



NOURISH  
ANCHOR COHORT

2021 -  
2023

# CLIMATE LEADERSHIP IN CANADA

Vancouver Anchor Team  
Impact Report



Vancouver General Hospital  
Revamps Food for Planetary  
Health

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# VANCOUVER ANCHOR TEAM

The Vancouver Anchor Team's work is situated within the context of the Nourish Anchor Cohort, a two-year national innovation program that ran from 2021 - 2023. The goal of the Anchor Cohort was to support health systems across Canada to develop anchor leadership, signalling their commitment to harness the long-term presence, mission, and resources of health care institutions to anchor wellbeing in their communities through food. The Cohort brought together seven multidisciplinary place-based teams to work on 'portfolios of systems interventions' that activated community assets and explored innovative food for health solutions. The accomplishments outlined in this report reflect their efforts to nudge local and regional health systems toward meaningful transformation in order to promote better health for people and the planet.

Vancouver General Hospital (VGH) is a large urban hospital with 700+ acute care beds. It is the largest hospital in Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH), one of seven British Columbia health authorities, and serves a population of ~1.25 million residents. VCH employs more than 27,000 staff; 3,200 medical staff across 13 hospitals, 55 long-term care and assisted living sites, 17 community health centres, and urgent primary care centres. Services cover the full continuum of care including public health, primary care, acute services, community-based long-term care and home health, mental health, substance use, and research. VCH has an operational budget of over \$4 billion.

In cooperation with University of British Columbia (UBC) Faculty of Medicine's Planetary Healthcare Lab, academia, Indigenous groups, local growers, community advocates, and other health organizations, the Vancouver Anchor Team aims to make a significant shift in the way food is perceived, procured, prepared, and consumed in health care settings. Food is often wasted and neglected as a therapeutic intervention, instead being relegated to a support service. The team strives to take a more holistic view of food in health settings, acknowledging food not only as an economic good, but recognizing its power as a source of nourishment, cultural identity, dignity, and connection to nature.



# TACKLING WICKED PROBLEMS THROUGH FOOD FOR HEALTH LEVERS

Each team in the Anchor Cohort named a 'Wicked Problem' that they looked to address during their time in the Cohort. Wicked problems were identified through a process of problem space mapping, stakeholder engagement, and surfacing the historical roots of how problems came to be.

## Vancouver Anchor Team's Wicked Problem

There is a disconnect between the perceived and actual role of food across the continuum of care. Food often fails to be recognized as a determinant of health that benefits equity and well-being for people and the planet.

The Vancouver Anchor Team identified 13 priority Food for Health Levers to action in their work. The Food for Health Levers were developed by Nourish to frame powerful ways of impacting climate, equity, and community well-being through food in health care. These leverage points help us make connections between our food, health, social, and ecological systems and reach their greatest potential when working in concert.



# INNOVATION IN ACTION

During the Anchor Cohort, the team employed a collaborative, experimental approach to developing and testing initially smaller scale ideas at the program and policy level in seven key areas before moving on to more transformative interventions:

1. Encourage plant-based meals for hospital staff, beginning with resident physicians, who are unable to access healthy foods at VGH after hours (between 7 pm-7 am)
2. Make plant-rich meal options more prevalent in monthly staff lunches
3. Start piloting more sustainable and culturally-relevant meal options for inpatients
4. Introduce behavioural nudges toward plant-rich meals as the default in the VGH cafeteria
5. Expand traditional food options for Indigenous patients in acute and long-term care settings, starting with building community engagement and partnerships
6. Build awareness and educate VCH staff on planetary health and the role of food in VCH's planetary health strategy through engagement sessions, presentations, and the development of a food as medicine module for new employees on the VCH staff Learning Hub (in development)
7. Establish sustainable health care food service infrastructure guidelines for new builds and renovations (in development)



Numerous interventions led by the Vancouver Anchor Team sought to elevate plant-forward options for patients, staff, and visitors at the hospital.

