CALGARY FOOD BANK

Theory of Change

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Contents

Executive summary

The Calgary Food Bank's theory of change researches and then defines the key assumptions and steps required to achieve its programs' desired outcomes. It serves as a foundation for evaluating program effectiveness and ensuring resources are optimally used to support food-insecure households in Calgary.

Developed through collaborative workshops with program staff, the theory of change maps the chain of outcomes associated with participation in Calgary Food Bank programs and the factors driving this change. It is summarized as follows:

- To effectively reduce access barriers and meet the diverse needs of food insecure individuals, the Calgary Food Bank's theory of change splits into two streams— direct client support and community partnerships.

- In the first instance, food insecure households are supported and encouraged to request and obtain foods of their choice directly from the Calgary Food Bank.
- Vulnerable populations can also obtain food through community organizations who are partnered with the Calgary Food Bank and who provide support and services beyond food, in locations and means not offered by the food bank.
- Clients receive targeted and sustained assistance, leading to measurable long-term outcomes, including improved food access, mental health benefits, financial stability, social benefits, enhanced quality of life, and overall better life circumstances.

What is a theory of change?

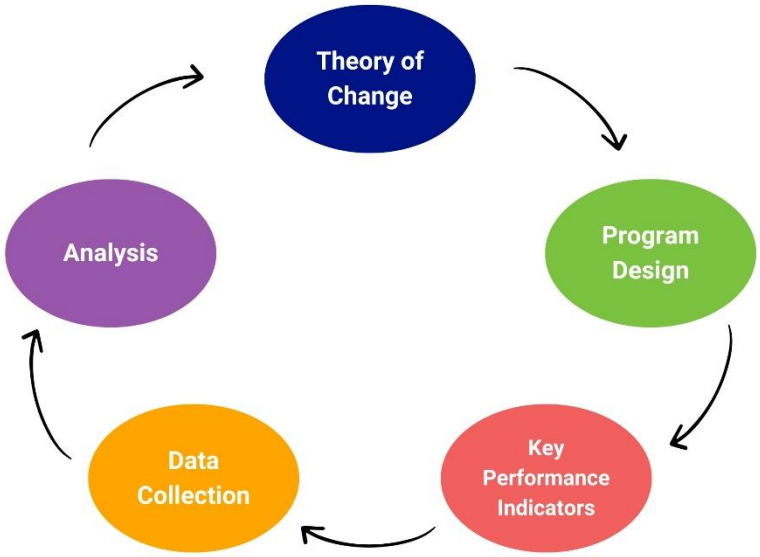
A theory of change is a framework for designing, implementing, and evaluating initiatives in an organization (Funnell & Rogers, 2011). The framework allows an organization to align its long-term mission with its activities by articulating the assumptions and the steps required to achieve the desired results. A theory of change describes how and why a desired change is expected to happen, and under what conditions this change is likely to occur. It can be represented both visually and narratively to illustrate the significance of an initiative, rationalize its activities and establish effective measures for determining its success.

Theory of change applications

A theory of change allows organizations to measure their impact, and based on these evaluations, make decisions about the most efficient use of time and resources. Moreover, it allows organizations to communicate more effectively with stakeholders by creating a common understanding of the initiative and helping to resolve conflicting views about its objectives (Funnell & Rogers, 2011). The theory of change can help non-profits understand their role in the larger ecosystem, as it may highlight the limits of a program and how collaboration with other organizations may help it to achieve its larger goals (Conrardy, 2022). It also supports continuous performance improvement through a cyclical process illustrated by Figure 1 below.

Figure 1.

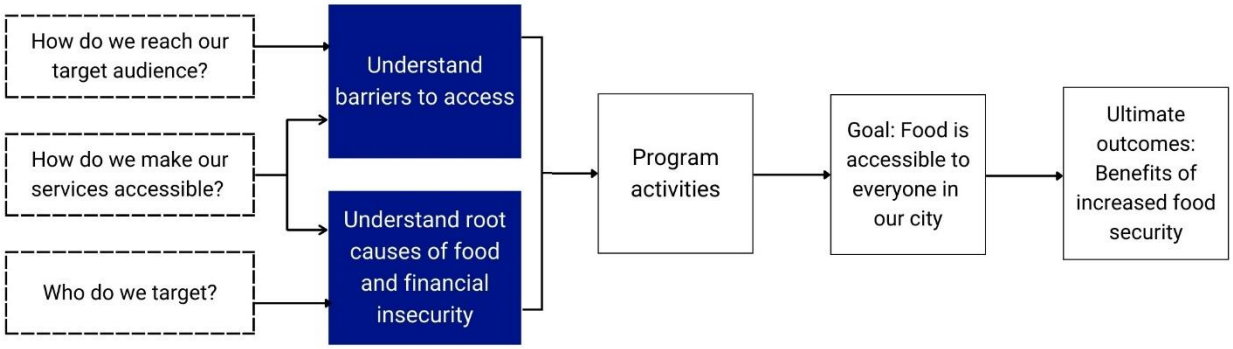
Performance Improvement Cycle



The development of a theory of change starts with research—this helps establish an evidence-based understanding of the problem and the intervention that will ultimately help to address it. The next step is to design the program and its key performance indicators, which will guide the evaluation of its success. Data is then collected and analyzed, bringing the cycle back to the beginning, where it can be determined whether the theory of change addresses the problem or whether it needs to be modified. Figure 2 (below) provides a key overview of the process used to establish the Calgary Food Bank's theory of change.

Figure 2.

Process Map



Program theory development process and method

The Calgary Food Bank's program theory development process was initiated following the release of its new five-year strategic plan in September 2024 and the completion of its Social Return on Investment (SROI) analysis in August of the same year. The SROI research engaged Calgary Food Bank clients in identifying the primary impacts and wider societal benefits of the organization's work, propelling further investigation into the Calgary Food Bank's change process and rationale behind its activities and priorities—hence, the theory of change.

During the first step of the program theory development process, the Calgary Food Bank's internal research team and program evaluator embarked on consultations with a Calgary-area charity to learn more about their approach in developing a theory of change. Following these meetings and subsequent literature overview of program theory development, a collaborative program theory development method with program staff and the research team was selected. By engaging program staff in the theory creation process, the researchers can articulate what the program would look like if it were functioning ideally, while using the exercise to build a common understanding of the program (Funnell & Rogers, 2011).

In preparation for the team exercise, the researchers closely examined the Calgary Food Bank's new strategic plan and mission to "make food accessible to everyone in our city,"

and in accordance conducted a literature review of barriers to food access. This review was part of a situation analysis which is utilized in program theory work to identify any factors contributing to the problem and opportunities to overcome those factors (Funnell & Rogers, 2011). The report on barriers to access was shared with the program staff ahead of the workshop for review.

The researchers scheduled two workshops with program staff. The first workshop involved an "outcomes chain" activity - a process which is referred to as "the heart of a program theory" - which was utilized to identify the contingent chain of outcomes brought about by the program (Funnell & Rogers, 2011, p. 176). For instance, if individuals become aware of a support service – such as the Calgary Food Bank – it can reasonably result in its utilization, leading to wider benefits for individuals. While considering the Calgary Food Bank's mission and barriers to food access, program staff were asked to think of all the desired and unintended outcomes of their programs, as well as outcomes that are difficult to measure and those that are not the direct focus of the programs—this level of thoroughness was necessary to ensure that every outcome is accounted for, each outcome is attributed to the correct change agent, and gaps in program theory are identified (Funnell & Rogers, 2011).

