purposes of this report, seniors are defined as individuals **65 and older**.

One of the community dialogue participants voiced her concern about food access viscerally when she commented that<sup>4</sup>:

*"I sometimes cannot sleep at night thinking about what I will eat when I get older."*

We can and must address concerns like these.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cpha.ca/household-food-insecurity-its-not-just-about-food>

<sup>2</sup> Giesbrecht, K., & Stepkina, K. (2021). Thinner and Thinner – 2021 Westside Food Asset Need and Scan.

<https://plantednetwork.files.wordpress.com/2021/10/thinner-and-thinner-westside-food-asset-need-scan.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Pottery, H. & Jinkerson, A. (2007). Exploring food security in Vancouver's Westside.

<sup>4</sup> Throughout the report we have included quotes from community dialogue participants

## BACKGROUND

### FOOD SECURITY: DEFINITION, IMPORTANCE AND SOLUTIONS

#### WHAT IS FOOD SECURITY?

**Food security** refers to the ability of individuals and households to access sufficient, safe, and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and preferences for an active and healthy life. In Canada **food insecurity**, or the lack of access to adequate food, is a critical issue that affects millions of individuals, and thus families and communities.

## FOOD SECURITY

The right to and the measure of the availability of food which is:

- Affordable
- Nutritious and Safe
- Culturally Appropriate
- Socially Just & Obtained with Dignity
- Ecologically Sustainable
- Honours Indigenous Food Sovereignty



Food security is ensured when four conditions are met: availability, access, utilization, and stability over time.<sup>5</sup>

**Availability** is ensured when there is a reliable supply of food of sufficient quantity and quality.

**Access** is achieved when individuals and households have adequate resources to obtain appropriate food, which is dependent on political, economic, and social factors, equitable distribution, markets, and infrastructure, and most notably, affordability and purchasing power.

**Utilization** refers to obtaining food that is nutritious and can be adequately metabolized and used by the body. Utilization is directly related to food quality, which is reliant on food safety, proper preparation, and nutritional knowledge.

Finally, **stability** is ensured when there is permanent and durable access to food, where the other three conditions of food security are maintained over time.

<sup>5</sup> Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FOA). (1996). Rome declaration on world food security and world food summit plan of action. <http://www.fao.org/3/w3613e/w3613e00.htm>

## WHY IS FOOD SECURITY IMPORTANT?

Food insecurity is a **serious, but avoidable, public health issue** - it can lead to or aggravate malnutrition, chronic disease, and mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety. It can also contribute to social and economic inequalities, as those who are already marginalized may be further excluded from accessing healthy food or from participating in experiences where food is shared. When we ensure everyone in a community experiences food security, we lessen both human distress and the cost to our healthcare services and needed supports.

## WHAT ARE COMMON RESPONSES TO FOOD INSECURITY?

Common responses to food insecurity include:

<b>Relief</b>	While not a long-term solution, there is a place for food charity programs such as food banks, free and low-cost meals, and hamper programs, especially when individuals are in an acute crisis.
<b>Development</b>	Community development programs like food skills workshops, food budget workshops, nutritional skills, community gardens, and community-supported agriculture build knowledge, community capacity and vital social connections.
<b>Advocacy</b>	To ensure adequate long-term resources and food democracy, there must also be community organizing and policy advocacy (e.g., community advisory committees and community dialogues).

Food security is a complex issue that calls for a holistic approach and must include multi-pronged solutions. While food relief programs will continue playing a crucial role in supporting acute food security needs, long-term policy responses aimed at supporting population incomes will be needed to address the root causes of food insecurity. Whether improving food programs to meet the critical need or working towards systemic solutions targeting root causes, we must center the lived experience of those most impacted by the issue in order to develop evidence-based responses.

## FOOD SECURITY IN THE SENIOR POPULATION: DISTINCT CHARACTERISTICS

Food security is a particularly critical issue for seniors, as it can have significant impacts on their health, wellbeing, and ability to live independently. Seniors can be a vulnerable population, and many face unique challenges when it comes to accessing adequate and nutritious food.

**Firstly**, many seniors live on **fixed incomes** such as pensions or government benefits (see Appendix 1). While the research<sup>6</sup> shows that food security improves once individuals reach the age of 65 and begin receiving guaranteed income in the form of senior benefits, this may still not be enough to cover the cost of healthy food as well as other critical expenses. As a result, seniors may be forced to choose more affordable, less nutritious food options, or skip meals altogether, leading to malnutrition and other health problems.

**Secondly**, seniors may have limited **mobility** or **transportation** options, making it difficult to access grocery stores or food banks. This can be especially challenging for those living in rural or remote areas, where access to fresh, healthy food is often limited. Some parts of the Westside of Vancouver do not have fresh food markets within walking distance.

**Finally**, seniors may face **health issues** that require particularly nutrient dense food, or that make it difficult to prepare or eat certain types of food resulting from dental problems, digestive issues, heart disease, or difficulty swallowing. These factors can further limit food options, lead to malnutrition, and become even more complex when one must navigate several health challenges at the same time.

Eating well is a key element of aging well and maintaining **quality of life** for seniors. Good food provides energy and essential nutrients, prevents or lessens the impact of chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, and kidney failure, and helps maintain mobility through preserving muscles, bones, and overall energy.

