Panel Summary

Everyone at the Table: Strengthening Efforts to Support Student Food Security

6 March 2020

McMaster University | McMaster HEALTH FORUM | FORUM+ | McMaster University

EVIDENCE >> INSIGHT >> ACTION

McMaster Health Forum and Forum+

The goal of the McMaster Health Forum, and its Forum+ initiative, is to generate action on the pressing health- and social-system issues of our time, based on the best available research evidence and systematically elicited citizen values and stakeholder insights. We aim to strengthen health and social systems – locally, nationally, and internationally – and get the right programs, services and products to the people who need them. In doing so, we are building on McMaster's expertise in advancing human and societal health and well-being.

About student panels

A student panel is an innovative way to seek input from the student body on high-priority issues. Each panel brings together 14-16 students from many backgrounds. Panel members share their ideas and experiences on an issue and learn from research evidence and from the views of others. A student panel can be used to elicit the values that students feel should inform future decisions about an issue, as well as to reveal new understandings about an issue and spark insights about how it should be addressed.

About this summary

On the 6th of March 2020, the McMaster Health Forum convened a student panel on strengthening efforts to support student food security. This summary highlights the views and experiences of panel participants about:

- the underlying problem;
- three possible elements of an approach to addressing the problem; and
- potential barriers and facilitators to implement these elements.

The student panel did not aim for consensus. However, the summary describes areas of common ground and differences of opinions among participants and (where possible) identifies the values underlying different positions.

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Summary of the panel

During deliberations of the problem, panellists agreed that the challenges identified in the student brief hinder efforts to strengthen food security on campus. Panellists further identified four additional challenges to food security for students based primarily on their personal experiences: 1) cultural norms make addressing all dimensions of food insecurity challenging; 2) harmful conceptualizations of student food insecurity minimize perceived severity and hinder action; 3) programs and services are not designed in ways that meet the full range of student needs; and 4) infrastructural barriers and students' perspectives hinder access to community resources.

In discussing the elements of an approach to address the problem, collaboration between students and stakeholders emerged as a key value through which to address student food insecurity. Panellists underlined collaboration as critical to ensuring that all elements appropriately capture students' needs and interests. Several other values-related themes were also identified by panellists with respect to each element. In relation to reshaping existing payment models **(element 1)**, panellists stressed universal eligibility for alternative payment plans for students. With regards to designing a monitoring and evaluation strategy **(element 2)**, panellists emphasized taking a co-design approach (by including students), creating multiple avenues for student participation, and strengthening campus stakeholder accountability to act on student feedback. In order to increase student awareness of existing supports for student food security **(element 3)**, panellists underlined the importance of creating an awareness strategy which prioritizes accessibility and fosters excellent student experience surrounding service use.

With respect to barriers and opportunities, panellists also took a broader perspective, identifying student "grind culture" as one of the biggest barriers to strengthening food security on campus. Panellists additionally cited difficulties with collaboration between stakeholder groups in and outside of campus as a challenge to implementing a uniform campus approach for food security. With regards to next steps, panellists identified leveraging social media and existing mental health campaigns as a potential avenue to raise awareness and foster collaborative action.

"Four years [of student food insecurity] is not transient."

Discussing the problem:

What are the most important challenges to strengthening efforts to support student food security at McMaster University?

Panellists began by reviewing the findings from the pre-circulated student brief, which highlighted what is known about the underlying problem – student food insecurity – and its causes. To provide a concise summary of such a multifaceted issue, the brief identified three key challenges related to strengthening food security at McMaster University:

1) students have competing financial commitments such as tuition and housing which may influence their food security;
2) meeting diverse student expectations and needs is challenging for campus food services due to a variety of pressures;
3) several student-level factors, such as lifestyle, perceptions, knowledge and skills limit the reach of existing food security initiatives.

Throughout the discussion at the student panel, panellists generally agreed with these three core components of the problem as outlined in the student brief. However, during the conversation, panellists expanded upon the three core problems and identified a variety of more complex dimensions to the issue of student food security. All of the challenges overlapped and ultimately demonstrated the intricacy of student food insecurity on campus, in the community, and in society at large.

