

Achieving
Planetary Health
through Food:
8 Insights
for 2025



Who We Are

Nourish is transforming how health care systems in Canada approach food. We believe food is more than sustenance - it's culture, connection, and care. As an essential part of healing, food can address systemic inequities, advance health equity, and support Truth and Reconciliation while promoting climate action and community well-being.

Our Mission

Empower health care to embrace food as medicine to advance health equity, climate action, and community wellbeing.

Our Vision

The health care system harnesses the power of food to advance health for people and planet.



Eight Insights for 2025

Nourish invites you to explore our eight insights for 2025 on shaping the future of food in health care. We continue to build and learn from our third national cohort, supporting hospitals to redesign menus and rethink food sourcing to impact human and planetary health. Nourish is leading the conversation about how food is medicine in health care for Indigenous communities, supporting the cultural dimensions of well-being and grounded in sustainability.

We centre our work around the ways that food nourishes us, connects us, and holds the power to heal - not only patients, but entire communities and the planet we share. **Our healthcare system is stretched to its limits, but food is a solution hiding in plain sight that addresses root causes.** Food is medicine for those in recovery, a tool to prevent and to manage chronic diseases, and a bridge to cultural belonging.



Rooted in equity and sustainability, good food is an upstream driver of health and a lever for climate action.

Food systems generate one-third of human-related greenhouse gas emissions. A coordinated set of strategies are needed to bring food systems impacts within planetary boundaries. Shifting to sustainable diets is the biggest opportunity. Hospital trays and cafeterias that model healthy eating (as outlined in Canada's Food Guide) are plant-forward and celebrate cultural diversity. Cultural humility is an important, sometimes overlooked dimension of climate action that needs to shine through. The dollars invested in food can reach far beyond the patient tray to build both soil and health equity.

As we navigate uncertain times, from the aftermath of COVID-19 to the challenges posed by global politics, food resilience is more urgent than ever. Health care has a role to play - and the cost of inaction is high.



From meeting net-zero commitments to improving wellness of overburdened healthcare professionals, changing the food served to patients and in hospital cafeterias is a hopeful way to create systems change, making tangible changes everyone benefits from three times a day. Needed investments in food as medicine through initiatives like medically tailored meals and produce prescriptions can help address the many costs of health inequity.

These eight insights outline some of the leading edges of our work and strategies for driving meaningful change. Together, we can reimagine health care food systems to nourish people, communities, and the planet.

We invite a robust discussion of these insights and look forward to collaborating with you in 2025.

Hayley Lapalme & Jen Reynolds
Co-Executive Directors



Insight 1: Achieving net-zero means integrating food into the climate equation.

Sustainable diets and food systems multi-solve for climate and health. [The Lancet Countdown: 2024 Climate and Health Policy Priorities for Canada](#) recognized this for the second year in a row, highlighting the critical role of healthier diets and health care leadership in sustainable purchasing and calling on hospitals to partner with Nourish to advance planetary health.

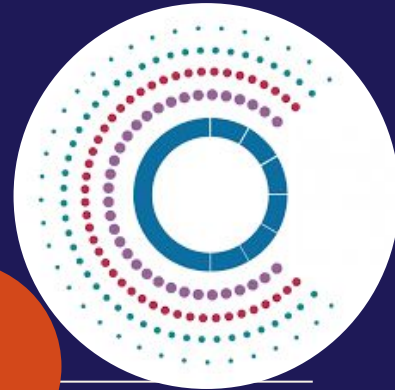
With 10% of healthcare's carbon footprint linked to food and waste, Canada's net-zero commitments demand action. This is where Nourish is stepping in. Health care can enact delicious climate action by redesigning menus and sourcing to reduce food-related emissions.

Twenty-five hospitals have joined the [Coolfood Pledge](#), committing to a 25% reduction of food-related emissions by 2030. Our landmark partnership with Mohawk Medbuy extends this mission to over 40 member health organizations, embedding sustainability into purchasing decisions.



