

Unique Get Together Society (UGTS) and Urban Indigenous Food Insecurity in British Columbia

A systematic analysis of the disproportionate rates of food insecurity experienced by Indigenous communities in British Columbia



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In a span of 10 years, the number of food-insecure individuals in Canada increased by **1,000,000**

Over 500,000 British Columbians are currently food-insecure

Indigenous households experience one of the highest rates of household food insecurity, with **1 in 3 Indigenous households** being food-insecure



What is food security?

The Food and Agriculture Organization defines food security as 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 healthy life”

What is household food insecurity?

Household Food Insecurity is the inadequate or insecure access to food due to **financial constraints**

What are traditional foods?

Coastal Indigenous communities include **traditionally harvested and processed** food such as: salmon, game meats, shellfish, etc.

Who are Indigenous Peoples?

A monolithic term that fails to address over **198 diverse First Nations** cultures in BC

What are urban areas?

Urban areas are a **concentration of population** at a high density. It is the opposite of rural, where the population is not concentrated but dispersed at a low density



"Indigenous Peoples" and "Urban Indigenous Peoples" are Monolithic Terms



Urban areas allow for a **mixture of Indigenous populations to gather from many different communities**. Addressing Indigenous food insecurity in urban areas presents the challenge of considering the 198 distinct First Nations in BC without treating all Indigenous Peoples as a **single monolith**.

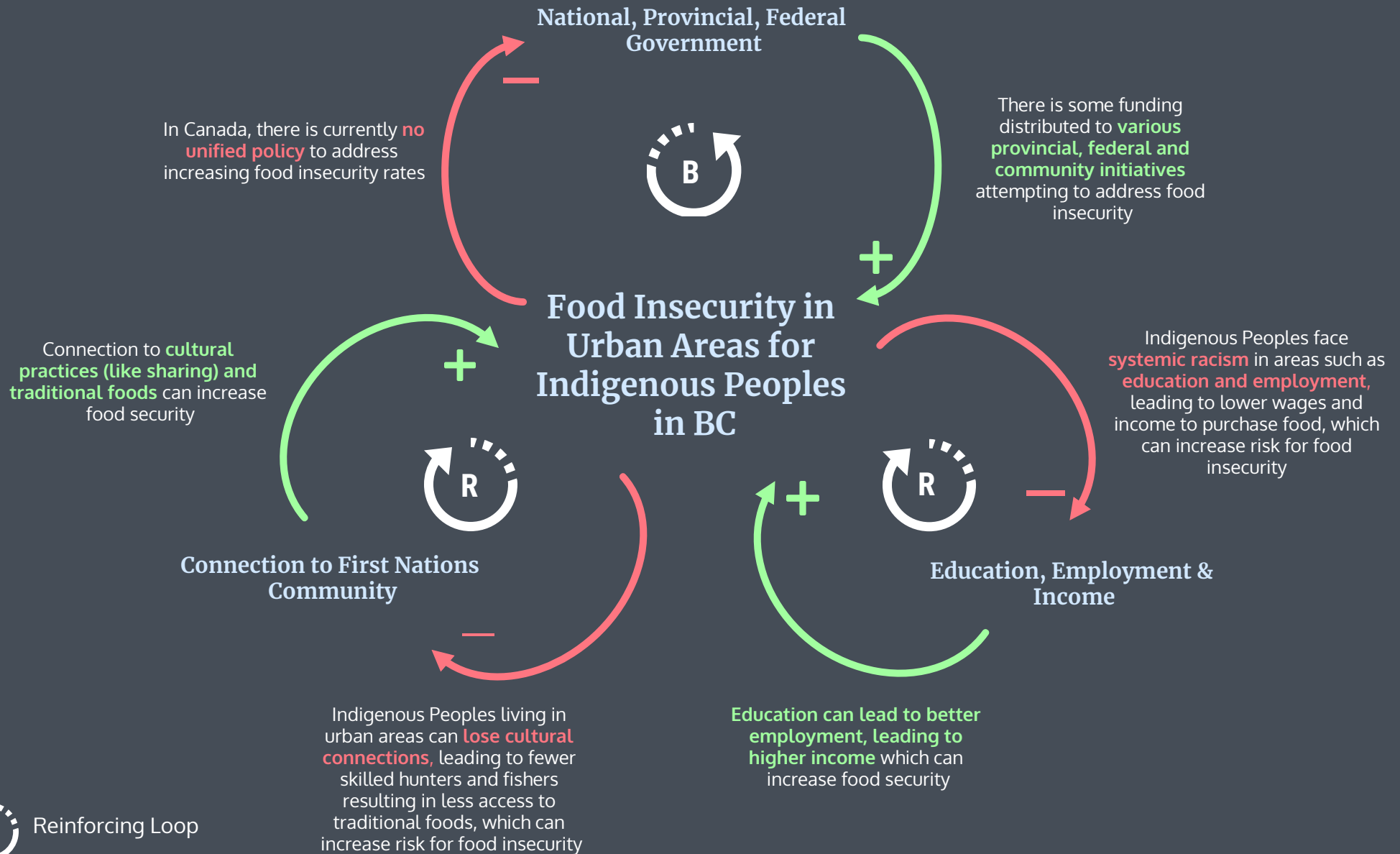
Urban Indigenous food insecurity is firmly held in place by a complex interplay between oppressive systems



