

Impact of a farmers' market nutrition coupon program on diet quality and psychosocial well-being among low-income adults

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## BACKGROUND

Income is amongst the strongest determinants of diet quality [1, 2] and overall health.[1] A clear socioeconomic gradient exists whereby individuals with lower incomes experience higher rates of nutrition-related chronic diseases [3-5] relative to those with higher incomes. Low household income is also a key determinant of household food insecurity,[6, 7] which is associated with lower diet quality [8-11] and inadequate nutrient intake.[12, 13] Evidence suggests that low-income populations tend to consume diets lower in fruits and vegetables and higher in refined white grains, high-fat meats, fried foods and added fats.[14, 15] These inequities in diet quality may partly explain the greater vulnerability of low-income and food insecure populations to poor health outcomes [14, 16-18] and undernutrition.[12, 13]

The many factors underpinning differential dietary patterns among low-income groups can be conceptualized through the socioecological model.[19, 20] The socioecological model depicts the complex and reciprocal interactions among multiple levels of influence, including individual, social, community, and policy level factors that shape dietary patterns and health outcomes.[19-22] At the individual level, factors such as psychological state [15, 23] and nutrition-related knowledge [23] have been shown to influence dietary patterns.[22, 24-27] For instance, high self-efficacy for consuming fruits and vegetables is associated with greater fruit and vegetable intake.[28, 29] The social level encompasses social and cultural contexts that influence dietary patterns.[23, 30] Low-income populations generally have low social support [29, 31] and social capital,[32-34], which are, in turn, associated with poorer dietary intake and health outcomes.[29, 35] The community level includes the physical environments in which people live and work.[20, 27] Studies from the United States (U.S.) [20, 36-39] and Canada [40] have shown that disadvantaged neighbourhoods generally have more fast food outlets, which are associated with greater purchasing and consumption of unhealthy foods.[37] The policy level

encompasses policies that influence the distribution of dietary patterns and health outcomes across a population.[1, 41] Interventions at the policy level provide significant potential for sustainable, cost-effective and equitable health impacts.[42, 43] Fiscal policies that influence food prices and affordability (e.g., taxation, subsidies) are particularly important for supporting healthy dietary patterns among low-income groups,[44] because the economic resources of low-income populations are often insufficient to purchase healthy foods consistent with dietary recommendations.[14, 45, 46] Given the multi-level contexts in which dietary patterns are situated, interventions at any single level (e.g., individual level interventions) are unlikely to substantially improve diet quality and health outcomes among low-income populations.[20, 47] Policies and interventions that address determinants of poor dietary patterns and ill health at all levels [48-50] are required to effectively reduce nutrition and health inequities.[51, 52] Notably, farmers' market healthy food subsidy programs are growing in interest as multi-component interventions that aim to improve access to and intake of nutritious among low-income populations.[53-56] As government funded food subsidy programs, farmers' market subsidy programs clearly operate at the policy level.

At the community level, farmers' markets have the potential to alleviate barriers associated with accessing healthy foods,[39, 57, 58] as they offer fresh, local produce [39, 59, 60] and can be set up in communities that otherwise have limited access to healthy foods.[61] Although some studies suggest that the high perceived and objective cost of produce at farmers' markets is a barrier for low-income populations,[62-64] others have found that low-income shoppers in the U.S. perceived farmers' market prices to be reasonable/fair,[64] and that farmers' market subsidy programs reduce food insecurity among program participants.[65, 66] Moreover, objective price comparisons in U.S. and Canadian markets showed that prices were lower or comparable to those at other food retailers.[39, 67, 68] Farmers' market food subsidies also support local farmers and promote sustainable local food systems

[69] by increasing awareness of farmers' markets within communities [70] and increasing the customer base, thereby generating increased sales.[71]

Farmers' market food subsidy programs can also influence social level determinants of dietary intake.[28, 72] Farmers' markets act as social spaces, increasing social interactions between community members and farmers,[59, 73] thereby fostering a sense of community and increasing psychosocial well-being of program participants.[74] These social aspects of farmers' markets are particularly important for low-income groups, as social exclusion and isolation are associated with food insecurity and low-income status.[75, 76] Finally, at the individual level, farmers' market healthy food subsidy programs have been shown to improve participant fruit and vegetable intake,[61, 66, 77-80] and farmers' market programs that offer nutrition skill-building activities may enhance participant food- and nutrition-related knowledge and skills [28, 81] and attitudes towards the importance of fruit and vegetable consumption.[81]