# OUTCOMES & IMPACT

Thanks to the strong leadership at VCH, reinforced by multiple research, engagement and educational efforts, the Vancouver Anchor Team, along with its key partners, wove together a variety of activities from **51 initial ideas** generated during the planning phase. These yielded a number of significant outcomes, including:

## Five broad types of innovative practices:

- **Subtle shifts in food practices at VGH to raise awareness and buy-in from staff:**
  - **More plant-forward menu options** for staff lunches
  - The pilot of an **after-hours healthy and sustainable food program** for physician residents, which soon may be expanded
- **Prototypes and pilots to test ways to improve patient experience and health while reducing food waste:**
  - A **mini-pilot** in the VGH cafeteria
  - **Plant-forward menus** at regular physician meetings
  - A **planetary health menu pilot** at VGH (start of pilot planned for Fall 2023)

## Four broad adjustments in systems and policies:

- More frequent and **deeper collaboration** between food services, dietetics, Energy and Environmental Sustainability (EES), clinical services, VCH Indigenous Health, and Public Health
- An increase in the VGH investment into planetary health- and food-related activities (e.g., over **\$200K of financial and in-kind support** for one project alone)
- **Increased staffing** for planetary health activities, including within VCH food services
- Plans to **scale several VGH food-related practices** across the organization's 12 other hospitals, starting with the planetary health menu

## OUTCOMES & IMPACT CONTINUED

The cumulative and immediate effects of these VGH-centered activities are concrete changes in a variety of key domains related to employing food as a therapeutic intervention for patients, staff, and the planet:



Reduced impact on the environment: By phasing out red and processed red meats, and by including a plant-forward option at each mealtime, GHG emissions associated with the menu are expected to decrease by 15-20% within a year



Improved patient satisfaction and nutrition: The increased provision of new and culturally-diverse menu options during the menu pilot is anticipated to improve the patient experience and may lead to improved clinical outcomes.



Improved staff health and well-being: The provision of plant-forward, low-carbon, nutritious meals significantly decreased on-call residents' reliance on meal delivery services and hospital retail outlets (from 41% to 4% and 31% to 11%, respectively) and the number of nights when residents ate no dinner at all (from 41% to 15%). This was associated with a significant decrease in financial and time stressors, and improved levels of perceived performance, mood, and physical well-being.



As part of their land-based learning, the Vancouver Anchor Team meets on the Stanley Park Seawall to learn from Candace and Elder Saopalaz about traditional medicines in the Pacific Northwest. Fall 2021.

## OUTCOMES & IMPACT CONTINUED

The most significant changes, however, are the deeper commitments and planetary health-aligned actions taken by VGH and VCH. This is demonstrated in a variety of ways in which the organization has shifted its priorities and objectives:

- Identifying **Planetary Health as a foundational pillar** for the entire health region (one of four pillars, along with Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion; Anti-Racism; and, Indigenous Cultural Safety).
- **Elevating food and planetary health** as a focus area for the Energy & Environmental Services (EES) team
- **Establishing Food and Nutrition as a priority area of action** within the VCH Planetary Health Roadmap (2023-2026), one of five priorities, along with Service Design and Delivery; Procurement, Supply Chain and Business Practices; Facilities, Infrastructure and Land Use; and, Community Mitigation and Adaptation).
- **Increasing collaboration** between health authorities through regular meetings and joint progress on food-related projects that aim to accelerate **the scaling of innovations across the province.**

These systemic shifts will not only dramatically expand the planetary health impacts across BC's second-largest regional health system, they will also fuel the next cycle of planetary health-aligned experimentation and systems change.



