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INUIT TAPIRIIT KANATAMI

Inuit-Led Framework to Replace Nutrition North Canada Program

March 2026

About Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (ITK) is the national, democratic Inuit representative organization whose mandate is determined by Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., Makivvik, and Nunatsiavut Government. These four Inuit Treaty Organizations have each signed one or more modern treaties with the Crown. They are the only Section 35 Inuit rights holding organizations in the country and their members include all Inuit.

Inuit are one of three Indigenous Peoples recognized by Section 35 of Canada's Constitution. Our homeland, Inuit Nunangat, makes up 40 percent of the country's land area, 72 per cent of its coastline, 32 percent of Canada's surface water, and significant marine areas. Our people monitor, use and manage all of it.

Inuit Treaty Organizations form the voting members of the Board of Directors of ITK and Inuit Circumpolar Council Canada. ITK works closely with ICC Canada, whose mandate is to strengthen unity among Inuit internationally. Pauktuutit Inuit Women of Canada and the National Inuit Youth Council are also members of the ITK and ICC Canada Boards serving non-voting roles.

Vision

Canadian Inuit are prospering through unity and self-determination.

Mission

Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami is the national voice for protecting and advancing the rights and interests of Inuit in Canada.

Background

Inuit living in Inuit Nunangat experience the highest documented prevalence of food insecurity of any Indigenous people in a developed country.¹ According to the 2022 Indigenous Peoples Survey (IPS), up to 70.5% of Inuit aged 15 and over in Inuit Nunangat live in food-insecure households,² compared to 18% of Canadian households in the ten provinces.³ The current way our food system functions across Inuit Nunangat directly contributes to food insecurity. Government policies, programs and investments have an incredible impact on food choices, food availability and food prices in our communities.⁴

Nutrition North Canada (NNC) has not been effective in improving food security in Inuit Nunangat. Incremental adjustments to the program in its current form are insufficient to address the structural drivers of food insecurity in the region. The **Inuit Nunangat Food Security Strategy** outlines a comprehensive, Inuit-led vision grounded in self-determination, food sovereignty, and systems-level reform. However, previous evaluations and research — including the horizontal evaluation of NNC finalized in October 2025 by Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada — indicate that while some NNC components contribute to addressing aspects of Inuit food security, the program overall remains fragmented, inflexible, and not fully aligned with Inuit priorities as articulated in the Strategy. The program must be replaced by an evidence-based food security initiative co-developed with Inuit so that it responds to the unique situation of our communities.

The right to adequate food and to be free from hunger is a fundamental human right affirmed by the International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights in 1976. Article 11 of the Covenant affirms the right to adequate food. However, despite ratifying the Covenant, Canada lacks the policy or other mechanisms needed to implement this fundamental human right, nor does it enforce implementation by provincial and territorial governments.

Past federal-led initiatives have proceeded with limited Inuit engagement, highlighting the need for a coordinated, Inuit-led framework to guide program design and oversight. The recommendations provided in this submission are intended to form the framework for a new, federal food security program to replace NNC. They focus on the policy measures and investments needed to address the main drivers of food insecurity in Inuit Nunangat.

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- 1 Rosol, R. et al. "Prevalence of affirmative responses to questions for food insecurity: International Polar Year Inuit Health Survey, 2007–2008." *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*, vol. 70, no. 5 (2011), pp. 488–497 and Egeland, G.M. "IPY Inuit Health Survey speaks to need to address inadequate housing, food insecurity and nutrition transition." *International Journal of Circumpolar Health*, vol. 70, no. 5 (2011), pp. 444–446.
 - 2 Statistics Canada. *Indigenous Peoples Survey, Custom Table – Unpublished Data*, 2022. Government of Canada, 2023.
 - 3 Li, T., Fafard St-Germain, A.A., and Tarasuk, V. *Household Food Insecurity in Canada*, 2022. Toronto: PROOF, 2022. <https://proof.utoronto.ca/resource/household-food-insecurity-in-canada-2022/>
 - 4 Kenny, T.-A., Li, N., Kim, M., Charmaine, T., Wesche, S., MacLean, J., and Wolki, C. "Unintended consequences: Food prices increase in an Arctic Indigenous community amidst road infrastructure development and loss of federal freight subsidy." *Frontiers in Nutrition*, vol. 12 (2025), Article 1521800. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fnut.2025.1521800>

The centerpiece of NNC is a retail subsidy premised on an assumption that the subsidy will be passed on to the primarily Inuit consumers who live in Inuit Nunangat. NNC does not shift decision-making power, economic benefits, or long-term capacity into Inuit hands, nor is the program designed to improve food security. Improving food security requires an evidence-based approach focused on systematically addressing the drivers of food insecurity among Inuit, rather than pursuing incremental adjustments to ineffective policy levers.

Principles

The following principles should guide the development of a new federal food security program replacing NNC. These principles reflect the need to prioritize evidence-based interventions, local decision-making and control, Inuit self-determination, and support for developing the Inuit Nunangat food system.

- Consistency with the Inuit Nunangat Policy
- Respect and support for Inuit self-determination
- Outcome-based affordability protections
- Structural cost reduction, not retail compensation
- Dignity, choice, and community control (e.g., community food centres, food hubs)
- Recognition of country food as a core part of the food system, not a supplement
- Sustainability through predictable funding aligned with Inuit strategies
- Investment in community infrastructure

Recommendations

The following recommendations are intended to inform the program components of a new federal program to replace NNC. Taken together, they provide a framework for a new, evidence-based federal program that would be both more responsive to our needs and priorities and more effective in reducing hunger in the region.