**Accessing, preparing, and eating** good meals and snacks gets harder as people age, especially when appetite, digestion, and ability to chew and swallow decline. Limited income, isolation, and/or the burden of caregiving can amplify one's ability to maintain adequate food and fluid intake.

As we age, **acute illnesses** like respiratory infections or food poisoning take a bigger toll on the immune system and may require longer recovery periods. As the body gets frailer, accidents, injuries, and surgeries become more common, and recovery time is longer. These frailties make it

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<sup>6</sup> McIntyre, L., Dutton, D. J., Kwok, C., & Emery, J. C. H. (2016). Reduction of Food Insecurity among Low-Income Canadian Seniors as a Likely Impact of a Guaranteed Annual Income. *Canadian Public Policy*, 42(3), 274–286. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cpp.2015-069>

harder to carry groceries, prepare food, and do other physical tasks. Undernourishment and/or chronic diseases make it even more difficult to fight off infections or illnesses. Food safety and other protections from illness are vital.

Food insecurity in seniors can also lead to (or worsen) **mental health** consequences, such as depression and anxiety. It can lead to **social isolation**, as seniors may avoid social gatherings or events due to a lack of food or the inability to afford food to share with others.

### *VANCOUVER'S WESTSIDE: COMMUNITY PROFILE*

This report uses demographic data from the Kitsilano Social Indicators Profile (2020)<sup>7</sup> to represent all of the Westside of Vancouver. The information presented here should be taken only as a broad indication of demographic trends for this part of Vancouver and does not reflect the significant impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Kitsilano has a smaller percentage of seniors (age 65 or older) than Vancouver overall, however, the number is growing: from 1996 to 2016 the number of seniors increased by 77%. In 2016, there were approximately 4600 people aged 65 – 70, and another 1200 aged 80+. Interestingly, the number of people aged 25 – 45 declined in this neighborhood in recent years.

Aging both impacts and is impacted by several factors, including housing type, social and family connections, and income. In Kitsilano, 41% of seniors live alone.

Seniors in this neighbourhood are more likely to own their homes than other age groups, which is a significant asset, but which also comes with the costs and burden of upkeep. This puts additional pressure on older adults on fixed incomes, making them more economically vulnerable. And if living in a house, there may be stairs, which become increasingly difficult to navigate.

Those who rent are at risk of losing their home. As of 2016, 28% of senior-led households in Kitsilano are rented, and 62% live in apartments.



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<sup>7</sup> <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/social-indicators-profile-kitsilano.pdf>



## SENIORS FOOD SECURITY IN THE WESTSIDE: A CAUSE FOR CONCERN

The rates of food insecurity in Canada are growing - 1 in 6 people in Canada now live in food insecure households<sup>8</sup>, which is a dramatic increase from the pre-pandemic statistics of 1 out of 8 people.<sup>9</sup> With food costs rising, more people are at risk<sup>10</sup>. Given the serious impacts of food insecurity for older adults, as well as the growing aging population, seniors' food security in the Westside is a timely and urgent issue.

### FOOD SECURITY IN SENIOR POPULATION IN THE WESTSIDE: STATUS OF THE ISSUE

As early as 2006, food security started to arise as an issue of importance at social service providers' meetings in the Westside. As a response to the growing concern, the **Westside Food Collaborative (WFC)** was formed with the goal to better understand and address the issue of food insecurity in Vancouver's Westside<sup>11</sup>. In 2007, the WFC commissioned a seminal study to explore food security in this part of Vancouver<sup>12</sup>. A key finding was that there was, indeed, a **serious food insecurity problem** in what is commonly perceived as an affluent neighbourhood<sup>13</sup>. The study identified seniors as one of the demographic groups most vulnerable to food insecurity.

Since food insecurity is often tied to **inadequate financial resources**, seniors' lower and fixed incomes were identified as a key factor in the problem<sup>14</sup>. Vancouver's Westside was an attractive neighbourhood that had experienced significant growth. This led to **rising housing costs** and many seniors who had long called the Westside home found themselves *house-rich, but cash-poor*, struggling to make ends meet.

A widespread perception of universal affluence in this part of Vancouver hides **pockets of poverty** and **sub-populations that face barriers**, including seniors<sup>15</sup>. This perception also amplifies **stigma** and **shame** often felt when one must access charitable food: seniors living in the "rich" Westside are less likely to admit that they are struggling and are more reluctant to ask for support. As a result, food supports are concentrated in other parts of Vancouver.

Vancouver's Westside neighbourhoods have also been referred to as **food deserts**, as residents must travel a good distance to access fresh, affordable food. This is a particularly serious problem

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<sup>8</sup> <https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/how-many-canadians-are-affected-by-household-food-insecurity/>

<sup>9</sup> Tarasuk, V., Fafard St-Germain, A.-A., & Loopstra, R. (2020). The relationship between food banks and food insecurity: Insights from Canada. *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations*, 31(5), 841–852. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-019-00092-w>

<sup>10</sup> Boynton, S. (2022, December 4). Food prices set to rise another 5-7% in 2023 after record inflation year: report. Global News. <http://www.globalnews.ca>

<sup>11</sup> Westside Food Collaborative. (n.d.). <https://www.kitshouse.org/westside-food-collaborative/>

<sup>12</sup> Gillard, S. (2009, July 13). Food insecurity on the Westside has seniors going hungry. *The Georgia Straight*. <https://www.straight.com/article-240019/spring-gillard-food-insecurity-west-side-has-seniors-going-hungry>

<sup>13</sup> Pottery, H. & Jinkerson, A. (2007). Exploring food security in Vancouver's Westside.

