



Annapolis Valley Health

Food Security and Healthy Communities: Position Statement

Annapolis Valley Health (AVH) has a responsibility to be a leader in health and advocate for policy change that can contribute to better health. Through stating our position on food security and its related societal and health impacts, AVH will influence healthy public policy to improve food security and the health of our communities. Position statements are based on best current evidence. They will be reviewed and updated every three years.

Food security is defined as existing in a community where all people across the lifespan, at all times, have access to nutritious, safe, personally-acceptable and culturally-appropriate foods, that are produced, procured and distributed in ways that are environmentally sound and socially just (Fairholm, 1999). *Food insecurity* occurs when food quality and/or quantity are compromised (Tarasuk V, 2009).

Nova Scotia has been a Canadian leader in advocating for food security. Healthy Eating Nova Scotia (HENS, 2005) and Thrive! (2012) have included food security as a provincial priority. Breastfeeding has been identified as a key foundation for food security and is the optimum nutrition for infants. Our understanding of food security has been strengthened through the Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Projects (Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Project 2002, 2004/05, 2007/08, 2010, and 2012). The 2010-2015 AVH Collaborative Community Health Plan identified Physical Activity and Healthy Eating as a key priority within the context of the social determinants of health (CCHP, 2010).

Impact of food insecurity on our communities

Statistics indicate that 11.8% of Nova Scotia households report food insecurity. Food insecurity is closely related to poverty; the lower the household income, the higher the risk of food insecurity. Persons most at risk of being food insecure include children, Aboriginal people, those who rent rather than own a home, those who receive income assistance, those who are unemployed or underemployed and those in single parent households (CCHS, 2011-2012).

Food insecurity is linked to unhealthy eating, chronic disease, higher crime rates, stress on families, compromised child development, poor mental health, and increased health care needs (Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Project, 2013). Food insecurity also impacts literacy and education outcomes, and contributes to lost productivity.

The consequences of food insecurity compromise the health of our communities, environment and economy (Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Project, 2013; CCHS, 2011-2012). Taking action on poverty and food security will help build and sustain healthy communities.

Our environments affect how healthy we are. Access to acceptable and affordable healthy food is now more difficult than it has ever been before. Marketing and advertising targets our children, families and communities. It exposes them to a food culture that promotes unhealthy foods and contributes to societal harms (HENS, 2005). Healthy environments support people and communities to develop healthy relationships with food.

A comprehensive approach: Working together to build a solution

Food security is a significant health, social, economic, environmental and political issue. It is influenced by a variety of sectors including food producers, manufacturers, retailers, media, education, health care and social safety systems. With our growing commitment to local and sustainable agriculture, using comprehensive, multi-pronged and multi-governmental strategies and interventions involving all stakeholders is essential to influence positive change and achieve food security. Effective population-based strategies involve developing

policies that address poverty and food insecurity, including access to healthy, safe and affordable food, restricting industry marketing, sponsorship and promotion, and increasing community food literacy.

Annapolis Valley Health's Position on Food Security and Healthy Communities

- AVH supports the implementation of Healthy Eating Nova Scotia and Thrive!

Policy and Legislation

Policies that address poverty and food insecurity will create more supportive environments and improve the health of our communities.

- AVH will continue to advocate for healthy food and beverage policies in publicly funded institutions including AVH, schools, childcare, recreation and post-secondary institutions.
- AVH will provide and promote locally grown, produced and distributed foods when available and feasible.
- AVH recognizes that breastfeeding is a key foundation for food security. AVH supports the Baby Friendly Initiative™ and will continue to create welcoming spaces for breastfeeding.
- AVH will continue to advocate for policies that reduce poverty and increase economic and social equity.

Food Skills and Knowledge

Improving and supporting food literacy will enhance community food security and reduce chronic diseases. This will have limited benefit unless implemented as part of a comprehensive approach.

- AVH supports evidence-based actions that develop food and nutrition skills and knowledge with an emphasis on children, youth, families and vulnerable populations.

Marketing

Food advertising, sponsorship and fundraising heavily influence food and beverage choices. Processed foods, fast foods, convenience foods and sugary drinks are among the most heavily marketed food products.

- AVH will work with strategic partners to restrict advertising and sponsorship of unhealthy food and beverages, particularly to children and youth.
- AVH will review partnerships and contracts with companies to ensure that we are promoting and providing healthy foods.
- AVH fundraising will focus on non-food items or healthy food and beverages.

Strategic Partnership

Successful advocacy in communities will be achieved through the formation of effective, collaborative, and sustainable community partnerships. Our work with our partners is guided by our advocacy and partnership frameworks.

- AVH is committed to working with all levels of government, non-governmental organizations, community partners and coalitions to advocate for healthy public policy addressing food insecurity and poverty.
- AVH works to create supportive environments and strengthen the ability of communities to take action on issues of food insecurity and poverty.
- AVH will work with partners to support the expansion of local agriculture and sustainable food systems including small-medium scale farms, home, community and school gardens, and edible green spaces.

Complete references available in the AVH Food Security and Healthy Communities Position Statement Supporting Document.