

October 17, 2022

RE: *Chew on This!* Open Letter to Address Food Insecurity in Canada

Dear Deputy Prime Minister Freeland, Minister Gould, Minister Hussen, Minister Fraser, Minister Qualtrough, Minister Bibeau, Minister Hajdu, and Minister Vandal,

**October 17 is the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.** Dignity for All, along with [\*Chew on This!\*](#) supporters across the country, are calling on the federal government to implement equitable and effective policies to eradicate poverty and food insecurity.

**The Government of Canada has a duty to uphold the rights of all people in this country.** In 2015, Canada adopted the Agenda 2030 Sustainable Development Goals, which include targets for (1) No Poverty and (2) Zero Hunger. Reports from ESDC say they are on track to meet, or even exceed, the targets of their Poverty Reduction Strategy. But even with these improvements, **millions are being left behind.** Rates of food insecurity have continued to climb, with a provincial average of 15.9% in 2021, and even higher rates in the territories.

**Poverty and food insecurity disproportionately impact people who are Black, Indigenous, and/or disabled, and people with precarious immigration status.** 28.9% of Black households and 28.2% of Indigenous households live with food insecurity, compared to just 11% of white households.<sup>1</sup> Food insecurity rates intensify for people with intersecting forms of oppression, such as those who are 2SLGBTQ+, women, single mothers, and young adults.

**Food insecurity is not about a lack of food, it is about a lack of income and access.** Social assistance rates (including welfare and disability supports) fall short of the poverty line in every province and territory<sup>2</sup> with 63.1% of recipients' households experiencing food insecurity.<sup>3</sup> But this issue must be tackled by the federal government as well. 13.7% of households whose main source of income is employment are also food insecure.<sup>4</sup> Inadequate wages and income supports are compounded by high costs of housing, childcare, medical needs, and other essentials, leaving millions of people sacrificing their food budgets when there isn't enough money to pay for rent and other "non-negotiable" expenses.

**Food charity is not the solution.** The federal government must leverage all available processes and programs to ensure food security for all - this includes cash transfers, regulatory controls,

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<sup>1</sup> Statistics Canada, Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), 2017-2018

<sup>2</sup> Maytree Foundation, Welfare in Canada (2021). Retrieved from <https://maytree.com/welfare-in-canada/canada/>

<sup>3</sup> Tarasuk V, Li T, Fafard St-Germain AA. (2022) Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). Retrieved from <https://proof.utoronto.ca/>

<sup>4</sup> Same as above.

and publicly funded, universally accessible programs and services. Food security requires food systems that provide safe working conditions for all workers, and can adapt to climate change pressures. Food security requires income security and affordable housing. It requires empowering and funding community-led local and sustainable solutions. It requires recognizing food sovereignty for Indigenous and Black people.

We have outlined 4 policy recommendations that address some of the underlying causes of food insecurity in Canada and its disproportionate impacts among equity-seeking groups.

1. **Increase income security:** Increase federal income benefits, including Employment Insurance, the Canada Worker's Benefit, Canada Disability Benefit, Guaranteed Income Supplement, Canada Housing Benefit, and the Canada Child Benefit, to reflect current gaps and inadequacies. Expand eligibility and delivery options to ensure all people living in Canada can access benefits.
2. **Status for All:** Give everyone living in Canada permanent resident status to ensure that they have access to fair wages, worker protections, healthcare, EI, and other government benefits and programs.
3. **Subsidise Food Shipping Costs to the North:** While this will not address all forms of food insecurity in northern communities, increasing government subsidies for food shipping expenses will make food costs immediately more affordable for residents.
4. **Support Community-led Programs & Food Sovereignty:** Provide stable, adequate funding to community-run and non-profit food programs (particularly for Indigenous and Black-led organizations), recognizing community members with lived experience of food insecurity as experts in what services and food options are needed.

This letter has been endorsed by academics and advocates across the country and across sectors (please see the full list of signatures below). We would be grateful for the opportunity to meet with you to provide more information specific to your respective mandates and our policy recommendations.

We look forward to working with you towards our human rights commitments.

#### **Dignity for All Co-Leads**

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