Subsequently, the ideas derived from the outcomes chain activity were thematically analyzed for each program using Grounded Theory, and then further consolidated into an overarching outcomes chain to explain the change process for all Calgary Food Bank programs combined (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). The final outcomes chain was reviewed and verified by program staff in preparation for the second workshop.

The second and final staff workshop involved the "theory of action" activity, and its purpose was to identify what the program does to activate the change theory (i.e., providing food choices results in improved self-esteem), and to ascribe specific statements about what each successful outcome in the outcomes chain would look like. Ideas provided by staff were used to build a program theory matrix—a table complete with the definitions, activities, performance measures, and outputs for each outcome. The program theory matrix serves as a central document for evaluating the performance of all Calgary Food Bank programs and ensuring new initiatives are aligned with the program theory. Additionally, the researchers conducted a review of the literature on the root causes of food insecurity and financial insecurity, as well as federal-level data showing which socioeconomic groups experience high rates of food insecurity in Canada to prioritize organizations for onboarding, backed by empirical evidence.

Before finalizing the program theory, the researchers consulted with senior leadership to set performance measurement targets that align with the organization's strategic and business plans. Any areas for growth that were identified during the program theory development

process were thematically analyzed and grouped into several categories of recommendations made by Food Banks Canada for reducing barriers to food bank access (Food Banks Canada, n.d.). Finally, the researchers worked with the internal communications and graphics team to produce a visual representation of the theory of change to share with Calgary Food Bank stakeholders, which is explained in detail by a narrative.

The context

What is food insecurity?

As the Calgary Food Bank's mission statement is to "make food accessible to everyone in our city," it is first necessary to examine the issue of food insecurity. PROOF, a national leader in food insecurity research that is funded by the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, defines household food insecurity as, "the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints" and further explains that it is, "a serious public health problem in Canada" (PROOF, n.d.). Health Canada defines food insecurity as, "the inability to acquire or consume an adequate diet quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways, or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so" (Health Canada, 2020b). The Government of Canada attributes food insecurity with a household's financial ability to buy adequate food, and as such, measures it through the Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM), which is designed to capture compromised eating patterns due to financial constraints (Health Canada, 2012, 2020b). The Canadian government recognizes that food insecurity is a pressing public health issue, thereby incorporating the HFSSM in the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) and the Canadian Income Survey (CIS), to ensure that food insecurity is monitored annually as part of their Poverty Reduction Strategy (Tarasuk et al., 2022).

In the HFSSM, households are classified into one of four categories, depending on whether all households members had access to food at all times in the past year, to lead an active and healthy life (food secure); or whether in that time period they worried about running out of food due to financial constraints (marginally food insecure), cut down on the amount of food they ate due to financial constraints (moderately food insecure); or went a day or more without eating due to financial constraints (severely food insecure) (Health Canada, 2020a).

Origins of food insecurity and financial insecurity

According to the Government of Canada, food insecurity is "linked with the household's financial ability to access adequate food" (Health Canada, 2020b). Although financial

insecurity is the common denominator for any individual facing food insecurity, the origin of limited financial resources can be varied and may involve systemic, social, and personal factors (City of Calgary, 2012). In other words, various factors cause uneven distribution of resources among sociodemographic populations, resulting in higher or lower rates of food insecurity by group. Data pooled from the 2021 Canadian Income Survey and the 2019 Survey of Financial Security summarized in Table 1 below, shows demographic groups who experience higher rates of food insecurity, in contrast to their comparison group (Uppal, 2023).

Table 1.

**Proportion of food insecure households by demographic group*

Demographic Group	% who reported food insecurity
Relying on social assistance benefits	56% (18% for all Canadian families)
Unemployed (all year)	45% (15% for employed all year)
Living in subsidized rented housing	42% (26% of renters, 16% of mortgage holders)
Female lone-parent family	41% (24% for male lone-parent families)
Black Canadian	38% (16% for non-racialized, non-Indigenous)
**Indigenous (off-reserve)	34% (18% for non-Indigenous)
Living with a disability	30% (18% for all Canadian families)
Filipino Canadian	28% (16% for non-racialized, non-Indigenous)
Recent immigrant (2013-2022)	26% (20% for established immigrants, 17% for Canadian-born)
Student (full-time and part-time)	25% (17% for non-students)
Separated/divorced/unattached	24% average (15% for married and common-law relationships)
Racialized	23% (16% for non-racialized, non-Indigenous)
Female major income earner	23% (16% for male major income earners)
High school diploma or less	22% (13% for university degree holders)

Note: sourced from Uppal, 2023

*Data is based on characteristics of the household major income earner

**Indigenous people living in the territories, on-reserve, and other Indigenous settlements in the provinces were excluded from the surveys

Women and children

In Canada, 28% of children and 41% of lone-female families are food insecure (Uppal, 2023). Children who experience adverse childhood experiences (ACEs), including witnessing

violence at home, are more likely to live in food insecure households and to experience food insecurity later in life (Chilton et al., 2014; Sun et al., 2016). Concurrently, women experiencing intimate partner violence have higher odds of experiencing food insecurity (Ricks et al., 2016). In Canada, women who are more likely to be food insecure are younger, single, less educated, renters, and reliant on alternate income supports other than employment (Tarasuk et al., 2020b). Food insecurity among mothers was found to be associated with depression, anxiety, stress, social isolation, eating disorders, and feelings of powerlessness, guilt, embarrassment, and shame, which in return weaken the quality of child-parent interactions, leading to declined child mental health (Bastian et al., 2022; Collins, 2009). Although the relationships and cumulative risks between food insecurity, poor mental health, and domestic violence are well-documented, there is limited evidence on interventions that address all three factors. Nevertheless, research shows that cash-transfers and trauma-informed counselling on their own or in combination with financial literacy courses improves food security for families with young children (Laurenzi et al., 2020; McKay et al., 2022; Phojanakong et al., 2020).

Houselessness

Although Housing First [1] programs are effective at reducing negative outcomes of homelessness, some studies suggest that their effectiveness at reducing food insecurity for unhoused individuals can be mixed (Brothers et al., 2020). Specifically, these interventions are less successful at reducing food insecurity when the housing is located in food deserts, require residents to share kitchen space, does not create safe spaces for residents or address interpersonal conflict between residents; do not address resident trauma, systemic discrimination, substance-use disorder, sexual risk, or community integration— they can limit an individual's ability to access or address other social and basic needs, including food security (Brothers et al., 2020; Lachaud et al., 2020; Parpouchi & Somers, 2019). Research also suggests that instead of focusing on housing retention, more emphasis should be placed on housing quality and of ensuring that interventions are compatible with local contextual factors, such as policies and social assistance programs (Parpouchi & Somers, 2019). In other words, the benefits of providing client autonomy in the home, client choice over the foods they consume, delivery of meals or provision of food on-site, and developing client's interests and abilities, may not be sufficient if the right conditions are not in place (Parpouchi & Somers, 2019).

[1] According to Housing, Infrastructure and Communities Canada, Housing First, "involves moving people experiencing homelessness —particularly people experiencing chronic homelessness—rapidly from the street or emergency shelters into stable and long-term housing, with supports." (HICC, 2022).

