



# The Correlation Between Income, Food Security and Community in Nunavut

2023 Social Connectedness Fellowship Program  
in Partnership with Qajuqturvik Community Food  
Centre (QCFC)

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**SAMUEL CENTRE  
FOR SOCIAL  
CONNECTEDNESS**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In Canada, 15.9% of Canadian households face food insecurity or inadequate access to food. In the territory of Nunavut, 70% of Inuit households are food insecure. Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre (QCFC) is an organization based in Iqaluit which runs an emergency food access program that is currently serving more people than ever before in the organization's history. Throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, QCFC's team witnessed the impact that income-based resources have on fulfilling community member's needs. In 2022, with the discontinuation of CERB, there was an increased demand for the emergency food access programs. These levels were higher than ever witnessed previously and have remained unsustainable since the discontinuation of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB). This project aimed to see how income-based solutions offered during the pandemic, such as CERB, impacted people's access to food and adequate food security for their households. One of the most pressing research gaps identified throughout this project is the lack of data, such as the cost of living analysis (COLA), for the territories within Canada. This made it challenging to compile comprehensive data for this project. Nunavut is both under-researched in minimum wage, COLA, and living wage statistics, while being over-researched on topics of climate change, impacts on arctic ecosystems, hunting, and fishing regulations etc. This has resulted in a population that is over-surveyed and underserved. This research asked:

1. What are the impacts of the newly adjusted income assistance funding for folks in Iqalummuit? Has the adjustment to income assistance helped reduce costs or has it made a limited impact?
2. How has CERB improved food security or impacted it throughout the pandemic?
3. What programming or services could use improvements?
4. What impacts do ongoing food insecurity/security have on how people are engaged in the community? How does food insecurity/security impact people's sense of belonging, primarily, connection to place, the land, to one another and to systems of power within the region?

This project utilized qualitative research methods which were primarily conducted via a review of secondary sources. With the support of QCFC staff, a short 7 question multiple choice survey was developed and translated to Inuktituk. The process for selecting participants and recruiting for outreach was developing an open survey for anyone visiting QCFC or accessing emergency food programs. The outreach for this project was limited to community members visiting QCFC within Iqaluit. The data collection method was solely through the survey, with questions designed to be completed within 10 minutes to avoid participant exhaustion and aim for maximal survey completion. Community engagement was to involve community members primarily through word of mouth at QCFC, staff, and volunteers for the centre. This strategy was to encourage participation through honoraria and other gift cards that had been provided by QCFC and funded through the Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness (SCSC). However, despite my best efforts, along with the efforts of QCFC staff, we were unable to recruit participants for the survey. This indicated that research fatigue and over-researching is a problem within the region for Indigenous populations in the area of food insecurity.

## PART I: INTRODUCTION

In 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was signed in an international covenant marking the first legal document that declared the right to food a universal human right. Since the signing of the declaration, this right to food has been further affirmed in several documents such as the *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, which states that “all human beings regardless of their race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status have the right to adequate food and the right to be free from hunger.”<sup>1</sup>

Despite the enshrined rights to adequate food and to be free from hunger, 15.9% of Canadian households face food insecurity or inadequate access to food.<sup>2</sup> Looking closer to the region of Nunavut, 50% of households face food insecurity,<sup>3</sup> 70% of which are Inuit households.<sup>4</sup> According to Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami “76% of Inuit aged 15 and over living in Inuit Nunangat are experiencing food insecurity when taking into account “marginal,” “low,” and “very low” food security states”.<sup>5</sup> In examining a statistical report from 2018, the median income of those residing within Inuit Nunangat was \$23,485 for

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<sup>1</sup> United Nations Human Rights. “*The Right to Adequate Food*”. 2023. Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights. Fact Sheet No. 34.

<https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/Documents/Publications/FactSheet34en.pdf>.

<sup>2</sup> Amber Ripley, “Household food insecurity: it’s not just about food,” Canadian Public Health Association, January 13, 2023, <https://www.cpha.ca/household-food-insecurity-its-not-just-about-food>

<sup>3</sup> Statistics Canada, “Household food insecurity, 2017/18,” Stats Can, June 24th, 2020, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-625-x/2020001/article/00001-eng.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Pauktuutit: Inuit Women of Canada, “*Social and Economic Development: Food Security*,” 2023, <https://pauktuutit.ca/social-and-economic-development/food-security/>; Food Secure Canada, “*Affordable Food in the North*,” 2023, <https://pauktuutit.ca/social-and-economic-development/food-security/>; Nunavut Food Security Coalition, “*Rates*,” 2023, <<https://www.nunavutfoodsecurity.ca/Rates>>; Jane George, “*We are struggling to keep up*”: hunger in Iqaluit stretches food centre’s capacity,” August 30, 2022, CBC News, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/gajugturvik-community-food-centre-igaluit-food-crisis-1.6566896>>

<sup>5</sup> Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami. Rep. *National Inuit Climate Change Strategy*. Ottawa, ON, 2019. [https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ITK\\_Climate-Change-Strategy\\_English.pdf](https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/ITK_Climate-Change-Strategy_English.pdf)

Indigenous people, while for non-Indigenous people, the median income within the region was \$92,011.<sup>6</sup> This income inequality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Nunavut illustrates not only an unbalanced income, but also exemplifies how poverty and lower income households are more likely to experience food insecurity compared to their counterparts that have higher incomes.

Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre (QCFC), an organization based in Iqaluit, runs an emergency food access program that is currently serving more Iqalummiut than ever before in the organization's history.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the pandemic, QCFC's team witnessed the impact that income-based resources, such as the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), had on assisting community members' needs. In 2022, with the discontinuation of CERB, there was an increased demand for the emergency food access programs, compared to when CERB was provided previously. These levels were higher than what QCFC have ever seen prior, and have remained unsustainable since the discontinuation of CERB.

