

# Evidence Review & Recommendations

## Identification of Food Insecurity in Healthcare Settings: Executive Summary

### Background

- Household food insecurity (HFI) is an income-based determinant of health that impacts physical, mental, and social well-being.
- Healthcare providers are likely to encounter patients in food-insecure households in the course of their practice, either knowingly or unknowingly.
- Considerations for screening to improve the health of individuals in the Canadian health and social system context is an important question.

### This Report

- Summarizes current published evidence on HFI screening tools.
- Critically reviews the evidence for the effectiveness of HFI screening in identifying and addressing HFI.
- Presents the option of screening for poverty as an alternative to screening for HFI.

### Key Findings

The question of screening for HFI in healthcare settings is more complex than determining whether valid and reliable tools exist for healthcare setting-specific identification of HFI.

Screen for poverty to identify this income-related issue, rather than specifically screening for HFI.

While long, short, and brief tools exist to identify HFI, the predominant action HFI screening leads to is food program referral, which is not an effective or recommended screening action.

Screening needs to lead to actions to address financial strain.

### Recommendations

- Ensure screening tools and approaches are:
  - Consistent with the Canadian social context that addresses HFI with income policy versus food provision policy.
  - Based on research that establishes financial strain and inadequate income as the root cause of HFI.
  - Aligned with Canadian and Albertan actions on screening for and addressing poverty in healthcare settings.
  - Based on the understanding that screening is only one component of incorporating social determinants of health (SDOH) into client care processes.
  - Based on the concept of SDOH as a structural issue.
- If asked for guidance regarding HFI screening:
  - Recommend screening for poverty vs. screening for HFI.
  - Rationale: A poverty screen approach supports the identification, discussion and interventions around issues that are rooted in financial strain, including HFI, and are best addressed by income approaches.
- If asked for guidance regarding screening tools:
  - Recommend screening for poverty using the [1-item tool](#) currently in use in Canada and Alberta.
- Critically assess the preparedness of the team to screen for and effectively intervene to identify and mitigate threats to individual health posed by social conditions.
- Continue to provide an evidence-based lens to the HFI and SDOH screening healthcare discussions.

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### Complete Findings and References:

Please refer to the full report for complete findings and recommendations: [Food Insecurity | Alberta Health Services](#)

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