The four additional dimensions of the problem are:
1) cultural norms make addressing all dimensions of food insecurity challenging;
2) harmful conceptualizations of student food insecurity minimize perceived severity and hinder action;
3) programs and services are not designed in ways that meet the full range of students' needs;
4) infrastructural barriers and students' perspectives hinder access to community resources.

We review each of these challenges in turn below.

Cultural norms make addressing all dimensions of food insecurity challenging

> **Box 1: Key features of the student panel**
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> The student panel on strengthening efforts to support student food security had the following 11 features:
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> 1. it addressed a high-priority issue for students;
> 2. it provided an opportunity to discuss different features of the problem;
> 3. it provided an opportunity to discuss three options for addressing the problem;
> 4. it provided an opportunity to discuss key implementation considerations (e.g., barriers);
> 5. it provided an opportunity to talk about who might do what differently;
> 6. it was informed by a pre-circulated, plain-language brief;
> 7. it involved facilitators to assist with the discussions;
> 8. it brought together students affected by the problem or by future decisions related to the problem;
> 9. it aimed for fair representation among the diversity of students involved in or affected by the problem;
> 10. it aimed for open and frank discussions that will preserve the anonymity of participants; and
> 11. it aimed to find both common ground and differences of opinions.

Throughout the student panel, panellists noted that prevalent norms around food make addressing food insecurity a complex and challenging goal. Two main challenges related to this issue were identified: 1) a student culture oriented towards the promotion of unhealthy

food; and 2) a "grind culture" that encourages students to prioritize productivity over health and well-being.

Firstly, panellists spoke of a widespread permeation of a food culture that revolves around unhealthy food consumption. Panellists cited a normalized, "that's just the way it is" mentality around the general unhealthiness of student food culture. For example, pizza is often the default food for events on campus, which is a campus-wide behaviour that is rarely questioned and largely accepted by the student body. Panellists also cited an existing perception that food pricing on campus is oriented towards foods with poor nutritional value, ultimately suggesting that this pricing could incentivize the consumption of unhealthy food. Panellists perceived healthy foods on campus are relatively "expensive" compared to unhealthy foods like pizza sold at the same venues. Many panellists noted that while healthy meal options are available for student purchase on-campus and around McMaster University, these options are largely unaffordable. One panellist stated that a piece of fruit at nearby food retailers, such as Shoppers Drug Mart, can cost upwards of three dollars. The cost of healthy foods offered by campus food services was also perceived by panellists to parallel or exceed prices at nearby food retailers. Thus, with a student culture that normalizes the consumption of unhealthy food and pricing that sometimes works to corroborate this behaviour, making healthy food choices can be difficult for students.

Furthermore, this culture is fortified by the perpetuation of both a falsified image of health amongst students and a lack of education to debunk this falsified image. Panellists suggested there is too much of a "food as fuel" mentality which frames individualized eating as exclusively about utility, not enjoyment. In addition, students' understanding of health is generally Westernized and focuses exclusively on nutrition, rather than taking a more holistic perspective of health and well-being. Thus, health is generally associated with foods Western society perceives as healthy, rather than incorporating health knowledge from other places. Furthermore, health in regard to food is examined exclusively at the individual level, even though healthy eating is tied to collective eating for some people. Panellists generally acknowledged the need for better and more holistic education around healthy and balanced meals. Holistic education would ideally allow students to gain more knowledge on what food is best for them, what foods are fresh and in season, what constitutes food security, and how to enjoy food and cooking, in ways that better suit them.

Secondly, within the context of student culture, panellists agreed that students' mindsets and beliefs which tend to value productivity over personal well-being are among the biggest barriers to student food security. Panellists noted that university norms typically assert an idea of success in which ambition is perceived as mutually exclusive from healthy lifestyle

and self-care practices. One panellist voiced the idea that such perceptions are often fueled through student-run social media platforms, such as MacConfessions or Spotted at Mac. These platforms often post anonymous student "confessions" boasting about a lack of sleep, spending all day at the library or not eating throughout the day. Issues of student well-being through such platforms are not only humoured and normalized, but additionally support student interpretations of these behaviours as signs of hard work. Professors and other teaching staff were also said to contribute to the normalization of this "grind culture". One panellist reported taking a course in which professors characterized spending all day in the lab as critical to academic success.