<sup>14</sup> Leung, W. (2008, July 10). Seniors struggling to shop for a decent meal. *The Globe and Mail*. <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/life/seniors-struggling-to-shop-for-a-decent-meal/article656645/>

<sup>15</sup> Shore, R. (2012, June 25). Poor and elderly stranded in Westside food deserts. *The Vancouver Sun*. <https://vancouversun.com/news/staff-blogs/poor-and-elderly-stranded-in-westside-food-deserts>

for frail seniors with deteriorating health and mobility challenges. Food deserts can be described as geographic areas where residents' access to affordable, healthy food options (especially fresh fruit and vegetables) is restricted or nonexistent due to the absence of grocery stores within convenient traveling distance.<sup>16</sup>

To address food **accessibility** and **affordability** issues for seniors living in this part of Vancouver, the WFC, in partnership with the South Granville Seniors Centre, launched the *Plenty Campaign* in 2013 to raise awareness about the lack of options for affordable produce in the Westside and to provide **fresh produce in places where seniors congregate**<sup>17</sup>. The Westside Mobile Market for seniors and low-income residents offered low-cost fresh fruits and vegetables and received a positive response.<sup>18</sup> The program was stopped after several years due to lack of sustainable funding.

While seniors' food insecurity remained a strategic priority for social service organizations in the Westside, no further significant engagement was conducted. However, COVID-19, once again, highlighted senior's vulnerabilities, including mobility challenges, lack of access to technology, and social isolation. In 2021, the WFC and Union Gospel Mission completed the *Thinner and Thinner* report to assess food needs and assets, and take stock of pandemic lessons. This report primarily focused on insights from service providers. While focused on the general population, the report identified **seniors as a vulnerable population**, leaving the question of addressing seniors' food insecurity open. The report also recommended **engaging people with lived experience** of food insecurity.



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<sup>16</sup> Food Empowerment Project.(n.d.) <https://foodispower.org/access-health/food-deserts/>

<sup>17</sup> Loewen, A. (2013, September, 20) Vancouver on the cheap: The Plenty Campaign. *Vancouver Is Awesome*.

<https://www.vancouverisawesome.com/events-and-entertainment/vancouver-on-the-cheap-the-plenty-campaign-1927491>

<sup>18</sup> Westside mobile market creates an oasis in a food desert. (2013, July 30). *Vancouver Is Awesome*.

<https://www.vancouverisawesome.com/courier-archive/news/seniors-westside-mobile-market-creates-an-oasis-in-a-food-desert-2970159>

# SENIORS' FOOD SECURITY IN THE WESTSIDE COMMUNITY DIALOGUE

## OVERVIEW

A **community dialogue** is a method of engagement that enables participants to express their perspectives on issues in their community, which may lead to finding viable solutions.<sup>19</sup> Community dialogue upholds the principle of **deep democracy**, which strives to enable diverse community members to have their voices heard, especially those who face barriers to more traditional forms of civic participation.

A **seniors' food security community dialogue** was held in March 2023 at the Kitsilano Neighbourhood House (Kits House). Thirteen (13) senior participants attended. While all who attended were healthy enough to travel to the venue and engage in the dialogue, several needed **mobility aids**. Several participants struggled with mild to moderate **hearing loss**, and for some, **English language** was a barrier to communication.

The session was co-facilitated by Ksenia Stepkina, Community Food Developer with Westside Food Collaborative of Kitsilano Neighbourhood House, and Karen Giesbrecht, Registered Dietitian. Kits House staff provided facilitation support. The discussion was held in several breakout groups and focused on four elements of food security: **availability, access, utilization, and stability**. Within each of these, participants were asked to identify **strengths, gaps, and opportunities** based on their personal experience. While individual experiences differed, the discussion revealed some notable considerations for our senior population when it comes to food security. In the section below, we highlight key findings and recommended actions.

## FINDINGS: AVAILABILITY, ACCESS, UTILIZATION, AND STABILITY

### AVAILABILITY

Several participants remarked positively on the **availability of grocery stores** in the neighbourhood. There is a **wide variety** of products, as well as regular farmers' markets providing locally grown produce. Many expressed gratitude for the variety of good food they have access to, but they do not take it for granted. Participants noted the availability of a few free and low-cost food programs, including free hamper programs, food distribution, and community fridges. Additionally,

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<sup>19</sup> Shemer, O. (2014). Community dialogue. In D. Coghlan & M. Brydon-Miller (Eds.), *The SAGE encyclopedia of action research* (Vol 1, pp. 143–146). SAGE Publications Ltd.

participants appreciated the available **opportunities to grow their own food**, including private garden plots, community gardens, and garden-matching programs.

*“We are fortunate for the varieties of food we have.”*

However, the wide availability of food does not come without limitations for the senior population in the Westside. Those who have health concerns that require a special diet (i.e., lower sodium, soft, vegetarian), cultural preferences or religious beliefs (e.g., Kosher, Halal) shared that appropriate food options are rarely available in free or low-cost community programs. When it comes to growing their own food, some participants cited a limited availability of gardening opportunities, with long waitlists for community plots. All participants identified the limited growing season as a barrier to local food availability.