Racialization

In Canada, 23% of racialized households experience food insecurity, which is 1.4 times higher than non-racialized households (16%) (Uppal, 2023). Among racialized groups, Black Canadians experienced the highest food insecurity (38%), followed by Indigenous individuals off reserve (34%), Filipino (28%), South-East Asian (23%), Arab (22%), and South Asian Canadians (19%). Data regarding the food insecurity levels of Indigenous Canadians living on reserve is not currently collected by Statistics Canada but is likely to be even higher than those living off reserve (Uppal, 2023). Due to Canadian cultural perceptions of race and systematic limits of race-based data collection, majority of the research on racism and food insecurity have been conducted in the US and applied to the Canadian context (Williams et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the research literature demonstrates that racism is a fundamental cause of food insecurity by limiting a household's financial and physical assets, its impact on mental health and adverse life experiences, employment and workplace discrimination, inequalities in health care and the education system, increased interactions with policing and the criminal justice system, and the impacts of residential segregation on reducing opportunities for upward social mobility in areas of concentrated poverty (Williams et al., 2022). For instance, research has found that urban centres in Canada lack sufficient and accessible services that consider the cultural needs of Indigenous people (UAKN, 2016). By way of example, moving to a city often results in a change of diet and decrease in food sharing practices for many Indigenous people, due to the unavailability of traditional Indigenous foods in urban areas (Ford et al., 2012; Skinner et al., 2016).

Immigration

Twenty-six percent of families that have immigrated to Canada within the last 10 years experienced food insecurity, compared to 17% of Canadian-born families (Uppal, 2023). Once a family becomes established in Canada, their risk of household food insecurity drops slightly to 20% (Uppal, 2023). Research shows that Canada lacks a systematic approach to supporting skilled immigrants find suitable work in their field of employment, often leading to low economic integration and underemployment (Raihan et al., 2023). A devaluation of foreign credentials, work experience, and training often leads to low-wage labour exploitation, or necessitates unexpected accreditation processes, including obtaining license and registration, passing prerequisite exams, or conducting further study, all of which are time-consuming and expensive (Raihain et al., 2023). Upon arrival to Canada, employment rates for refugees are lower than for those who immigrated for economic reasons—this gap closes only after a decade of residence (Brell et al., 2020). Nevertheless, after the decade mark, refugees' wage-levels continues to lag significantly behind native-born citizens and other groups of immigrants (Brell et al., 2020). Factors associated with

these low labour market integration figures are intricately tied to the refugee experience and include lower mental health due to traumatic occurrences during war and persecution and the journey to the country of arrival; lower language skills due to unexpected displacement, and weaker social networks in country of arrival (Brell et al., 2020).

Mental health

Studies show there is a bidirectional association between food insecurity and poor mental health, wherein one contributes to the other and vice versa (Pryor et al., 2016). It has been hypothesized that stress caused by worrying about finances contributes to the development of poor mental health, which in turn impedes on the ability to maintain stable employment (Maynard et al., 2018). Alternatively, an existing mental health condition may impact employment stability, leading to poor finances and food insecurity (Maynard et al., 2018). These findings suggest that interventions focused on mental health can positively shape individuals' food security, particularly for individuals who may use drugs and alcohol to cope, which can further deplete their financial resources (Lachaud et al., 2020; Pryor et al., 2016).

Disability

Canadians with disabilities have employment rates 40% lower than the general population, and less net worth after accounting for education level, employment, and family structure (Maroto & Pettinicchio, 2020). In addition, employed workers with disabilities earn less than workers without disabilities and are less likely to experience wage growth over the course of their careers (Maroto & Pettinicchio, 2020). Recent data from Statistics Canada shows that 30% of individuals living with a disability reported being food insecure (Uppal, 2023), and one third of those individuals rely on income support other than employment to make ends meet (Crawford, 2013). One common source of income support for people with disabilities include government benefits, which are subject to means-testing of allowable income and assets to qualify. Means-testing in turn discourages people with disabilities from saving money and building wealth (Maroto & Pettinicchio, 2020). Individuals with disabilities incur additional costs for medical and adaptive equipment, personal assistance, and special dietary needs (Schwartz et al., 2019). Although social supports from family, friends, and neighbours were found to reduce household food insecurity by assisting persons with disabilities with transportation and food preparation, it was also linked to reduced independence and increased negative self-perception (Schwartz et al., 2019). Programs that provide subsidized housing and medical care increase food budgets, while living with others reduced social isolation and increased division of tasks and motivation to obtain, prepare, and eat food (Schwartz et al., 2019).

What are the desired outcomes?

In the ten provinces of Canada, 8.7 million people reported experiencing some level of food insecurity in 2023, making up almost 23% of the total population (PROOF, 2023). The detrimental outcomes of not having enough, nutritious food have been widely investigated, including by researchers at the Calgary Food Bank (Harry et al., 2024). This research illustrates the ways in which access to food not only leads to secondary societal benefits (i.e., social systems' monetary savings), but also prevents detrimental outcomes on the individual and the household levels, such as worsening physical and mental health, housing loss and late bill payments, social isolation, and other harmful consequences (Harry et al., 2024). By identifying the program's impact, the researchers were able to define the desired ultimate outcomes of the program, or in other words, the final outcomes expected to occur as a result of the program. Understanding the ultimate outcomes of a program offers several key benefits. It helps focus attention on the long-term changes necessary for success, ensures alignment with the program's original purpose, and prevents underestimating the program's broader impact (Funnell & Rogers, 2011). The next section of this report delves into the six ultimate outcomes (listed in figure 3 below) identified by Calgary Food Bank researchers, providing a detailed analysis of the benefits of achieving each, as well as the consequences of failing to do so.

Figure 3.

Ultimate outcomes expected to occur as a result of the Calgary Food Bank's programs

Outcome 1: Food access and impact on physical health

The Calgary Food Bank's mission is "to make food accessible to everyone in our city". In providing free, nutritious food, clients should experience improved physical well-being and avoid detrimental health outcomes. This objective is supported by research, which shows that food insecurity is associated with chronic conditions such as diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, hyperlipidemia, migraine headaches, high blood pressure, bowel disorders and asthma (Alberta Health Services, 2023; Nagata et al., 2019; Seligman et al., 2010; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003). Adults living in food insecure households are likely to have lower intakes of dairy, fruit and vegetables, and meat, which affects their nutrient levels (Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk, 2008). Amongst Canadian First Nations populations, the rate of diabetes is two to three times higher than in non-Indigenous populations, which is often attributed to the inaccessibility of healthy, nutritionally dense traditional foods (Crowshoe et al., 2018; Halseth, 2019). Moreover, childhood food insecurity has long lasting effects on health and general wellbeing, and increases the risk of conditions like asthma, anemia, and iron deficiency, and is associated with poorer general health (Eicher-Miller et al., 2009; Gundersen & Ziliak, 2015; Skalicky et al., 2006). High food insecurity increases the burden on the health system: research from the Alberta Health Services found that adults experiencing high food insecurity stay on average 1.48 to 2.08 more days in hospital and accrue $400-565 more per person for acute care costs – with this excess constituting 4.4% of total acute care costs (Alberta Health Services, 2023).

With regards to the effectiveness of interventions such as food banks in addressing access to food and associated physical health outcomes, research from Quebec found that food banks were effective in the short-term, with participants' food insecurity status and their perceived physical health having improved at a nine-month follow-up (Roncarolo et al., 2016). Other work has shown that that community food programs reduce food insecurity, although outcomes are contingent upon the quality of food provided (Oldroyd et al., 2022).

Outcome 2: Improved mental health

Research highlights the links between food insecurity and mental health outcomes. For example, a Canadian study examined four cycles of the annual Canadian Community Health Survey and found that, as household food insecurity increased, so did the risk of adverse outcomes on six mental health measures, including major depressive episodes, anxiety disorder, and suicidal thoughts (Jessiman-Perreault & McIntyre, 2017). Furthermore, a meta-analysis that pooled data from over 350,000 participants from the available international research found that food insecurity is significantly correlated with the presence of depression, with elevated risk of developing depressive symptoms with the rise of food insecurity (Pourmotabbed et al., 2020). Those effects were more pronounced in

adults over the age of 65, while the risk of experiencing stress was most prominent in individuals living in North America. Other work shows that food insecurity and poor mental health are interdependent, with food insecurity increasing the risk of depression and vice versa (Huddleston-Cases et al., 2009).