Vancouver General Hospital staff carefully measure food waste in an effort to understand patient experience and food-related GHG emissions, leading to the identification of gaps and opportunities around improving patient food and reducing the health sector's environmental impact

# LOOKING FORWARD

**The Vancouver Anchor Team and partners will continue to expand their current portfolio of initiatives by launching another cycle of food-related projects upon completion of their participation in the Anchor Cohort.**

Five of them in the planning to implementation stages include:

1. A joint effort by VGH food services, VGH dietetics, and the UBC Planetary Healthcare Lab to design and trial a planetary health menu for inpatients that can be adapted and scaled to other sites within VCH and beyond.
2. Creating a CASCADES playbook and adding to the existing Low Carbon Resilience and Environmental Sustainability Guidelines for healthy, sustainable, and healing infrastructures, available in April 2024.
3. A Learning Hub project to develop a primer course on the role of food for individual, patient, and planetary health for new staff at VCH, including food services and clinical services, expected to launch within the next two years.
4. Additional investment and activities to support the integration of traditional foods in health care institutions, with a collaboration between VCH and Providence Health Care.
5. A Sechelt farm-to-hospital project: in progress, beginning with the 2023 harvest.

**In keeping with VCH's longer-term commitment to transformation in a variety of areas, the Vancouver Anchor Team is also exploring a set of new ideas that may fuel the next chapter of innovation and systems change:**

1. Substantially increasing the visibility of food services across the health authority, and beyond
2. Working with VCH's supply chains to identify options for more local and sustainable sourcing
3. Assessing the potential of leveraging planetary health and cultural responsiveness as 'drivers' to assist the organizational shift from 'business for profit' to 'service to patients'



**Want to learn more? Reach out to the Vancouver Anchor Team about their work, or contact Nourish if you're inspired to lead change in your own community.**

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# VANCOUVER ANCHOR TEAM SNAPSHOT

## Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH)

Vancouver Coastal Health is a regional health authority that provides health services including primary, secondary, tertiary and quaternary care, home and community care, mental health services, population and preventive health and addictions services in parts of Greater Vancouver and the Coast Garibaldi area.

**Participating Site:** Vancouver General Hospital

### Other Organizations Involved in the Team's Work:

- UBC Planetary Healthcare Lab
- Fraser Health
- Providence Health Care

## Number of Meals Impacted

Within VCH, 3.8 million meals are served yearly to 1.3 million hospitalized patients.



### Communities Served:

Vancouver Coastal Health Authority serves a **population of 1.25 million** covering **12 municipalities, four regional districts** and **14 Indigenous communities**.