Stakeholders are highly interconnected, **government and environmental sectors** play the biggest roles. For true, lasting change, collective action between all stakeholders must be adopted.

Focusing on the Key Root Causes

(Government & Environment Sectors)

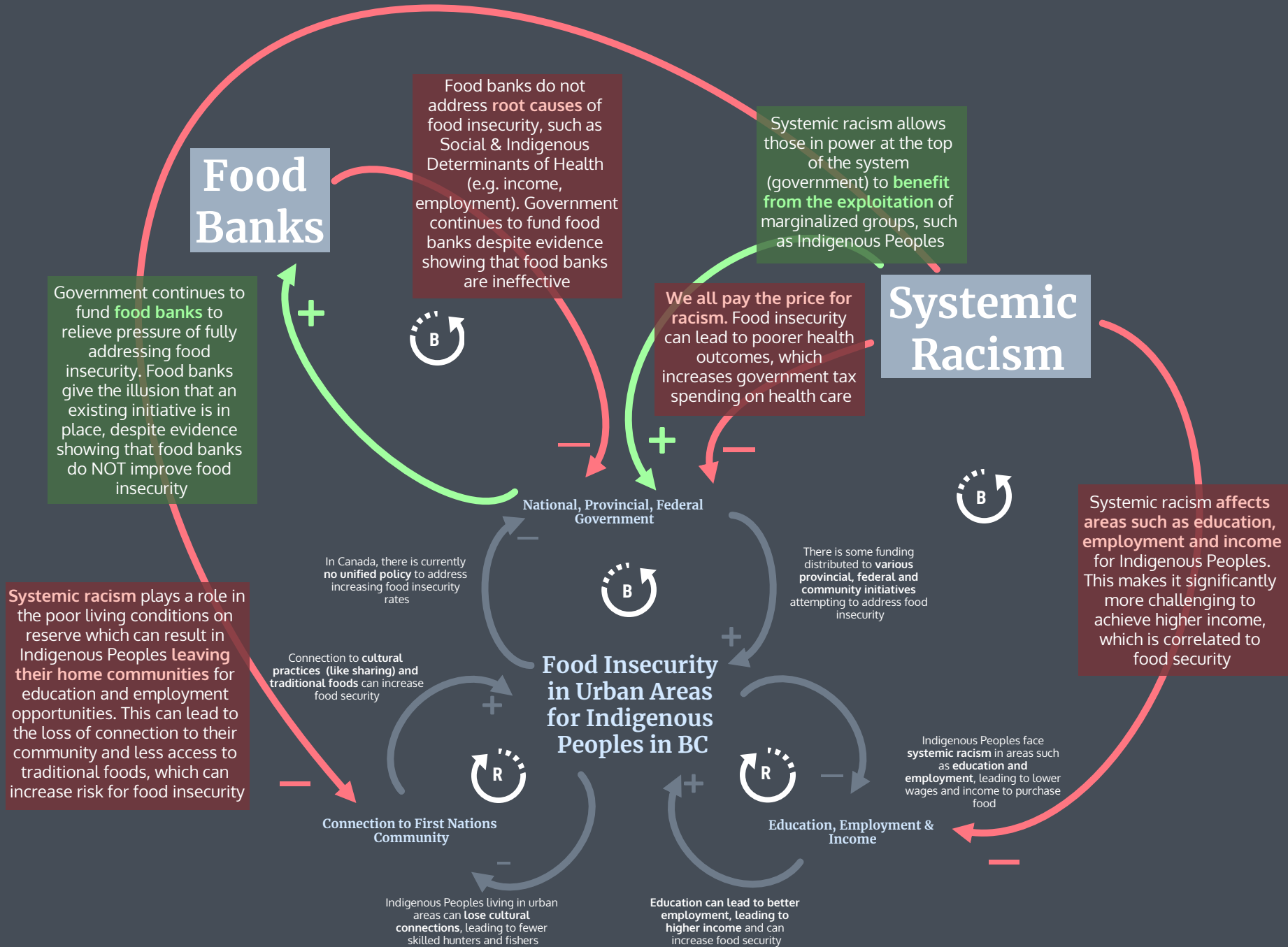


R Reinforcing Loop

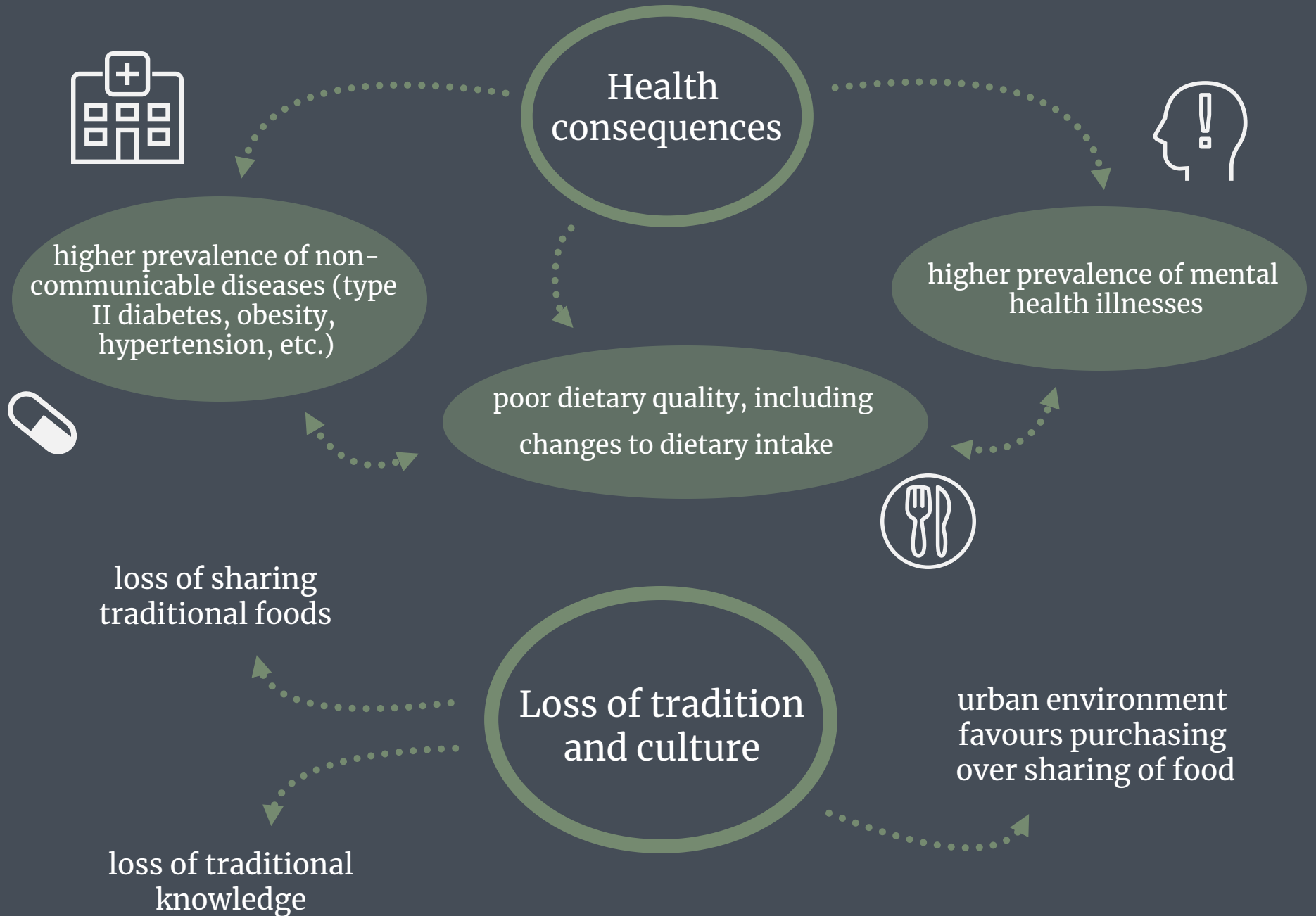
B Balancing Loop

Perpetuating the Status Quo

Food Banks & Systemic Racism are keeping urban Indigenous Peoples food-insecure



Symptoms of Urban Indigenous Food Insecurity



Urban Indigenous Food Insecurity is More Than Just Lack of Access to Food

Events

Intergenerational trauma from residential schools & colonialism contribute to poorer physical & mental health, lack of finances to balance food security & health care

Blame is placed on Indigenous communities when interventions fail to alleviate food insecurity — programs fail to address complex root causes so the situation does not improve

Stereotyping and discrimination of Indigenous Peoples, many believe situation is brought upon the communities by themselves

Monolithic treatment of Indigenous communities. Many do not realize Indigenous communities are multi-cultural

Behaviour Patterns

No accountability for well-intended, uninformed initiatives that end up re-traumatizing and harming Indigenous communities.