QCFC strongly believes that income-based solutions are the most effective means to address food insecurity in Nunavut. They are currently working closely with many levels of government to advocate for effective income-based solutions to address the public health crisis in Nunavut in the hope to see improved policies that respond to community members' needs. QCFC believes that food security in Nunavut can only occur when food sovereignty that supports the local food systems is achieved in the region.

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<sup>6</sup> Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, "*Inuit Statistical Profile 2018*," 2018, <https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Inuit-Statistical-Profile.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Note: *Iqalummiut* refers to a resident of Iqaluit.

## **1.1 Purposes**

The purpose of this research project is to advocate for long-term solutions to address food insecurity and increase food system autonomy within Nunavut. By advocating for an income-based solution to address food insecurity in Nunavut, this research project aimed to highlight policies and programs that could benefit from being reviewed and updated to address the territory's evolving needs. By updating the policies and programs, it will provide more substantive support for individuals and families. Through this research, I will advocate for an annual review of these income supports to ensure they are continuing to have a meaningful impact on households, and develop to provide more extensive support. An annual review should be flexible and adjustable to inflation rates, while also considering the high cost of living in Nunavut. Gaps in policies and factors that place people within Nunavut at an increased risk for food insecurity, have been identified and examined throughout this project.

## **1.2 Research Questions**

The following are the research questions that helped frame this research project throughout all stages of the process:

1. What are the impacts of the newly adjusted income assistance funding for folks in Iqalumiut? Has the adjustment to income assistance helped reduce costs or has it made a limited impact?
2. How has CERB improved food security or impacted it throughout the pandemic?
3. What programming or services could use improvements? (Nunavut child benefit, disability support, income assistance etc.)

4. What impacts do ongoing food insecurity/security have on how people are engaged in the community?
  - a. How does food insecurity/security impact people's sense of belonging<sup>8</sup>, primarily, connection to place, the land, to one another and to systems of power within the region?

## **PART II: BACKGROUND RESEARCH AND SETTING THE STAGE**

### **2.1 Key Stakeholders**

The key stakeholders involved in this research project are the Qajuqturvik Community Food Centre, Iqalumiut, Inuit both within and outside of Nunavut, the Nunavut territorial government, the Federal Government of Canada, and other non-profit organizations invested in the rights of Inuit and food security within Nunavut.

### **2.2 Background Information and Historical Context**

There are several key pieces of information that will be vital for understanding this research project, the first being the colonial history within Nunavut, and how it has perpetuated and severely impacted current food security issues within the region.

Prior to colonization, long lasting food scarcity in the region was rare, until the 1900s when colonial laws were implemented and enforced in the region. Colonial laws that forced settlement in the area, enforced mandatory attendance at residential schools, strict harvesting laws, and the government mandated slaughter of Inuit sled dogs,<sup>9</sup> all had their hand in prohibiting Inuit access to traditional foods, the land, and

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<sup>8</sup> Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness, "About Social Connectedness," September 2023, <https://www.socialconnectedness.org/about-us/about-social-connectedness/>.

<sup>9</sup> Government of Canada, "Government of Canada's Apology to Qikiqtani Inuit," August 14, 2019, <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1565717416770/1565717444492..>

their right to govern themselves.<sup>10</sup> In cutting off the ability for Inuit to sustain themselves through traditional means, and restricting their freedom of movement through the use of sled dogs, the colonial trading posts within the area became the sole food supplier for many Inuit. These grocery retailers, in this context, have a direct link to colonization and have severely impacted people's access to food and food sovereignty.<sup>11</sup>

The history of food insecurity, and colonial laws and regulations, exhibits an unbalanced power dynamic between the consumer and the grocer. In more recent years, this unbalanced power dynamic has been further encouraged through federal government funding in the form of the Nutrition North Canada (NNC) program. This program, instead of sending funds directly to consumers, sends food subsidies to the grocery retailers directly, where they are entrusted with passing on savings to the consumer. However, there is a severe lack of transparency and accountability, as there is no way of knowing if consumers are reaping the benefits of the subsidy; this renders the program possibly ineffective, especially if it only lines the pockets of for-profit institutions. This lack of transparency in knowing if the well-being of Inuit are being prioritized by grocery retailers further exemplifies the unbalanced power dynamic and role that colonial regulations and laws continue to have on Inuit within Nunavut. The monopolized access to food and restriction of local food options has directly contributed to food insecurity in Nunavut.

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<sup>10</sup> Marc Fawcett-Atkinson, "Colonialism created food insecurity in the Arctic. It will take huge changes to end the crisis," Canada's National Observer: Food Insider Special Report, July 21, 2021, <https://www.nationalobserver.com/2021/07/16/news/colonialism-food-insecurity-arctic-inuit-nunangat-strategy>.

<sup>11</sup> Marc Fawcett-Atkinson, "Colonialism created food insecurity in the Arctic. It will take huge changes to end the crisis," Canada's National Observer: Food Insider Special Report. July 21, 2021, <https://www.nationalobserver.com/2021/07/16/news/colonialism-food-insecurity-arctic-inuit-nunangat-strategy>.



The food insecurity crisis is a public health crisis, and as aforementioned, is a direct consequence of colonization. Although this hunger crisis has been experienced for generations, there has been little government-led action to support local food systems to counter food insecurity in the region. In 2011, the Harper government initiated the Nutrition North Canada (NNC) program, a federally funded food subsidy program, and the only government mandated program to address the high cost of food in Nunavut. Although this program was designed to decrease food insecurity, it has had the opposite effect.<sup>12</sup> Since the program's implementation, food insecurity has steadily increased, at a rate of 13.2 percent.<sup>13</sup>

To understand the ongoing food insecurity crisis, we must understand income-based policies and programs. These programs are currently dysfunctional and require a thorough update. One example is the Nunavut Child Benefit, available to families with a net income of \$20,921 or less. These families only receive \$330 per year for each eligible child under the age of 18 that are living at home, and eligible families will receive up to \$275 per year for the first child, and \$75 for the second child.<sup>14</sup> With the knowledge that in 2018 the average income of Inuit people residing within Inuit Nunangat was \$23,485, this child benefit is not nearly enough to contribute meaningful support, especially considering the high cost of living in the territory.<sup>15</sup> Thankfully, like other Canadian citizens, parents with children in Nunavut are also eligible for the federal

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<sup>12</sup> Andrée-Anne Fafard St-Germain, Tracey Galloway, and Valerie Tarasuk, "Food Insecurity in Nunavut Following the Introduction of Nutrition North Canada," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 191, no. 20 (May 21, 2019): E552–58, <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.181617>.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Government of Nunavut, "Nunavut Child Benefit (NUCB)," Family Services- Income Assistance: Nunavut Child Benefit (NUCB), 2023, <https://gov.nu.ca/family-services/information/nunavut-child-benefit-nucb#:~:text=The%20Nunavut%20Child%20Benefit%20is,of%2018%20living%20at%20home>.

