

# Hunger, malnutrition in Canada's Arctic nears crisis

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A new report highlighted Thursday growing hunger and malnutrition in Canada's Arctic as development snowballs and tastes change, and called for immediate actions to stop an "emerging public health crisis."

The report found that most northern households are twice as likely—27 percent versus a national average of 12 percent—to face hunger or fear of starvation.

Northern households with children reported even higher rates of [food insecurity](#). Nearly 115,000 people, mostly indigenous, live in Canada's northern territories.

The peer-reviewed study was prepared by the non-profit Council of Canadian Academies for the Canadian government, which is promoting [economic development](#) in the Arctic as warming opens up the region to shipping, mining and oil and gas drilling.

However, jobs alone for populations that lived as hunter-gatherers for centuries won't address the problem, the authors concluded.

The expert panel called for "a range of holistic approaches" that includes a poverty reduction strategy, economic development and support for local food systems.

Undernourishment has become a "particularly serious and growing challenge" for northerners and "is a problem that requires urgent

attention to address and mitigate the serious impacts it has on health and well-being," the researchers said.

The root of the problem is equally complex, they said, with "colonialism and environmental dispossession, rapid and sometimes unpredictable environmental change, economic transitions and material poverty, changing demographics and current logistical challenges" at play.

As a result, the local populations have faced "declining harvests of plant and animal wildlife species, increased imports and consumption of store-bought food and the discovery of environmental contaminants in traditional and country food."

Inuit and northerners who once ate mostly fish and seal meat along with local plants and berries are relying increasingly on imported foods, which they cannot afford to buy.

The report notes that the average cost of groceries in Canada's Nunavut territory is Can\$19,760 (US\$17,877) per year, while half of Inuit adults earn less than Can\$20,000 per year.

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