*“By using health system purchasing power to partner with existing organizations such as **Nourish**, hospitals should move toward providing foods that are plant-rich, local, healthier, and culturally appropriate. In doing this, Canadian hospitals can promote healthier diets while reducing their greenhouse gas footprint by 25% by 2030 through menu shifts toward locally sourced, plant-rich foods that are more advantageous for people, local economies, and the planet.”*

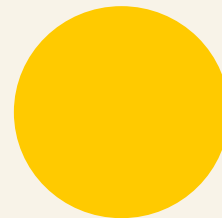
The Lancet Countdown: 2024 Climate and Health Priorities for Canada



Insight 2: Survey says, patients *do* like tofu. Move over, meat and potatoes.

As part of Nourish's second Cohort, Vancouver General Hospital (VGH) piloted the first hospital-wide Planetary Health Menu, redefining what hospital food can achieve for climate action, while also being delicious. Dr. Annie Lalande, Tiffany Chiang, and Chef Ned Bell led the project in 2024, bringing together clinicians, dietitians, food service teams and sustainability experts to create low-carbon, patient-centered meals like Creamy Coconut Chickpea Curry and Steelhead Trout with Tomato Miso Dressing. Serving these meals in the 900-bed hospital, the project team found clear evidence that patients do, in fact, like tofu.

The VGH pilot exemplifies how, by combining culinary changes with sustainability, hospitals can tackle food-related emissions while enhancing care. The lessons learned on patient feedback, food waste, and GHG-reduction are shaping Nourish's strategies to scale such innovations. The opportunity for climate action achieved by empowering health care teams to make tangible change never looked - or tasted - better.



Insight 3: Beware carbon-tunnel vision – planetary health requires cultural humility.

Equity and sustainability are inextricably connected. Cultural humility and mindfulness are important, sometimes overlooked, dimensions of climate action. Industrial livestock production has different inputs and externalities than does, for example, a herd of caribou or a moose roaming the boreal forests. Traditional customs and practices around the hunt and harvest offer insights around balance and reciprocity in our eating habits. Not all animal-based meat has the same carbon footprint and we need to beware carbon-tunnel vision in our wayfinding.

Nourish's programs guide health care leaders to design planetary health menus that honour cultural dimensions. Culturally mindful meals may need to integrate meat and find balancing points elsewhere. This work requires systems thinking and creative solutions. Nourish creates spaces for our network to explore ways to embrace complexity and move beyond trade-offs, diving deep into the interconnections to find our collective way forward.

The challenge for the field now is clear: building systems where sustainability, equity, and nutrition reinforce each other, setting a new standard for sustainable food in health care.



Insight 4: Relationships, not simply bannock, are the way forward in Truth and Reconciliation.

For years, Nourish received requests for “traditional Indigenous food recipes.” Leading cohort members and the Nourish Indigenous and Allies Advisory seized the opportunity to demonstrate that an ingredient or recipe removed from its cultural context and connection with the land is not traditional or healing at all - it’s ongoing colonization.

[Food is Our Medicine \(FIOM\)](#) was created to help professionals explore the legacy of colonization and find respectful ways to begin decolonizing our food and health systems.

Over 2,000 individuals have registered for FIOM, working through the challenges that arise when health care commits to Reconciliation. There are inspiring examples across the country.

Truth and Reconciliation isn’t a box to check; they are an ongoing commitment to address systemic inequities and build trust. We invite you to join the [2025 Intake](#) for Food is Our Medicine. Participants almost unanimously complete the journey feeling less daunted and more empowered for the road ahead.



"By going through Food is Our Medicine, it reinforced for me how much we have to learn from Indigenous communities about how they practice sustainable food practices as we try to tackle our planetary health challenges."

Elaine Eppler, Clinical Dietician, Vancouver Coastal Health



Insight 5: Nourishing health care workers keeps the system healthy.

Labour shortages in the healthcare sector don't stack up well next to demand. Health care professionals are often stretched to their personal limits, navigating burnout and rising demands with overburdened health systems. Often, hospital food environments do not offer fresh, healthy, sustainable food to nourish staff well-being. Nutritious, thoughtfully sourced food provides care and connection, reinforcing resilience and community, modeling the sustainable diets we all need to shift to.

The future of healthcare depends on the well-being of its people. By investing in wellness-focused food systems in health care, leaders can nourish the hearts and minds of their most valuable resource: their staff.



Insight 6: It's time to ensure the dream of visionary public sector procurement doesn't fall short.