<sup>15</sup> Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, "Inuit Statistical Profile 2018," 2018, <https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Inuit-Statistical-Profile.pdf>.

child benefits. The Canada Child Benefit (CBB) was increased to be adjustable to inflation in July 2022, from \$569.42 to \$583.08 per month for a child under 6 years of age, and for parents with children between the ages of 6-17, it was increased from \$480.41 to \$491.91 per month.<sup>16</sup> However, the purchasing power of this benefit for Nunavummiut is lower than Canadians in other regions of Canada, as Nunavut's cost of living is markedly higher than the national average.

The income assistance program in Nunavut intends to offer benefits to families and individuals to meet their basic needs for different reasons, such as disability, illness, low income, or unemployment.<sup>17</sup> It offers different calculated amounts for unattached singles, unattached singles with a disability, single parents and for couples with children respectively. The first two categories: unattached single and unattached single with a disability, are both offered the same amount for income assistance: \$9,228 per year.<sup>18</sup> Single parents receive \$11,436, while couples with children receive \$17,520 in income assistance annually.<sup>19</sup> In 2022, 27.9 percent of people in Nunavut under 65 received income assistance; in other words, roughly one in four people within the region required income assistance to sustain themselves and their dependents.<sup>20</sup> When examining who was enrolled in the Nunavut income assistance program, the largest group was unattached singles; about 57% of people accessing the program in 2022.<sup>21</sup> The second highest group accessing this program were single parents, consisting 24% of people

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<sup>16</sup> Maytree: Poverty, Rights, Change, “*Nunavut*,” Maytree, 2023, <https://maytree.com/changing-systems/data-measuring/welfare-in-canada/nunavut/>.

<sup>17</sup> Maytree: Poverty, Rights, Change, “*Nunavut: Social Assistance Summaries*,” Maytree, April 2023, <https://maytree.com/changing-systems/data-measuring/social-assistance-summaries/nunavut/>.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Maytree: Poverty, Rights, Change, “*Nunavut*.”

<sup>20</sup> Maytree: Poverty, Rights, Change. “*Nunavut: Social Assistance Summaries*.”

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

accessing income assistance.<sup>22</sup> In 2022, “couples with children were on average the highest proportion of income assistance program beneficiaries [...] with just about 38%, followed by single parent households with under 34%, the unattached singles with over 26%.”<sup>23</sup> In 2022, there were over 5,101 cases of income assistance, and over 10,801 beneficiaries of these cases.<sup>24</sup> To put this in perspective, there were only 40,586 people living in Nunavut in 2022.<sup>25</sup>

The disability support program offered for unattached singles with a disability in 2022 was \$3000 annually.<sup>26</sup> In total, income assistance from both the federal and territorial governments for unattached singles with disabilities was \$12,755 annually, which represents a decline compared to the previous year.<sup>27</sup>

	Unattached single considered employable	Unattached single with a disability	Single parent, one child	Couple, two children
Basic social assistance	\$9,228	\$9,228	\$11,436	\$17,520
Additional social assistance	\$0	\$3,000	\$0	\$0
Federal child benefits	\$0	\$0	\$6,915	\$11,668
Territorial child benefits	\$0	\$0	\$330	\$660
Federal tax credits / benefits	\$456	\$527	\$1,151	\$1,390
Territorial tax credits / benefits	\$0	\$0	\$0	\$0
<b>Total 2022 income</b>	<b>\$9,684</b>	<b>\$12,755</b>	<b>\$19,832</b>	<b>\$31,238</b>

Note: Totals may not add up due to rounding.  
Source: Maytree - Created with Datawrapper

Chart Image: Maytree<sup>28</sup>

The above chart provides these numbers and the respective categories from Maytree for a more concise comparative understanding of the statistics discussed in this section.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>23</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>24</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>25</sup> Government of Nunavut, “Statistics Home,” Government of Nunavut, 2023, <https://www.gov.nu.ca/information/statistics-home>.  
<sup>26</sup> Maytree: Poverty, Rights, Change. “Nunavut.”  
<sup>27</sup> Ibid.  
<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

### **2.3 The Problem**

This research project aims to address the food insecurity and hunger crisis across the territory of Nunavut. More directly, this research project investigates the relationship between food insecurity and income. This research seeks to identify policy areas that require more comprehensive funding, actionable income-based solutions to food insecurity, and the policy changes necessary to implement such solutions. In addition, this research seeks to understand how belonging and social connectedness are impacted by food insecurity in Nunavut.

### **2.4 Systemic and Research Gaps**

In identifying the research gaps for this project, one of the most pressing is the lack of cost of living analysis (COLA) in all three territories. Currently all COLA analysis only looks at the provinces' cost of living and doesn't provide any information on Nunavut, the Northwest Territories or the Yukon. This has made it particularly challenging to find comprehensive data for this project. Nunavut, as a region, is both under-researched when it comes to COLA, minimum wage or living wages statistics, while simultaneously being over researched, with plenty of reports and journal articles coming from the region on topics such as climate change, impacts on the arctic ecosystem, changes to hunting and fishing regulations etc. This has resulted in a population that is over surveyed, underserved, and without meaningful measures of economic or poverty comparisons.

