

We are all in this together - not just today, but always

In this time of Covid-19, our thoughts at the Durham Food Policy Council turn to all who are ill, caring for those who are, coping with changes to their studies and livelihoods, and taking measures to prevent infection. We deeply appreciate the efforts of community organizations, medical staff, and governments at all levels who are scrambling to meet the needs of those affected. And we appreciate those who continue to work in essential services, especially those along the food chain who are helping to ensure a steady supply of food for all of us.

The truth is, this pandemic affects all of us and is shedding light on how interdependent our lives are. Right now, we utterly rely on each other to take measures to contain the spread of the virus. However, we know that there are many in our community who can't afford what they need, like safe housing, to stay healthy and reduce transmission. In fact, [9.7% of Durham residents were already living on low incomes before the pandemic.](#)

Today's crisis also means that some people are experiencing food insecurity, the inability to afford sufficient food, for the first time. However, the latest numbers available from Statistics Canada (2017-18), show that food insecurity in Canada was already affecting [the most people ever, 4.4 million](#). It was one of Canada's under-addressed emergencies even before we ever heard of COVID-19. Food insecurity incurs steep costs on: [physical, mental, and social health](#); the healthcare system; and people's lives. In fact, being severely food insecure robs [9 years](#) off people's lives and [costs the healthcare system more than twice as much as being food secure.](#)

How do we address poverty and food insecurity? Jobs alone are no guaranteed solution. In fact, [65% of food insecure households already rely on wages.](#) Jobs need to be stable and wages must be sufficient. Food banks were already straining before the added demands that have come with Covid-19. These primarily charitable, volunteer organizations were only serving [a very small proportion of food insecure households even before COVID-19.](#) Food banks cannot be our primary response in addressing widespread food insecurity. In addition, even before COVID-19, programs like Ontario Works and ODSP have kept people living far below the poverty line. And, although the new government initiatives may bring relief to many, they will also miss many who need the support and were already vulnerable. We need to build the resilience of our food system, our communities, and our nation by insisting that **everyone**, including supermarket cashiers, restaurant workers, farmers, caregivers, volunteers--all of us who need to eat, really--have enough to live on.

At DFPC, we strongly recommend a guaranteed Basic Income that complements other social programs, one that is designed so that everyone in Canada has at least enough income to cover their basic needs and to help ensure the health and dignity that comes with this.

We are all in this together--let's move forward with this in mind.