Farmers' market food subsidy programs may, therefore, represent a promising multi-level approach to improving the diet quality and psychosocial well-being [82] of low-income populations; however, several knowledge gaps remain.[61] First, given the short-term nature of the intervention, it is unclear whether any positive program outcomes will be sustained over time. However, one study demonstrated that provision of a farmers' market fruit and vegetable subsidy of \$10/week for 6 months resulted in an increase in fruit and vegetable intake of 1.4 servings/1000kcal, which was sustained 6 months following program completion.[78] Second, although prior studies have examined the impact of farmers' market subsidies on fruit and vegetable intake,[61, 66, 77-80] psychosocial well-being,[74] and food insecurity,[65, 66] potential positive impacts of farmers' market subsidies on other relevant outcomes such as subjective social status, sense of community, mental well-being, and malnutrition risk have not been examined. Subjective social status and sense of community are closely associated with social

participation and support.[83-85] In addition, poor mental well-being (e.g., depression, stress) in low-income populations is often linked to financial strain [86, 87] and social isolation and exclusion.[76]

Therefore, we hypothesize that the combined financial support from subsidies and the social aspects of shopping at farmers' markets and participating in skill-building activities may improve participants' mental well-being, subjective (i.e., perceived) social status, and sense of community. Moreover, farmers' market subsidies may influence malnutrition risk by providing additional funds to purchase nutritious foods.

In addition, most previous studies have been cross-sectional [57, 77, 88-92] or used a pre/post design,[53, 56, 93] and/or lacked a control group,[56, 57, 94] each of which does not allow for causal inference.[61] Most have also been conducted over short time frames. Randomized controlled trials (RCT) conducted over longer time frames can provide stronger evidence of the dietary and health impacts of farmers' market food subsidy programs and their sustainability over time.[61] Furthermore, most studies have only assessed changes in fruit and vegetable consumption and have measured dietary intake using brief fruit and vegetable screeners [61] rather than more comprehensive and valid assessment tools such as food frequency questionnaires and 24-hour dietary recalls.[61, 70] Assessment of overall dietary intake is important, as when one aspect of diet changes, such as fruit and vegetable intake, concurrent changes occur in other aspects of dietary intake.[95] Moreover, studies suggest that use of farmers' market food subsidies may differ according to age and sex;[80, 96-98] however, evidence is limited on how the impacts of such programs vary across these groups. Finally, the majority of studies have been conducted in the U.S., and evidence from other nations is sparse.[39]

In British Columbia (BC), Canada, the average monthly cost to purchase a healthy diet for a family of four is \$1,019,[99] nearly one-half the income from low-wage employment.[100] The BC Farmers' Market Nutrition Coupon Program (FMNCP) is a healthy eating initiative that offers a healthy food subsidy, along

with supportive nutrition skill-building activities, for low-income populations.[101] It is the only government-funded program of this type in Canada. Between 2007 and 2017, households received \$15/week. This amount was determined based on a U.S. farmers' market coupon program that provided on average \$10-30 for participants [102] and based on the availability of funds. The amount increased to \$21/week in 2017 to account for increased food costs. In 2018, the BC FMNCP served over 11,000 individuals, including 532 pregnant women, 1,084 seniors, and 4,965 children.[103] The program facilitates access to nutritious foods for low-income families, pregnant women, and older adults by providing participants with coupons valued at \$21/week to purchase fruits, vegetables, dairy, meat/poultry/fish, eggs, nuts, and cut herbs from participating BC farmers' markets.[101] Farmers' markets that participate in the BC FMNCP operate 1-2 days per week, with hours that vary by location. While coupons may only be redeemed from June to November, most communities offer indoor markets that are open year-round.[101, 104] The goal of the BC FMNCP is to provide financial support for low-income households to purchase and consume healthier foods, thereby improving diet quality [47, 105] and overall health.[106, 107] The program also aims to minimize further marginalization of low-income individuals by encouraging their participation in farmers' markets, which are important social spaces that may foster social and mental well-being.[54, 108, 109] Currently, the FMNCP operates in 57 BC communities and reaches over 3900 households;[101] however, the need remains substantial, with over 15 communities on waiting lists to participate. It is unclear if the BC FMNCP is achieving its aims, as the program's outcomes have not been rigorously investigated.

