

Smart Cities Project Update

To: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

Meeting Date: May 11, 2022

Report No. **BH.01.MAY1122.R11** Pages: 9

Prepared By: Rachel Ackford, Health Promotion Specialist
Lisa Needham, Public Health Nutritionist

Approved By: Dr. Kyle Wilson, MSc, PhD
Director of Information Systems & CIO/CPO

Submitted By & Signature: *Original signed document on file*

Dr. Nicola J. Mercer, MD, MBA, MPH, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health & CEO

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board of Health:

1. Receive this report for information.

Key Points

- The Nutritious Foods Workstream (NFW) has an ambitious goal to increase access to affordable, nutritious foods by 50% by 2025 in Guelph-Wellington;
- A food environment assessment was completed to better understand local food security and identify opportunities for interventions;
- In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the workstream also collected information about food insecurity and food access from residents and service providers to inform service planning;

- To date, \$205,000 has been distributed to fund community-led food security interventions in Guelph-Wellington and three more collaborative funding models will be launched in the spring of 2022; and
- A Food Security and Health Action Plan describing the workstream’s shared vision, strategic objectives, funded interventions, and sector specific recommendations for the next five years will be released in the fall of 2022.

Discussion

Background

Our Food Future – A Smart Cities Initiative

In May of 2019, the City of Guelph and County of Wellington (Guelph-Wellington) were awarded \$10 million in funding from Infrastructure Canada’s Smart Cities Challenge to create Canada’s first circular food economy. In January of 2020, Guelph-Wellington officially launched Our Food Future which aims to reimagine how our community produces, distributes, sells and consumes food. Rather than a linear take-make-dispose model, Our Food Future intends to create a circular food system that increases access to nutritious foods, recognizes the value of waste, and creates space for businesses to adapt their operations and implement circular practices.¹ Our Food Future’s governance structure includes three workgroups that focus on each pillar of the circular food economy: 1) Nutritious Foods Workstream, 2) Waste Workstream, and 3) Business Workstream.

Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health (WDGPH) was one of many community stakeholders that contributed to and supported Guelph-Wellington’s Smart Cities proposal. Currently, two public health staff specializing in public health nutrition and health promotion are members of the Nutritious Foods Workstream (NFW). WDGPH continues to lead workstream activities and oversee the NFW budget.

Nutritious Foods Workstream

The NFW is comprised of various health and social service agencies, municipal staff, academic researchers, and community groups. The workstream has an ambitious goal to increase access to affordable, nutritious foods by 50% by 2025. The workstream recognizes that nutrition plays a major role in growth and development, mental health, and preventing lifestyle-related chronic diseases. They aspire to create a supportive environment where everyone can achieve **food security** – a condition that exists when

all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and health life.² Using a results-based accountability framework, the NFW agreed to complete a food environment assessment to identify local gaps and opportunities, followed by a community-driven intervention strategy.

Progress to Date

Food Environment Assessment

Food environments are the physical, social, economic, cultural and political factors that impact food availability, affordability and accessibility.³ NFW's vision is to create a food environment where everyone has physical and economic access to nutritious foods, is equipped with the knowledge and skills to consume nutritious foods, and lives in a community where nutritious foods are promoted and celebrated.

Between June 2020 and September of 2021, the NFW completed a food environment assessment to better understand features of our local food environment. The assessment serves as a snapshot of food access in Guelph-Wellington, bringing together past research and local data. Information was gathered from secondary sources and six research projects involving community-wide surveys, targeted outreach, focus groups, interviews, retail audits and document reviews. The results will be used to guide decision-making and inform interventions. Deliverables from the assessment include a written report featuring over 70 measures of food access, summary slides, infographic describing key findings (Appendix A), and a podcast episode for the Our Food Future's "In Conversation with Our Food Future" podcast. All deliverables will be available on www.foodfuture.ca.

Food Insecurity During COVID-19

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Our Food Future launched [Grow Back Better](#), an 18-month strategy to support Guelph-Wellington's agri-food and social benefit sectors.⁴ As part of this response, the NFW agreed to collect information about food insecurity and food access during the COVID-19 pandemic between October 2020 and December 2020. Twenty-two food provision organizations and organizations that service food insecure individuals were surveyed to understand changes in demand, operational challenges, and opportunities for collaboration. A community-wide phone survey was administered to a representative sample of 600 Guelph-Wellington residents to identify the prevalence of food insecurity, common barriers to food access, and actions residents would find helpful to meet their needs. To supplement these findings,

100 individuals at higher risk of food insecurity were also surveyed through targeted outreach. Results were used to inform service planning and the allocation of \$100,000 for interventions (described below as the Co-Lab Action and Funding Process). Deliverables from this project include summary slides and an infographic describing key findings (Appendix B).