Food insecurity has negative consequences for children and adolescents. Children who experience food insecurity are more likely to experience chronic depression and have suicidal thoughts than their peers who are food secure (Cook & Frank, 2008). In young adulthood, food insecurity has been linked to increased risk of suicidal ideation, depression, and substance use (Pryor et al., 2016).

Crucially, Roncarolo and colleagues (2016) investigated food bank usage and found that after a nine-month period of utilizing food support services, participants self-reported improvements in their mental health.

Outcome 3: Improved financial situation

Food insecurity in Canada is primarily due to income insecurity (Food First NL & PROOF, 2022). Indeed, according to The Daily Bread's 2023 Who's Hungry Report, one third of employed clients surveyed reported using the food bank in Toronto because their income was too low (Daily Bread, 2023); while nine in ten users of the United Kingdom's Trussell Trust food bank network received service referrals due to late essential bill payments including, electricity, water, and mortgage/rent (Trussell Trust, 2024).

Food banks do not operate in isolation and their use is dependent on the wider social safety net – including government structures and systems, private sector charities – whose conditions affect how, when, and to what extent individuals draw upon food banks for support (Kneebone & Wilkins, 2022). Food bank use increases when social security benefits, such as pension and disability, are reduced; conversely, food bank use increases when rent and employment loss rises. For example, a one dollar increase in minimum wage would lead to around 36,876 fewer visits to food banks annually in Toronto and 187,756 fewer visits to food banks annually in Ontario, and a $15 increase in Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) is likely to result in 53,652 fewer visits annually to the food bank in Toronto and 273,099 fewer visits annually to food banks in Ontario (Kneebone & Wilkins, 2022). These results show that people turn to food banks for support when the economy is downturned and social policies are unfavourable.

Outcome 4: Social benefits

Food insecurity is associated with loneliness and social isolation[2] in adults, regardless of age, gender, and occupational status (Rotenberg et al., 2021). A US study conducted found that loneliness and low social support increased the odds of food insecurity in adults 65 years or older (Burris et al., 2021).

Conversely, food supports can be a source of sociability. When given the opportunity to participate in charity meal service, participants saw a decrease in loneliness and social isolation (Rotenberg et al., 2021). Home food delivery services have also been found to decrease social isolation and loneliness (Thomas et al., 2016). In Indigenous communities, traditional foods are a means to build community and social connection and are linked to mentoring practices and the passing down of cultural values to children (Cidro et al., 2015).

A study of community-kitchen style local food sharing initiatives in London – which form part of a wider strategy for addressing food insecurity in the city – found that social isolation and loneliness were primary factors driving participants and volunteers to partake in these programs, and that cooking meals together and eating together ("commensality") facilitates the forming of social bonds (Marovelli, 2019).

Outcome 5: Increased quality of life

Research into the impacts of food insecurity on Quality of Life[3] has shown that low food security has negative effects on individuals' subjective wellbeing, and that these effects are stronger in countries that are more economically and socially "developed," like Canada (Frongillo et al., 2017). It is hypothesized that this is because those who are experiencing food insecurity in developed countries may seem relatively worse off compared to the general population.

While there is a relative dearth of external research on this subject matter, a study from the Calgary Food Bank has shown that clients' quality of life improves when they are provided with pet food, as this enables them to maintain their pets (Harry et al., 2024). Other research attests to the fact that pets improve their owners' life satisfaction (Bao & Schreer, 2016).

[2] Loneliness is the feeling of being alone and dissatisfied with the quality or quantity of relationships in one's life, while social isolation is the lack of regular contact with other people.

[3] Quality of Life has been defined as: "Individuals' perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems in which they live and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns. It is a broad-ranging concept affected in a complex way by the persons' physical health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships and their relationship to salient features of their environment" (Frongillo et al., 2017, p. 680).

Furthermore, Calgary Food Bank clients referenced the enjoyment they derive from cooking and trying new foods. Research has shown that aside from just the nutritional value of food, eating also has psychological and sociological benefits too, which are contingent upon the characteristics of the food (variety, healthiness), the physical and social environment (comfortable space, good conversation), and the preparatory activities leading up to food consumption (enjoyment derived from preparing and cooking the food) (Macht et al., 2005). The Calgary Food Bank clients reported that this was especially pronounced when they are given novel foods that they would not have been able to purchase on a limited budget.

Outcome 6: Improved life circumstances

Research shows that food insecurity can have adverse impacts on an individual's life circumstances, and thus food banks can be used to mitigate these effects. A key example of this is the link between food insecurity and homelessness. Those at risk of homelessness will minimize their spending on other basic needs, including using food banks to reduce food expenditures to redirect that money towards housing (Kneebone & Wilkins, 2023). Indeed, it is estimated that a $30 increase in rent would lead to 73,776 more visits to food banks annually in Toronto and 375,512 more visits to food banks across Ontario annually (Kneebone & Wilkins, 2022).

Numerous media articles report on the desperate measures that food bank clients take to minimize the risk of homelessness and to reduce their food insecurity, including foregoing heating, taking out dangerous loans, shoplifting, and engaging in sex work (Bernard, 2023; McRae, 2023a, 2023b; Murray, 2023). Research has shown the links between sex work and food insecurity, with, for example, one study from the US finding that 36% of the young women in their sample had entered the sex trade in order to afford basic necessities, such as food (54%) and housing (36%) (Footer et al., 2020; Barreto et al., 2019).

A study by Ricks and colleagues (2016) found an association between food insecurity and intimate partner violence (IPV), with the odds of experiencing IPV being higher among women who are more food insecure. Furthermore, the research literature suggests that food insecurity can be related to intimate partner violence through financial abuse suffered by victims in controlling relationships; the propensity for IPV and food insecurity to arise from the same living conditions; and the tendency for survivors who leave abusive relationships to work low-wage jobs and receive government assistance (Power, 2006; Ricks et al., 2016).

Barriers to access

While the above research outlines the multitude of benefits that individuals can experience as a result of accessing a food bank, research shows that many food insecure individuals do

not utilize a food bank. According to research that compares national food insecurity data to food bank usage from the Food Banks Canada network, in 2011, the number of people living in food insecure households was 4.6 times greater than those who were receiving support from food banks (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2015). In 2012, the rate of individuals reporting food insecurity was 4.5 times higher than those who accessed food banks (Tarasuk et al., 2020a). This general trend appears to remain stable over time; data from 2007 to 2011 found that, "food bank usage remains relatively constant within a much larger and dynamic rate of food insecurity in the population" (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2015, p. 447). Furthermore, a look at low-income families in Toronto found that only 28% of households who were food insecure accessed a food bank (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012). Low rates of food bank usage relative to food insecurity in the population are in large part due to barriers to accessing food. Based on the existing literature, the barriers to access can be categorized as follows:

- Stigma
- Getting to the food bank (transportation, mobility)
- Food (content, choice, quality, quantity)
- Food bank operations
- Limited information awareness

Stigma

Judgement from others and cultural expectations about what a food bank client looks like impacts individuals' willingness to ask for help (Fong et al., 2016; Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012). In some cases, food insecure individuals refuse to access food support due to the perception of food banks as a "desperate measure," that does not match their need relative to those in more dire situations (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012). Social stigma and the fear of being seen impacts some clients' willingness to return to food charity services (Middleton et al., 2018). Stigma is especially pronounced in children, adolescents, and students who utilize food support services (Holley & Mason, 2019). One way to combat the labelling effect that comes with traditional subsidy programs includes school-based food support, such as school-wide breakfast programs, because they meet children in ordinary places they already attend, without singling any one child out and defining them by their socioeconomic status (Holley & Mason, 2019). Research with post-secondary students found that stigma could be reduced by renaming on-campus food banks, for instance, the University of Dalhousie rebranded their on-campus food bank to "The Loaded Ladle" (Bessey et al., 2020).