Panellists expressed that while several initiatives have been implemented by McMaster University to advance student health from a more holistic perspective – which include addressing food security – additional actions must be taken to address "grind culture" in order to prompt behavioural shifts among students. By addressing "grind culture" and re-framing productivity-oriented aspects of university life, students could spend more time engaging in health-promoting behaviours, like cooking healthy meals. One panellist stated that if productivity is perceived as critical to students' success, perhaps approaches can be undertaken to "translate other things beyond self-negligence into forms of productivity."

Harmful conceptualizations of student food insecurity minimize perceived severity and hinder action

Panellists noted perceptions and characterization of post-secondary education as a transient life stage by stakeholders and students contributes to the trivialization of this issue. One panellist stressed the duration of academic programs at McMaster University, noting that, "four years is not transient." According to the same panellist, the perception of student food insecurity as being experienced during a transient stage in an individual's life can also weaken students' investment to drive systemic change, since they expect their experience with food insecurity to be temporary. However, their experience of food insecurity may continue even after graduation, and this panellist noted most students in need won't know what food services are available in their greater communities. In addition, the treatment of student food insecurity as an issue which takes place during a transient life stage may be associated with why support programs are predominantly focused on acute food-insecurity relief rather than broader structural change.

Programs and services are not designed in ways that meet the full range of students' needs

Another general theme to emerge during discussions among panellists was that programs and services aimed at addressing student food security do not meet the full range of students' needs. The specific challenges identified under this theme included:
1) sub-optimal location and design of existing food-security initiatives;
2) unclear target audience of existing food-security initiatives;
3) lack of individualization surrounding food choices on campus;
4) limited cleanliness within food services and residence fridges; and
5) lack of coordinated protocols about student disclosures of food insecurity.

In reference to the location and design of existing food-security initiatives, one challenge was the lack of anonymity associated with using food-security services. Achieving anonymity was challenging because accessing services often necessitated contact with staff. For example, one panellist noted that the Food Collective Centre (FCC) provides some of its services in the basement of Bridges, which is a highly visible location. This panellist shared how a staff member once asked, "Is everything okay? I've noticed you coming here often. Can I do anything else for you?" The panellist expressed how this comment made them uncomfortable and shared that such interactions could act as a barrier for accessing services. In addition, certain services require users to "sign in", which could jeopardize their sense of anonymity. Several panellists also noted that current food-security services only offer band-aid solutions. While existing programs are designed to meet the immediate needs of those facing food insecurity, they don't tackle factors underlying food insecurity, making food insecurity a recurring experience for many students accessing support.

Next, in discussing the target audience of existing food-security support programs, several panellists noted that food-security initiatives must be able to target two populations: those who cannot afford food but know they are food insecure, and those who don't know they are food insecure. The panellists pointed out that efforts that aim to provide a blanket solution for all students can create challenges because these two groups require different types of support. Students who cannot afford food but know they are food insecure may already be seeking out resources. However, those who do not know they are food insecure would be less perceptive to traditional programs. Instead, the latter group may benefit more from initiatives that attempt to create a culture of normalizing discussions around food security that allows these students to first recognize they may be food insecure.

Panellists also identified the lack of individualization surrounding food choices on campus to be a problem. In particular, the discussion on meal portions arose as panellists described that most meals at McMaster University are offered in only one-portion size. One panellist said allowing students to choose their portion size could help cater to various needs of caloric intake. In addition, this measure could strengthen food services' commitment to sustainability by reducing food waste from serving portions that are too large for some students. Next, panellists discussed how even the minimum meal plan was too much for some students. One panellist explained how they can charge more money to an existing meal plan, but cannot pay less than $3,000 because they were living in residence. This panellist asked, "why do I have to spend $3,000 to buy a meal plan if I can cook and I can only buy Halal food?" Subsequently, panellists noted different cultures have their own definitions of food. Panellists emphasized the importance of having access to culturally appropriate food, but also acknowledged the challenge for campus food services to accommodate diverse cultures. For example, one panellist mentioned the staple food for group events in Canada is often pizza, which they perceived as unhealthy. Another panellist noted that some breakfast options are only served before 9 a.m., but many cultures have alternate times for breakfast. This panellist also indicated that some cultures do not share the model of eating three meals a day.