Funding Interventions

Literature reviews were completed in collaboration with University of Guelph students to understand promising food access interventions and best practices that could be applied in Guelph-Wellington. NFW members participated in discussions about prioritizing interventions and distributing intervention funds.

In December of 2021, Toward Common Ground and 10C Shared Space hosted the ‘Co-Lab Action and Funding Process’. Rather than applying for a particular funding amount, community groups brought forward ideas, explored and built on the ideas, and decided as a group how to best allocate \$100,000 in funding for food insecurity projects. Seven projects were funded that range from expanding community markets that sell fresh food on a sliding scale to making farmland and commercial kitchen space available to support local food initiatives. To learn more about the funding process and successful projects, visit <https://harvestimpact.ca/co-lab/>.

In January and February 2021, the Nutritious Foods Workstream funded two collaborations. A total of \$105,000 was distributed to two projects that align with the workstream’s vision. The first is the [**Food Equity With Dignity \(FEWD\) project**](#) hosted by the Guelph Neighbourhood Support Coalition that cooks meals from surplus food and sells the meals on a sliding-scale through a mobile food truck. Using a farm-to-table model with no fixed menu, the operation provides an efficient way for surplus foods to move from fields, boxes, fridges, and freezers and onto dinner tables. The second collaboration is the Medicine Bundles – nimide wayan project. Funding will help cover the costs of Indigenous foods for medicine bundles, supplies, delivery costs, Oshkabewis project guide, and storytelling.

Next Steps

Launch Collaborative Funding Models

The NFW is sharing key findings from the food environment assessment and seeking feedback about interventions the community would be interested in. In May of 2022, the

NFW will be launching collaborative funding models to fund small-scale and large-scale community-led interventions.

1. **The Co-Act Collaborative Funding Process** will build on the success of the previous Co-Lab. The Co-Act follows the same participatory funding process and allows participants to allocate \$100,000 in funding for food access initiatives that increase availability of nutritious foods in settings where people live, work, learn or play.
2. **The Spark Grants Idea Generation Competition** is an opportunity for small-scale independent projects to publicly socialize their ideas on Our Food Future's Kitchen Table platform. Five ideas will then be selected to develop proposals and receive a portion of the allocated funds which are up to \$75,000.
3. **The Food Equity Funding Stream** consists of \$50,000 allocated to funding actions that arise from a local Food Equity Summit, an event being hosted by the NFW and Our Food Future to engage in meaningful dialogue about food system barriers BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) and underrepresented groups experience. A diverse group of community stakeholders will plan the summit and prioritize subsequent actions while the NFW provides funding and logistical support.

Develop Food Security and Health Action Plan

As interventions are implemented, the NFW will capture details of the intervention strategy in a Food Security and Health Action Plan. This document will describe our shared vision, strategic objectives, community driven approach, funding models, funded interventions, success stories, and sector specific recommendations for the next five years. While developing this plan, NFW members will engage with community members and stakeholders in a post-pandemic context to advocate for policy changes, source additional project funds, and evaluate funded interventions from an implementation science perspective. A fulsome Action Plan will be released in the fall of 2022.

Conclusion

The Nutritious Foods Workstream has an ambitious goal to increase access to affordable, nutritious foods by 50% by 2025 in Guelph-Wellington. Using a results-based accountability framework, the NFW agreed to complete a food environment assessment then implement a community-driven intervention strategy.

In 2020, a food environment assessment was completed to understand local food security and identify opportunities for interventions. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the workstream also collected information about food insecurity and food access from residents and service providers to inform service planning.

The workstream is distributing funds for small-scale and large-scale food security interventions in Guelph-Wellington. To date, \$205,000 of funding has been distributed and three more collaborative funding models will be launched in the spring of 2022. A Food Security and Health Action Plan describing the workstream's shared vision, strategic objectives, funded interventions, and sector specific recommendations for the next five years will be released in the fall of 2022.

Ontario Public Health Standard

WDGPH is mandated through the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS) to address health equity and chronic disease prevention.

Health Equity: Public health practice results in decreased health inequities such that everyone has equal opportunities for optimal health and can attain their full health potential without disadvantage due to social position or other socially determined circumstances.

Population Health Assessment: Public health practice responds effectively to current and evolving conditions and contributes to the public's health and well-being with programs and services that are informed by the population's health status, including social determinants of health and health inequities.

Chronic Disease Prevention and Well-Being: To reduce the burden of chronic diseases of public health importance and improve well-being – including healthy eating behaviours.