Colonial structures oppress Indigenous Peoples in society resulting in the least amount of opportunities for growth

Policies lack flexibility and are generalized, lack intersectionality

Settlers of Canada benefit off the **exploitation** of Indigenous Peoples, true "reconciliation" is vague and will likely take many years to achieve

System Structures

Harmful stereotypes & oversimplified beliefs such as substance abuse, "special treatment" from government, residential schools have no lasting effects and Indigenous Peoples are "uncivilized" lead many to believe current health disparities are deserving and self-inflicted

Centuries of oppression and mistreatment make it difficult for Indigenous communities to trust external organizations

Lack of accurate representation in media do not allow many Indigenous communities a voice of their own, many are not aware of the challenges faced by Indigenous Peoples

Many stakeholders are not informed about traditional practices, land-based health, or Indigenous knowledge. This may lead to inappropriate approaches to food insecurity initiatives.

Mental Models

Stakeholders Map

External Stakeholders



Internal Stakeholders

Relationships Between Key Stakeholders

International Organizations
[WHO, FAO]



Current Solutions

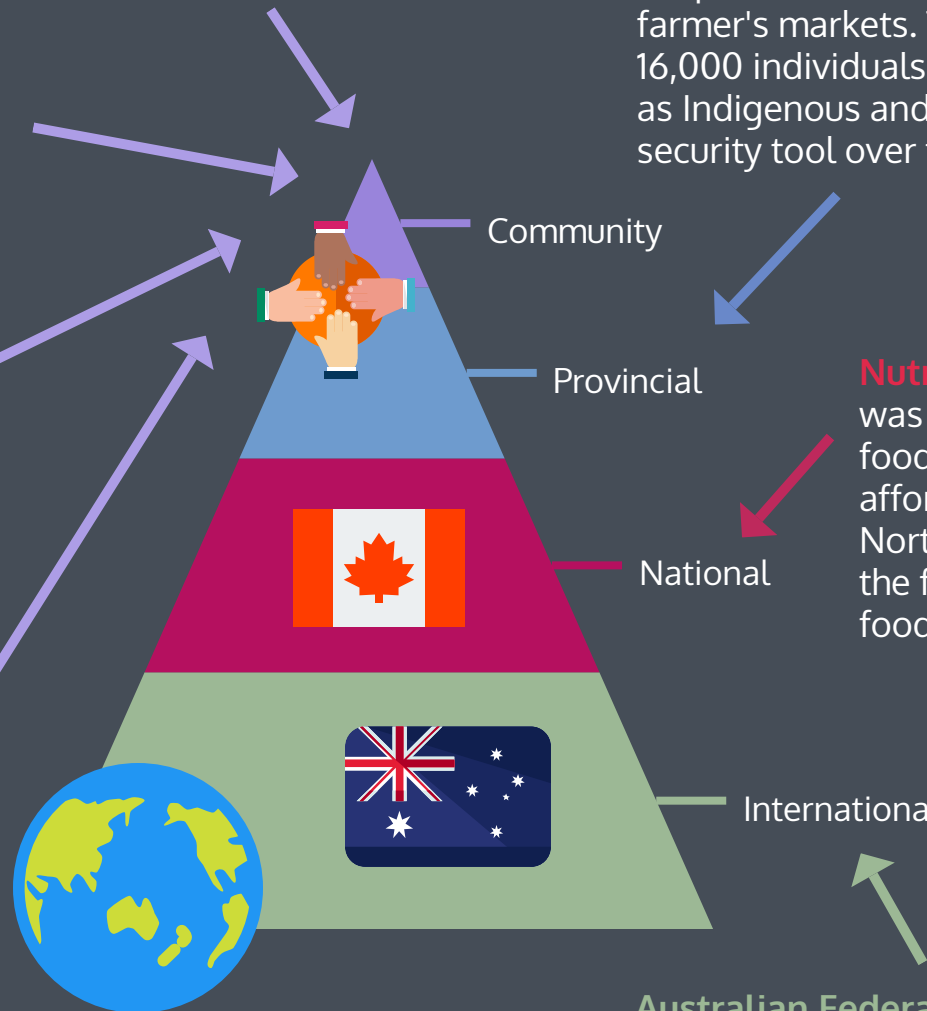
Charitable Food Programs do not address the root causes and many barriers exist when accessing these programs