This study was co-designed with the BC Association of Farmers' Markets and the FMNCP in order to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) Conduct a RCT to examine the impact of the BC FMNCP on the following outcomes immediately post-intervention and at 16 weeks post-intervention among low-income adults:

- a. mean overall diet quality (primary outcome);
- b. mean diet quality subscores, mental well-being scores, sense of community, odds of experiencing household food insecurity and odds of malnutrition risk (secondary outcomes); and
- c. mean subjective social status (exploratory outcome)

## **METHODS**

### Study design

Using a parallel group RCT, we will collect data at three time points: baseline (Time 1; 0 weeks, June 2019), immediately following the BC FMNCP (Time 2; 10-15 weeks, October 2019) and 16 weeks after the BC FMNCP ends (Time 3; 26-31 weeks, February 2020).

### Program overview

The BC FMNCP functions through a collaborative partnership between the BC Association of Farmers' Markets, the BC Ministry of Health, farmers' markets and community partners (i.e., local non-profit organizations). The BC Association of Farmers' Markets supports, develops and promotes farmers' markets across BC [101] and oversees the operations of the FMNCP. The FMNCP is supported by the province of BC and the Provincial Health Services Authority. Community partners distribute coupons to program participants from their organization locations (e.g., pregnancy outreach and community services agencies) on a weekly or biweekly basis and offer nutrition skill-building activities such as cooking classes or community gardens to promote nutrition- and food-related knowledge and skills.[101]

### Recruitment

The FMNCP Director will identify approximately 15 BC communities for the study (from the existing FMNCP and from program waiting lists) with the aim of achieving similar rural/urban coverage as the existing FMNCP. Within each community, the FMNCP director will recruit community partners by contacting those who are members of the BC Association of Farmers' Markets and offer nutrition skill-building activities for low-income groups. Community partners within study communities will be responsible for identifying and enrolling eligible low-income adults into the study from among their existing clients and will share study details via phone, email or in-person, using posters and other recruitment aids as needed. Community partners will assess eligibility using a screening questionnaire and will obtain voluntary, informed consent from eligible participants.

#### Eligibility criteria

Individuals will be eligible to participate if they meet the following criteria:

- Adults ( $\geq 18$  years)
- Low-income as determined by community-specific thresholds ( $\sim \$18,000$ /year annual household income before taxes)
- No expected change in household income prior to study completion
- $\leq 8$  people living in the home (including the participant)
- No expected change in household composition prior to study completion
- Primary food shopper for the household
- Does not self-report dementia or Alzheimer's Disease
- Able to speak, read and write in English (or have someone who can assist them)
- No plans to move from principal residence prior to study completion
- Has not previously participated in the BC FMNCP



## Randomization

Following baseline data collection, eligible participants will be randomized to the FMNCP group (n=132) or a no-intervention control group (n=132), with a 1:1 allocation ratio. An independent researcher from the Clinical Research Unit at the University of Calgary will generate a blocked randomization sequence that stratifies participants into blocks according to sex (male, female), geographic location (rural, urban), pregnancy (yes, no) and breastfeeding (yes, no). Blocked randomization will help to ensure balanced representation of participants in study arms.[110] REDCap (Research Electronic Data Capture), a secure, web-based data collection and management application [111] hosted at the University of Calgary, will be used to randomize participants into the FMNCP and control groups on the basis of this randomization sequence. The study coordinator will subsequently communicate participant group assignments to community partners and participants. Allocation concealment will be ensured via secure storage of the randomization sequence separately from the participant database, which will only be accessible by the study coordinator and the Clinical Research Unit. Researchers will remain blinded to respondent condition throughout the study. Although participants cannot be blinded to group allocation, they will be blinded to the specific study objectives to reduce expectancy bias, whereby communication of expected study outcomes influences participants' behaviour.[112-115]