This one is the hardest for us to say, but the potential of “anchor leadership” by the broader public sector (hospitals, universities, colleges, municipalities) in building resilient regional food systems is falling short. The gains to date have been incremental and played within the safety of the dominant food system.

BUT: pockets of the future exist and it's time we turn to them.

Without planetary health, we can't have human health. Regenerative agricultural approaches need to be centred so that food production restores soil health, reduces greenhouse gas emissions, and improves food quality.

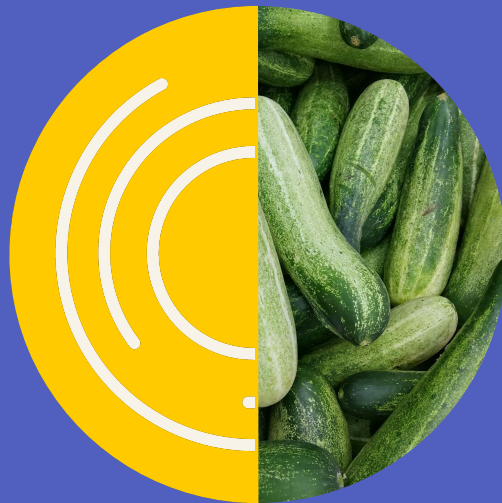
Nourish is advancing the conversation on value-based procurement, connecting healthcare to agriculture and scaling bold solutions for resilient food systems.



Insight 7: The prescription for better health will be grown, not written.

Globally, food is being recognized as a transformative force in health care. Programs in the U.S. and other countries are demonstrating that interventions along the [Tufts Food is Medicine Pyramid](#) are promising ways to improve patient outcomes and translate into saving precious health care resources.

In recent years, the Nourish community of practice has been exploring food prescribing. In 2024, Nourish led a food prescribing [field scan](#) to look for patterns in select pilots to date. The potential for health care through food is immense, and medically-tailored meals, in particular, have not been tested in Canada. We look forward to creating partnerships to bring together health care organizations, food producers, and communities to find innovative solutions. Improving access to sustainable food not only supports health and well-being, it builds health equity and fosters community connections. Food is medicine - but only if we're bold enough to make it so.

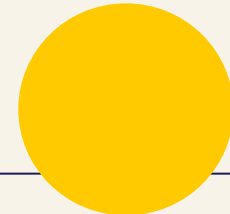


Insight 8: We can achieve planetary healthcare through food.

The industrial food system reduces food to a commodity - packaged, processed, and divorced from the soil that once nourished it, stripped of its cultural, ecological, and nutritional dimensions. This disconnection has staggering consequences. The [2024 Food System Economics Commission](#) reported that modern food systems destroy more value than they create, with an annual economic toll that tops USD\$10 trillion each year.

Nourish wants to flip the script. Food in health care can be a catalyst for planetary health when it's seen as more than a meal - as a strategic investment. From sourcing regenerative and organic ingredients to incorporating traditional and country foods into health care settings, the opportunities are vast. Hospital menus can not only help heal patients, but also nurture ecosystems, reduce food insecurity, and empower local food systems.

Delivering planetary health care requires bold action: forward contracts to build value chains for sustainable farms, equitable access to healthy and delicious hospital meals, and systems that honour both human and environmental health. By aligning investments in food with these goals, we can move from extracting value to regenerating it - restoring the health of people and the planet, one plate at a time.



Insight Alignment with UN SDGs

There is strong alignment between Nourish's 2024 Insights, our work on Planetary Health, and the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).



2 ZERO HUNGER
Insights
2, 6, 7, 8



12 RESPONSIBLE CONSUMPTION AND PRODUCTION
Insights - All



3 GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING
Insights
1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8



13 CLIMATE ACTION
Insights
1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8



8 DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH
Insights
5, 6



15 LIFE ON LAND
Insights
3, 4, 5, 8



10 REDUCED INEQUALITIES
Insights
3, 4, 7



17 PARTNERSHIPS FOR THE GOALS
Insights
1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8



Conclusion

The role of food in health care is no longer *if* but *how*. This Insights Report outlines what Nourish and its partners know to be true: food is a lever for meaningful change – advancing climate goals, Truth and Reconciliation, health equity, and patient care.