*“If I had a magic wand, I would ensure we had enough fruit, vegetables, and honey.”*

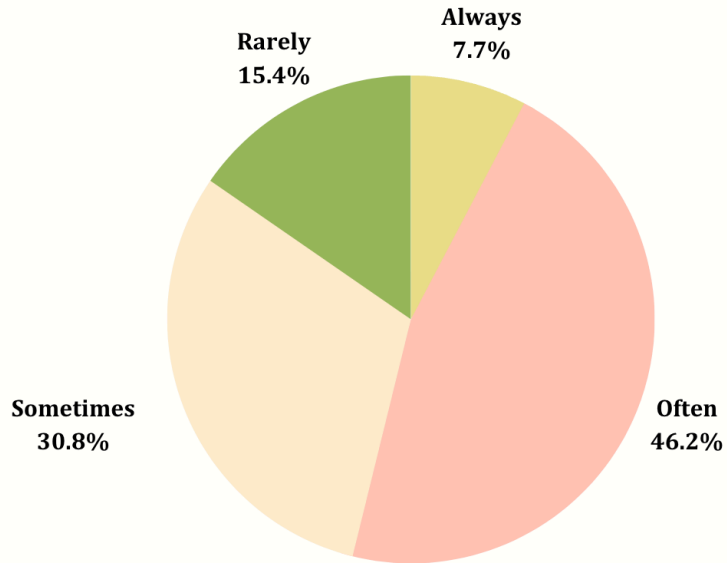
## ACCESS

Access to food is the most critical aspect of food security, and the one that is the most challenging to reach. Even when food is widely available, as described above, **lack of access** can hinder one’s food security status. Participants talked about how they are coping now with food access, but do worry about the **future**, especially if food prices continue to rise. Many had made some changes to be more resourceful but were looking for even more ideas. Some talked about shopping at several stores each week to find sales and deals. Many shared factors that present barriers to access to food resources.

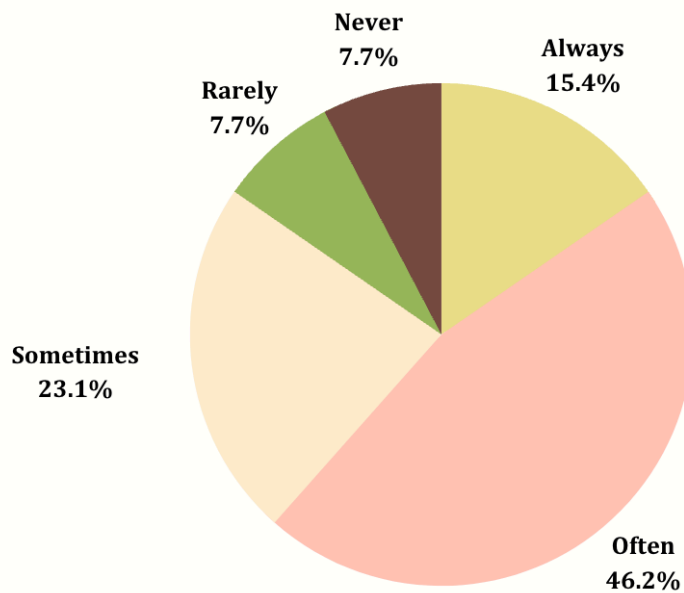
*“We always have to adapt how we get food.”*

The biggest barrier highlighted by participants was **unaffordability**. While a wide variety of food is available at the grocery stores and farmers’ markets, prices are prohibitive for many. With food costs rising, pensions not keeping up with inflation, and housing costs taking up more than half of the monthly budget for some, participants find themselves compromising on the quantity and quality of food they access.

## I HAVE TO COMPROMISE ON QUALITY OF FOOD THAT I BUY



## I HAVE TO COMPROMISE ON QUANTITY OF FOOD THAT I BUY



*“I do not always buy what I would like to. I pick up what is on sale and let that determine what is on my menu.”*

The challenge of affordability was especially true for **locally grown food** that has a higher nutritional value, smaller environmental impact, and often better taste, but tends to be of higher cost. Farmer’s markets were cited as prohibitively expensive. Some participants expressed concern that the government does not support local farmers, and there were not enough accessible garden plots for those who wanted to subsidize their intake with food they could grow.

*“I wish for a neighbourhood full of garden boxes instead of grass.”*

Several participants cited a “**single’s tax**”, which refers to the higher cost of living for a single person, compared to a multi-family household. Participants note that discounted items tend to be of larger (e.g., *family size*), or grouped together (e.g., *buy 2 get 1 free*) which is not appropriate for older adults living alone. One participant suggested a coordinated protest to grocery stores to address these kinds of sales tactics.

Those who follow a special diet (i.e., lower sodium, soft, vegetarian, Kosher) find it challenging to find suitable food at a lower cost, as these items rarely go on sale and are not always available in food hamper programs.

*“I try to use only healthy foods.”*

For most respondents, physical access to grocery stores was not a challenge, due to their **proximity** and reliable connection to **public transit** networks. The dependency on public transit, however, presents a risk for the senior population, as it can often be unreliable, especially in inclement weather. Several participants shared that walking distance to the bus is often a challenge, particularly with carrying heavy grocery items back home. A few remarked that several bus stops were moved to accommodate the ongoing subway construction<sup>20</sup>, which increased the walking

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<sup>20</sup> At the time of this dialogue, construction had been underway for more than a year, and is expected to be completed in 2026.

distance and made accessing food more challenging. A few participants said that even with food stores located nearby, the inability to carry heavy groceries serves as a barrier to accessing food.