## Intervention

In the existing BC FMNCP, community partners distribute one to two sheets of coupons per week (each sheet contains \$21 in coupons) to program participants for a total of 16 sheets. Coupons can be used over 16-20 weeks to purchase fruits, vegetables, dairy, meat/poultry/fish, eggs, nuts, and cut herbs at participating BC farmers' markets. However, to allow sufficient time to recruit participants for this study, community partners will distribute 16 coupon sheets to the FMNCP group over 10-15 weeks (households with 5-8 individuals will receive 32 coupon sheets). To ensure participants receive all 16 coupon sheets,

community partners will provide two coupon sheets per household during weeks 1-6 of the intervention. Participants may redeem coupons at farmers' markets at a frequency of their choice (e.g., redeem coupons weekly or redeem several weeks' worth of coupons simultaneously). Participants in the FMNCP group will be invited to participate in nutrition skill-building activities (e.g., cooking classes) offered by community partners throughout the intervention period, although participation is not required (this is consistent with the existing FMNCP). The types and frequency of nutrition skill-building activities offered vary across community partners. For the duration of the study, the control group will not receive coupons nor be eligible to participate in nutrition skill-building activities but will be eligible to participate in the BC FMNCP the following farmers' market season. As participants in the control group already receive other supports from community partners, they will continue to meet with their community partner as they normally would throughout the intervention period.

#### Data collection

Data will be collected from the FMNCP and control groups at three time points: Time 1: baseline (0 weeks), Time 2: immediately post-intervention (10-15 weeks), and Time 3: 16 weeks post-intervention (26-31 weeks). At each time point, participants will complete a questionnaire assessing sociodemographic characteristics, health-related variables, and secondary and exploratory outcomes, followed by a 24-hour dietary recall to assess diet quality. The questionnaire and dietary recall will be integrated within a web-based platform developed and pilot tested by the researchers [116]. A second dietary recall will be completed 2-5 days later to better estimate usual intake and account for within-individual variation in diet quality. All participants will receive cash incentives valued at \$20 at baseline and \$40 at each Time 2 and 3. Participants will also receive small gifts prior to data collection at Time 2 and 3, which will serve as a reminder for the upcoming data collection.

At baseline, researchers will provide participants with a username and password to access the web-based platform. Participants will be encouraged, but not required, to complete baseline data collection at a community partner location immediately after providing informed consent. Community partners will record whether data collection was completed at a community partner location or elsewhere (e.g., home). Immediately post-intervention and at 16 weeks post-intervention, participants will receive an email requesting that they complete data collection (i.e., questionnaire and dietary recall) at a location of their choice.

### *Questionnaire*

The questionnaire will be administered via REDCap at all three time points and will collect data on sociodemographic characteristics, health-related variables, sense of community, mental well-being, household food insecurity, malnutrition risk, and subjective social status. Questions related to the FMNCP intervention (e.g., coupon receipt) will be included in the questionnaire at Time 2 only.

### ***Sociodemographic characteristics and health-related variables***

Sociodemographic characteristics and health-related variables that will be assessed include date of birth, sex, race/ethnicity, years lived in Canada, marital status, household size, number of children living in the home, perceived physical health, pregnancy/breastfeeding, smoking status, height, weight, educational level, employment status, annual household income, main source of income, and community of residence.

### ***Mental well-being***

Mental well-being will be assessed using the valid 14-item Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-Being Scale.[117] Scale items are positively phrased and assess various aspects of mental well-being such as

positive affect (e.g., optimism), psychological functioning (e.g., self-confidence) and satisfaction with interpersonal relationships over the past two weeks.[118-120] The scale has been validated in a variety of age, sex, and socioeconomic status groups [120] and cultural contexts,[117] has captured change within short-term interventions,[121-124] and has demonstrated high test-retest reliability with an intra-class correlation of 0.83.[120] Responses are scored on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (none of the time) to 5 (all of the time) and are summed to provide a single score ranging from 14 to 70.[117, 119] A higher score indicates higher perceived mental well-being.[117]