An additional research gap is that the majority of research that's been conducted have not had Inuit researchers or scholars involved in the process. However, there have been some reports and articles where statistics have been compiled by Inuit

organizations, government or non-profits organizations, who tend to provide a collective voice for Inuit within Nunavut. The reason that I'm identifying this as a research gap is due to the fact that Inuit perspectives and voices are not being included in the analysis, compilation or research conducted in this area. Since food insecurity disproportionately impacts Inuit households and lives, it is significant to note that Inuit scholars and researchers are being overlooked or deprioritized.

Finally, the most significant systemic gap is that, although a lot of research has been conducted on the state of food insecurity within Nunavut, there is a lack of updated policies or significant government action implemented to address the food insecurity crisis, aside from the Nutrition North Canada program. The current federal framework for reducing food insecurity in the region of Nunavut is lacking transparency, oversight, proper funding, government capacity, and collaboration with community stakeholders to effectively combat food insecurity. Since the only government-led action to reduce food insecurity in the territory lacks transparency and oversight, it is difficult to know how the subsidy program is assisting households in the region. This makes it challenging to accurately assess how this program works with the current policies, as there is a lack of sufficient information available for this report.

### **PART III: CORE QUESTIONS**

This research was guided by four core questions:

1. How did pandemic-related income benefits, like CERB, impact how Iqalumiut experiencing food insecurity accessed food? What impact did this have on wellbeing?

2. What impacts did the end of pandemic-related income benefits have on emergency food access programs in Iqaluit?
3. What type or amount of income benefits were most effective at reducing demand on emergency food access programs in Iqaluit?
4. What is the relationship between food insecurity, income security, and belonging?

## **PART IV: METHODOLOGY**

This research project utilized qualitative research methods and was primarily conducted via a review of secondary sources, often called desk research. With the support of staff at QCFC, a short 7 question multiple choice survey was developed and translated to Inuktitut to gauge clients' reflections on income-based responses to food insecurity. The process for selecting participants and recruiting for outreach was developing an open survey for anyone visiting QCFC or accessing emergency food programs. The outreach for this project was limited to community members visiting QCFC within Iqaluit. The data collection method was solely through the survey, with questions that were aimed to be completed within 10 minutes to avoid participant exhaustion and aim for maximal survey completion.

Community engagement was to involve community members primarily through word of mouth at QCFC, staff and volunteers for the centre. This strategy was to encourage participation through honoraria and other gift cards that had been provided by QCFC and funded through the Samuel Centre for Social Connectedness (SCSC). However, despite my best efforts, along with the efforts of QCFC staff, we were unable to recruit participants for the survey. This indicated that research fatigue and over

researching is a problem within the region for Indigenous populations in the area of food insecurity.<sup>29</sup>

Another portion of the community engagement was through a postcard and petition advocacy campaign. The postcard and petition campaign were chosen as methods to best facilitate action and change in this realm of public policy. After researching this area, it became clear to me that change is desperately needed. Oftentimes, the best ways to get the attention of Government leaders and decision-makers is by spear-heading action through public advocacy, and demanding calls to action. Furthermore, the community engagement initiative allowed a platform for community members to share stories and experiences, which through the petition and the postcard campaign will be shared with Government leaders. Community participation through the post card and petition portion was designed to be filled out both online and in-person to broaden our engagement with as wide an audience as possible within the region of Nunavut, and more broadly, across Canada. The petition and postcards were addressed to the Federal Government of Canada, more specifically to the Minister of Health, Mark Holland. This was done in the hopes to have the food insecurity crisis addressed, as it is a concern for public health within Canada that requires immediate attention.

#### ***4.1 Summary of Findings***

Although we did not have any participants in the survey, we can nonetheless derive some key takeaways from this result. The first is that, in the past couple decades, there has been a high volume of studies conducted in Nunavut and the Arctic region.

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<sup>29</sup> Note: this will be further discussed in **Section 4.1: Summary of Findings**.

This could suggest that the region is over-researched, without subsequent, or with little action resulting from these various research projects. There have been over 14 studies completed since 2016 on the topic of food insecurity and income, not including the census conducted by the Government of Canada, or the Territorial Government of Nunavut.<sup>30</sup> Nor does this number include newspaper articles, journals or online platforms advocating for changes in funding etc. to better address food insecurity. A good majority of these studies have been conducted through PROOF, a research facility based out of the University of Toronto that has primarily collected data through Government issued surveys etc., rather than actively extracting information from the folks living in Nunavut.

Extractive research in Nunavut has led to people experiencing severe participant exhaustion, while often not benefitting from the studies they have participated in, or at times not having access to the outcomes of the study. This has created an uneven power dynamic between people and researchers. So, while there has been a lot of research conducted within Nunavut as a whole, those residing in the region are continuously seeing little to no action being taken to correct issues such as funding, programming, housing, food security or employment, despite giving their time and energy to researchers for this very purpose.

The reason that this research has been conducted even though these questions have been previously asked by other researchers is due to new circumstances and for new data collection as a result. QCFC sought to ask these questions for several reasons. Firstly, to understand how COVID-19 financial supports (CERB) have assisted

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<sup>30</sup> Note: This was done by using a Safari search engine by using keywords such as “food insecurity”, “Nunavut”, “arctic”, “food access”, “income”, “statistics”. In varying orders. I also looked at PROOF’s website using these keywords and filtering through the reports.



households in food stability. Secondly, to grasp how the adjustment to income assistance has impacted how households grapple with food security or insecurity. Since COVID-19 began, these two factors have not been studied to understand the impacts that they have on households acquiring more stable food security or worsening it. This is a new element that this report sought to understand and could come into play along with the other public policies that were already in place.

## **PART V: LIMITATIONS**

One of the most notable research limitations for this project is research fatigue due to extensive research over the past several decades. Research fatigue “occurs when often marginalized, minority or Indigenous groups are repeatedly approached, surveyed, questioned and incorporated into research projects.”<sup>31</sup> In this context, participants experience a research fatigue whereby they have been asked questions around food insecurity as part of studies so frequently, yet have seen limited action to improve food insecurity in response to the research they participated in. This results in a feeling that their participation was meaningless or fruitless, and makes them less willing to participate in future research.<sup>32</sup> This was a barrier I encountered during my project.