But shame and embarrassment are nuanced issues for food bank users (Wainwright et al., 2018). While some participants feel a sense of stigma due to accessing charitable food

support, other food bank patrons manage their sense of stigma through reciprocity, including volunteering their time or donating to the food bank, to feel like they are "giving back" as opposed to "taking" (Fong et al., 2016; Middleton et al., 2018). Furthermore, interactions between volunteers and food bank users are less antagonistic and judgmental compared to government programs because users' eligibility is not assessed by volunteers, and volunteers do not apply any penalties the way government workers do (Fong et al., 2016). The informal social interactions with food bank staff, volunteers, and other clients are more pleasant and non-threatening to food bank users, as clients can obtain emotional support, or, if desired, avoid lengthy conversations altogether (Fong et al., 2016; Middleton et al., 2018).

Individuals construct their level of "need" based on subjective measures of who a typical food bank client is, as opposed to objective measures of their income and food security standards (Fong et al., 2016). These perceptions may impact an individual's inclination to seek resources and information. Oftentimes those perceived to be "needy" are stereotyped as unemployed, unable to work, or homeless (Fong et al., 2016; Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012). In some cases, people try to distinguish themselves from stereotypes; for instance, if people of a particular nationality are stereotyped as frequently accessing the food bank, some might be deterred to visit, due to intolerant attitudes (Fong et al., 2016; Middleton et al., 2018). Moreover, observational research found that food bank volunteers offered preferential treatment to those clients who were similar to them in terms of nationality, ethnicity, gender, and age, which can present barriers in a context where most volunteers are older, white, and middle-class (Haynes Stein, 2023). In an effort to combat both implicit and explicit bias, food relief organizations are increasingly incorporating diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)[4] strategies into their frameworks (Hamilton et al., 2024). These strategies range from shifting their language—particularly how they refer to their target audiences ("neighbour" and "client" over "the hungry"), thereby valuing diversity; shifting the metrics collected and reported—for instance, how much food was allocated relative to the food-insecure population in a service area, as well as the appropriateness of food, thereby valuing both equity and cultural diversity. There has also been an intentional shift toward innovative distribution models that favour diverse food options. Food bank's valuing DEI with strategies such as cultural sensitivity and resource management, "help its clients experience a sense of belonging in the humanitarian food relief ecosystem" (Hamilton et al., 2024, p. 7).

[4] According to Hamilton and colleagues (2024), diversity is, "the quality of being different or unique at the individual or group level." While "equity" refers to the perceived fairness in the processes and initiatives related to an organization's strategy, operations, and overall design, including both the procedures and outcomes involved. And "inclusion" fosters and sustains diversity.

Getting to the food bank (transportation and mobility)

Unavailable or inadequate transportation and decreased mobility are frequently cited barriers to food support access (Allen & Farber, 2021; Brothers et al., 2020; Dean et al., 2011; Rajasooriar & Soma, 2022; Schwartz et al., 2019). Research shows that prior to the opening of additional food banks in Toronto to combat rising food insecurity during the Covid-19 pandemic, most low-income and visible minority residents had to travel at least 30 minutes by public transit to reach the nearest food bank (Allen & Farber, 2021). In Vancouver, participants' most frequently cited barrier to accessing non-profit food hubs was transportation distance/time, followed by transportation inconveniences, and transportation costs (Rajasooriar & Soma, 2022).

In urban areas, people with disabilities travel mostly by public transportation, walking, or using mobility assistive devices (Schwartz et al., 2019). Nevertheless, they face challenges with transportation type, routes, design of stations, waiting periods, lack of seating, and harsh weather (Schwartz et al., 2019). Despite the availability of HandyDART, a local transportation system for people with disabilities in Vancouver, individuals expressed that service requires long preparation and wait times, increasing the overall transportation duration (Rajasooriar & Soma, 2022). Conversely, social support from neighbours, family and friends was found to offset household food insecurity for people with disabilities by assisting them with transportation to grocery stores (Schwartz et al., 2019).

Older adults, particularly those with few community-based social support networks, struggle to access food programs because they lack the transportation to obtain food, as well as practical assistance in preparing food, emotional support, and normative pressure to eat regular and healthy meals (Dean et al., 2011). Given the challenges of physically accessing a food bank, some older adults instead rely upon home-delivered meal services (Zhu & An, 2013). Research shows that home-delivered meals improve older adults' diet-quality, nutrient intake, opportunities for socialization, and overall quality of life (Zhu & An, 2013). Home-delivered meal programs also allow older adults to maintain independence and consequently continue to live in their homes and communities (Zhu & An, 2013). Food delivery has the added benefit of eliminating transportation inconveniences that prevent people from fully accessing food charities, such as heavy grocery bags, inaccessible transit spaces, and expensive transit passes (Rajasooriar & Soma, 2022).

When discussing transportation, it is also important to mention food deserts. Food deserts are defined by many factors, including distance, quantity and density of grocery stores, characteristics of food retailers, the affordability of food, access to fresh and healthy food, and availability of transit options (Howerton & Trauger, 2017; Wright et al., 2016). Food deserts prevent people from accessing grocery stores and food charities without incurring

high transportation fees, and so instead individuals may turn to unhealthy fast food (Brothers et al., 2020). Research has found that the food desert environment intersects with socioeconomic inequalities and racialized landscapes (Howerton & Trauger, 2017; Wright et al., 2016). In other words, food deserts "exist in places with concentrated poverty, uneven development and racial inequality" (Howerton & Trauger, 2017, p. 741). Individuals living in food deserts without convenient transportation options often spend long periods on public transportation to access grocery stores, negotiate for rides (exchanging childcare or food retailer membership access for a ride to the store), or must consider the trade-off between paying for gas versus other expenses (Shannon, 2016).

Food (content, choice, quality, quantity)

Research shows that individuals living in food insecure households in Canada choose not to access food banks due to issues with the content of the hampers or parcels they receive (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012). These issues include undesired content, content that does not match their cultural and dietary restrictions, actual and perceived low-quality content, and the lack of food choice (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012). The perceived quality of food received from food charities impacts users' self-perception, with poorer quality content contributing to lower self-esteem (Fong et al., 2016; Middleton et al., 2018). Clients receiving content perceived as food that other people do not want, feel like "second-hand citizens," increasing their frustration and sense of degradation, especially if they are part of an already marginalized social group (Rizvi et al., 2022). Simultaneously, clients feel disrespected by the food bank that gave them the low-quality food (Fong et al., 2016).

Limited food choice forces individuals to take food that they normally would not eat, do not know how to prepare, or that is not appropriate for their cultural or health needs (Middleton et al., 2018). Receiving undesired food leaves participants feeling shame, embarrassment, degradation, failure, intimidation, guilt, discomfort, powerlessness, and frustration (Middleton et al., 2018). To restore self-respect, some clients return food that they do not deem to be of good quality, but in most cases, clients are resigned over their situation and display gratefulness for the food bank as they feel they are expected to do so (Middleton et al., 2018). In contrast, research has shown that a pantry choice model improves clients' sense of dignity and satisfaction with food content (Wood, 2020). Research has also highlighted the social benefits of providing client choice, as it necessitates increased interaction with volunteers during check-in, increasing opportunities to receive additional support and encouragement (Remley et al., 2010).