BC Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program provides low-income families coupons that can be redeemed for food at local farmer's markets. This program reached over 16,000 individuals in 2020 with 22% identifying as Indigenous and has been a powerful food security tool over the years

Non-Profit Organizations like the UGTS Essential Food Basket Program eliminates stigma by delivering food and eliminating proof of need

Food Recovery Programs collect perishable food and redistribute it to organizations. Currently, no evidence has shown that this improves food insecurity

Urban Agriculture provide individuals the ability to grow their own food but they do not help those that are severely food-insecure. Developers can turn vacant lots into community gardens to save on taxes which results in an increased number of "community gardens" with empty lots



Nutrition North Canada (NNC) was created to make nutritious foods and essential items affordable and accessible in Northern communities, but after the full implementation of NNC, food insecurity increased by 13.2%

Australian Federal Government implemented welfare "quarantining" so a portion of welfare payments could only be used to purchase food. However, many food-insecure individuals often sacrifice food when other expenses like rent or medicine are more important

Before the gaps and levers can create meaningful change...



it is essential for stakeholders to build relationships and establish trust and respect within Indigenous communities

All stakeholders need to



- 1 Empower Indigenous voices and communities
- 2 Recognize the intergenerational trauma that exists today
- 3 Be informed of Indigenous ways of knowing and learning

Gaps & Levers



GAP

LEVER

INTERVENTION

Most initiatives do not support co-creation and self-determination

Prioritize co-development and empowerment of Indigenous communities

All programs must co-create with direct input from the Indigenous community, Elders, Chiefs and Councils

Stakeholder Action

Government, Educational Institutions & Non-profits

- Indigenous communities and stakeholders must co-create interventions together, with involvement of Elders, Chiefs and councils
- Acknowledge that Indigenous communities are diverse in culture, thus have different needs and preferences
- Implement **Two-Eyed Seeing approach**, support **self-determination** and respect **Indigenous traditions and culture**



GAP

LEVER

INTERVENTION

Researchers and Educational Institutions are in positions of power where they can perpetuate harm

Prioritize reflecting on positionality, learning the culture of the Indigenous community, and acknowledge the community's right to their information

Implement the First Nations of OCAP, a Participatory Action Research approach and a Two-Eyed Seeing approach in all research projects

Stakeholder Action

Educational Institutions

- Include Indigenous perspectives and take time to learn each Nations' customs
- Ensure outcomes benefit the community and findings are disseminated back
- Acknowledge positionality of researchers
- All research policies involving Indigenous Peoples must implement the **First Nation Principles of OCAP**
- Incorporate **sharing circles** in research and teaching methods
- **Distinguish research** between urban, rural and specific Indigenous communities
- Allow Indigenous Elders and other knowledge keepers to also be knowledge translators
- Advocate for **strengths-based research**, as current colonial perspectives on Indigenous Peoples are deficit-based

Gaps & Levers



GAP LEVER INTERVENTION

Lack of upstream approaches to food security

Recognize that food insecurity stems from lack of income, which exacerbates Social & Indigenous Determinants of Health (SIDoH) and perpetuates the issue

implement a unified policy addressing food insecurity, focusing on uplifting SIDoH such as income, education and housing

Stakeholder Action

Government

- Policies must focus on addressing the social & Indigenous determinants of health
- Prioritize reducing food insecurity for urban Indigenous Peoples
- Instead of only consulting Indigenous Peoples as a stakeholder, make Indigenous communities co-developers when co-creating initiatives together

Organizations

- Advocate for policy action together

GAP LEVER INTERVENTION

Inconsistent funding or underfunding of Indigenous-led and BIPOC organizations

Prioritize continuous funding for Indigenous-led and BIPOC-led organization

Create low barrier funding opportunities and expand funding for current successful initiatives

Stakeholder Action

Government

- Allocate low-barrier funding specifically for BIPOC-led non-profits
- The Federal and Provincial government must consistently fund effective, Indigenous-led local organizations and initiatives
- Many Indigenous-led organizations are impactful, but are shut down due to underfunding
- Expand funding to support current successful initiatives instead of creating new initiatives