The **environmental impact** of food was also important for participants of this dialogue. In one discussion group, four of the five participants were vegetarian or vegan. Individuals were mostly following a plant-based diet for health and environmental considerations, but cost was also a factor. One participant talked about being intentional about adding more beans and pulses into her diet, but was looking for new ideas on how to use them in tasty ways. Others talked about how they want to support growers who care about the environment, and wished they could know more about the origin of their food. Someone suggested a workshop on soil testing and maintenance, possibly in partnership with Village Vancouver<sup>21</sup>.

Most participants had not used **food charity** (i.e., food hamper programs) and would prefer not to start. Some admitted that a sense of pride and self-sufficiency prevents them from asking for help: realizing that they could not make ends meet they choose to limit their food intake instead of reaching out for support. Some acknowledged that the community pantries and fridges do help, as do the weekly groceries that the group of churches provide, referencing Kits Cares <sup>22</sup>.

*“Food at community programs is often a small portion, which is good for some, and too little for others.”*

When it comes to accessing free and low-cost food programs, many participants noted a lack of updated, consolidated **information on food resources** or **technological barriers** that prevent accessing the services that do exist. Most consistently, however, it was **stigma** and shame associated with accessing charitable food supports that were cited as the main barrier to accessing these resources. One participant talked about how there is often judgment when someone who accesses free food looks well dressed, but how we must acknowledge that we do not know what others are going through.

Participants tend to favor food programs that are rooted in community care, aimed at supporting social connections, and prioritize safety and belonging. Many participants shared that they often turn to their social networks, including neighbours and friends, to support food access.

*“The kindness of friends helps me access the food I need.”*

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<sup>21</sup> <http://www.villagevancouver.ca/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://redemptionchurch.ca/ministries/community-volunteer/pages/kits-cares>

## UTILIZATION

Utilization is ensured when food is nutritious and can be adequately metabolized and used by the body, which is increasingly important for people as they age. Many participants noted a limited diet and dietary restrictions due to health conditions. All recognize the importance of **food as medicine** as critical with advancing age.

At least half of the participants in this dialogue expressed confidence in their nutrition knowledge and food skills and took the time to shop for and prepare nutritious food that meets their dietary needs. Several talked about how much they enjoy cooking and hosting others around a meal.

Some participants, however, admitted lacking knowledge on food, nutrition, and health, particularly information on potentially harmful pesticides and toxins in food. Several respondents shared that they do not have enough food skills knowledge and/or do not have enough energy to prepare food that is tasty and nutritious. Some would like to use meal kits or ready-made meals, as they are simpler, but the cost makes them unaffordable and/or the portions are too small.

*“Cooking is harder on days I do not feel well.”*

**Food safety** is another aspect of utilization. Most participants reported having a reasonably good understanding of safe food handling practices, but could also share experiences of food poisoning, likely from restaurant meals. Several had questions about how to appropriately use leftover food. One group discussed the need to wash fruits and vegetables, sharing questions and techniques for ensuring their produce was safe to eat. One individual expressed concern over formaldehyde in our tap water, as she had heard about this on the news. Others then brought up concerns over the safety of their drinking water, as they live in older homes or apartment buildings. Another participant expressed uncertainty about how much fish she should consume, given its potential mercury content. This led to a brief discussion on ways to deal with contradictory health advice or misinformation.

## STABILITY

When it comes to the stability dimension of food security, participants expressed their concerns around maintenance of the three pillars: availability, access, and utilization, over time. Many noted the reliance on food that comes from other Canadian provinces, the United States, Mexico, or farther. This **lack of self-sufficiency** in food production is a cause for concern for many participants.



All participants were concerned with the rates of food inflation<sup>23</sup> and its impact on their food security status, particularly if food prices continue to climb at the same rate they have been. About two-thirds of the respondents worry about running out of money to buy food.

Finally, many realized that proper food utilization will continue playing an ever-increasing role in their health status, particularly as they advance in age.

**RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE DIALOGUE**

Following is a summary of the recommendations made by the seniors that participated in the discussion. For this report, seniors are defined as individuals **65 and older**. Whenever we work with seniors, we must recognize that there is a significant range in energy and ability between those in this age bracket who are healthy and living independently, those who are moderately frail or starting to experience some limitations, and among those who are significantly frail, needing assistance with activities of daily living. Recommendations are made with this continuum in mind.

**AVAILABILITY**

<b>Dietary Needs</b>	We must consider the unique and changing dietary needs of older adults when developing community food programs.
<b>Fruit Trees</b>	Increased availability of free public fruit trees would provide significant nutrient-dense fruit in season.
<b>Gardens and Urban Food Forests</b>	Increased availability of local gardening opportunities would be an asset, including private garden plots and community gardens.
<b>Greenhouse</b>	There is potential in creating public greenhouses to accommodate a relatively short growing season in this bioregion.