It is important to note that client choice is most effective when diverse cultural foods are available and promoted (Remley et al., 2010). Indeed, the availability of culturally appropriate foods impact individuals' perception of their food security (Maynard et al., 2019).

Immigrating to a new country with different dietary customs brings about a loss of comfort, familiarity, and identity, and so access to traditional foods is part of maintaining ethno-cultural identity and is associated with healthier diets (Moffat et al., 2017). Indeed, the unavailability of traditional Indigenous foods exacerbates food insecurity in Indigenous communities and reduces opportunities to foster a sense of connection to ancestral traditions, pass down values to children and celebrate social gatherings (Assembly of First Nations, 2007; FAO, 2021). Research also shows that food bank users prefer fresh foods over canned foods; indeed, patrons report having to supplement their hamper by purchasing additional food, typically to align with their food preferences and cultural norms (Hardcastle & Caraher, 2021).

Unhoused clients face unique challenges utilizing food banks. Due to their housing situation, unhoused patrons lack the ability to store and carry foods, particularly large quantities, as well as frozen items such as meat, and fresh food such as fruits and vegetables (Crawford et al., 2014). Additionally, the lack of kitchen equipment, such as can openers, ovens, and microwaves prevent clients from preparing healthy meals and exacerbates reliance on unhealthy convenience foods (Crawford et al., 2014). Research shows that food received by unhoused clients lacks variety and food options are imposed on them; often the food provided is unhealthy and can exacerbate pre-existing medical conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and gastrointestinal issues (Easton et al., 2022).

Food bank operations

Food assistance programs that are only open on certain days and for short periods of time are inaccessible to individuals who are working, those with family obligations and regular medical appointments, and to those without regular access to transportation (Gany et al., 2013; Rajasooriar & Soma, 2022; Shannon, 2016; Haynes Stein, 2023). Unlike the average grocery store, food charities tend to be open for limited times, limited days, or they put a cap on services, impacting when and how often people can receive food (Rajasooriar & Soma, 2022). An example of this is post-secondary students struggling to make their schedules align with food bank hours of operation due to late class scheduling and school obligations (Bessey et al., 2020).

Another operational barrier to food bank access is the necessity to have English-language skills, which are crucial for getting information about the available food resources, navigating the application process, and acquiring the documentation required to receive food support (Maynard et al., 2019; Moffat et al., 2017). Research shows that newcomers with lower English proficiency, typically those who arrived in their host country within the past three years, experience higher food insecurity than individuals that have higher speaking proficiency (Mansour et al., 2020). Other operational barriers include invasive

intake processes, such as the necessity to provide personal information and financial statements; research has found that individuals living with food insecurity were deterred from going to a food bank due to the lengthy or difficult registration process (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012; Wainwright et al., 2018).

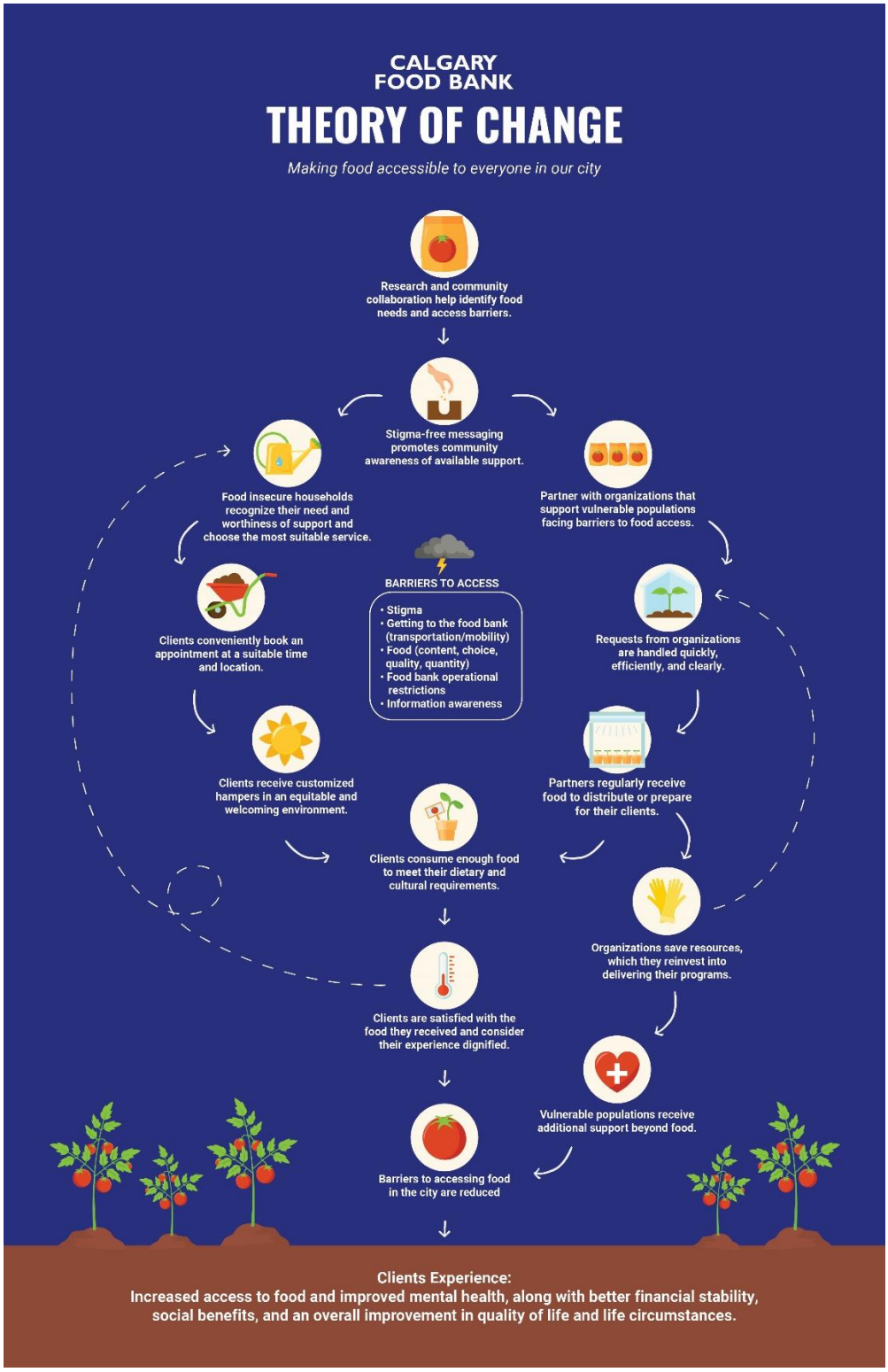
Limited information awareness

The lack of information and misinformation about food bank services, including their purpose, location, hours and times of operation, eligibility criteria, and required proof of eligibility, present common barriers to access. Research shows that food insecure individuals will fail to use food bank services due to a lack of accurate information (Loopstra & Tarasuk, 2012). Some of the food banks researched changed their operations on a regular basis, without updating their official channels or their partner organizations (Haynes Stein, 2023).