Another significant research limitation for this project is that this research was conducted entirely remotely. I was unable to conduct the research in person in the community, which would have enabled me to form trusting, meaningful relationships with community members; relationships necessary to conduct impactful research. Due to the nature of this project, and considering the location and positionality of our partner

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<sup>31</sup> Ilona Kater, “Natural and Indigenous Sciences: Reflections on an Attempt to Collaborate,” *Regional Environmental Change* 22, no. 109 (September 3, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10113-022-01967-3>.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

organization, we were only focusing on surveying community members that access QCFC food programs and community meals.

Additionally, the length of the project could be considered a limitation for conducting this work. Specifically, it is unclear whether 4 months is enough time to compile contextual information, compare policies, conduct qualitative research and synthesise the research project; the most time consuming being establishing relationships and building connections with participants and community members. This relationship and trust-building piece, especially in this context, is a process that cannot be rushed.

## **PART VI: ISSUES**

The issues outlined throughout this research project highlight the need for better policy, and more comprehensive funding and programming in Nunavut to ensure that food insecurity is addressed primarily through comprehensive funding support for families and individuals within Nunavut.

Several policy gaps were identified throughout the research project; mostly policies that just have not been updated or adjusted to current living wages, inflation or the local economy. Policy gaps such as the Nunavut Child Benefit that is only available for families that make \$20,921 or less per year. Families receive \$330 per year for each eligible child under the age of 18, who are living at home. Families that are eligible will receive \$275 per year for the first child, and \$75 for the second child.<sup>33</sup> As mentioned

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<sup>33</sup> Government of Nunavut, “*Nunavut Child Benefit (NUCB)*,” Family Services- Income Assistance: Nunavut Child Benefit (NUCB), 2023, <https://gov.nu.ca/family-services/information/nunavut-child-benefit-nucb#:~:text=The%20Nunavut%20Child%20Benefit%20is,of%2018%20living%20at%20home>.

earlier in this report, this is not nearly enough assistance to meaningfully reduce the expenses that parents face on a monthly basis much less on an annual basis. It is additionally not nearly enough to cover food expenses let alone assist with the high cost of living in the territory<sup>34</sup>.

Similarly, as aforementioned, income assistance, although it has been improved in 2023 by the Government of Nunavut, it is still lacking in adequately ensuring that households have regular access to food. Unattached singles and unattached singles with a disability are both offered the same amount for income assistance: \$9,228 per year.<sup>35</sup> Single parents receive \$11,436, while couples with children receive \$17,520 in income assistance annually.<sup>36</sup> In 2022, roughly one in four people within the region required income assistance to sustain themselves and their dependents.<sup>37</sup> In 2022, there were over 5,101 cases of income assistance, and over 10,801 beneficiaries of these cases.<sup>38</sup> There were only 40,586 people living in Nunavut in 2022.<sup>39</sup> The reason this report states that income assistance is still insufficient for adequately providing households with a source of income to ensure that they are food secure is that QCFC has continued to see vast increases of people accessing their emergency food programs in Iqaluit. This indicates that with new records of meals being served everyday, these government policies are falling short in ensuring that people aren't going hungry everyday.

Clearly, there is a limited government capacity to address this problem. The issue is very clear and urgent action is necessary to avoid further harms for individuals and

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<sup>34</sup> Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, *"Inuit Statistical Profile 2018."*

<sup>35</sup> Maytree: Poverty, Rights, Change. *"Nunavut: Social Assistance Summaries."*

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Government of Nunavut, *"Statistics Home."*

families residing within the territory. These are severe concerns that have been identified throughout this project.

## PART VII: ANALYSIS OF FINDINGS

Due to the lack of research participation in the survey for this project, we can conclude several things. Firstly, there is severe participant exhaustion in Nunavut. This indicates that there has been some extractive research conducted on community members, particularly Indigenous peoples within the region, which has created an unbalanced power dynamic and lack of trust with researchers. That being said, there is a need for action in response to these studies that have already been conducted. Since the data has been compiled in regards to this research topic, it is time to move forward with action based on the findings of said studies.<sup>40</sup> This is where the advocacy component of the community engagement initiative can assist this project.

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<sup>40</sup> Sophie Wirzba, "COVID-19 is worsening food insecurity in Nunavut," *The McGill International Review*, June 30 2020; Andrée-Anne Fafard St-Germain, Tracey Galloway, and Valerie Tarasuk, "Food Insecurity in Nunavut Following the Introduction of Nutrition North Canada," *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 191, no. 20 (May 21, 2019): E552–58.; Fei Men et al., "Effect of Canada Child Benefit on Food Insecurity: A Propensity Score-matched Analysis," *American Journal of Preventive Medicine* 64, no. 6 (June 2023): 844–52.; Fei Men, Frank J. Elgar, and Valerie Tarasuk, "Food Insecurity Is Associated with Mental Health Problems among Canadian Youth," *Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health* 75, no. 8 (July 9, 2021): 741–48.; Fei Men and Valerie Tarasuk, "Food Insecurity amid the COVID-19 Pandemic: Food Charity, Government Assistance, and Employment," *Canadian Public Policy* 47, no. 2 (June 2021): 202–30.; Fei Men, Marcelo L. Urquia, and Valerie Tarasuk, "The Role of Provincial Social Policies and Economic Environments in Shaping Food Insecurity among Canadian Families with Children," *Preventive Medicine* 148 (July 2021): 106558.; Fei Men et al., "Food Insecurity Is Associated with Higher Health Care Use and Costs among Canadian Adults," *Health Affairs* 39, no. 8 (August 2020): 1377–85.; Erika M. Brown and Valerie Tarasuk, "Money Speaks: Reductions in Severe Food Insecurity Follow the Canada Child Benefit," *Preventive Medicine* 129 (December 2019): 105876.; Valerie Tarasuk, Andrée-Anne Fafard St-Germain, and Andrew Mitchell, "Geographic and Socio-Demographic Predictors of Household Food Insecurity in Canada, 2011–12," *BMC Public Health* 19, no. 1 (January 3, 2019).; Naomi Dachner and Valerie Tarasuk, "Tackling Household Food insecurity: An essential goal of a national food policy," *Canadian Food Studies* 5, no. 3 (September 2018): 230-47.; Qikiqtani Inuit Association, "Food Sovereignty and Harvesting," Qikiqtani Inuit Association, 2018.; Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, "Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy," Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, July 2021.; Maytree: Poverty, Rights, Change, "Nunavut," Maytree, 2023.; Maytree: Poverty, Rights, Change, "Nunavut: Social Assistance Summaries," Maytree, April 2023.