Another challenge identified by one panellist was cleanliness with food services and residence fridges. The panellist gave an anecdote of finding cockroaches in food and moss in mugs in campus restaurants. Other anecdotes included finding a frozen sock in a residence fridge, which was noted to have discouraged students from storing their own food and preparing meals in residence. This panellist said that while these details may seem small and petty, it can lead to negative impressions of food services that make students want to avoid campus food. Avoidant behaviour could contribute to food insecurity by reducing eating options on campus for students.

Another problem identified by the panellists was the lack of coordinated protocols about student disclosures of food insecurity. Several panellists reported experiences of feeling frustrated, uncertain, and overwhelmed when determining where to seek help beyond the MSU Food Collective Centre. Firstly, panellists noted that many students are unaware of administrative-level supports for food security offered at McMaster University, such as the Meal Voucher program operated by Student Financial Aid Services. Secondly, several panellists agreed that many students feel disoriented accessing support at the administrative level due to a lack of coordination between administrative offices. One panellist recounted their experience of reaching out to several administrative offices before finding an office

that appropriately addressed their needs. Thirdly, panellists discussed their perception of "closed-door policies" in accessing administrative support for food security. One panellist mentioned that existing administrative supports for food security operate through frameworks designed to disincentivize struggling students from requesting help. In expanding on this, the panellist noted that utilizing meal-voucher programs, as offered by Student Financial Aid Services, often entails a reduction in funds received by the student through the annual McMaster University Bursary.

Infrastructural barriers and students' perspectives hinder access to community resources

Throughout the discussion, panellists suggested that accessing off-campus community services within Hamilton posed its own unique challenges. These challenges were largely shaped by perceptions around students not being "worthy" of utilizing community-based services. One panellist suggested that narratives such as, "if you can afford to go to university, then you can afford to buy food," prevent students from reaching out to community-based supports. Furthermore, panellists perceived that there is already "a lack of resources within the community" for those who need to access food services; thus, they did not want to take already strained services away from community members who may be more deserving.

Box 2: Profile of panel participants

The panel aimed for fair representation among the diversity of students likely affected by the problem. Below is a brief profile of panellists.

- **How many participants?** Eight

- **What genders were represented?**
  Three male-identifying panellists and five female-identifying panellists; three panellists identified as members of the 2SLGBTTIQQA community.

- **What was the educational level of participants?**
  As undergraduate students, all panellists had completed high school. One panellist was a level I undergraduate, three panellists were in level II, three panellists were in level III, and one panellist was in level IV+.

- **What was the ethnic background of panellists?**
  Four panellists considered their ethnic background to be East or South-East Asian, one panellist identified as South Asian, and three panellists identified as White.

- **What was the living situation of the panellists?**
  One panellist lived on campus in residence, one panellist lived off campus in their family home, and six panellists lived off campus in student accommodation.

Another barrier to accessing community-based services was that community supports have a "much more formalized process," which can require students to "wait for hours to even get access to a food bank." While there have been efforts on the part of community-based services to provide students with guidance and support through the intake process, such barriers continue to limit the feasibility of accessing community-based food-security services for students experiencing food insecurity.

Panellists further highlighted student dependence on public transportation systems and a lack of time as additional barriers to accessing community-based services, many of which were perceived to be situated far from campus geographically. Similar considerations, such as transportation, distance, and time, were also noted as limiting factors in accessing food retailers perceived to be more affordable and culturally diverse, such as Nations.

"It's important to recognize that food security is directly related to students' success."

Discussing the elements:
How can we address the problem?

After discussing the challenges that together constitute the problem, panellists were invited to reflect on three elements for strengthening efforts to support student food security:
1) reshape existing payment models for student expenses;
2) establish a monitoring and evaluation strategy for food security on campus; and
3) create a campus food-security awareness strategy to inform students of existing initiatives to support food security.

The three elements were framed in a way that ensured panellists understood the elements could be pursued together or in sequence. A description of these elements and associated research evidence were provided to panellists in the student brief circulated before the panel.

Panellists identified collaboration between students and campus stakeholders as critical across all discussions about the elements. Panellists noted that engaging students in decision-making processes at the administrative level would ensure that campus food security policies and programs appropriately addressed student needs and interests. Panellists additionally emphasized the importance of prioritizing equity in the implementation of the elements to ensure the needs of marginalized students are addressed adequately.

