

2022

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# The Real Cost of Eating in Huron and Perth



**Food security is when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.**

**Food insecurity is when people or their families have inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints.**

## What is monitoring food affordability?

To monitor food affordability, Huron Perth Public Health surveys the price of a variety of food from grocery stores across Huron and Perth counties. Using a survey tool called Monitoring Food Affordability (formerly the Nutritious Food Basket), we calculate the cost of one week's worth of groceries. In 2022, the tool was updated to reflect the new Canada's Food Guide recommendations (2019). The results cannot be compared to previous years because it is a new survey tool that is being piloted across the province.

This survey is conducted by pricing 59 food items using the lowest available cost in six area grocery stores (three conducted in-store, three conducted online) and calculating the average retail price. The items costed meet the recommendations from Canada's Food Guide, and assume that people have the time, skill, and equipment needed to cook these food items. The tool does not include prepared convenience foods or household non-food items, such as toiletries.

In 2022, the cost of groceries for a family of four in Huron Perth was \$249 per week, or \$1,076 per month. For a family of four receiving Ontario Works, this means they need to spend 39% of their income on food to meet the Canada's Food Guide recommendations. This leaves \$261 each month for all other expenses not including rent.

## Why can't people afford food?

For people earning minimum wage, working part-time and precarious jobs, receiving social assistance (Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program) or living on a fixed income, it's hard to make ends meet.

### Households living on low income will struggle to afford food

Food insecurity is the inadequate or insecure access to food because of financial constraints. People living with food insecurity may not experience hunger, but the food available to them might not be enough, safe, culturally adequate or meet the Canada's Food Guide recommendations.

In 2017, it was estimated that 11%\* of Huron Perth households experienced food insecurity.<sup>1</sup>

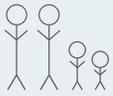
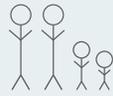
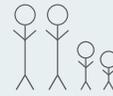
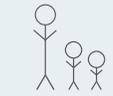
\*Interpret with caution due to high sampling variability

### Poverty is the root cause of food insecurity.

Below are examples of different income scenarios showing money remaining after basic monthly expenses are paid. As households living with low income often reside in rental housing, local rental rates are included.

These scenarios show that households living on low income have little, if any, money left over to pay for other basic expenses, such as:

- Heat, hydro and other utilities
- Transportation, car maintenance and gas
- Child care
- Phone and internet
- Clothing
- Insurance
- Laundry
- Non-prescription drugs and dispensing feeds for prescription drugs
- Eye and dental care
- Home maintenance
- Costs for children in school
- Household cleaners and personal hygiene products

	Households with Children				Households without Children			
	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4	Scenario 5	Scenario 6	Scenario 7	Scenario 8
	 Ontario Works	 Minimum Wage Earner	 Median Ontario Income	 Single Parent Ontario Works	 Ontario Works	 ODSP	 Senior OAS/GIS	 ODSP
<b>Income</b>								
Total Monthly Income (After Tax)	\$2,760	\$3,973	\$9,323	\$2,528	\$863	\$1,309	\$1,885	\$2,322
<b>Expenses</b>								
Housing <sup>2-8</sup>	\$1,423	\$1,423	\$1,423	\$1,622	\$742*	\$1,258	\$1,258	\$1,258
Food	\$1,076	\$1,076	\$1,076	\$792	\$386	\$386	\$279	\$643
<b>Monthly Income Remaining for Other Expenses</b>								
	<b>\$261</b>	\$1,474	\$6,824	\$114	<b>-\$265</b>	<b>-\$335</b>	\$348	\$421
<div style="border: 1px solid green; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;"> <p>A single person living on Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program could spend most of their income on the rent. There would be no money left for food or other expenses.</p> <p>*The cost of rent could be higher for a single person on Ontario Works if there were no bachelor apartments available to rent in Huron and Perth counties, in which case they would need to rent a one-bedroom or share living expenses with a roommate.</p> </div> <div style="border: 1px solid blue; padding: 5px;"> <p>The situation is not much better for a family of four or a single parent on Ontario Works. After paying for rent and food, they have only \$261 and \$114 respectively left to cover all other expenses.</p> </div>								
% Income Required for Rent	52%	36%	15%	64%	86%	96%	67%	54%
% Income Required for Food	39%	27%	12%	31%	45%	29%	15%	28%

## Why does the cost of food matter?

In reality, people usually choose to pay their rent and other fixed expenses, such as heat and transportation, first. Food becomes a flexible expense, meaning food such as fresh vegetables and fruits is only bought **if** and **when** it can be afforded. This often results in a diet that does not meet Canada's Food Guide recommendations, as well as food insecurity.