Core recommendations and findings that have been identified through the research, input of QCFC and advocacy campaign:

1. **Implement progressive income policies:** Allocate additional financial resources to support income policies that ensure that all Nunavummiut can afford nutritious, culturally appropriate food for their families. Policies like senior benefits, income assistance, and child benefit payments should be in line with the high cost of living in Nunavut and indexed to inflation. Progressive policies, such as Basic Income, should be explored.<sup>41</sup>
2. **Collaborate with Inuit organizations:** Engage in meaningful and collaborative partnerships with Inuit communities and the government in Nunavut. Indigenous-led solutions are crucial to addressing food insecurity. As such, in shifting from food security to food sovereignty, Inuit organizations should be involved in all levels of the decision-making processes that relate to food sovereignty initiatives. Food sovereignty, in this context, has a huge impact on self-determination and rebuilding and strengthening belonging to place, power and purpose, and is only possible when space is made for such collaboration, leadership, and decision-making.<sup>42</sup>
3. **Enhance infrastructure:** Invest in the development and improvement of infrastructure that facilitates access to affordable and nutritious country food and store-bought food, such as marine infrastructure processing and distribution

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<sup>41</sup> Stanford: Basic Income Lab, "What is UBI?" Stanford Basic Income Lab, 2023, <https://basicincome.stanford.edu/about/what-is-ubi/>.

<sup>42</sup> Samuel Centre For Social Connectedness, "About Social Connectedness: The 4 P's," Samuel Centre For Social Connectedness, April 2023, <https://www.socialconnectedness.org/about-us/about-social-connectedness/>.

facilities, transportation systems, and community markets.<sup>43</sup> These enhancements will improve food distribution networks, and increase both food sovereignty and access in remote communities.

4. **Support local food production:** Encourage and support local country and food production in Nunavut, including the promotion of traditional hunting and fishing practices.<sup>44</sup> Implement programs and policies that directly support the actions and livelihoods of hunters, such as offering hunters a liveable wage for their work. These efforts will not only enhance food security, but also contribute to economic development and cultural connection. In reconnecting with Inuit culture and traditional food systems, it allows for the decolonization of the current food system to take place and create better support for self-determination.
5. **Improve nutrition programs:** Strengthen existing nutrition programs in Nunavut, particularly those targeted towards vulnerable populations such as children, pregnant women, and the elderly. These programs should focus on providing access to healthy and culturally appropriate foods, as well as nutrition education and counselling. Ensuring that these nutrition education programs are accessible to the community is vital for continuing the grassroots programming that QCFC have been providing. A program that would allow for community centres, schools or social hubs in the region to be platforms or venues for nutrition education could allow community members to provide traditional teachings on how to

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<sup>43</sup> **Note:** Country food, or local food, in this report, refers to traditional foods that Inuit have relied on for generations. Things such as: berries, wild game like caribou, elk, seal, fish etc.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

harvest country foods, for example, and more generally make nutritional knowledge and information more widely accessible.

## **PART VII: IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

In reflecting on this research project, I've compiled several recommendations: Basic Income (BI), annual review of government policies, involving community stakeholder leaders in decision-making, investment in food-centric infrastructure and food sovereignty, and cultural connection and belonging.

### ***7.1 Basic Income (BI) Approaches***

The first is the implementation of a Basic Income (BI)<sup>45</sup> in Nunavut to address and fill the gaps in income assistance provided by the government, specifically, the gaps in the Nunavut Child Benefit. BI has been argued for and against on many occasions, but for the purposes of this research project, I will be arguing for a BI implementation specifically to assist with food access, food security, and eventually food sovereignty throughout the territory.

There have been several successful studies of Guaranteed Basic Income (GBI) experiments both throughout the world and within Canada. 'Mincome' was a study conducted in Dauphin and Winnipeg, Manitoba, and proved "that guaranteed annual

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<sup>45</sup>Basic Income projects are often categorized under two main umbrellas, first Guaranteed Basic Income (GBI) and second Universal Basic Income (UBI). Universal Basic Income (UBI) and Guaranteed Basic Income (GBI) though different, share many similar qualities. UBI in simplest terms ensures everyone is given a base livable income, regardless of their household earnings, however, houses with higher incomes pay higher taxes helping to mitigate unfair distribution. GBI is distributed only to people whose incomes fall below a certain economic threshold. Many organizations advocate for both GBI & UBI depending on the context and circumstances of their respective missions. For the purpose of this report, the author has included voices advocating for both to address food and income insecurity.

income could improve the lives of people in poverty.”<sup>46</sup> This experiment was conducted between 1974-1979 and aimed to establish:

- a. “If a guaranteed annual income would cause people to leave the workforce;
- b. how such a program could be administered;
- c. the social effects on the communities involved;
- d. if it could act as an alternative to existing social assistance programs such as welfare.”<sup>47</sup>

The experiment aimed to try different approaches to ‘Mincome’ payments in accordance with employment income (EI). “For every dollar of employment income that came in, the family ‘Mincome’ payment would be cut by 50 cents.”<sup>48</sup> The idea was to encourage people to work because they were “better off if they worked than if they didn’t.”<sup>49</sup> This also meant that participants and households who received some supplement in this program would receive additional support that they would not have been eligible for under a general welfare program.<sup>50</sup> The Executive Director of the Mincome project stated that, “Mincome provided people with assurance that whatever happens in their life, they will be able to put food on the table and a roof over their heads.”<sup>51</sup> The experiment’s funding ended with the electoral losses of both the Manitoba New Democratic Party (NDP) and the liberals in the federal government election, when the program was labelled “too expensive” and cancelled under the new government.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Travis Tomchuk, “Manitoba’s Mincome Experiment,” Canadian Museum for Human Rights, August 10 2022, <https://humanrights.ca/story/manitobas-mincome-experiment#:~:text=The%20research%20program%20hat%20studied,a%20program%20could%20be%20administered.>

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.



