



# FOOD SECURITY

## QANUILIRPITAA? 2017

Nunavik Inuit Health Survey

Nunavimmiut have a diet comprised of foods that come from stores and country foods that are hunted, fished or gathered on the land. Gaining access to and consuming healthy, nutritious, safe and desired foods in adequate amounts on a daily basis are critical for individual health and well-being. Despite the recognized importance of this basic need and human right, an increasing number of Inuit across the North are reporting significant challenges in meeting the requirements to be food secure. *“Food security [is] a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life”* (FAO, 2002). When unable to fulfill these needs and preferences, individuals are considered to be food insecure. Being food insecure has previously been associated in Nunavik and elsewhere with shorter stature, poorer nutritional status, increased chronic disease risk, and poorer mental health. In past studies, estimates of food insecurity in the region have ranged between 22% and 77% depending on the survey tool used.

The objectives of the present report are: (i) to document food insecurity status among Nunavimmiut aged 16 years and older using both the same method used in the *Qanuippitaa?* 2004 Inuit health survey and an adapted version of the USDA Household Food Security Survey Module; (ii) to document food preferences, strategies

used when individuals could not gain access to enough food, and food sharing behaviours; and (iii) to examine differences between groups and associations with key socio-demographic characteristics in Nunavik regarding food insecurity status, food preferences, coping strategies used, and food sharing behaviours.

The recognized and widely used USDA food security evaluation tool was adapted in this survey to be more inclusive of the different kinds of food and modes of accessing food common in Nunavik. The survey found that up to 78% of Nunavimmiut 16 years and older were food insecure in 2017. Nearly 12% were classified as being marginally food insecure, 48% were moderately food insecure, and 18% were reported to be severely food insecure in the year prior to the survey. Comparing results for the one question asked in *Qanuippitaa?* 2004, a greater proportion of individuals were classified as being food insecure in 2017 compared to 2004 (35% versus 22%).

In 2017, 66% of Nunavimmiut reported being worried ‘sometimes’ or ‘often’ that the food they had would run out before they could get more, 55% reported not being able to eat healthy meals, 26% said they had to cut the size of their meal or skip meals, 23% experienced hunger and were not able to eat while 12% of Nunavimmiut reported having to go a full day without eating because of a lack of resources to get food.

Being food insecure was more common among: youth aged 16 to 19 compared to adults or elders, Hudson Bay residents compared to Ungava Bay or Hudson Strait residents, individuals making less than \$40,000 annually compared to those making \$40,000 or more, individuals who had completed secondary school or less compared to those who had completed more than secondary education, unemployed individuals compared to individuals who were employed full-time, individuals who did not have access to a vehicle to move around town compared to those who did, and individuals living in small communities compared to those living in large communities.

Pregnant women were found to be more at risk of food insecurity than non-pregnant women. Food insecurity also increased with the number of children in the household. While no associations were found between time spent on the land and total food insecurity, individuals who never go out on the land were more likely to be severely food insecure compared to individuals who go out on the land occasionally or often. No associations were identified with food security by sex or household type (single or multi headed); however, when considering specific questions, men reported experiencing hunger and not eating for a full day in higher proportions than women did.

In terms of food preferences, most Nunavimmiut reported preferring a mix of country foods and store-bought foods (68%). Food preferences varied with age, with elders being the most likely to report preferring country than the other age groups.

The majority of Nunavimmiut reported using at least one food support program in the year prior to the survey (93%). The most commonly used programs were community freezers (82%) and hunter support programs in the communities (65%). Nunavimmiut who were food insecure more commonly reported using community freezers and food coupon programs. Individuals using more than 3 food support programs were more likely to be moderately food insecure than individuals using 1-3 food support programs.

Nunavimmiut who reported not having enough to eat in their home or having gone a whole day without eating were asked about their coping strategies. The most frequent coping strategies used were to ask for food from family/friends (81%), have someone else in the household gather country foods (74%), buy the cheapest food that would feed the most people (65%), gather country food themselves (62%), and borrow money for food from family/friends (60%). Nunavimmiut borrowing money, buying the cheapest food and asking a health worker for help reported being more food insecure than others.

Sharing food is widely practiced in Nunavik. Almost all Nunavimmiut (93%) gave food to 1 or more households, and 86% of individuals received food from 1 or more households in the year prior to the survey. Nunavimmiut who reported receiving food from other households more than they gave food to other households were more likely to be food insecure.

Findings of the *Qanuillirpitaa?* 2017 Inuit health survey indicate that food insecurity appears to have grown since 2004, and is a major issue in the region. More in-depth multivariate analyses are needed to better identify food security determinants as well as associations with country and market food consumption frequencies, nutritional status as well as physical and mental health outcomes among different groups, particularly youth, pregnant women and households with numerous children. In light of the growing socio-ecological, demographic and economic changes in the region, the results presented here call for continued mobilization of multiple sectors to better understand and take action on this important topic across Nunavik and at the provincial and national levels. Food insecurity of this scale represents a significant social and environmental injustice.



*Qanuillirpitaa? 2017 is a population health survey carried out in Nunavik from August to October 2017. A total of 1 326 Nunavimmiut aged 16 and over from all 14 villages participated to this survey.*

**Nakurmiik to all Nunavimmiut who contributed to this important health survey!**

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