



IMPACTS 2017



How a **CUP partnership** with **Multicultural Health Broker (MCHB) Cooperative** is impacting **FOOD INSECURITY** for immigrant children and families in Edmonton.

What is food insecurity?

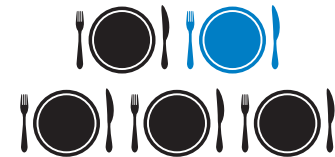
'Food insecurity' means individuals and/or families are not able to eat because they do not have enough money to buy food. Children as well as recent immigrants to Canada are more likely to experience food insecurity. In April/May 2015, one in five clients who responded to an Edmonton's food bank survey reported that they, or one of their family members, had not eaten for 2-5 days.

There are various ways that individuals or families experience food insecurity. They may worry about having enough food to eat in a day. They may have trouble accessing quality foods. They may not be able to afford a healthy variety of foods. Or they may not have enough money to buy enough food for their household. All of these experiences put individual and families at higher risk for . . .

- **Complications in pregnancy and poor health outcomes for babies.**
- **Lack of proper nutrition for families and a higher level of stress and depression for mothers.**
- **Lower grades among school aged children.**
- **Mental health issues, increased risk of chronic disease, depression, and suicidal thoughts in adolescence and early adulthood.**



One in eight households in Alberta experiences food insecurity.



One in five households of recent immigrants to Canada experience food insecurity.



In 2011, more than **one in six** Alberta children lived in homes that did not have access to regular food and sometimes they could go a whole day without eating.

What you need to know:

Food insecurity is a growing and serious issue that has negative physical, mental, and social health consequences across all age groups. Emergency food initiatives provide some food relief, however the only way to reduce food insecurity is by addressing the underlying problem: **poverty**.



Food insecurity among immigrant families is a complex issue that requires systemic changes. Working in this project enabled me to understand the numerous challenges in tackling food insecurity but also to understand the strength and immense potential that exists within immigrant communities. As researchers, we can play a role in fostering action across all system levels.

Maira Quintanilha, MSc, RD, PhD Candidate





Power of Partnerships

Maria Mayan (CUP Associate Director) and Yvonne Chiu (Executive Director of Multicultural Health Broker (MCHB) Cooperative) have been working together on community-based research projects for the past 20 years. The MCHB is an independently run health worker cooperative that supports the health and well-being of immigrant families and fosters community building to help families thrive in Edmonton. The MCHB programs are run by 'health brokers'¹ who are also immigrants or refugees who have experienced many of the issues their clients face. Health Brokers often begin their support for the families with

“We can tell you we have many sleepless nights in the past due to food shortage and that really hurts as a mother to not feed our children.”

Health Broker, 2017

the women, and support annually around 10 to 13% of childbirths in the Edmonton Region through their perinatal program. Although, with the level of food insecurity

being experienced by their clients, health brokers are forced to divert their work from promoting healthy pregnancies and postpartum care, to managing a family's food crises. The majority of their clients are living in poverty and do not have money to buy food. This creates immense stress for health brokers on a daily basis as they struggle to find solutions, so that clients and their children can eat that day. As one Somali health broker describes it "Life without food, there is no life".

In 2013, Maria and Yvonne had an opportunity to initiate a project that would help the health brokers better support the nutritional needs of their pregnant and postpartum migrant clients as part of a University of Alberta research program, headed by Dr. Rhonda Bell, called ENRICH. The focus of the research shifted as early findings revealed that hunger, not nutrition, was of immediate concern for these mothers. Discussion with mothers about their perceptions of a healthy pregnancy showed that healthy eating was not even an option, as many immigrant and refugee women were unable to even meet their basic food needs.

¹ Health Brokers are community health workers in Edmonton who have incorporated cultural brokering into their practice. "Cultural Brokering is the act of riding, linking, and mediating between groups of persons of different cultural backgrounds for the purpose of reducing conflict and producing change." (Jezewski, Anthropologist 1999)