### ***Household food insecurity***

Household food insecurity will be assessed using Health Canada's validated 18-item Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM), which includes a 10-item adult scale and an 8-item child scale for households with children under 18 years of age.[125] The HFSSM typically assesses experiences of household food insecurity over the past year;[126] however, similar to how the HFSSM has been modified in previous studies,[127-130] it will be modified to assess experiences of household food insecurity in the past month. The HFSSM assesses experiences of marginal (one affirmative response), moderate (adult subscale 2-5 affirmative responses/child subscale 2-4 affirmative responses) and severe (adult subscale  $\geq 6$  affirmative responses/child subscale  $\geq 5$  affirmative responses) food insecurity.[125] The HFSSM has been validated in a variety of population groups and languages,[131, 132] has captured changes in food security status during short-term interventions,[129] and has good test-retest reliability with a Pearson correlation coefficient of  $r=0.75$ .[133]

### ***Sense of community***

Sense of community will be assessed using the validated 8-item Brief Sense of Community Scale.[134] Scale components are designed to assess each sense of community dimension according to the McMillan-

Chavis (1986) Model [135, 136] for sense of community, which includes four elements: membership, influence, integration and fulfillment of needs, and a shared emotional connection.[135, 136] Each item is scored using a Likert Scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).[134] Total sense of community scores can range from 8 to 40 with a higher score indicating greater needs fulfillment, group membership, influence and emotional connection within the community.

### ***Malnutrition risk***

Malnutrition risk will be calculated using the validated Malnutrition Universal Screening Tool (MUST).[137, 138] The MUST assesses malnutrition risk using body mass index (BMI) (scored as 0 = BMI > 20, 1 = BMI 18.5-20, 2 = BMI < 18.5), unplanned weight loss in the past 3-6 months (scored as 0 = < 5% of body weight, 1 = 5-10% of body weight, 2 = > 10% of body weight) and acute disease effect score (acute illness with no or likely no nutritional intake for > 5 days).[138] Unplanned weight loss will be modified to the past 3 months to accommodate the study timeline. In addition, acute disease effect is unlikely to occur in community settings [138] and will, therefore, be excluded.[139, 140] Overall malnutrition risk will be obtained by adding together subscores for BMI and unplanned weight loss, with 0 indicating low risk, 1 indicating medium risk, and  $\geq 2$  indicating high risk of malnutrition.[139] The MUST is an appropriate tool to assess malnutrition in community-dwelling [140, 141] adults aged  $\geq 18$  years,[141-143] as it was designed to screen for malnutrition in all patient groups and care settings.[141] The MUST has been used to assess change in short-term interventions [144] and has demonstrated high test-retest reliability with a Cohen's kappa coefficient of  $\kappa=0.94$ . [145]

### ***Subjective social status***

Subjective social status will be assessed using the validated MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status community ladder,[146, 147] which consists of a single-item visual analog scale whereby respondents

place themselves on a ladder rung according to their perceived social standing relative to others in their community.[146, 148] Response values can range from 1 to 10, with a higher score indicating higher perceived social status.[146] The subjective social status community ladder has been used to capture changes from short-term interventions.[149]

### ***FMNCP intervention data***

At Time 2 only, participants in both the intervention and control groups will report whether they received FMNCP coupons and attended nutrition skill-building activities (to assess contamination of the control group), how often and how much of their own money was spent at farmers' markets during the intervention period and the types of foods purchased.

### ***Dietary intake***

Participants will complete two unannounced dietary recalls at each time point. Twenty-four hour dietary recalls are a recommended dietary assessment method to evaluate the effect of an intervention on diet quality, as they have less systematic error than other self-reported dietary assessment tools.[150, 151] Administration of unannounced dietary recalls minimizes reactivity bias, where participants adjust their dietary intake in anticipation of having to report it.[152]