During the discussions, panellists generally supported the three elements, and expressed belief that they would effectively address some aspects of the problem. However, panellists noted that due to the complexity of student food security on campus and the culture that

surrounds it, implementation of the elements could be challenging. Throughout the deliberation of each of the three elements, a variety of different values-related themes emerged.

Element 1 – Reshape existing payment models for student expenses

The first element involved reshaping existing payment models for student costs like tuition and rent. Importantly, many students who experience food insecurity also experience financial insecurity; however, due to the fixed and upfront nature of costs like tuition and rent, students sometimes end up sacrificing food, due to its status as a more flexible cost. This element suggested that by providing students with more customizable payment plans for costs like tuition and rent, they would be less financially insecure and better able to afford adequate food. To reshape current models of payment, this element suggests implementing changes within the University system that allow students to pay tuition and residence fees in instalments.

> **Box 3: Key messages about reshaping existing payment models for students (element 1)**
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> **What are the views of panellists regarding this element?**
>
> - This element may not be effective in alleviating financial and food insecurity as it can be perceived as a reactionary "band-aid solution" that does not address the root causes of student financial precarity.
>
> - One of the most difficult aspects of implementing this element is ensuring the inclusion criteria for who gets access to re-shaped payment plans is equitable; alternatively, this element could be implemented to provide all students with access to reshaped payment plans.
>
> - Implementing reshaped payment plans within the existing University infrastructure may be difficult due to logistical and financial factors.

During deliberations about element 1, three values-related themes emerged as they related to how to proceed with reshaping payment models: 1) fairness; 2) effectiveness; and 3) efficiency.

The first values-related theme was fairness, which included conversations around who would be eligible for reshaped payment plans. Panellists perceived this as one of the most important considerations, and suggested that it would be very difficult to determine inclusion criteria in an equitable way. Panellists noted that establishing any sort of criteria is difficult, more specifically saying that "labelling people as potentially deserving and

undeserving" creates two categories of students and could potentially contribute to stigma around financial insecurity. Furthermore, creating these dichotomies around inclusion may further add to student misconceptions around what "types of people" are allowed to ask for help around food insecurity. Multiple panellists suggested that a solution would be accommodating flexible payment options – between instalments and upfront – for all students, thus eliminating the need for a formalized inclusion process. One panellist suggested that if there were to be inclusion criteria, it could be integrated with other service forms that are filled out, such as accessibility and accommodation forms used in residence and in academic courses. Another panellist suggested eligibility could be evaluated after a student had completed a budget plan or proposal with a member of administration. Finally, panellists expressed that no eligibility system would be perfect as some people who need financial aid may be left out of the customizable payment plan program; thus, mechanisms need to be put in place that can "catch" students who may not be eligible, but still require support.

The second values-related theme to emerge during discussions about element 1 was the importance of ensuring effectiveness of any payment restructuring. In particular, panellists were not sure how effective element 1 would be as they perceived it as more of a reactionary solution since it would not solve financial and food insecurity issues on its own. One panellist suggested that element 1 was a "band-aid solution" for financial insecurity, which would inevitably let financial challenges persist, albeit re-distributed over different times of the year. One panellist suggested that this may become stressful for some students who would feel financial stress and pressure for the entirety of the semester. This stress would be compounded for students who felt they may have been able to pay, but can no longer afford student costs after completing their early payments. Furthermore, panellists noted that element 1 does not provide students with any education that would allow them to more effectively make decisions regarding financial choices past food security, for example their housing, tuition, and other financial choices. In addition, this element still does not address financial pressures that are outside of the University's control, including off-campus housing.

Lastly, the third values-related theme that emerged in the dialogue around element 1 was efficiency. These conversations were primarily related to the difficulties – especially financially – of implementing this element into the current University structure. Many panellists noted that a broad change in the way students pay their fees may not be feasible with the University's current system, and could potentially pose a risk to the University's finances, or inhibit the University from planning for the future. If McMaster University's

infrastructure is reliant on upfront student payment structures, a shift in this structure could require huge administrative changes by the University, a shift which would be inefficient. For example, the University would have to ensure they had the administrative capacity to track each students' customized payments. This administrative burden would be compounded by the uncertainty in knowing how many students would opt for flexible payment each year, especially if the numbers shift dramatically between years. However, despite acknowledging the potential issues with element 1's efficiency, panellists did suggest that the University needs to put more onus on the financial insecurity of students, and further, embody a 'public service' ideology in its functioning.

