

COVID-19: FIRST WAVE IMPACTS ON THE CHARITABLE FOOD SECTOR IN MANITOBA, CANADA

Investigating new policies/procedures and challenges in response to the pandemic and public health orders using qualitative thematic analysis



KEY INFORMANT INTERVIEWS

N = 10: Executive Directors & Coordinators



SOCIAL MEDIA COMMUNICATIONS

N = 92: Organization websites & Facebook pages



NEWS MEDIA ARTICLES

N = 60: National & regional news websites

NEWLY IMPLEMENTED POLICIES/PROCEDURES

CHANGES TO PROGRAMS/SERVICES

- switch to pre-packaged hampers
- switch to take-out meals only
- home deliveries for clients
- temporarily close or switch locations to comply with pandemic guidelines

FINANCE & ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES

- organizational meetings cancelled
- reallocating funds to priority programs
- accepting monetary donations only
- minimize barriers for customers to access donations

SAFETY PROTOCOLS

- physical distancing
- limit personnel in building
- new sanitizing procedures
- masks, gloves, handwashing

CHANGES TO PAID & VOLUNTEER STAFFING

- increase staffing to meet demand
- elderly volunteers request or choose to stay home
- adjust scheduling to reduce staffing per shift
- limit volunteers shifts per week

ADVOCACY FOR RESOURCES & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

- switch to virtual fundraising to replace traditional food drives & donations in grocery stores
- collaboration with other community groups for delivery, donations, and assistance
- request to gov't and wider community for food & supplies
- appealing to provincial gov't for financial supports

“Normally, it uses a "client choice" model, where people are able to browse the shelves and select the items they need. These days, that's not possible. Instead, clients must wait outside the building, not always ideal depending on the weather. They're let in one at a time, must wear masks, and are given bags of groceries put together by the volunteers.” – CBC News, May 24, 2020

CHALLENGES EXPERIENCED

- stop accepting food donations due to limited storage capacity
- decreased fundraising opportunities
- restrict on-site client drop-ins
- limited capacity to provide masks to clients for entry

- rapid increase in clients accessing program
- maintaining sufficient food supply
- increased barriers for food insecure volunteers & clients

- unreliability of food donations from retail grocers
- difficult for clients to transport prepackaged hampers
- switching to take-out only for meals was time-consuming and costly

- insufficient staff for workload
- staff experiencing burn-out
- temporary loss of staff due to self-isolation or child-care
- volunteer hesitancy

FOOD SUPPLY: ACQUISITION & DISTRIBUTION

ADMINISTRATION & OPERATIONAL CHANGES

INCREASED DEMAND & NEED FOR SERVICES

MANAGING STAFF & VOLUNTEER RESOURCES

LACK OF GOVERNMENT RESPONSE & STRUCTURAL SUPPORTS

EMOTIONAL VULNERABILITY & PERCEPTION OF SAFETY

INTERNAL & EXTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS

- unsustainable & insufficient financial supports for low-income clients
- poor emergency guidelines compared with other provinces
- increase in operational costs
- no guidance or feedback from public health for implementing safety protocols

- adjustments to preserve client dignity & confidentiality
- clients fearful despite safety restrictions in place
- staff shamed at grocery store for purchasing larger quantities

- struggle to keep up with changing guidelines
- lack of communication between local charitable organizations
- difficulties informing clients without access to internet or telephone about program changes

“Just the rate of change, you know what you've just figured out is the right way to do it, changes the next day... again we're all working on sanitizing and what is the right thing to help everybody feel safe, when to wear a mask, when not to wear a mask, things change so frequently” – Participant, Urban

KEY MESSAGES

- Charitable food organizations were essential services during the first wave of the pandemic
- Organizations had to rapidly shift operating procedures as pandemic and public health orders evolved, while coping with fewer staff (paid and volunteer)
- High stress because of the unprecedented economic changes converging with public health orders: more clients & fewer donations; lack of government support
- Pandemic exposed how quickly food insecurity can increase, and problems with how we respond to food insecurity. Pandemic planning needs to account for food security; build 'resilient communities'

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MORE INFORMATION

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