Research suggests that individuals facing household food insecurity live with diverse socioeconomic and life circumstances that may affect their ability to acquire up-to-date information. For example, for food bank patrons who do not use social media or do not have access to the internet or a cell phone, it is even harder to get up-to-date information on food bank operations (Haynes Stein, 2023). Additionally, newcomers describe a lack of awareness about eligibility criteria, with many participants not knowing they were allowed to access food banks (Moffat et al., 2017). In other instances, youth in supportive housing assumed they were no longer eligible for food subsidies after becoming housed (Brothers et al., 2020). Research on Indigenous food insecurity conducted by the Calgary Food Bank found that new families joining Indigenous programming are often unaware of the Calgary Food Bank's services (Harry & Jeftic, 2024). Indeed, Indigenous-serving organizations interviewed for this study stated that some of their clients are misinformed or apprehensive about applying for a hamper because they are unsure of their eligibility and other processes.

Theory of change

Visualization of the theory of change



Narrative theory of change

Please note: Citations in the following narrative are superscripted for ease of reading and can be found by number in the reference list.

What is a theory of change narrative?

A narrative account of the theory of change is a detailed written explanation accompanying the visual representation. A narrative communicates all essential features of the program theory in sequential order.[33]

What is the problem / context?

Food insecurity in Canada is a growing problem.[28,91] In 2023, 8.7 million people in the ten provinces reported some form of food insecurity, constituting nearly 23% of the population.[77] According to data pooled from the 2021 Canadian Income Survey and 2019 Survey of Financial Security, those most likely to experience food insecurity are racialized, female, and relying on social assistance benefits.[100] Research shows that the root causes of food insecurity are financial in nature, which in turn is influenced by various systemic, social, and personal factors.[14]

Who are Calgary Food Bank stakeholders?

- Individuals experiencing food insecurity and/or barriers to food access
- Community organizations and public institutions
  - Non-profit organizations
  - Government institutions (e.g., providing food to health services, police services, public schools)
  - Educational institutions (e.g., research partnerships)
- Donors and funders
- Calgary Food Bank staff, volunteers, and leadership

Narrative

— Set-up—

Research and collaboration: By understanding the food insecurity landscape, the Calgary Food Bank accurately and effectively structures its services for the intended audiences.

The Calgary Food Bank draws on peer-reviewed publications, data from Statistics Canada's Canadian Income Survey and Canadian Community Health Survey, consultations with the City of Calgary's demographic and economic outlook teams, and collaborations with academics at the University of Calgary and other institutions, to predict and understand the food needs of the community, where those demands are concentrated within the city, and

how to effectively communicate its services to marginalized populations facing high levels of stigma.[27] Furthermore, by collaborating with organizations whose objectives are aligned with the Calgary Food Bank's mission, and surveying its clients and partners, the food bank can improve the provision of its services.

Community awareness: Disseminating stigma-free messaging changes the narrative around food insecurity and builds awareness of available judgement-free and efficient support.

Stigma is a powerful deterrent to food insecure households accessing food support.[26,27,56,67] By using promotional materials which clients can identify with, such as interviews with people who use or have used its services, the Calgary Food Bank dispels misconceptions about food insecurity and the people that access food support, encouraging its target audience to reach out to its accessible services.

— Programs Stream —

Impactful partnerships: Partnering with community organizations who provide support to vulnerable populations facing barriers to food access strengthens reach and impact.

Food and financial insecurity are associated with numerous factors, including mental health,[78] disability,[60] immigration,[9] race and ethnicity,[103] housing,[10] and gender.[94] By partnering with community organizations with well-developed knowledge in their domain and built-in relationships with their target population, the Calgary Food Bank better reaches and supports sociodemographic groups who experience high rates of food insecurity and barriers to accessing food at the Calgary Food Bank's main location.

Efficient support: Requests by community organizations are handled quickly, efficiently, and clearly, establishing the Calgary Food Bank as a reliable partner.

The Calgary Food Bank ensures community organizations are onboarded within three months of their collaboration request (dependent on their eligibility and the Calgary Food Bank's capacity); partners receive a regular food pick-up or delivery schedule; and program coordinators are responsive and available for requests and questions as they arise. By doing so, the food bank creates confidence in its service, trust in its relationships, and satisfaction in its partners, which ascertains long-term collaboration with community organizations.

Direct assistance: Partner organizations receive food, which they provide to their clients directly.

Transportation and mobility are two significant barriers to food support access.[2,80] These barriers are especially pronounced for older adults,[22] people with disabilities,[86] and racialized populations living in underdeveloped areas.[48,105] For individuals who can travel to the food bank, a lack of information awareness about their food bank eligibility, the intake process, or times of operation may present barriers to accessing food support,[56] particularly if they are navigating a new cultural and linguistic environment,[63,68] managing work and school obligations,[8,80] and have concerns about sharing their personal information with food support services.[56,102] As such, partnering with community organizations that are dispersed throughout the city and provide specialized support to their clientele, eliminates the additional labour involved in engaging with the food bank while simultaneously leading clients to access food that they otherwise would not have easy access to.

Reducing costs and delivering programs: Community organizations reduce their spending on food, redirecting those resources to deliver and enhance programming and further supporting clients instead.

Budget constraints preventing community organizations from delivering or improving their programs are minimized by reducing their food budgets. Community organizations can then reinvest money into delivering their programs, expanding their services, improving the quality of their programs, and increasing their staffing and outreach.

Client participation in support beyond food: Clients obtain desirable food that their organization requested, further incentivizing clients to participate in community programming.

When clients participate in community programming, they receive support addressing or alleviating factors known to be associated with food insecurity. The Calgary Food Bank consciously partners with organizations that provide services which help to alleviate the issues associated with food insecurity, including mental health counselling,[12,15,54,72,73] substance-use disorder support,[72,78] subsidized housing,[10,86] sexual violence support,[72,82] and violence support services,[92] community integration,[72,96] cultural re/connection,[13,63,90] transportation and food delivery,[106] social isolation support,[6,73,96] advocacy and anti-discrimination work,[54,103] language-skills attainment support[59,68]; education, training and upskilling,[68,94,96] and labour-market integration support.[79,96] By continuing to participate in community programming and receiving support beyond food, clients obtain food access and may alleviate factors associated with their food insecurity.

— Client Stream —

Reduced stigma: Recognizing their need and worthiness of food support prompts people experiencing food insecurity to reach out for support.

Individuals tend to assess their state of food insecurity based on personal and cultural perceptions of what a "typical" food bank client looks like and may therefore try to distinguish themselves from such identities by refusing to seek out food support.[26] However, upon exposure to positive and diverse advertising that transforms the negative narrative around who accesses food banks, the target audience appraises their food insecurity status based on objective measures (access to food, money for food), instead of misleading subjective measures, encouraging them to seek out food support. Furthermore, through the spread of accurate information, the target audience is confident that they are eligible for food assistance, know what to expect from the food bank, and understand which service is most fitting for them, effectively reducing the barriers to food that they might face otherwise face.

Timeliness & suitability: Wide-ranging and flexible services allow individuals to receive timely and suitable food support.

By providing a food delivery service, various hamper appointment times and days, and numerous hamper pick-up locations, clients can receive a hamper in a manner and location that is suitable for their needs and fitting with their schedule. Although most clients can benefit from versatile booking options, clients with transportation and mobility barriers, who are especially vulnerable to distant and sparse food vendors, receive crucial support. Concurrently, by dispersing its secondary locations in areas of concentrated low-income, the Calgary Food Bank aims to address food deserts— or in other words, the lack of affordable food vendors — which are often found in areas with uneven development and racial inequality.[48]

Dignified experience: Offering nutritious food choices in a welcoming environment makes individuals feel valued, thereby fostering their self-worth and identity.