Element 2 – Establish a monitoring and evaluation strategy for food security on campus

The discussion about the second element focused on the development of a campus monitoring and evaluation strategy for food security. This strategy was framed as a way to capture data on the prevalence and severity of food insecurity among McMaster University students. As highlighted in the student brief, this may include:

- setting annual strategic targets for food security;
- increasing opportunities for student engagement in the development of food-security initiatives (for example, through surveys or councils); and
- publishing annual report cards to review the impact of existing supports.

Three values-related themes emerged during deliberations on element 2: 1) student and stakeholder collaboration; 2) responsiveness to student needs; and 3) accountability.

Box 4: Key messages about establishing a monitoring and evaluation strategy for food security on campus (element 2)

What are the views of panellists regarding this element?

- A successful monitoring and evaluation must be co-designed by McMaster students and stakeholders.
- Members of marginalized groups across campus, who are disproportionately at risk of food insecurity, must be included in the design process to account for equity considerations.
- Students must be provided with multiple avenues through which to provide feedback.

Transparency and accountability must be prioritized to support the integration of student feedback into existing policies, programs and services.

The first values-related theme outlined during discussion was fostering collaboration between students and campus stakeholders, such as food services and University

administration, in the development of a monitoring and evaluation strategy. Panellists noted that food-security initiatives on campus are often mobilized without input from students and thus have limited impact. Co-design was stressed as critical to ensuring that food-security initiatives reflect the diverse perspectives of students and work to address diverse needs. One panellist summarized co-design as a safeguard to designing a monitoring and evaluation strategy that "asks the right questions to begin with."

With respect to encouraging stakeholder and student collaboration, the formation of a year-around food-security student advisory committee was suggested as a potential avenue to engage, connect and co-design with students. Panellists stated that an advisory committee would not only enable students to inform campus food security decisions at the administrative level, but also ensure that student voices are accounted for in the development of initiatives. One panellist noted that a student advisory committee may additionally be used to advise food services across campus on decisions such as meal prices and menus. Panellists saw this role of the committee as "obligatory, especially when considering that students make up the largest consumer base for campus food services".

In order to promote collaboration, diversity among committee members was also cited as a key consideration in the establishment of a student advisory body. Panellists stated that opportunities for students to participate in decision-making processes at the administrative level were often exclusively composed of a specific "niche" of students; that is, students of particular socio-economic, ethnocultural or academic backgrounds. Recruiting committee members through administrative offices, such as Student Financial Aid Services or the Equity and Inclusion Office, was identified as a potential approach to ensure the inclusion and representation of marginalized students.

The second values-related theme emphasized creating responsive feedback platforms which cater to diverse student needs; more specifically, establishing multiple avenues through which students can provide feedback, such as filling out a brief survey, providing an online review, or volunteering as part of a student advisory committee. Panellists noted that creating such avenues would enable students to engage in decision-making processes in a manner which accommodates their diverse schedules and workloads. Within the context of providing feedback online, one panellist suggested the adding of features on the Mac Eats app, which would provide an avenue for constant, online feedback from students for stakeholders during decision-making processes. Panellists expressed that the development of this portal would enable broader student outreach and engagement. Sending mass emails, similar to those sent out for course evaluations, was outlined as a potential mechanism to advance the number of students providing feedback and to ensure that feedback systems are responsive to diverse student needs.

The last values-related theme focused on establishing and enforcing accountability. Panellists noted that while a monitoring and evaluation strategy would provide data which adequately captures student needs and demands, mechanisms must be in place to generate action in response to such findings. The establishment of a central authority, which includes student representatives and other campus stakeholders, was discussed as being critical in building accountability. Panellists voiced the idea that this authority could oversee the development, implementation and improvement of all campus food-security initiatives, as well as monitor progress in meeting the University's food-security targets. Transparency surrounding the state of student food insecurity on campus and actions being taken to address this issue was also highlighted as critical to holding University administration and food services accountable. Panellists expressed that making data collected through the monitoring and evaluation strategy publicly available might be an avenue towards increased transparency.

