



Media Release

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Windsor-Essex coalition calls on community to support emergency food action

Windsor, ON – With donations at a stand-still and fewer volunteers to support food banks and meal programs, along with the potential for increased need, the food assistance system in Windsor and Essex County is in danger of running out of food, but a coalition of local service providers is trying to change that and is calling on the community for help.

To meet this immediate need, community leaders across Windsor-Essex have joined forces as the Emergency Food Action Coalition (EFAC) to develop a coordinated response to this local food security issue. EFAC is developing a plan to address how to collect food and distribute it to those in need in these unprecedented times. The Coalition is looking for community-wide collaboration and financial support to ensure that service providers can purchase food and supplies to support our most vulnerable populations.

Local food providers have suspended their normal operations and are now focusing on how residents can safely access emergency food. Most programs have implemented measures to reduce interactions, maintain social distancing and support frontline staff.

As the citizens of Windsor-Essex County adjust to many new challenges, people who already rely on meal programs and services will be facing additional struggles. The absence of school nutrition programs will make it harder for children and families to cope. Precarious employment and the closure of many businesses means that the number of people who will require emergency food will increase dramatically in the coming weeks.

Local food banks are weeks, if not days, away from being empty and community support programs are struggling to ensure staff and volunteers are safe and have the means to check in with vulnerable populations. Some food banks have closed due to insufficient staff, volunteers, and food donations.

To address the coming shortfall, EFAC is currently surveying service providers to understand their immediate and short-term needs. The data collected will help EFAC develop its plan to shore up support. EFAC will then create an action plan to address these needs, which may include providing grocery gift cards to people in need, ramping up a county-wide food delivery strategy, developing a mobile network of community helpers who are trained to stay safe, and

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transportation options for vulnerable populations to ensure they can access the food they need. To complete the survey, service providers can visit <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/foodaction>.

Service providers and residents are also invited to visit the Facebook group **Windsor Essex COVID Care Coalition** (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/WECovidCareCoalition>) and share either what they are already doing to help or what needs exist, to help us better coordinate resources. EFAC also hopes to establish a phone hotline for people in need of food in the coming days.

Despite the measures being enacted by the federal and provincial government, a shortfall in meeting people's immediate basic needs is expected. Those with the financial means to help can donate through United Way at www.weareunited.com/COVID-19. All donations will go towards helping the local emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic and will be distributed to the partners providing emergency supports. Alternatively, people can mail or drop off grocery gift cards to the Unemployed Help Centre, which will redistribute the gift cards to people in need.

EFAC will have more to say on its action plan in the coming days and weeks as it gathers more information from the community.

EFAC partners include the Unemployed Help Centre, The Victorian Order of Nurses for Canada, Ontario Branch - Windsor-Essex Site (provider of Meals on Wheels and the Ontario Student Nutrition Program), United Way/Centraide Windsor-Essex County, Windsor Essex Community Foundation, Windsor-Essex County Health Unit, South Essex Community Council, and Family Services Windsor Essex.

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Visit the [Windsor-Essex County Health Unit](#) for the most up-to-date health information on COVID-19.