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<sup>23</sup> Boynton, S. (2022, December 4). Food prices set to rise another 5-7% in 2023 after record inflation year: report. *Global News*. <http://www.globalnews.ca>

## ACCESS

<b>Asset Maps</b>	We must know the ever-changing food assets and gaps (i.e., food deserts, or neighbourhoods without grocery stores) to plan appropriate services.
<b>Awareness</b>	We must continue to raise community awareness around critical issues like policing, stigma, racial disparity, trauma-informed care, and understanding issues connected to food security.
<b>Food Prices</b>	We must consider advocating for grocery price-control, discounts for seniors (which may include smaller packaging suitable to senior's consumption patterns), and subsidized food, especially organic, locally grown food.
<b>Grocery Options</b>	There is interest in food co-ops, which would allow access to bulk groceries in quantities suitable for seniors' needs.
<b>Income</b>	Adequate, appropriate food access can only be assured when people have sufficient income, so we must support vulnerable seniors to access available assistance as needed, and ensure these supports are appropriate.
<b>Information</b>	We must ensure updated, consolidated, and easily accessible information, in many forms, on food resources is available. This must be translated into different languages and appropriate for seniors with and without access to online tools. Some participants expressed interest in learning to better use social media. Others noted community boards that need attention (like the one outside Kits House, where the dialogue was hosted).
<b>Sharing</b>	There is potential in more formal coordination of sharing food resources with neighbors such as bulk buying and food exchanges.
<b>Shop by Phone + Delivery</b>	Grocery stores to offer shop-by-phone service to support food access for older adults with technological and mobility challenges
<b>Supportive Programs</b>	Food programs must be rooted in community care, support social connections, and create safe space of belonging.

<b>Transportation</b>	Participants named proximity to grocery stores and farmers markets as both an asset and a barrier - there are options in this part of Vancouver, but they are still not close enough for some. Low-cost transportation options must exist, including shuttles, volunteer drivers, and delivery services. Several participants talked about no longer being able to afford and/or drive a car, and thus being more reliant on public transit. When bus stops are more than a few blocks away from grocery stores and/or their homes, carrying groceries is difficult, especially in winter weather.
<b>Volunteers</b>	Volunteer support for food access must exist, including grocery shopping and delivery. We must support vulnerable seniors to access existing services.

#### UTILIZATION

<b>Cultural Sharing and Belonging</b>	Promote opportunities for cultural food sharing to foster belonging
<b>Food Literacy</b>	Some participants talked about making more and more food at home, from scratch, because of rising food costs. While many seniors have significant cooking skills, there is value in opportunities to share and exchange nutrition and food skills knowledge, particularly around cooking for specific health needs, food safety, and food preservation techniques.
<b>Food Safety</b>	Ensure food safety training is available to individuals and staff of community programs, and that basic concepts are reinforced in any program.
<b>Ready-to-Eat Meals</b>	Improved availability of affordable, nutrient-dense ready-to-eat meals would help more frail seniors.

**STABILITY**

<b>Advocacy</b>	There is a need for coordinated food security policy and reliable income support in line with the rising cost of living, both for seniors in the Westside, and beyond.
<b>Advocates</b>	Participants also talked about the challenges of navigating government benefits, which can provide critical income and access to food and other necessities of daily living. Some senior's advocates are available in the Westside, but their role does not necessarily include food security support for people who need it.
<b>Production</b>	More local food production would result in more stable access to nutritious food.

## AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH<sup>24</sup>

<b>Advocacy</b>	<p>There is further opportunity to learn about advocacy and explore how the senior population in the Westside can influence local and provincial government policies that impact their food security status. Several participants expressed an interest in more opportunities to gather and share ideas, both amongst themselves, and to amplify their voices collectively, with the aid of an organization like Kits House. Organizers of such events should arrange for interpreters as appropriate. Even for participants of this dialogue who spoke English as a second language relatively fluently, an interpreter was helpful to convey complex ideas. One participant suggested that a <i>Kitsilano Elder's Council</i> could be beneficial.</p>
<b>Indigenous Food Sovereignty</b>	<p>While several of the participants of this dialogue were Indigenous, their unique experience of food security was not a specific focus of the dialogue, nor did we find explicit information on the food assets and needs of Indigenous people in the Westside. This area calls for further inquiry. This is particularly critical as we work towards the recommendations made in the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action<sup>25</sup>, specifically Call to Action 19, which outlines the need to measure and close gaps in health outcomes between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities<sup>26</sup>.</p>
<b>Intersectionality</b>	<p>Intersecting social identities of race, class, gender, ability, geography play a role in the diversity of seniors' experience navigating the food system. Area for further research may include examining the issue of seniors' food security through an intersectional lens<sup>27</sup>.</p>
<b>Physical Activity</b>	<p>While this conversation focused on food, participants also talked about the need for physical activity to maintain their health. Several appreciated programs they could access, especially after the pandemic and seasons of not being able to gather. Further research should be done into opportunities and barriers for active programs in the Westside.</p>

<sup>24</sup> These are presented in alphabetical order, not in order of importance.

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1450124405592/1529106060525>

<sup>26</sup> [https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls\\_to\\_Action\\_English2.pdf](https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> While intersectionality is becoming a commonly understood term, some contributors to this dialogue were not familiar with it. Just as we work towards accessible food, we must ensure that our language is accessible for all who participate in a project like this.