Element 3 – Create a campus food-security awareness strategy to inform students of existing initiatives to support food security

The discussion around the third element focused on ways to raise awareness of existing food-security initiatives, particularly on features that would make an awareness campaign successful. This element was initially selected to support students who are in need, but not accessing resources due to a lack of awareness. Engaging students in building such a campaign could help ensure the organization of services is more closely aligned with values, needs and their preferences. Panellists mostly agreed with the considerations that must be taken in creating an awareness strategy, as laid out in the brief.

Three values-related themes emerged during deliberations about element 3: 1) accessibility; 2) collaboration; and 3) excellent student experience.

The first values-related theme was focused on improving accessibility. One panellist suggested there should be guidelines outlining who can access support, so that students may feel they have "permission" to utilize programs and services. This panellist said many students may feel uncertain about whether they should access help, and these guidelines could improve accessibility for those students. Another panellist highlighted the need for key services to recognize food as an essential part of student well-being, which would allow students to access food-security supports from a wider range of services. It was also emphasized that, in order to reach as many students as possible, an awareness campaign must target both students who perceive themselves to be food insecure as well as those who do not.

The second values-related theme focused on improving collaboration to strengthen student food security. One panellist suggested that a top-down approach administered by all campus food vendors - including the MSU, McMaster Hospitality Services, and the GSA -

> **Box 5: Key messages about creating a campus food-security awareness strategy (element 3)**
>
> **What are the views of panellists regarding this element?**
> - There is value in developing a food-security awareness campaign, but it must reach many students, involve collaboration across University stakeholders, and provide a positive student experience.
> - Social media is a powerful tool that, if appropriately leveraged, could engage many students and help normalize discussions around food security.
> - Various actors involved in campus food and support services must act together to bring campus-wide momentum to the awareness strategy.
> - Student support services should recognize food as a pertinent determinant of health and well-being.

could ensure all actors are engaged in the development and implementation of the campaign. To achieve this movement, high-level collaboration would be important. Several panellists also agreed that it is crucial for food vendors and support services to build relationships with students so that they have ways of connecting with the student body to share information and resources. Developing such relationships would require collaboration between service providers and the student body. The discussion then shifted to who should be involved in the awareness strategy. Panellists reached a consensus that professors, faculty members, and other campus stakeholders would all be valuable actors in the campaign. They noted instructors play a vital role in interacting with students on a daily basis. As one panellist put it: "it is important for instructors to recognize mental health and food security are directly related to students' success." Involving instructors would necessitate collaboration between campus services and faculty members, in aims to address student "grind culture" more holistically through all aspects of students' lives, including academia.

The third values-related theme centred on excellent student experience. Since most students use social media already, several panellists noted that normalizing discussions around food through social media could improve students' experience in accessing information about food security. To further assert the importance of social media, one panellist emphasized: "we live in a viral culture." Making food security a "viral" topic would normalize conversations around food security. In using social media, one panellist suggested being strategic about "how the atmosphere of engagement is created," so that students feel personally connected to the issue and know how they can benefit from using the services. One suggestion to achieve personalization was by sharing other students' anecdotes around food insecurity on social media. Another idea of using social media in an awareness strategy was a "myth-buster" approach, which involves flagging and breaking down perceived barriers to food security. Debunking popular myths was expected to catch students' interest and improve their experience in interacting with the information. An example of a myth buster could be sharing what percentage of students experience food insecurity, to combat the myth that only a small proportion of students are food insecure. Meanwhile, one panellist emphasized that a more holistic shift is needed in students' perception of food. This panellist suggested building community and social experiences around food could improve student experience in discussing topics related to food. The panellist explained that elevating the social significance of food so that it is conceived as more than just fuel for bodies could facilitate more positive and normalized discourses around both eating and food security.

Special attention should be given to "how the atmosphere of engagement is created."

Discussing implementation considerations:
What are the potential barriers and facilitators to implementing these elements?

Throughout the student panel, panellists cited potential barriers with regard to the implementation of the three elements. Broadly, barriers fell into four main categories: 1) cultural barriers; 2) student "grind culture" barriers; 3) challenges in ensuring elements have broad-reaching and simultaneously individualized impacts; and 4) challenges in involving numerous stakeholder groups.

