



Food Safety and Food Security in British Columbia

Promoting Effective Inter-Sectoral Collaboration

Promoting Successful Collaborations

The food safety and food security sectors in British Columbia aim to improve the health of the population as it relates to food and eating. Collaboration between the sectors provides opportunities for sharing best practices and addressing common challenges faced by public health dietitians and environmental health officers.

There are many examples of successful collaborations between the food safety and food security sectors in B.C. Joint projects and programs as well as formal collaborative efforts have occurred in the areas of healthy eating in schools, food in childcare facilities, temporary markets and farm gate sales, gleaning and donation, meat regulation, and others.

This resource is intended to provide public health practitioners, decision-makers, and food security organizations with ideas to support future collaborative efforts. It identifies some of the facilitators and barriers to effective collaboration as well as the range of formats that collaboration can take. It is based on a 2015 literature review and key informant interviews with the food safety and food security sectors from the regional health authorities, provincial government, and non-governmental organizations.

Why Collaborate?

Food safety and food security are linked.

- Food safety is a component of food security. Both sectors use a population health approach to consider factors such as poverty, land use and agricultural practices, climate change, capacity building, and sustainability.
- People who are food insecure tend to eat less nutritious and lower quality foods and may not be equipped to store and handle food safely.
- The food safety and food security sectors both have the potential to be affected by issues such as changing demographics, population growth, changing food preferences, and climate change. Collaboration can lead to more effective understanding of and responses to these pressures.
- Collaboration between the two sectors can improve the consistency of interpretation and application of food safety regulations, resulting in more positive outcomes for both sectors.
- Many food security initiatives, such as community kitchens, farmers' markets, and urban agriculture, promote cooking and local food production and processing. This creates opportunities to engage in food safety education and to develop processes that reduce food safety risks.

This project was commissioned by the BC Centre for Disease Control as part of a Population and Public Health Prevention Project called *Through an Equity Lens: A New Look at Environmental Health*, and PHSA Population and Public Health. For more information or for a copy of the full research report, please contact Karen Rideout (Karen.Rideout@bccdc.ca) or Melanie Kurrein (Melanie.Kurrein@phsa.ca) or visit the "Food Access, Food Security & Health" web page at www.bccdc.ca/foodhealth/FoodSecurity.





Food Safety and Food Security

Core Public Health Programs in British Columbia

Both food safety and food security are core public health programs in B.C. These are long term public health programs, based on the best available evidence, that health authorities provide as they seek to improve the health of their populations.

- The **food safety** program focuses on improving the health of the population by implementing strategies designed to minimize the risk of food-borne illnesses and outbreaks.
- The **food security** program focuses on supporting access to, and availability of, sufficient, safe, nutritious, and personally acceptable foods that are produced in a sustainable way.
- Individuals working in food safety and food security often work in different areas of public health. The food safety sector is situated within environmental health while the food security sector is part of healthy living.
- Food safety specialists rely on health protection strategies that consider health authorities to be responsible for protecting the public from illness and injury, including from food. People working in food security rely on health promotion and population health strategies to help increase access to and availability of healthy food.
- Both sectors have the **same ultimate goal** of improving the health of the population as it relates to food and eating.

Childcare Facilities

By working together, environmental health officers and public health dietitians found ways to meet both the food safety and healthy eating goals for children's snacks prepared on site. They assessed the risks specific to childcare settings and developed a plan to prepare and offer fruit smoothies in buildings without permanent sanitation facilities. They designed temporary sanitation set-ups that worked for those settings and met the regulatory objectives.



What Works

Common Facilitators of Successful Collaborations

Key informant interviews with mid- to late-career professionals from B.C.'s food safety and food security sectors identified key facilitators to collaboration. Below are general considerations to guide future activities.

1 Early engagement and ongoing communication. Early engagement with the other sector – once a particular idea is being considered – is important for successful collaborations. Identify one or more overall goals in common, focus on achieving the desired population health outcomes, and be solutions-focused (as opposed to focusing on the continued use of current or usual processes).

2 Precedent, not prescription. Examples of collaboration from other jurisdictions can be a key facilitator as they provide a precedent from which individuals can promote the viability of a project or program within their organization (“someone else has done it... how could we?”). Adapting successful approaches to local context can provide opportunities for innovation and shared learning.

3 Creative problem solving. Creative problem solving by individuals who are confident in their expertise, who have the authority to make decisions and who are receptive to new ideas is valuable to the success of many projects.

4 Leadership from the top. Provincial level support and clear direction from health authority leadership are essential. This clarifies an overall vision and validates efforts toward collaboration and action at the local level.

5 Joint leadership and decision-making. Leadership and decision making that occurs jointly and that allows for input from all involved players can better ensure that a program or project considers the different factors that influence its implementation and outcome. Projects have successfully used shared leadership models, joint messaging in media, articles and reports, and joint membership on committees or explicit cross-discipline or cross-function committees.

6 Collaboration as a process. Successful collaboration requires both formal and informal relationship-building. Early engagement between the sectors and opportunities for iterative questioning and consultation throughout a project allow potential issues and possible solutions to emerge.

Temporary Food Markets

Temporary food markets, such as farmers' markets, are often promoted as strategies to increase local food security. They also introduce new food safety risks. Previous regulations and policies prevented the sale of many foods at temporary markets – resulting in tensions and misinformation and inhibiting development of innovative solutions to improve both food safety and food security. Food safety authorities and farmers' market representatives collaborated to develop new processes for consultation, questioning, piloting, and ongoing engagement. This led to new guidelines for temporary food markets that allow people to sell lower risk foods they prepare at home and provide direction for people who want a permit to sell higher risk foods.



Getting Started

Collaboration Begins At Any Level

Collaborative processes are supported by the presence of numerous facilitators – the more activities and structures that are in place to support collaboration between the food safety and food security sectors, the easier and smoother it will be for collaborations to occur and succeed.

At an individual level:

Informal relationship-building can support formal working relationships in the long-run.

- Make time to have ‘hallway’ or ‘water cooler’ chats.
- Provide brief updates on current projects at meetings with diverse membership.
- Take the time to learn about the work of individuals in another sector – what tools, processes, and issues do they use and address?

At a project or program level:

Work to find common goals. While working from different mandates and perspectives, both sectors have the same ultimate goals related to healthy food.

- Use planning and management processes that look at the ‘bigger picture’ to help find greater value in working together. Group meetings, debriefings, and early engagement between the sectors can help to increase understanding of each sector’s goals, priorities, and constraints (e.g., resources, legislation).
- Share stories of successes and promising practices as a way of networking and learning together.
- Take time to discuss difficulties and address ‘the elephants in the room.’



At an organizational or management level:

Create opportunities for co-learning between the sectors. Be aware of how frequent staff turnover or not being located in the same area or building can affect relationship-building with the other sector.

- Support cross-disciplinary and inter-agency committee meetings and other activities.
- Encourage early engagement and consultation between the two sectors.
- Provide and encourage continuing education and job shadowing in related fields.
- Include an overview of related sectors in new employee orientations.
- Develop and update an organizational list of who can be contacted for different functions (e.g., who provides food safety training? who consults on nutrition?).

References

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This research summary was prepared by T. Nathoo, based on a report by Majowicz & Speed (2015).



BC Centre for Disease Control
An agency of the Provincial Health Services Authority

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