Grocery Run Program

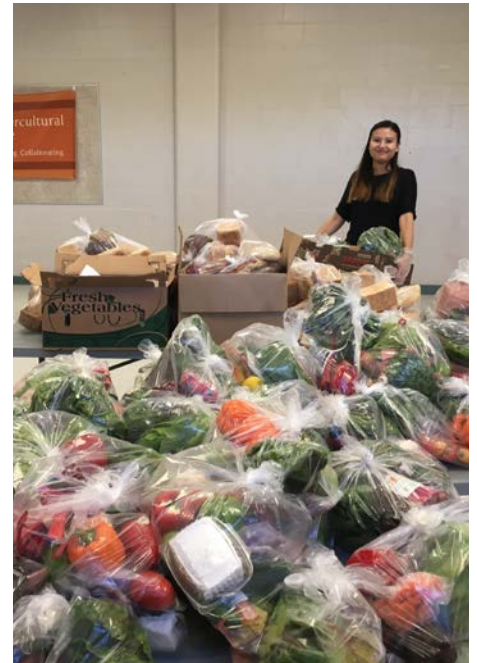
In response to these research findings, the partnership developed the *Grocery Run Program*, a food rescue model that provides for same-day food needs of MCHB clients (women and their families). Supported by a resource coordinator (Sandra Ngo) and University of Alberta Alumni, the groceries are made available through ongoing donations from Cobs Bread, the Organic Box, Planet Organic, and Little Potato Company. Program staff are now working to find grocers willing to donate a greater variety of culturally appropriate food staples like flour, lentils, pasta, rice, beans, fresh fruit and vegetables.

Prior to the Grocery Run Program, health brokers were spending a significant amount of their time dealing with food

emergencies. Fortunately, the program has helped to alleviate some of this pressure by providing essential food for hungry parents and children. This has been a relief for health brokers and families alike, "Being able to help those experiencing food insecurity was a relief for us as workers and for the families as well", explained one health broker. Not only does the program address hunger, health brokers say it provides hope for vulnerable families and makes them feel supported by their community. Health brokers recognize that the Grocery Run is a stop gap measure, but now they have the time and energy to focus on clients' other emotional stressors, including factors that can help families move out of poverty.

Impacts and benefits of the Grocery Run Program:

- Over the past year, 90 families per week received a food hamper, providing meals for approximately 450 individuals each week.
- Opportunities for women to connect with other women who are going through similar experiences and learn about resources and supports in their community.
- Reducing food waste - one of the biggest contributors to global greenhouse gas emissions.



“Being able to help those experiencing food insecurity was a relief for us workers and for the families as well.”
Health Broker at Grocery Run

“The program is closer to the community and easy to access and for those families who cannot come to pick up the food, the food is delivered to their home through a network of other ladies from our community.”
Health Broker at Grocery Run

Building Sustainable Solutions

Using research developed through CUP, ENRICH and the MCHB, and leveraging relationships developed by the Grocery Run program, CUP has taken on work in the Community Economic Development (CED) space. Two prominent areas of work are described below:

1 Microenterprise development

Partners from MCHB, CUP, the ENRICH program, and the University of Alberta Alumni are supporting immigrant women in developing and running their own sustainable and scalable enterprises. The MCHB have identified ideas from the women they work with that could be developed into productive enterprises. In May 2017, the partners established the Community Economic Development (CED) Committee to work directly with immigrant and refugee women to understand their enterprise ideas, identify their existing capacities, and navigate and access needed resources and supports.

2 Developing Intentional Economies

EndPovertyEdmonton (EPE) has created opportunities and momentum to address the root causes of food insecurity through access to appropriate business skill training, mentoring, and capital sources (both for start-up and to scale). CUP, ENRICH, and EPE have joined forces to bring together stakeholders across food systems to develop "intentional economies" which identify gaps that can be turned into viable economic opportunities. These could include social procurement strategies or socially driven enterprises that improve access to healthy and affordable foods, culturally appropriate foods, or training/employment opportunities for people in poverty. 18 partners have been identified including non-profit agencies, the University of Alberta, the Edmonton Community Development Company, Northlands Agriculture Department, Agriculture Food Council, businesses, incubators, and others. Partners will be invited to take part in this intentional economies work to tackle the systemic problems of food processing, access, and distribution, collectively identify and create new opportunities, while also creating new economic opportunities for those most marginalized.

The CED Committee supports community organizations to understand, develop, and execute community economic development opportunities for the people they support. In doing so, we aim to expressly build CED capacity in these community organizations and create models that are rooted in everyday experiences and that can be shared/scaled with other community groups.

CED Committee Purpose Statement

I joined the CED because I am passionate about community and the collective effort it takes to uplift people and better their lives. I find it exciting and meaningful to lend what I know to hopefully make a difference in someone's journey into business and self-sufficiency, especially for newcomers and low-income families struggling despite their unlimited potential. Having independence through self-employment is an amazing gift that I hope to help our protégés succeed at.

Kareema Batal,
University of Alberta
Alumni
Volunteer



For more information
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