Firstly, panellists emphasized the importance of perceiving issues regarding food security as being about more than just food. Panellists suggested that all efforts addressing food security would need to contend with prolific cultural perspectives that view food as utilitarian and time-consuming. Thus, all elements need to address this barrier by "creating a culture" that perceives food as important beyond its role of fuel by addressing the contextual complexity surrounding experiences of eating.

Secondly, panellists cited barriers created by the prevalent student "grind culture" narratives, which normalize food insecurity and minimize the perceived importance of food-security initiatives. Panellists spoke to narratives of productivity over well-being as contributing to these student norms. Furthermore, they cited an irony within the campus context that simultaneously tells students to be productive and academically successful

while also maintaining their health. These conflicting messages create an environment wherein action around food and well-being is challenging.
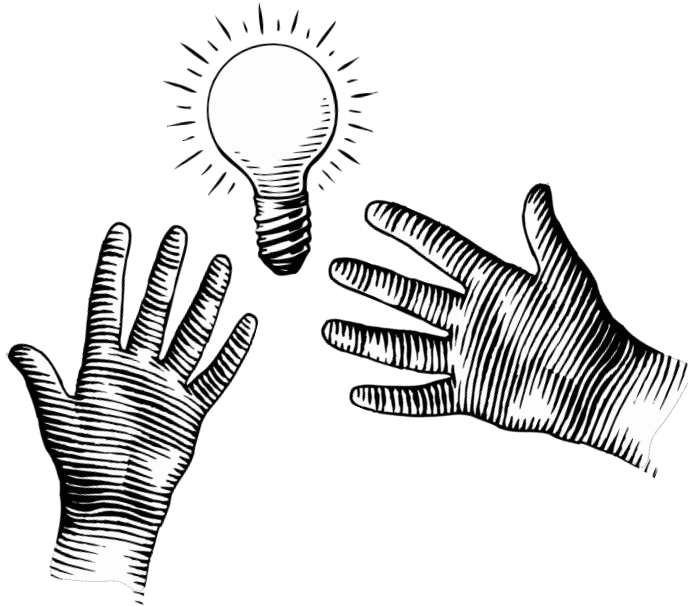
Thirdly, panellists spoke to the difficulty of implementing programming that is broad-reaching and simultaneously addresses the diverse needs of individual students. Given the diversity of food patterns, behaviours and challenges amongst individual students, creating and implementing services and programs that address sometimes contradictory needs is a difficult task.

Finally, panellists noted a final barrier revolving around the difficulty of engaging in stakeholder collaboration between and within campus and student groups. The diversity of stakeholders on campus, many of whom hold a large variety of responsibilities, presents potential challenges in convening stakeholders to implement initiatives uniformly across campus.

Within the context of potential facilitators, panellists stressed the importance of leveraging existing mental health campaigns to strengthen student food security across campus. Since access to food is a pervasive issue across campus and is integral to student success, many panellists stated that food security could be included as a key aim under existing mental health strategies employed across campus. This approach was not only noted to align with McMaster University's holistic approach to student wellness, but also as a way to garner more attention, funding and action surrounding food security – which may otherwise be overlooked by students and stakeholders. Panellists also highlighted utilizing online platforms to advance awareness about food security as an opportunity. Examples include implementing social media campaigns or creating McMaster-specific apps which aim to inform students about healthy eating practices. Panellists noted that these approaches could strengthen and expand student outreach given widespread access and use of technology among the students.

Student views on next steps

As the student panel concluded, panellists shared their key takeaways from the discussion and what they hoped to see going forward. One panellist emphasized that some of the responsibilities for food security should be shifted from already overburdened students to the University. Panellists also stressed the importance of the University being receptive to new ideas and open to change. One panellist's takeaway was that food security extends beyond an individual's health and can allow them to establish a sense of belonging. This panellist stated that it is the responsibility of universities to make students feel at home. Several panellists added to this holistic view of food by emphasizing that food security does not exist in isolation from other sociocultural issues, and therefore must be considered from a macro perspective that appreciates the complexities of the issue. Lastly, one panellist was happy that the discussion generated a lot of ideas, but was unsure of how the insights would carry forward: "I hope our discussion can spark change and do something."

Acknowledgments