Health care systems across Canada are under immense pressure, and today's decisions will shape their future resilience. Food must be seen as a strategic priority, not an afterthought. Solutions exist: evidence-based tools like the Coolfood Pledge, value-based procurement frameworks, and Nourish's upcoming Food Prescribing Lab, which will unify fragmented efforts into cohesive action.

At Nourish, we're not just asking questions; we're finding pathways. Achieving our vision requires systems leadership and multi-stakeholder action. Food must become a cornerstone of health and sustainability in every healthcare institution.

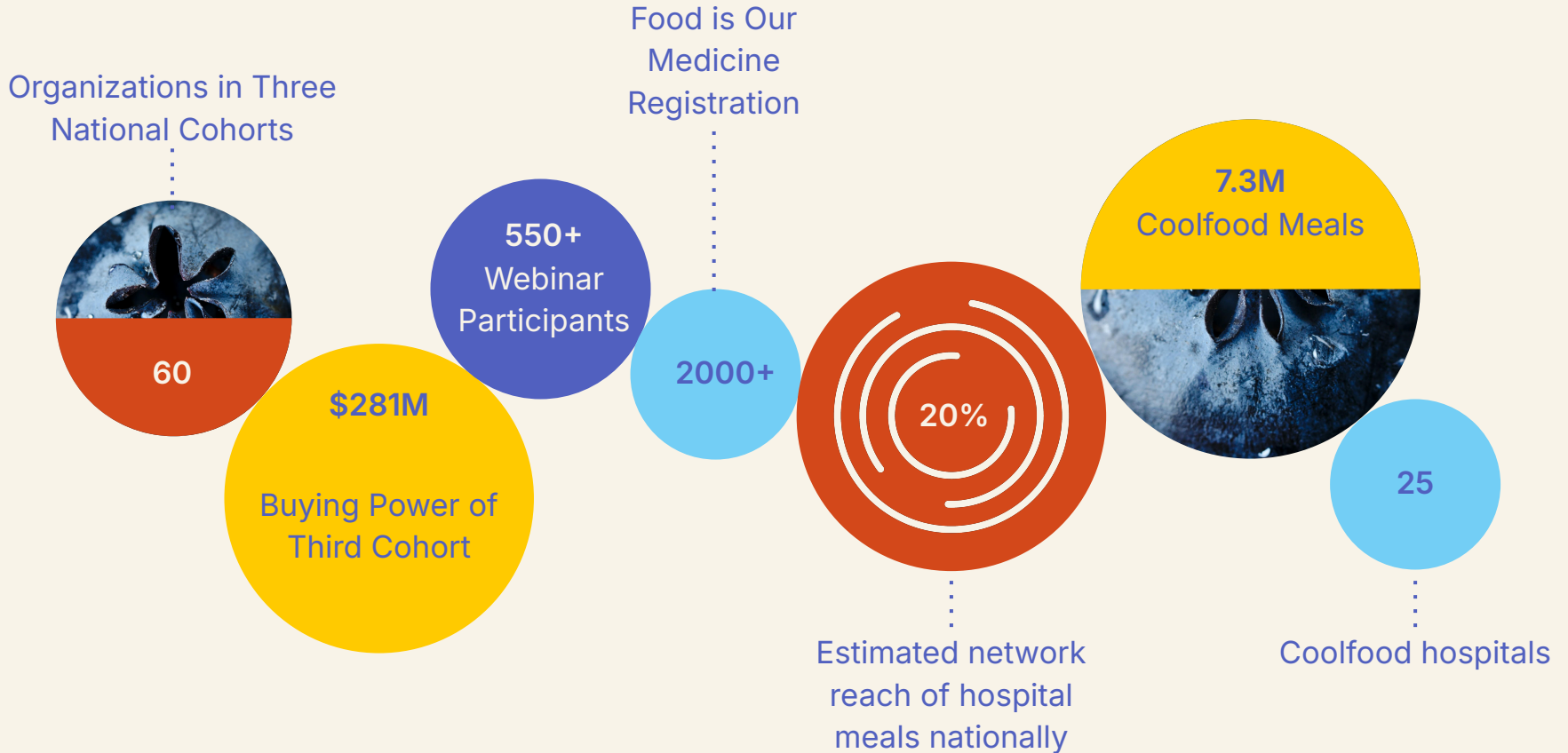
Now is the time to align priorities and harness the synergies of climate, health and the quality of care through food. The future of regenerative food and health systems is taking shape - will you join us in making it happen?