The data collected during the Mincome experiments was studied some years later and found several positive results. Mincome payments allowed mothers to “stay at home longer” with their infants and ensured that teenage boys could stay in school longer instead of dropping out “to help support their families.”<sup>53</sup> In addition to these findings, further analysis showed that Dauphin had experienced “lower rates of domestic violence, work-related injuries, farm and motor vehicle accidents, and mental illnesses” when Mincome payments were in place.<sup>54</sup>

A more recent example of Guaranteed Basic Income (GBI) in Canada was conducted in Ontario between 2017-2019.<sup>55</sup> Similarly to the Mincome experiment, it was designed as a potential alternative to the traditional social assistance program in the province.<sup>56</sup> After 18 months, the pilot project was cancelled under the Conservative Ford government, much like the Mincome project.<sup>57</sup> Although the pilot was cancelled, there were many efforts taken to gather the data and analyze the findings of the project. Results of the pilot showed that there were positive effects on “physical health, mental health and well-being” for participants and beneficiaries in their households.<sup>58</sup> Recipients of the basic income pilot were found to have adopted “healthier life choices” with less substance use (56% for tobacco and 48% for alcohol), less stress (86%), less likely to be depressed (83%) and have a more positive outlook on life (86%).<sup>59</sup> This

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<sup>53</sup> Travis Tomchuk, “*Manitoba’s Mincome Experiment*,” Canadian Museum for Human Rights, August 10 2022, <https://humanrights.ca/story/manitobas-mincome-experiment#:~:text=The%20research%20program%20that%20studied,a%20program%20could%20be%20administered>.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Mohammed Ferdosi, Tom McDowell, Wayne Lewchuk and Stephanie Ross, “*On how Ontario trialed basic income*,” UNESCO Inclusive Policy Lab, February 24 2022, <https://en.unesco.org/inclusivepolicylab/analytics/how-ontario-trialed-basic-income>.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

additionally placed less pressures on the public health care system, as people were accessing health care less frequently.<sup>60</sup> Overall, employment rates during this pilot remained stable and did not experience much fluctuation; “recipients continued to work and others were more empowered to locate more optimal jobs to improve their” education and training.<sup>61</sup> The authors of the paper argued that Basic Income (BI) could greatly assist in the post-COVID recovery in the economy and would allow for greater stability.<sup>62</sup>

Organizations such as Food Secure Canada have been advocating for Universal Basic Income (UBI)<sup>63</sup> implementation and for Indigenous food sovereignty to combat food insecurity, in particular in the northern regions of Canada.<sup>64</sup> Food Secure Canada acknowledges that individuals that identify as Indigenous or Black are more likely to experience food insecurity within Canada.<sup>65</sup> In acknowledging this, this organization believes that in order to accomplish the United Nations goals for sustainable development, there needs to be not just focus on food security but food sovereignty by nations to ensure that nobody is left out of these decisions. Additionally, Food Secure Canada believes that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada and the calls

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> Basic Income projects are often categorized under two main umbrellas, first Guaranteed Basic Income (GBI) and second Universal Basic Income (UBI). Universal Basic Income (UBI) and Guaranteed Basic Income (GBI) though different, share many similar qualities. UBI in simplest terms ensures everyone is given a base livable income, regardless of their household earnings, however, houses with higher incomes pay higher taxes helping to mitigate unfair distribution. GBI is distributed only to people whose incomes fall below a certain economic threshold. Many organizations advocate for both GBI & UBI depending on the context and circumstances of their respective missions. For the purpose of this report, the author has included voices advocating for both to address food and income insecurity.

<sup>64</sup> Sophie Wirzba, “COVID-19 is worsening food insecurity in Nunavut,” The McGill International Review, June 30 2020, <https://www.mironline.ca/covid-19-is-worsening-food-insecurity-in-nunavut/>.

<sup>65</sup> Food Secure Canada, “Sustainable Development Goals,” 2023, <https://foodsecurecanada.org/knowledge-hub/sustainable-development-goals/#:~:text=While%20food%20was%20often%20used.access%20to%20land%20and%20water.>

to action identified through them can be a tool to reaching the sustainable development goals from the United Nations as well as ensuring that the goals that were outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) can be achieved.<sup>66</sup>

For these reasons, and based on the studies conducted on BI implementation, I recommend a BI implementation for Nunavut. These two experiments were both cut in funding due to the election of conservative governments. With proposed fiscal constraints, and political changes being the primary reasons for cutting these programs, rather than ineffectiveness, worsening poverty, or negative community impacts, there is a strong case for implementing BI in Nunavut.

## ***7.2 Annual Policy Reviews***

The second recommendation is that there should be a more structured annual review of policies that are meant to assist folks living and residing within Nunavut. A structured annual review of funding policies such as the Nunavut Child Benefit, income assistance, disability support programming, and housing should be conducted on an annual basis compared to being done every couple decades. Having a more structured review of these programs will ensure that they remain realistic on the basic needs that they can cover to support households. This will ensure that policies remain updated to cover the essentials such as food, rent, utility costs etc. For example, an annual review of income assistance should be adjusted with inflation and cover the high cost of living in the region, ensuring that all single parent households are able to afford housing, food, and other basic necessities to keep families out of abject poverty. Supporting this, an article discussing the NNC subsidy states, “We need government interventions for food

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

security to be targeted. We need them to be social programs. We need them to help innovate access to healthy nutritious food.”<sup>67</sup>

### **7.3 Community Stakeholder Leadership in Decision-Making**

The third recommendation is to foster a more collaborative approach between community stakeholders and the territorial government. This would ensure that community stakeholders, such as QCFC, who provide vital services to community members can provide input and recommendations to governments based on what they are observing in the community as vital needs, or needs that are not being adequately met under programming, for example.