2020 WDGPH Strategic Direction(s)

Double click checkbox to change from unchecked to checked.

Service Delivery: We will provide our programs and services in a flexible, modern and accessible manner, and will ensure they reflect the immediate needs of our Clients and our role in the broader sector.

System Transformation: We will equip the Agency for change in all aspects of our work so that we are ready for transformational system change when the time comes.

☒ **Knowledge Transfer:** We will ensure that our decision-making and policy development efforts are informed by meaningful health data at all times.

Health Equity

Food security and health inequities

Food insecure households have inadequate or insecure access to food because of financial constraints.⁵ Food insecure households often depend on emergency food provision services that may not meet their cultural and dietary needs.⁵ These services do not address the root cause of food insecurity, such as inadequate or unstable incomes and few financial assets.⁵ Individuals experiencing food insecurity also experience health inequities. They are more likely to report poor general health, adverse mental health outcomes, and multiple chronic conditions.^{6,7,8} Premature mortality is among the most serious health consequences of food insecurity.^{9,10} Research has shown that the average lifespan is nine years shorter for severely food-insecure adults compared to food-secure adults.⁹

Low-income households, female lone parent households with children under the age of 18, households on social assistance or on employment insurance as a main source of income, individuals living in rental housing and certain cultural/racial groups are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity. For example, the 2017-2018 Canadian Community Health Survey found that 28.9% of individuals who identified as black were food insecure compared to 11.1% who identified as white were food insecure. Individuals who identified as indigenous had a 28.2% prevalence of household food insecurity.¹¹

Our Food Future Food Equity Summit

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we were not able to have meaningful conversations to capture the perspectives and experiences of everyone in Guelph-Wellington. The workstream is committed to building an equitable community in which everyone has the opportunity to thrive. A community-led Food Equity Summit is being planned for the fall of 2022 to engage in meaningful dialogue about food system barriers BIPOC and other underrepresented groups experience. A diverse group of community stakeholders will plan the summit and prioritize subsequent actions while the NFW provides funding and logistical support. The Food Equity Funding Stream will then have \$50,000 to fund actions and recommendations that result from the summit.

References

1. City of Guelph. Our circular future midterm report [Internet]. 2022 [cited 2022 Mar 16]. Available from:
<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1a6BFMrFvFyTg9P6ez1FpYfGX4FKqUZ1Y/view>
2. Food and Agriculture Organization. An introduction to the basic concepts of food security [Internet]. 2008 [cited 2022 Mar 16]. Available from:
<https://www.fao.org/3/al936e/al936e.pdf>
3. National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health. Food environments: An introduction for public health practice [Internet]. 2015 [cited 2022 Mar 16]. Available from:
https://www.nccch.ca/sites/default/files/Food_Environments_Public_Health_Practice_Dec_2015.pdf
4. City of Guelph. Grow back better: Our Food Future's 10-point recovery plan in response to COVID-19 [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2022 Mar 16]. Available from:
<https://guelph.ca/wp-content/uploads/Our-Food-Future-10-point-plan.pdf>
5. Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH). Position statement and recommendations on responses to food insecurity [Internet]. 2020 [cited 16 Mar 2022] Available from:
<https://www.odph.ca/upload/membership/document/2020-11/odph-food-insecurity-executive-summary-2020-en.pdf>
6. 28. Vozoris N, Tarasuk V. Household food insufficiency is associated with poorer health. *J Nutr.* 2003;133:120-126. 29.
7. Jessiman-Perreault G, McIntyre L. The household food insecurity gradient and potential reductions in adverse mental health outcomes in Canadian adults. *J SSMPopulation Health.* 2017;464-4.
8. 31. Fowokan A, Black J, Holmes E, Seto D, Lear S. Examining factors for cardiovascular disease among food bank members in Vancouver. *Prev Med Reports.* 2018;10:359-362.
9. Men F, Gundersen C, Urquia M, Tarasuk V. Association between household food insecurity and mortality in Canada: a population-based retrospective cohort study. *Canadian Medical Association Journal.* 2020;192(3):E53-E60. [Free full text]
10. Gundersen C, Tarasuk V, Cheng L, De Oliveira C, Kurdyak P. Food insecurity status and mortality among adults in Ontario, Canada. *PLoS One.* 2018;13(8):e0202642. [Full free text]

11. Proof. Household food insecurity in Canada. [Internet]. 2017-2018 [cited 16 Mar 2022]. Available from: <https://proof.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Household-Food-Insecurity-in-Canada-2017-2018-Full-Reportpdf.pdf>

Appendices

Appendix A (attached)

Appendix B (attached)