

Food Assistance Services in the Sooke-West Shore Region



Background

- The Western Communities, comprising Langford South, Sooke, Colwood, Langford North/Highlands, Metchosin, and the Juan de Fuca Coast, have a combined population of approximately 107,000 residents (2021 Census)
- Many individuals and families are struggling with the cost of living
- Approximately 17% of the population of South Vancouver Island is experiencing food insecurity (2023), with Indigenous communities, young adults, lower-income households, and individuals with racialized identities being especially affected (2023 Canadian Community Health Survey; 2023 BC SPEAK Survey)
- The population of Western Communities is expected to grow by 26.7% by 2032
- Population growth, combined with ongoing affordability challenges, underscores the importance of maintaining a robust and resilient food assistance service system capable of meeting current and future community needs

Survey of Food Assistance Service Providers



- In October 2025, food assistance service providers identified the need for a survey of existing services to examine and strengthen their collective efforts
- A survey was developed by the Village Initiative, Community Safety Planning Council, and the Island Health Nutrition team
- The aim of the survey was to assess the current state of food assistance services that support food security in the Sooke-West Shore region, with a focus on identifying challenges and opportunities
- Results were analysed by the Island Health Community Health Promotion team





Who Participated?

- Seventeen organizations participated in the survey, a 100% response rate
- The 17 participating organizations described offering 20 services and programs, corresponding to food banks (25%), school-based programs (25%), neighbourhood food pantries (15%), food delivery services (15%), community meals (10%), food rescue and distribution network (5%), and food literacy support (5%)

What Did We Learn?



- Food assistance programs offered a variety of food types, including non-perishable foods (65% of programs), perishable foods (65%), food hampers (35%), dietary-specific items (35%), infant formula (30%), and prepared meals (25%)
- Food is sourced through personal and retailer donations, food purchasing, food rescue, and growing food
- Participating organizations served between 1-2500 households per day
- Populations served diverse populations, including newcomers, Indigenous Peoples, individuals experiencing homelessness, children and youth, and racialized communities
- Many organizations served multiple municipalities, with Colwood and Langford being the most served and Highlands and the Juan de Fuca Coast the least served
- Hours of operation varied, from 24/7 neighbourhood food pantries to food banks operating during standard business hours
- Volunteer support is essential to the delivery of most food assistance programs
- **Demand for the majority of programs (85%) has grown over the past year and approximately half of the food assistance programs are at or over capacity**

What are the Key Challenges?



- **Insufficient Food Supply** to address demand
- **Lack of Diversity in the Food Supply**, such as access to gluten-free items, perishables, and non-perishables
- **Need for Infrastructure** such as transportation vans, larger spaces, and cold storage facilities
- **Need for Volunteers** and human capacity to meet needs of the population
- **Rising Operational Costs**
- **Emotional Labour** associated with providing food assistance services



Recommendations for Service Providers

Based on the survey results and suggestions from participating organizations, the following recommendations were identified for service providers:

- **Maintain the Collective:** Continue advancing the West Shore & Sooke Food Security Collective and explore resourcing to support ongoing collaboration.
- **Strengthen Coordination:** Align services, including operating hours and geographic coverage, and strengthen connections with other regional food networks and local Nations to reduce service gaps and duplication.
- **Maintain Resources:** Maintain a shared food services calendar and map, with clear responsibility assigned to a lead organization for regular updates.
- **Recruit Volunteers Collaboratively:** Partner across organizations and with groups such as Volunteer Victoria to recruit, train, and share volunteers.
- **Use Data to Inform Service Delivery:** Gather qualitative and quantitative information from clients to better understand needs and inform program planning. Repeat this survey on a regular basis to monitor changes in demand, identify emerging challenges, and uncover opportunities for collaboration.

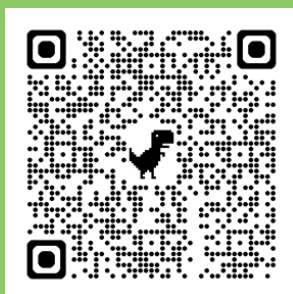
Recommendations for Funders, Municipalities, and Partners



Based on the survey results and suggestions from participating organizations, the following recommendations were identified for funders, municipalities, and partners:

- **Provide Consistent Funding:** Offer multi-year, renewable funding to food assistance organizations that covers operational costs and capacity building.
- **Invest in Infrastructure:** Fund essential infrastructure needed to deliver food assistance services, such as cold storage facilities and transportation vans.
- **Provide Space:** Increase access to affordable space by making public facilities available and offering leases below commercial market rates.
- **Create a West Shore-Sooke Food Policy Council:** Establish a collaborative body of community organizations, municipalities, Indigenous partners, and other stakeholders to inform and advance local food policy.
- **Strengthen the Local Food Economy:** Protect agricultural land, support local food producers, and expand opportunities for community food growing, harvesting, processing, and distribution.
- **Lower the Cost of Living:** Increase the supply of affordable housing, improve transportation networks, expand access to childcare, support job creation, and advocate for income-based solutions from provincial and national governments.

Map of food assistance
service locations:



Additional Information

Additional results and recommendations can be found in the accompanying report, available at thevillageinitiative.ca.

For any questions about the survey and the results, please contact: raquel.burgess@islandhealth.ca.