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Program Leadership</b></p>	<p>The goal of this dialogue was to hear from seniors in the Westside. Further dialogue would be beneficial with leadership from non-profit organizations, healthcare services, community programs, churches and businesses that serve seniors to share the results of this dialogue, and further explore needs, training opportunities, and potential in the Westside.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Recycling</b></p>	<p>When considering what we eat, we must also be mindful of the waste generated by our consumption. While also not a focus of this dialogue, participants expressed interest in recycling food containers and packaging, but were sometimes confused as to how to do it correctly. There were questions around why a charge for some containers exists when they cannot be returned or recycled, and why there are no recycling centers on the Westside. One participant suggested that it would be helpful to have a list of stores that accept containers and materials that cannot be deposited into the blue bins. Another wanted to hold store managers accountable for creating opportunities to recycle the containers they sell their food in.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Trauma Informed Care</b></p>	<p>Some community dialogue participants came to Canada because of war or other challenging circumstances in their country of origin. Although they are in a stable situation now, they are still struggling to make sense of the trauma they faced (sometimes many years ago), and do not have significant savings or family support to rely on. There is a need for continued building of trauma informed care for this community, including training service providers of appropriate responses.</p>

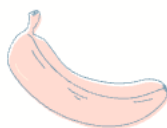
## CONCLUSION

Given the aging population in Canada, **addressing food insecurity for those 65 and older is a critical public health issue.** Better food leads to better health, which costs less - both to the individual (and their families and caregivers), and to supportive programs and health care services. **Community voices of those directly affected by the issue** are key in developing effective, evidence-based programs and policy solutions to seniors' food insecurity. The community dialogue, co-led by the Kitsilano Neighbourhood House and the Westside Food Collaborative, created space for meaningful engagement of older adults with lived experience of food insecurity. We were able to better understand the unique needs of seniors in the Westside of Vancouver.

**Key strategies** to address food insecurity for seniors are those which ensure adequate income, such as pensions and the Guaranteed Incomes Supplement. **Secondary supports** also contribute to eating well, including access to affordable and nutritious food, transportation options, support with activities of daily living when needed, and nutrition education programs. Senior populations often experience barriers to participation in democratic processes, and thus it is critical to continue creating **spaces for meaningful engagement** for all voices to be heard.

Seniors' food insecurity is a complex issue that requires a **systemic** and **collaborative approach**, centered around lived experience. We hope the findings and recommendations found in this report will help inform program and policy decisions as we work collaboratively towards a future where all seniors have access to adequate and nutritious food. We believe that by working together we can improve health and wellbeing of older adults and ensure everyone in our community can age with dignity and respect, and no one will have to lose sleep because of concern over what they will eat as they get older.

*"If I had a magic wand, I would ensure quality organic food, reasonably priced, for everyone, especially for those who are vulnerable and for whom nutritious food would make the biggest difference."*



## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1: FEDERAL & PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT SUPPORT AVAILABLE TO BC SENIORS

Seniors in BC receive both federal and provincial government supports. Here are some of the key federal and provincial programs available. For many of these, one needs to be below a certain income, above a certain age, and/or have a medical diagnosis. Check with a senior's advocacy group to learn about new or changed supports.

#### FEDERAL GOVERNMENT SUPPORTS (ADMINISTERED BY SERVICES CANADA)

<b>Old Age Security (OAS) Pension</b>	The OAS pension is a federal program that provides a monthly income to seniors aged 65 and older who meet the residency requirements. It is available to all eligible seniors across Canada.
<b>Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS)</b>	The GIS is a federal program that provides additional monthly income support to low-income seniors who are receiving the OAS pension. The amount of GIS received depends on the recipient's income level.
<b>Canada Pension Plan (CPP)</b>	The CPP is a federal pension program that provides retirement, disability, and survivor benefits. Seniors who contributed to the CPP during their working years are eligible for CPP retirement benefits upon reaching the eligibility age.

#### PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT SUPPORTS (BRITISH COLUMBIA)

<b>British Columbia Seniors' Supplement</b>	This program is specific to BC and provides a monthly income top-up for low-income seniors. It is designed to supplement the federal OAS and GIS benefits.
<b>Medical Services Plan (MSP) Premium Assistance</b>	The MSP is BC's provincial medical coverage program. Low-income seniors may qualify for premium assistance, which reduces or eliminates the monthly MSP premiums they need to pay.
<b>Fair Pharmacare</b>	Fair Pharmacare is a provincial prescription drug program that assists BC residents with the cost of prescription medications. Seniors' coverage is based on their income and household size, providing reduced or eliminated deductibles for low-income seniors.
<b>BC Bus Pass Program</b>	BC offers an annual, low-cost bus pass through this provincial program. It provides unlimited access to public transit services within the region for eligible seniors and individuals with disabilities.
<b>Social Housing</b>	A variety of options exist in different communities.
<b>Persons with Disability</b>	A monthly financial assistance program designed to support individuals with disabilities who are unable to work. Eligible recipients receive a monthly stipend to help cover basic living expenses.