When people can't afford to buy enough food, they are more likely to have poorer health. This may include experiencing depression, an increased risk of chronic illnesses, poor growth and development, and a shorter life expectancy.<sup>9</sup>

In 2015, Tarasuk et al. estimated that healthcare costs for severely food insecure households are 121% higher compared to those living in food secure households, which results in an additional \$2,322 per person per year in health care costs in Canada.<sup>10</sup> Today, that cost is likely significantly higher.

## Food charity is not a solution to food insecurity

Food banks were originally intended to provide temporary relief during difficult economic times in the 1980s. Even after the economy improved, the need for charitable food assistance continued and has grown exponentially in that time. Food banks remain the primary community response to food insecurity.

Many people believe that the existence of food banks means that food insecurity is solved. In reality, food banks and other charitable food programs are not a solution because:

- The majority of people who cannot afford to feed themselves and their families do not or are unable to access food banks. It's estimated that only about one quarter of households who are food insecure use food charities.<sup>11</sup>
- Food banks operate under many constraints, including limited selection of food due to reliance on donations, and lack of facilities to store fresh produce.
- Food banks are forced to restrict the number of times people can use their services because of low supply, lack of storage and a shortage of volunteers. Individuals may only be allowed to visit a food bank once per month, receiving only five to seven days' worth of groceries.

Other food programs such as community kitchens, community gardens, community meals and school nutrition programs benefit participants greatly because they decrease social isolation, can teach food skills, and offer other opportunities. However, these programs are not able to decrease the prevalence of food insecurity, which is a result of inadequate income rather than lack of access to food or food skills.



## What can we do to ensure everyone has access to enough food?

1. Become more aware about why food insecurity is a serious public health problem. You can read about this at [PROOF: Household Food Insecurity in Canada](#); [PROOF Fact Sheets](#) or participate in Food Insecurity Training put on by your local health unit.
2. Learn about why income solutions are needed to reduce food insecurity by reading the [Ontario Dietitians in Public Health \(ODPH\) Food Insecurity Position Statement](#)
3. Spread the word!  
Share what you learn with others. This could be with community partners, clients, friends, family or coworkers to educate them about food insecurity and help them become aware of the root cause – income. You can use [ODPH's Food Insecurity Infographic](#) or share the [Cent\\$less Campaign](#).
4. Speak with Candidates.  
You may have the opportunity to speak with candidates before the next election and you can bring up your findings about food insecurity and ask them how they plan to address the issue.
5. Send letters to your MP and MPP showing your support for income-based solutions to address food insecurity. ODPH has a [letter template](#) that you may use and edit as needed.

## Strategies to address food insecurity

- Basic Income Guarantee
- Increases to Social Assistance and disability pension rates
- Implementing a Living Wage
- Increases to minimum wage
- Increases in investments for subsidized, affordable and stable housing
- Income protection for precarious employment and low wages
- Providing accessible and affordable child care
- Investing in affordable public transit



## What else can you do?

- Visit the [Poverty to Prosperity Facebook page](#) to learn more about the causes of food insecurity, share what you learn with friends, neighbours and community leaders and start a conversation.
- Learn about the [Huron-Perth Living Wage](#) from the Social Research and Planning Council. Share the summary with friends, neighbours and community leaders and start a conversation.
- Ask your MP and MPP to support affordable housing, income security, public transit and accessible child care.
- Support free tax clinics, either by hosting or becoming a volunteer. These clinics provide free income tax filings to those living with low incomes in order to receive their entitled benefits.
- Visit [Ontario 211](#) to learn about the resources available to help families living with low income participate in community activities such as sports and arts activities.
- Join the thousands of Canadians who are advocating for Guaranteed Livable (Basic) Income!

**Food insecurity** is the inadequate or insecure access to food because of financial constraints.



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For more details about  
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