Nourish Impact
Highlights:
2024 At-a-Glance

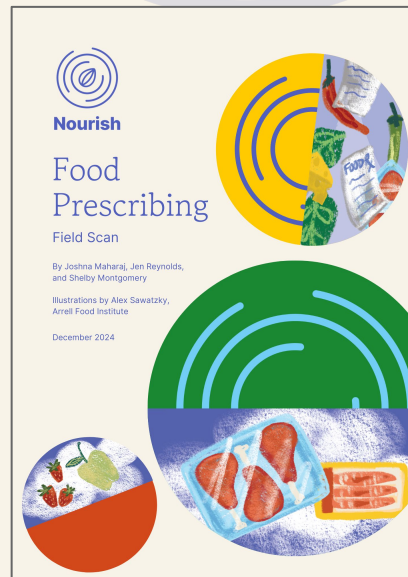
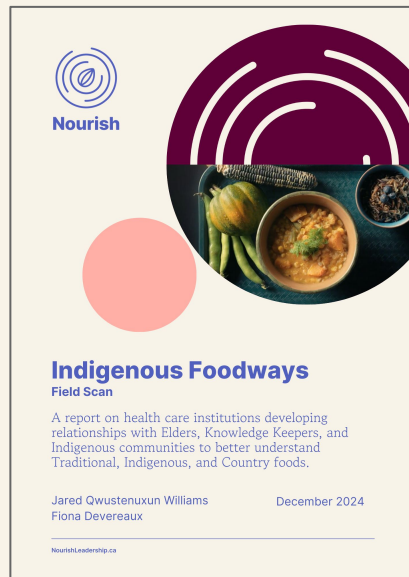
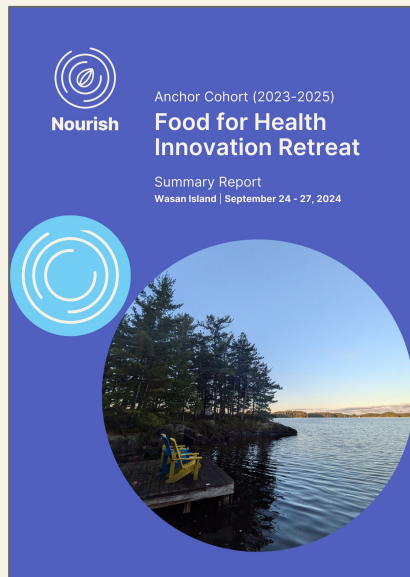
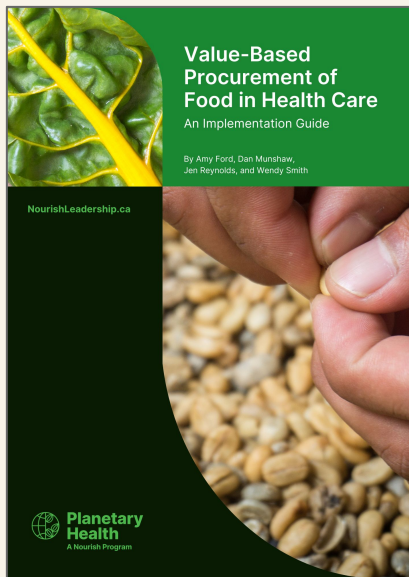


Nourish in 2024



2024 Program Highlights

In 2024, Nourish contributed four publications to the field of learning and practice around food as medicine.



To further enable learning and the adoption of promising food as medicine practices, Nourish hosted several webinars and workshops for health care professionals and others.



To learn more about Nourish's work making food as medicine a reality, visit our [Knowledge Hub](#) and [Video Library](#).

2024 Media Highlights

Check out some of Nourish's work that made the headlines in 2024.

[Canadian Press](#)

[CBC's The Current](#)

[The Tyee](#)

[CTV Morning Show](#)

[Growability Podcast](#)

[Vancouver Sun](#)

[The Lancet Countdown](#)

[2024 Local Food Report](#)

[National Observer](#)

[Hospital News](#)

[SJHC London News](#)



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