**\$2.3M annual food budget**

## Vancouver Coastal Health Public Health

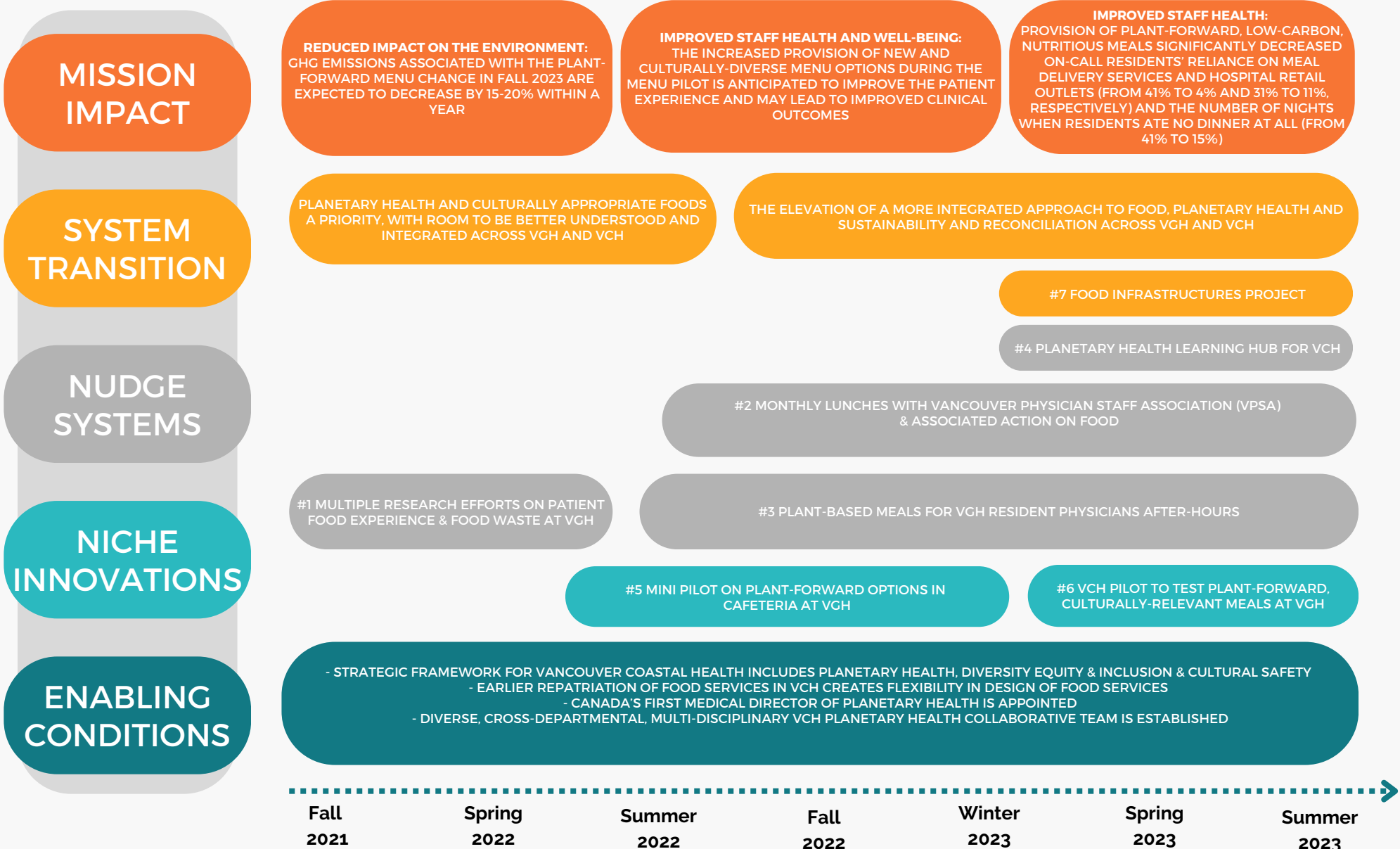
VCH Public Health is the public health arm of the health authority aiming to improve health and well-being by working to prevent disease, promote health, and prolong life in catchment communities. Public Health programs assess and monitor the health of communities, and address the social, environmental, and structural factors - largely outside the health care system - that impact population health.



### Number of Beds:

700 acute care beds at VGH

# DETAILED INTERVENTIONS & OUTCOMES



Reference Number & Date	Title	Key Outcomes	Significance	Contributions
1. Summer - Fall 2021	Multiple research efforts on patient food experience & food waste at VGH	Uncovered new insights on the food experiences and health outcomes of diverse participants, as well as level of food wastage, based on a series of studies: hospital-wide surveys, food waste baseline, observational studies, and a consultation with Indigenous communities.	Surfaced directions on where and how the Vancouver Anchor Team could focus its efforts to achieve desired impacts.	The Vancouver Anchor Team designed and developed each study, with extra support for Indigenous consultation from Nourish Leadership via a land-based learning grant.
2. Summer 2022 - Ongoing	Monthly lunches with Vancouver Physician Staff Association (VPSA)	VPSA begins to align offerings with planetary health, with attendance averaging 250 participants.	Increases the awareness of a growing number of physicians regarding the case for plant-forward menus, which led them to take on food as their major focus for associated planetary health work, including looking into local farmers' market integrations with hospital services (at the early discussion stage).	The Vancouver Anchor Team supported efforts from several local champions advocating for plant-based meals to be served more reliably, developed supporting resources, and pushed for a larger menu change.
3. Summer 2022 - Ongoing	Plant-based meals for VGH resident physicians after-hours	As a pilot, the UBC General Surgery program started to offer residents plant-based meals after hours. The program has now expanded to other residency programs, and a vending machine with more sustainable meal options is now available in a few VCH sites after hours.	Typically, there are limited food options after hours for physicians and other staff at VGH. This initiative makes plant-forward foods more available, increasing awareness and buy-in for planetary health options while also reducing the GHG emissions associated with staff meetings and after-hours meals. These were well-received by plant-based and omnivore residents alike, and the program has expanded to 3 surgical residency programs.	The Vancouver Anchor Team supported the initial pilot program and advocated for after-hours options to be available for all staff, beyond resident physicians.

