



Photo: BCAFM, Brian Harris Photography.

How can local governments support healthy eating and food security in communities?

This Action Guide supports British Columbia's local governments in their efforts to build healthier communities for all. It shares promising practices and examples of how local governments can create conditions that support healthy and thriving communities.

Actions can include planning and consultation, implementing bylaw and policy changes, and supporting programs and partnerships with community stakeholders. The specific actions recommended below are compiled from both evidence-based best practice and promising innovations that are showing results in Canadian communities.



Healthy People



Healthy Society



Healthy Environments

Healthy Eating and Food Security in BC

How does healthy eating and food security affect British Columbians?

Healthy eating and food security promote and support social, physical, and mental well-being at all ages and stages of life, and contribute to the overall health of individuals, families, and communities. Food security at the community level is achieved when all citizens obtain a safe, personally acceptable, nutritious diet through a sustainable food system¹ that maximizes healthy choices, community self-reliance, and equal access for everyone. Food security is vital to the health and well-being of a community² and is the foundation for healthy eating.

Access to and availability of healthy, safe food are key elements of food security.³ Food availability refers to having sufficient quantities of quality food available on a consistent basis, while food access relates to having sufficient resources to obtain appropriate foods for a nutritious diet,⁴ and is strongly related to household economics. Better physical and economic access to healthy food increases the likelihood of healthier eating, healthier weights and reduced rates of diabetes.⁵ Vulnerable populations such as low income families, families headed by single mothers, aboriginal peoples, marginally housed, homeless people and new immigrants⁶ are at risk of facing financial barriers to a sufficient, safe and healthy food supply necessary for overall health and wellbeing.

We know that eating vegetables and fruit contributes to good health. However, only 41 per cent of British Columbians eat the recommended five servings of fruits and vegetables per day.⁷ There is evidence to show that even a one-serving-per-day increase is linked to a 20 per cent reduction in chronic disease related mortality.⁸

The food system in communities affects the accessibility and consumption of healthy food. For example, some communities have restricted access to healthy foods due to geographic transportation barriers. Others have increased availability of non-nutritious foods due to high density or proximity to fast food outlets and convenience stores. Unhealthy food marketing practices and tactics that target children in their own communities (e.g. billboards, sponsorship in public buildings or events) contributes to poor dietary patterns and has lifelong health impacts.

Improving healthy eating and food security at a population level is a shared responsibility of all levels of government and across multiple sectors. Local governments are uniquely positioned to be able to identify and respond to many needs within their community. They can help to foster a healthy and vibrant local food system from production to consumption while building opportunities to support healthy food access for all community members across a spectrum and economic, geographical and cultural contexts.

“ Food security is vital to the health and well-being of a community² and is the foundation for healthy eating. ”



Actions Local Governments Can Take

What can local governments do to increase healthy eating and food security in communities?

Many local governments have integrated healthy eating and food security actions into their community plans, policies, programs, and partnerships. Local needs, resources, and infrastructure are key factors in selecting initiatives that best serve the community.



Planning

Through assessment and planning, local governments can identify opportunities to increase access to healthy food, create healthy eating environments, build food security, and support local food systems. Specifically, local governments can:

Develop a working group (e.g., food policy council) with multiple stakeholders in the food system to help identify community needs and priorities, and build a broader understanding of local issues.

Conduct a community food assessment to determine the existing food-related activities, resources, and assets in the community in order to identify gaps and needs, in particular those for vulnerable populations.⁹

Plan and assess public transportation, social housing, and neighbourhood development to support citizens to access healthy food sources like grocery stores and local food markets.¹⁰

Incorporate local opportunities into official community plans and municipal strategies to set priorities and guide decisions around food planning and policy.

Many communities across BC have created frameworks for action on food security. Examples include: Village of Kaslo Food Charter, City of Vancouver Food Strategy, and City of Kamloops Food Action Plan.



Policies

Policies and bylaws can be used to enhance the production, sale, distribution, and storage of healthy and local foods, and discourage that of non-nutritious foods. Specifically, local governments can:

Designate areas for urban community gardens, edible landscapes, and local food markets, and offer access to underutilized local government properties.

Create social eating spaces in public places, including recreation centres, city plazas and parks, to encourage friends and families to eat together.

Support local agriculture by protecting the existing Agricultural Land Reserve and adding land to this reserve where appropriate.

Promote permits and incentives for healthy food retailers such as markets, grocery stores, mobile vendors, and restaurants, especially in underserved neighbourhoods.¹¹

Increase access to and beautify water fountains/hydration stations in the community, municipal parks and recreation centres to promote drinking water and reduce sugary drink consumption.

Adopt and promote healthy food and beverage consumption and sales' policies for recreation centres and public buildings using Stay Active Eat Healthy® resources and the Nutritional Guidelines for Vending Machines in B.C. Public Buildings policy.

Pass or amend policies restricting food and beverage marketing in all settings frequented by children (e.g., libraries, recreation centres, parks).

Adopt and promote workplace or organizational healthy eating policies (e.g., serve healthy foods at local government meetings and events using the Eat Smart, Meet Smart guidelines).

Support local, healthy, and safe food production and distribution through procurement policies, bylaws, and permits for farm-gate sales and small-scale urban agriculture (e.g., raising chickens or bees on residential property).