Participants will record all foods and beverages consumed (excluding supplements) from midnight to midnight the previous day using Health Canada's validated Automated Self-Administered 24-hour Dietary Recall (ASA24-Canada-2018),[151, 153-155] an automated online dietary assessment tool.[154, 155] The ASA24 collects information regarding dietary intake in a series of four steps: 1) foods consumed at each meal/snack, 2) queries regarding omitted meals/snacks, 3) details (e.g., cooking methods, portions), and 4) review of commonly forgotten items.[151, 156] The ASA24 concludes with a question querying

whether reported intake was less than usual, usual, or more than usual.[156] The ASA24 has been used with older, multi-ethnic, and disadvantaged adults [113-115, 151, 157] and was preferred by a majority of participants compared to interviewer-administered recalls;[113] however, in a recent study among BC FMNCP participants, we identified several usability issues with the ASA24.[116] For example, participants reported difficulties in searching for specific foods and making changes to entered meals.[116] We will aim to address these challenges by including a pictorial user guide in survey invitation emails, and by training community partners to assist participants in-person with the ASA24-Canada-2018. Further, participants and community partners will have access to a toll-free study helpline available 10 hours/day, 6 days/week during data collection. Helpline operators will provide assistance via telephone or email, and include three registered dietitians and the study coordinator, all of whom completed a half-day training session. Interrater reliability in entering meals into the ASA24-Canada-2018 among the helpline operators was high, with an intraclass correlation of 0.98.

The purpose of the helpline is two-fold: 1) to serve as a support platform for community partners to ask questions and update researchers, and 2) to assist participants in completing data collection. If needed, helpline operators will verbally read all questions to participants and enter their responses online on their behalf. To maintain blinding, operators will remind participants not to disclose their group assignment during the call. Supporting participants during data collection will help to minimize missing and inaccurate data and participant attrition. To further minimize attrition, if data collection is not completed within 48-hours of the initial prompt, researchers will make up to four attempts to contact participants by email and/or phone. Community partners will also remind participants to complete data collection.

*Data collected by community partners and farmers' market vendors*

Community partners will maintain records of the number of coupons distributed to each participant (by recording the unique bar code number on each coupon) and the frequency and types of nutrition skill-building activities attended. Farmers' market vendors will track coupon redemption and foods purchased with coupons (e.g., fruits, vegetables, dairy) by using checkboxes on the back of each coupon. Farmers' market managers will collect redeemed coupons from vendors and submit them to the FMNCP. They will complete tracking sheets noting the number of coupons redeemed and foods purchased with coupons.

#### Statistical analysis plan

##### *Healthy Eating Index-2015*

Diet quality scores and subscores will be calculated using the validated Healthy Eating Index-2015 (HEI-2015),[158-162] a tool used to assess conformance with the 2015-2020 Dietary Guidelines for Americans.[161] HEI-2015 subscores will be examined to gain insight into the specific dietary components that change in response to the intervention.[163] HEI scores are associated with indicators of socioeconomic position [164] and chronic disease.[18, 160, 165-168] Although Canadian adaptations of the HEI have been developed, they have either not been validated, are not density-based, or reflect dietary recommendations that are no longer current.[9, 169] Given that dietary recommendations in Canada and the U.S. are similar,[170-172] the HEI-2015 remains an appropriate tool to assess diet quality of Canadians.[9]

The HEI-2015 encompasses thirteen dietary components to assess overall diet quality,[161] including nine 'adequacy' components (recommended foods/nutrients, including total fruits , whole fruits, total vegetables, greens and beans, whole grains, dairy, total protein foods, seafood and plant proteins, fatty acids) and four 'moderation' components (foods/nutrients recommended to limit, including refined grains, sodium, added sugars, saturated fats). Component scores are density-based and, therefore,



independent of energy intake.[161, 163] Diet quality (total HEI-2015 scores and subscores) will be calculated using the simple HEI scoring algorithm.[161] This method provides scores at the individual level and can, therefore, accommodate the multi-level nature of our data and include covariates.[161] HEI-2015 scores will be calculated using three nutrient databases linked to the ASA24-Canada-2018:[173] the Canadian Nutrient File and the U.S. Department of Agriculture's (USDA) Food and Nutrient Database for Dietary Surveys to convert dietary intakes to energy and nutrient intakes, and the USDA Food Patterns Equivalents Database to convert dietary intakes to dietary constituents (e.g., fruits) and measurement units consistent with HEI-2015 scoring standards (e.g., cup-equivalents of fruit).[162, 163, 174, 175] Ratios for each of the dietary constituents (e.g., quantity of fruit per 1000 kcal) will be calculated for each participant and scored using HEI-2015 scoring standards. The total score for each participant will be derived by adding the scores for intake of 'adequacy' and 'moderation' components with possible scores ranging from 0-100. A higher score indicates a higher quality diet.[161]

### *Statistical analyses*

Descriptive analyses will be conducted to examine participant characteristics by group at each time point. Characteristics of study completers (i.e., provided data at Time 3) and non-completers will also be compared.