4. Spring 2023 - Ongoing	Planetary Health Learning Hub for VCH	Developed curriculum to introduce mandatory training in 'Food in Patient & Planetary Health' at Vancouver Coastal Health, with full curriculum forthcoming.	Exposes existing and new VCH staff to the case around improving food to improve patient and planetary health across the health authority.	The Vancouver Anchor Team is currently leading the curriculum development.
5. Winter 2022 - Spring 2023	Mini Pilot on Plant-Forward Options in Cafeteria at VGH	Designed and implemented a practice of promoting plant-based menu options for patients and staff in the VGH cafeteria.	Provided insight into how simple nudges in how food was presented (e.g., where it is displayed amongst options) can increase uptake.	As a result of the Vancouver Anchor Team, the retail food services team at VGH was keen to undertake this work and evaluate the possibility of encouraging patrons to consume more sustainable options.
6. Spring 2023 - Ongoing	VCH Pilot to test plant-forward, culturally relevant meals at VGH	Designed and trialed a planetary health menu for inpatients at Vancouver General Hospital. The novel planetary health menu developed by Chef Ned Bell will be piloted at VGH over the fall of 2023, with successful recipes planned to be integrated in the regular and regional menus, at VGH and in other Health Authorities. St Paul's Hospital (SPH) will be transitioning its menu as a result of a merge to a central kitchen for SPH and VGH, starting in January 2024. More sites across VCH and Providence Health Care have shown interest in integrating the menu in their offerings, which will gradually happen after the VGH pilot.	Demonstrates a deepening commitment to plant-forward menus. Can be scaled to other Vancouver Coastal Health sites and medical centers across the Lower Mainland.	The Vancouver Anchor Team is currently leading the VGH project, with plans to implement this across other sites.
#7 Spring 2023 - Ongoing	Food Infrastructures for Planetary	The project will result in the creation of food infrastructure guidelines and requirements for kitchens and outdoor	These guidelines will help support operational goals and targets related to sustainable and culturally	Members of the Vancouver Anchor Team are leading the

	Health	spaces. These will be added to the existing Low Carbon Climate Resilient and Environmental Sustainability Design Guidelines for Healthcare New Construction. In addition, a new CASCADES Playbook will be developed that addresses the why, what, and how of food infrastructure and assets within health care facilities. These will be shared nationally next spring.	relevant foods by mapping out the infrastructure-related requirements for new builds and retrofits in BC, and beyond. They will help to keep food front and centre in the infrastructure planning and ensure that spaces are designed to optimally position health care facilities as anchors in their communities as they relate to food.	development of these guidelines with a small financial contribution from Nourish. They are leaning on relationships and networks built throughout their participation in the wider Nourish Cohort to recruit collaborators and content experts.
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**NOURISH**

**Nourish believes food is a powerful way to build health for both people and the planet, in addition to providing comfort and healing to patients, creating more resilient communities, and addressing climate change.**

**Starting from a community of practice, we have grown to a network of leaders, organizations, and communities, shifting the focus upstream to work preventatively through food in health care.**

**Through our work with cohorts of leaders and action learning programs, we equip innovative individuals and teams with the skills and momentum to empower bold leadership in climate action and health equity. We work across community, institutional, and policy scales to steward food for health innovation.**

**Join us!**

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