Actions Local Governments Can Take



The City of Kelowna allows urban agriculture as a principal use in all of its single- and two-family dwelling zones, public and institutional zones, and as a secondary use in multi-family, commercial, and industrial zones.¹²



Programs

Local governments can encourage, facilitate, and support community programs and services that aim to increase healthy eating, food skills, and access and distribution of healthy and local food. This could include providing space, promoting programs, creating directories and inventories, funding or other in-kind support, and working closely with other stakeholders.

Providing additional support for vulnerable populations, such as providing transportation, childcare, or priority placement in healthy eating and food security programs, may help to increase this group's participation in community programs or services.

Specifically, local governments can:

Offer programs that build food skills and knowledge needed to produce, prepare, and access healthy, safe, and traditional foods. This could include hands-on cooking workshops, community kitchens, community gardens, and coupon programs targeted to those who experience access barriers to healthy food, such as low-income families and seniors.

Support the development of farm to school and farm to cafeteria programs that connect institutions to local farms to increase access to food, improve nutrition and support local farmers.¹³

Facilitate the distribution and storage of healthy local foods (e.g., The Good Food Box, community supported agriculture programs (CSAs), and community storage facilities).



Partnerships

Partnerships, networking, and community capacity building are fundamental activities for engaging stakeholders in building and sustaining healthy eating and food security initiatives. In many communities, non-profit organizations and community members champion such projects. Local governments can:

Build relationships with health authority representatives that focus on healthy eating and food security. Health authorities can help to identify and maximize strategies and activities in the community.

Identify and engage with other organizations (e.g., local food security groups or networks, farmers' associations, schools, faith-based agencies) that work on food security and healthy eating programs, to make use of their knowledge, skills, and relationships to help support and implement policies.

As part of the BC Parks and Recreation Association's and the Stay Active, Eat Healthy® program, Saanich Commonwealth Place increased the provision of healthy food and beverages while restricting unhealthy options to create a healthy food environment. These changes followed a policy decision by Saanich Council to support healthy food choices.

The Kamloops Food and Urban Agriculture Plan includes Farm to School as an implementation support for several strategies. This demonstrates how municipalities can facilitate local food access and support healthy eating in schools.¹⁴



Checklist

The following checklist can help assess the ways that healthy eating and food security is supported in the community and provide insight into next steps. How many boxes can be checked off for your local government?



Does your organization:

- Support healthy food policies that make the healthy choice the easy choice? (For example, healthy items are procured and sold in vending machines, cafeterias, concessions, and food programs.)
- Support activities or have policies that increase access to healthy foods, especially for vulnerable community members? (For example, community food assessments, transportation planning, and incentives or permits for healthy food retailers such as grocery stores and local food markets.)
- Support urban farms, local food markets, community and school gardens, and food skills programs that help connect communities with healthy food, increase food security, and contribute to community partnerships?
- Use partnerships and its own capacities to promote active living and healthy eating messaging?

Case Study: Campbell River

What are other local governments doing to promote healthy eating and food security?

The City of Campbell River's Sustainable Official Community Plan has a chapter committed to food security and food self-sufficiency. The following food security policies have been committed to:

By 2031:

- Campbell River will have capacity to be at least 10% self-sufficient in food.
- A community and/or demonstration garden will exist in every neighbourhood.
- The Pier Street Farmers Market will be an important direct marketing opportunity for local producers.

By 2060:

- Campbell River will have capacity to be 50% self-sufficient in food. This entails having the capacity for a largely self-reliant agriculture and food system, with the majority of food consumed locally being produced, raised, and/or processed on Vancouver Island.
- Food stores from large to small will offer healthy food within a 10-minute walk of nearly all homes.¹⁵

Resources

BC Ministry of Health

Provides a listing of provincial healthy eating and food security programs, services, and resources <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/healthy-eating>

Local Leaders Harvesting Change: A toolkit to help remote communities enjoy fruits and vegetables <http://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/health/keeping-bc-healthy-safe/food-safety-security/local-government-toolkit.pdf>

Dietician Services at HealthLink BC : HealthLink BC dietitians can answer questions about food and nutrition by phone or email <http://www.healthlinkbc.ca/healthyeating/>

Provincial Health Services Authority

Healthy Built Environment Linkages Toolkit - Healthy Food Systems http://www.phsa.ca/Documents/linkagestoolkitrevisedoct16_2014_foodsystems.pdf

BC Food Security Gateway
www.bcfoodsecuritygateway.ca/

A Seat at The Table: Resource guide for local governments to promote food secure communities www.phsa.ca/Documents/aseatatthetableresourceguideforlocalgovernmentstop.pdf

Promoting Healthy Eating and Sustainable Local Food in BC: An Action Framework for Public Institutions—Health Authorities, Educational Institutions, Childcare Facilities and Local Governments <http://www.phsa.ca/Documents/foodactionframeworkforpublicinstitutions.pdf>

Food for Thought: The Issues and Challenges of Food Security http://www.phsa.ca/Documents/foodforthought_issueschallengesoffoodsecurity.pdf

Dietitians of Canada

Cost of Eating in British Columbia <http://www.dietitians.ca/Dietitians-Views/Food-Security/Individual-and-Household-Food-Insecurity.aspx>

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More Information

Want support or to learn more about improving health and well-being in your community?

Health authorities can support local governments by providing advice and expertise on health, acting as a resource for local government staff and elected officials to develop healthy public policy, providing community health profiles, and facilitating opportunities and partnerships to work together on joint healthy living actions.

You might already have relationships with your health authority. If not, the contacts below are a good place to start:

Please Contact:

Health Authorities

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