**Note:** the availability and specific details of these supports are subject to change.



## APPENDIX 2: FOOD PROGRAM SUPPORTS IN THE WESTSIDE



WESTSIDE FOOD  
COLLABORATIVE

# FREE AND LOW-COST COMMUNITY FOOD RESOURCES WESTSIDE

### **Kits Cares Community Market - LOW COST/FREE**

Every Thursday, 12:30 pm-2:30 pm  
Redemption Church, 3512 W 7th Ave W, Vancouver.  
Kits Cares Community Market sells low-cost and subsidized produce and canned goods. Cash, debit and credit accepted. Guests can also enjoy a hot drink and a sweet treat at a cafe area at no cost. Free items of food available

### **Jewish Family Services - Cooked with Chesed Meal Delivery - LOW COST**

Subsidized meal delivery service for seniors and those who need additional support. (\$10 for 5 prepared meals). Meals are Kosher Pareve (BCK certified). For more information or to register, contact the JFS care line at 604-558-5719 or <https://www.jfsvancouver.ca/services/food-services/cooked-with-chesed/>

### **Seniors Lunch at Kitsilano Neighbourhood House - LOW COST**

Tuesdays 11:00 am – 1:00 pm.  
2305 W 7th Ave, Vancouver. Cost: \$7  
Light exercise, engaging conversation, entertainment and a delicious meal.  
To register, contact Sara at 604.736.3588 ext 129 or [sarad@kitshouse.org](mailto:sarad@kitshouse.org)

### **Farm-to-Plate Marketplace - SUBSIDIZED**

Pickup is on Thursday evenings in Kitsilano.  
Order fresh food directly from local farmers at [farmtoplatemarketplace.com](http://farmtoplatemarketplace.com) or by calling 778-896-6754. Weekly \$10.00 subsidy available.

### **Heart to Home Meals - LOW COST**

Prepared meal delivery program for seniors. Visit <https://www.hearttohomemeals.ca/> or call 1-866-933-1516

### **Kits House Living Room Food Distribution - FREE**

Fridays, 11 am-1 pm  
Kitsilano Neighbourhood House, 2305 West 7th Ave  
Community space open to all Monday-Friday, 9 am-4:30 pm - no membership or registration required! Features amenities, free WiFi, tea and coffee, and community connections. On Fridays, a limited number of fresh and non-perishable food items are available to take home - no registration required, no questions asked, while supplies last.

### **Kits Community Fridge and Pantry - FREE**

Vine Street & 7th Ave – outside Kitsilano Neighbourhood House  
Fresh and non-perishable items. Take what you need – leave what you can.

### **Community Fridge - Kitsilano 13th Ave - FREE**

Located in the alley behind 3066 W 13th  
Take what you need – leave what you can.

### **St. James Community Square Food Pantry - FREE**

10th Ave. & Trutch Str.  
Take what you need – leave what you can. No policing. No shame.

### **St. Mary's Kerrisdale Church Food Pantry- FREE**

2490 W 37th Ave & Larch Str. Opens October 8.  
Non-perishable food goods and personal hygiene items. Take what you need – leave what you can. No policing. No shame.

### **Community Food Pantry- West Point Grey - FREE**

Trimble St. & 8th Ave  
Non-perishable items, dry, canned goods. Take what you need – leave what you can.

Version updated: October 2023.

Contact [wfc@kitshouse.org](mailto:wfc@kitshouse.org) with questions, suggestions, updates.

## Seniors Food Security in the Westside: Participant Survey

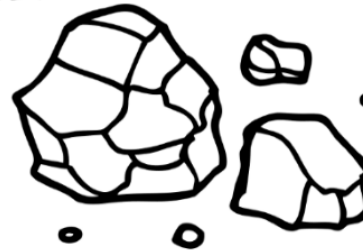
Reflecting on your own experience, on a scale from always to never, please mark how well the following statements apply to your situation:

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I eat a wide variety of foods					
I am able to eat food that supports my physical health					
I am able to eat food that supports my mental health					
I can find food that meets my preferences					
I can find food that meets my dietary needs					
I can find foods that are familiar in my culture					
I am able to buy food that meets my needs and preferences					
I have to compromise on <b>quality</b> of food that I buy					
I have to compromise on <b>quantity</b> of food that I buy					
I am able to find support in accessing food if I need it					
I know how to prepare food to maximize its nutritional value					
I know how to prepare food safely, so I do not get sick					
I like trying new foods					
I consider what is good for the environment when I decide what to eat					
I have regular meals and snacks					
There are months where I worry that I will run out of money for food					

WHAT HELPS YOU OBTAIN SUFFICIENT, HEALTHY, FRESH, AFFORDABLE, NUTRITIOUS FOOD?



WHAT BARRIERS DO YOU EXPERIENCE IN OBTAINING SUFFICIENT, HEALTHY, FRESH, AFFORDABLE, NUTRITIOUS FOOD?



WHAT CAN HELP YOU OBTAIN SUFFICIENT, HEALTHY, FRESH, AFFORDABLE, NUTRITIOUS FOOD?



**APPENDIX 4: PARTICIPANT SURVEY RESULTS**

Question	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
I eat a wide variety of foods	6	3		3	1
I am able to eat food that supports my physical health	8	4	1		
I am able to eat food that supports my mental health	8	3	2		
I can find food that meets my preferences	7	3	3		
I can find food that meets my dietary needs	8	3	2		
I can find foods that are familiar in my culture	9	2	2		
I am able to buy food that meets my needs and preferences	7	3	3		
I have to compromise on quality of food that I buy	1	6	4	2	
I have to compromise on quantity of food that I buy	2	6	3	1	1
I am able to find support in accessing food if I need it	6	2	4		1
I know how to prepare food safely, so I do not get sick	10	3			
I like trying new foods	5	3	5		
I consider what is good for the environment when I decide what to eat	7	2	4		
I have regular meals and snacks	5	3	2	3	
There are months where I worry that I will run out of money for food	1	1	4	2	5