### **7.4 Invest in Food-Centric Infrastructure**

The last recommendation advocates for an increase in funding to support the local food system and infrastructure in Nunavut. A report compiled by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), “Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy”, discusses the lack of “food-specific infrastructure,” which remains a challenge for achieving food security in Nunavut.<sup>68</sup> The lack of local storage facilities—which accommodate food storage for months at a time—has resulted in the inability to harvest and store local country foods adequately for the year.<sup>69</sup> Supporting and properly financing the local food system is a crucial part in preventing food insecurity and encouraging food sovereignty. Providing adequate infrastructure and funding to maintain the infrastructure for food shipments or

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<sup>67</sup> Marc Fawcett-Atkinson, “Colonialism created food insecurity in the Arctic. It will take huge changes to end the crisis,” Canada’s National Observer: Food Insider Special Report, July 21 2021, <https://www.nationalobserver.com/2021/07/16/news/colonialism-food-insecurity-arctic-inuit-nunangat-strategy>.

<sup>68</sup> Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK), “Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy,” Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, July 2021, 29. [https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ITK\\_Inuit-Nunangat-Food-Security-Strategy\\_English.pdf](https://www.itk.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/ITK_Inuit-Nunangat-Food-Security-Strategy_English.pdf).

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 29.

storage is a necessity for everybody, regardless of geographical location. Ensuring that people can access good quality food to nourish themselves and their households is a human right, and should be a priority to the government.

### ***7.5 Food Sovereignty, Cultural Connection, and Belonging***

As noted previously, food sovereignty has a large role to play and provides an opportunity to decolonize local food systems within Nunavut. This report has discussed how the Canadian government has historically implemented colonial regulations and practices that have created imbalanced power dynamics between grocer retailers and consumers. Instead of supporting current systems such as Nutrition North Canada (NNC), that continuously benefits grocer retailers and neglects the well-being of Inuit peoples', these funds should be channeled into food sovereignty programs that support local and traditional food systems that have been in place for generations. Supporting the local food system can further benefit Inuit within the region, as it could allow for subsidies to be given to hunters to make country foods more accessible to all.

Channeling these resources to the community to support the existing food system also has an additional benefit of giving space for reconnecting with cultural traditions. This can have a huge beneficial impact for increasing community member's connection to the land and sense of belonging. Making space to ensure that youth in particular, have a strong sense of belonging within their territories, communities and families. I'm stressing this as an important recommendation that could further have the additional benefit of lowering suicide rates within Nunavut. In 2019, Nunavut's suicide rate was reported to be the highest in the world.<sup>70</sup> Typically suicide rates among

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<sup>70</sup> Helen Epstein, "The Highest Suicide Rate in the World," The New York Review of Books, October 10, 2019, <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/2019/10/10/inuit-highest-suicide-rate/>.

Indigenous peoples is higher than the national average.<sup>71</sup> The rate for Inuit was approximately nine times higher than the non-Indigenous rate.<sup>72</sup> In some cases, the rate of suicide among Inuit male youth are 40 times the national average for men in Canada.<sup>73</sup> By increasing youth's sense of belonging to cultural connection, it can have the additional benefit of reducing suicide rates and decreasing social isolation. So not only would this recommendation focus on providing food security by establishing food sovereignty, it will also act as a recommendation to lower social isolation by decolonizing the current and inadequate food system that is in place.

Putting these resources into this new system that I am recommending, would enable a process of decolonization to occur, and for Inuit to strengthen their traditional local food systems; systems that aren't controlled by Western notions of how the chain of food production and supply occurs.

## **PART IV: CONCLUSION**

The main objectives of this research project were to assess how pandemic-related income benefits impacted Iqalummiut experiencing food insecurity, and analyze the impacts that income-related benefits have on emergency food programs within Iqaluit. The findings of this research project demonstrate that there is an over-surveying of Iqalummiut, and an under-serving of vital services, resulting in

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<sup>71</sup> Mohan B. Kumar and Michael Tjepkema, "Suicide among First Nations people, Métis and Inuit (2011-2016): Findings from the 2011 Canadian Census Health and Environment cohort (CanCHEC)," National Household Survey: Aboriginal Peoples, Statistics Canada, June 28, 2019, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/99-011-x/99-011-x2019001-eng.htm>.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Affleck, William, John L. Oliffe, Martha Malaya Inukpuk, Raymond Tempier, Francine Darroch, Allison Crawford, and Monique Séguin. "Suicide amongst Young Inuit Males: The Perspectives of Inuit Health and Wellness Workers in Nunavik." *SSM - Qualitative Research in Health* 2 (December 2022): 100069. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssmqr.2022.100069>.

participant exhaustion where residents no longer wish to participate in research projects.

The findings from this report are a call to action. One of the primary goals of this report is to convey the pressing need for advocacy to push change in Nunavut. The importance of community engagement and empowerment through cultural connection is a vital pathway to achieving food sovereignty in Nunavut. As stressed in these recommendations, collaboration with community stakeholders is vital and non-negotiable for this work to be done, and food security to be established. To conclude, the impact that food sovereignty can have on self-determination, decolonization of food systems, and rebuilding or affirming belonging to place, power and purpose, will only be possible when food security is established in the region.

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If you would like to further support this research project and advocacy initiative please feel free to donate to or contact QCFC, or reach out to SCSC on how to get involved or fill out the petition.

QCFC donation link: <https://www.qajuqturvik.ca/english/donations>

Petition link: <https://chnq.it/MZKThsqZOR>



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