Analyses will be intention-to-treat, in which participants will be analysed within the groups to which they were randomized regardless of adherence (e.g., failure to redeem coupons) or dropout. The analyses will include all participants who provided data at baseline. Repeated measures mixed-effect regression will assess differences in changes in mean HEI-2015 scores, HEI-2015 subscores, mental well-being, sense of community, and subjective social status between the FMNCP and control groups immediately post-intervention and 16 weeks post-intervention. Multinomial logistic regression will be used to assess

differences in the odds of experiencing household food insecurity and malnutrition risk for the FMNCP group compared to the control group immediately post-intervention and 16 weeks post-intervention. Statistical models will include intervention group (FMNCP vs control), time from baseline, intervention-by-time interaction, blocking variables (i.e., sex, rural/urban, pregnancy, breastfeeding), baseline values of the outcome, data collection mode (online, phone), household size, and place of data collection (community partner, other) as fixed effects covariates. Participant-specific (i.e., repeated measures) and rural/urban variations in outcomes will be modeled using random effects. Models will also include covariates specific to each outcome to increase the precision of estimates.[95] For the primary outcome of overall diet quality, models will include children living in the home (yes, no), sex, age, BMI, marital status, race/ethnicity, perceived health, smoking, day of dietary recall completion, and dietary recall number (i.e., dietary recall 1 or 2). Models that are and are not adjusted for an indicator of energy intake misreporting (the ratio of reported energy intake to total estimated energy expenditure) will be presented. Adjusted group differences (i.e., FMNCP vs control) in outcomes will be estimated using 95% confidence intervals and corresponding p-values.

Subgroup analyses will examine whether the impact of the intervention on primary and secondary outcomes differs according to age group or sex. Dose-response analyses will examine whether the impact of the BC FMNCP on overall diet quality depends on the number of coupons redeemed and the number of nutrition skill-building activities attended. Interactions will be retained in statistical models if  $p < 0.10$ . Analyses will be conducted in Stata (v15.1, Stata Corp, TX, USA), with  $p < 0.05$  indicating statistically significant differences between groups.

Missing data

Missing data will be handled using full information maximum likelihood under a missing at random assumption. We will also attempt to minimize missing data by reviewing all data within 24 hours of receipt and by contacting participants to fill-in missing or implausible responses within 48 hours. Participants who drop out of the study will be asked to provide reasons for drop out to assess the plausibility of a missing at random assumption.

#### Sensitivity analyses

Monte Carlo Markov Chain multiple imputation, inverse probability weighting and available case analysis will be used in a sensitivity analysis to investigate the impact of different assumptions about missing data on estimated program impacts.[176-178] Given the possibility of non-random attrition, pattern mixture methods models [179] will be used to explore the robustness of study findings to the assumption that data were missing not at random.[180]

#### Sample size calculation

The sample size was calculated from a RCT that investigated the impact of a fruit and vegetable rebate on HEI-2010 scores in low-income participants in the U.S.,[95] and a cross-sectional study that assessed average diet quality scores in disadvantaged Canadians.[36] In the RCT, diet quality in the intervention group was 4.7 points higher (95% CI 2.4, 7.1) at follow-up compared to controls.[95] This difference can be translated to, for example, an additional half serving of fruit per day, which is clinically meaningful and achievable.[107, 165] Assuming a type I error of 5%, an attrition rate of 30% by the 26- to 31-week follow up, and potential design effects based on sampling within different communities (estimated at 1.1, or an inflation of 10%), 264 participants are required for 80% power to detect a 4.7-point difference in diet quality.

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