1. **NNC must be replaced by a new, evidence-based food security program:** NNC was conceived as an economic development program and has proven ineffective in either improving earnings in the region or making food more affordable. NNC must be replaced by a new, evidence-based federal program focused on remedying the drivers of food insecurity in Inuit Nunangat. The program should be designed and implemented through a coordinated whole-of-government approach across all responsible federal departments and agencies with food security-related programs to ensure policy coherence, reduce fragmentation, and address food security in an integrated manner. It should be supported by a co-developed monitoring and evaluation framework grounded in Inuit priorities, with success contingent on measurably improving food security. Its components should be distinctions-based to respond to the unique situation of Inuit.

2. **Redesign the food subsidy component of the program:** The food subsidy must be fundamentally redesigned to align with Inuit-specific priorities in program design and delivery, with strengthened transparency, accountability, and measurable affordability outcomes. While a subsidy remains necessary to reduce food costs in the North and bring them closer to southern prices, the current model lacks transparency and clear tracking of how benefits reach consumers. Reform must address both the subsidy structure and the mechanisms that affect affordability outcomes. To ensure effective reform, the program must incorporate two interdependent pillars:
 - **Pillar 1: Subsidize food freight and transportation costs instead of retailers:** NNC's current retailer-based approach is ineffective and results in subsidy leakage, as retailers absorb the subsidy while selling eligible food items at inflated prices. The new federal program should instead prioritize subsidizing transportation and shipping costs, which are the primary drivers of both high food and living costs. Subsidies should be contingent on retailers demonstrating that funds are applied to freight costs.
 - **Pillar 2: Regulate retail food pricing:** The new federal program should regulate retail food prices rather than rely solely on pass-through requirements. A direct price regulation model would be clearer, more enforceable, and better aligned with affordability outcomes. Subsidy payments should require transparent pricing data, benchmark prices for staple goods, and justification for price increases based on legitimate cost pressures. The objective is to reduce arbitrary disparities across communities and shift the burden of proof to retailers.
3. **Enable direct financial support mechanisms:** The new program should enable flexible, direct financial/food support mechanisms, designed to empower individuals and families to access and afford the food they need. Eligibility criteria and distribution methods should be determined by Inuit Treaty Organizations to reflect regional needs and community priorities. This approach ensures Inuit-led design, avoids one-size-fits-all solutions, and supports practical, community-based delivery models rather than a centralized national program. Similar regional or targeted federal initiatives have demonstrated effectiveness in improving food security among the most vulnerable, including Inuit-specific programs during the pandemic and through the Inuit Child First Initiative.

4. **Incentivize and support the establishment of co-ops and other locally owned food retail options:** Inuit-controlled co-ops such as la Fédération des coopératives du Nouveau-Québec (FCNQ) in Nunavik enable Inuit communities in that region to exercise greater control over the food supply chain and, consequently, over food pricing compared to communities that depend on southern-based retailers. The program should incentivize the establishment of co-ops and other locally owned food retail options (i.e. country food stores) by Inuit communities and organizations through grants supporting start-up costs, capital costs, and governance and planning.

Transition from corporate retail dominance to Inuit-owned co-operatives

Dimension	Corporate Retail Model	Inuit-Owned Co-ops
Ownership	External shareholders	Community members
Decision-making	Head offices in the South	Local & regional Inuit governance
Pricing logic	Profit + risk buffering	Cost recovery + community benefit
Subsidy capture	Partial pass-through	Direct community benefit
Food selection	Shelf-life & margin driven	Nutrition, culture, preference-driven
Economic impact	Capital outflow	Local reinvestment
Accountability	Federal audits	Social + economic accountability
Dignity & trust	Transactional	Relational


5. **Expand support for harvesting and community-led food security initiatives:** The program should provide a single-window approach to providing flexible, long-term funding for harvesting and other community-led food security initiatives. Inuit have welcomed the Harvester Support Grant and the Community Food Programs Fund because they recognize and supports local food programming and harvesting as an integral component of the Inuit Nunangat food system. This support should be expanded through long-term, predictable funding for harvesting equipment as well as the processing, storage and distribution of harvested foods. The grant should also support broader community-led food security initiatives that complement harvesting activities, such as the development of community food hubs, country food stores, soup kitchens, or elder food assistance. The objective of this support should be to scale up successful community initiatives.

- 6. Utilize an Inuit Nunangat food guide to make program determinations:** The Canada Food Guide is not suitable for application in Inuit Nunangat, where our food system is distinct from all other regions of the country. Inuit Nunangat is the only region of the country where a significant share of the population depends on country foods to meet our day-to-day food needs as well as to maintain our language, culture, and way of life. The new program should instead utilize an Inuit Nunangat food guide developed by Inuit that reflects this unique reality to determine which food items are eligible for subsidy or purchase under the program. An Inuit Nunangat food guide would reflect Inuit food systems, including country food, be adaptable to regional realities, and support culturally appropriate nutrition outcomes.
- 7. Ensure the program is data-driven through research, data, and accountability:** The program should utilize data and information gathered from retailers and consumers to adjust and improve program interventions. This can be achieved through two interconnected mechanisms: federal-led monitoring and accountability, and Inuit-led research activities, by prioritizing the provision of Inuit-led research grants to ensure that we are able to conduct our own food security research. It can also be achieved by making subsidy eligibility contingent on data and transparency obligations that enable the federal government to monitor and evaluate whether subsidies and other interventions are effective.




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