Lack of food choice and low-quality content from food banks negatively impacts individuals' self-esteem, often leaving them feeling powerless and insignificant,[26,67,83] while also exacerbating loss of comfort, familiarity, and identity for Indigenous people and newcomers who are required to forego cultural foods in favour of unfamiliar and often unhealthy diets.[13,37,68] By providing opportunities to self-select an adequate quantity of nutritious foods from core food categories, such as protein, grain and dairy, as well as pantry staples like flour, oil, and condiments, the Calgary Food Bank helps to improve clients' sense of dignity and satisfaction, while also meeting their health needs.[27,39,81,104] To ensure clients feel valued

and cared for at the Calgary Food Bank, they foster an inclusive space that values equity and diversity. When staff and volunteers are properly trained on how to provide judgement-free and culturally sensitive support, clients can have positive interactions at the food bank.[26,38,67] These interventions create an inviting and welcoming environment, which further reduces the stigma barrier.[27]

— Combined Stream —

Food consumption: Individuals consume nutritious food.

Foods available for selection at the Calgary Food Bank consider diverse dietary needs, which are needed to maintain health and development[1,23,24,36,37,70,87,89,101]; consider cultural requirements that allow individuals to follow religious, social, or traditional beliefs[13,39,63,68,81]; and account for housing circumstances which impact the availability of kitchen equipment and food storage options.[19] As such, when given nutritious and appropriate foods, clients prepare meals for their household or consume the food provided by partner organizations.[39,68,81,104]

Sustained support: Individuals are willing to use the service again because they are satisfied with their experience and the content they received.

When clients have gone through the process of obtaining food, they are satisfied with their cumulative experience, including the hamper-booking process, the hamper pick-up experience, and the contents of their food hamper. At this stage, clients are confident that the services provided by the Calgary Food Bank are beneficial to their health and well-being, and do not pose threats to their self-esteem. The positive valuation of their experience empowers clients to reuse the food bank when needed, thus removing any barriers from receiving sustained support.

— Final Outcomes —

Goal: Food is accessible to everyone in our city.

Ultimate outcomes: The ultimate goal of the Calgary Food Bank is to help individuals achieve access to nutritious food, mental health benefits, improved financial situation, social benefits, improved quality of life, and improved life circumstances. These outcomes have been established through research with Calgary Food Bank clients and further verified by peer-reviewed research studies.[40]

Conclusion and recommendations

The Calgary Food Bank's theory of change outlines the assumptions and steps needed to achieve its goal of "making food accessible to everyone in our city". By exploring what accessibility means and how it differs across target populations, the researchers and program staff were able to define what the program does to achieve the desired change. During the program theory development process, Calgary Food Bank staff identified several ways to further reduce barriers to accessing the food bank's programs. These recommendations align with Food Banks Canada's[5] suggestions for reducing barriers to food bank access (Food Banks Canada, n.d.). Although staff recognize that several recommendations are contingent upon funding and technological systems upgrades, the larger goals of these suggestions remain the focus of their work.

Research / forecasting demand – By continuing to collaborate with the City of Calgary, the Calgary Food Bank can continuously project economic conditions and demographic changes in order to forecast food bank demand and meet the changing needs of the community. In addition, continuously observing new releases on population-level food insecurity data provided by the Canadian Income Survey, allows the Calgary Food Bank to maintain its sights on the most at-risk sociodemographic groups. These strategies will enable the Calgary Food Bank to have sufficient supplies for its clients and community partners and would have the added benefits of strengthening collaboration with suitable partners and directing service to underrepresented communities.

a. Clients
    i. Understand the food insecurity landscape and support those who need it most through policies and procedures.

b. Partnerships
    i. Reduce the onboarding waiting time for priority community organizations.
    ii. Increase the capacity to reach out to desirable community organizations for collaboration.

Food choice improvements – Food Banks Canada highlights food choice as an effective way to increase client dignity by positively impacting their self-esteem. Food choices allow clients to select items suitable for their dietary needs and cultural requirements, while reducing waste, and increasing opportunities for meaningful interaction between clients and volunteers. Several recommendations pertain to improving the food choice system at the Calgary Food Bank.

[5] Food Banks Canada is an organization representing the food bank community across Canada.

i. Expand food choices to partner organizations, depending on their needs. (e.g., different options for different school districts).

ii. Provide additional sub-options under food choices, for increased hamper customization (e.g., under "rice," provide options for brown, white, long-grain, or short-grain).

iii. Allow clients to select their choices online 48 hours before their hamper appointment in order to streamline client check-in on site, enable satellites to have food choices, and allow clients to preplan their meals.

Home delivery improvements – To reduce physical access barriers, Food Banks Canada recommends providing delivery options for clients who cannot come to a food bank location. The Calgary Food Bank already provides a home delivery service; however, staff have recommended several improvements to this service.

i. Optimize systems and procedures.
ii. Update and publish eligibility criteria to ensure all clients, volunteers, and staff understand the criteria and there is no ambiguity about qualifications.

Improved communication – Food Banks Canada cites client and partner communication and the delivery of information as a barrier to access. When individuals and community organizations do not understand the rules and expectations of food banks, they may be less inclined to seek out help and collaboration. The Calgary Food Bank staff have identified several ways to remedy this access barrier.

a. Clients
   i. Create clear and simple instructions for hamper booking.
   ii. Send clear email communications to clients when they encounter an error during their hamper-booking process.

b. Partners
   i. Create and publish a transparent onboarding process and timing structure for the approval of partner organizations.
   ii. Move the partner application process to an online form to remove the risk of delayed or lost communications.

Welcoming space – Shame, embarrassment, and guilt are the leading reasons people do not access food banks in Canada (Food Banks Canada, n.d.). By pairing a dignified service with a welcoming space, food banks can support the self-respect and inherent value of individuals. According to Food Banks Canada, making people feel welcome can help

combat the sense of dependency and burdening they feel when they ask for food support. Staff have made several recommendations to tackle this issue at the Calgary Food Bank.

i. Improve designated client access point by incorporating client-only entrance and exit, alongside existing check-in desks, seating, and tables for packing groceries. These strategies help to reduce crowding and safety hazards stemming from operational flow, while improving client-centricity.

ii. Clear signage, in simple language, with instructions for clients. This supports individuals who process written communication better, who are new to the food bank, and whose first language is not English.

iii. Decorate the space to reflect the community and promote organizational values. Examples include a pride flag, Indigenous mural, a "welcome" poster in different languages, posters, plants, books, drawings, and soft lighting.

Food bank operations / systems – Some organizational limitations affect the accessibility of the Calgary Food Bank, particularly for working people and people with transportation and mobility barriers. Staff have made several recommendations to improve accessibility and service delivery.

a. Clients
   i. Expand satellite services in all quadrants of the city.

b. Partners
   i. Provide a delivery service for organizations facing transportation barriers.
   ii. Implement an online food ordering system.

Registration requirements – Food Banks Canada discusses the careful balance food banks must strike between collecting valuable data and ensuring the client registration process does not strike fear, anxiety, and potential disqualification from services. By collecting data from clients, the Calgary Food Bank strives to correctly understand who is using food support. The Calgary Food Bank believes in ethical data collection for the purpose of social research, reporting, and sharing insights with the community. By refining the nuances of data collection, the food bank can ensure that important information is recorded while still prioritizing client dignity.

i. Review hamper eligibility criteria and registration process to reduce the intrusiveness of questions and collect only what is reasonable. Ensure the process is inclusive, simple and holistic (i.e., it considers both income and situation).

ii. Ensure informed consent documents are clearly visible on the website.

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