

## Policy Change Impacts on Food Insecurity in Northern Canada



### What this research is about

In Northern Canada, there is a high prevalence of food insecurity, particularly among the Indigenous population. To address this, the federal government subsidizes the shipping of foods and non-food necessities to northern communities, where year-round access to surface transportation is limited. Originally covered through the Food Mail Program, subsidization was changed under Nutrition North Canada in April 2011.

The policy change affected food insecurity in Northern Canada, particularly among Indigenous communities, as a result of the considerable changes to the list of subsidized goods. Criticisms arose because necessities such as bottled water, diapers, and harvesting equipment were not included in the subsidized list.

This study focuses on the impact of the transition from the Food Mail Program to Nutrition North Canada on both Indigenous and non-Indigenous families, particularly families with children. This change in policy altered subsidies aimed at alleviating the high cost of living in northern communities, leading to concerns about increased food insecurity.

### What the researchers did

The researchers used data spanning from 2007 to 2016 from the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS). They compared data from before and after the switch from the Food Mail Program to Nutrition North Canada. Their study centred on regions like Nunavut, the Inuvialuit Settlement Region in the Northwest Territories, Nunatsiavut in northern Labrador, and Nunavik in northern Quebec. It involved Indigenous and non-Indigenous adults aged 18 and over who participated in the CCHS and

### What you need to know

This study focuses on food insecurity in Northern Canada, particularly among Indigenous communities. It highlights the challenges faced due to limited transportation infrastructure and high living costs in these regions. The researchers examined the impact of the transition from the Food Mail Program to Nutrition North Canada. These are government initiatives aimed at subsidizing the shipping of foods and non-food necessities to northern communities. The researchers found that while the policy change reduced food insecurity among Indigenous families in some areas, it increased food insecurity in others. The impact was particularly harmful to Indigenous families with children.

provided information about food security and other household details.

The researchers identified families living in communities that received full subsidies under Nutrition North Canada as the treatment group. They identified families living in remote communities but were not affected by the policy change as the control group. The researchers used a difference-in-differences model to estimate the impact of the policy change on Indigenous and non-Indigenous families. Their analysis also looked at how the policy change affected families with children of different ages.

The researchers used three measures of food insecurity. The three measures were based on 18 questions on food insecurity in the CCHS: 1) overall food insecurity (one “yes” response); 2) moderate/severe food insecurity (two or more “yes” responses); and 3) severe food insecurity (six or more “yes” responses).

## What the researchers found

The policy change from the Food Mail Program to Nutrition North Canada increased the likelihood of overall food insecurity by 8.9%, and moderate/severe food insecurity by 7.1%. The likelihood of severe food security increased by 7.3% among Indigenous families.

However, the effects on food insecurity among Indigenous families varied across regions. In the northern parts of the provinces, moderate/severe food insecurity decreased by 14.1% among Indigenous families. In the territories and Inuit Nunangat, the probability of overall, moderate/severe, and severe food insecurity rose by 15.2%, 18.5%, and 10.8%, respectively. The adverse effects of the policy change were heightened in the presence of children, especially among Indigenous families.

Overall, the transition to Nutrition North Canada raised the likelihood of food insecurity. It particularly affected Indigenous families, with severe food insecurity becoming more prevalent. These findings remained consistent across various robustness checks, indicating that the negative impact of the policy change persisted and might have been more significant than initially estimated.

This study highlights the concerning levels of food insecurity among Indigenous families in Northern Canada, and the negative impact of the policy change from the Food Mail Program to Nutrition North Canada. The list of subsidized goods has been expanded since 2019 to include additional goods like diapers, but significant challenges persist, which can worsen the disparities in food pricing across regions and communities.

## How you can use this research

This research can inform future studies and policy decision-making. For future research, the researchers suggest delving deeper into potential mechanisms, like changes in eligible goods, subsidy amounts, and how programs are monitored and adhered to. When it comes to shaping future policies, it is essential to remember that subsidization alone is not enough to solve the multifaceted issue of food insecurity.

## About the researchers

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*Research Snapshot by Emily Kenny*

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