



Food Insecurity

A PRIMER FOR MUNICIPALITIES

Food insecurity is an increasingly urgent public health problem affecting Huron and Perth counties.

Between 2019 and 2024, the prevalence of household food insecurity rose from 19.3 per cent to 26.1 per cent in the South West region of Ontario.^{1*}



Household food insecurity refers to inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints.²

Put simply – not having enough money for food.

Research shows that food insecurity requires income-based solutions.²

Food programs, such as food banks and community meals, can temporarily reduce the effects of hunger; however, they do not address the root cause and are not a long-term solution to addressing food insecurity.

Food insecurity and poverty are pressing issues that municipalities can help address.

This resource provides a range of income-based strategies that municipalities can implement to make a meaningful impact in their communities. When strategies are implemented to make food and life more affordable, individuals and families can strengthen their health and well-being, and flourish.

Adapted from, *Food Insecurity: A Primer for Municipalities*, developed by the [Ontario Dietitians in Public Health \(ODPH\) Food Insecurity Workgroup](#).

*Source: *Canadian Income Survey*. Due to small sample size for Huron Perth, South West public health unit region data were used. Population demographics and food insecurity trends in Huron Perth are similar to those in the South West region. Trends for the South West region and Ontario are similar.





Household Food Insecurity in Huron and Perth Counties

Household food insecurity means not having enough money for food.¹

The number of households affected by food insecurity is at a new record high. In 2024, **26.1 per cent of households in South West Ontario** were food insecure.¹



Food Affordability

After paying for rent and food, many people in Huron Perth don't have enough left for other monthly expenses.³

Single parent of 2 on Ontario Works

\$323 monthly deficit



Single person on Ontario Works

\$859 monthly deficit

Income

Having a job does not guarantee food security.

In 2022, **58.6 per cent** of food-insecure households in Ontario relied on employment income.²

Food Insecurity Takes a Toll on Our Community

Physical and mental health



Increased risk of diabetes and heart disease¹

Increased risk of depression, anxiety and mood disorders¹

Healthcare costs



23 to 121 per cent higher healthcare costs⁴

In 2017, Ontario municipal governments contributed **\$2.1 billion** for healthcare costs⁵

Overall well-being



Increased barriers to employment

Increased social isolation

Impedes people's ability to advance in life⁶

When everyone has reliable access to food, our whole community becomes healthier and stronger.

Solutions

Food insecurity is an income problem and requires income solutions.

Municipalities can support policies and initiatives that improve the finances of households with low incomes and advocate for a stronger social safety net.



Strategies for Municipalities

The following checklists outline actions municipalities can take or continue to support.

Support Effective Provincial and Federal Policies

Work with provincial and federal governments to strengthen income-based policies and supports so households in Ontario and across Canada can meet their basic needs and live with dignity.^{1,7}

Advocate to the provincial government to:

- Increase income supports (e.g., minimum wage and social assistance rates) to match the cost of living.
- Enhance the poverty reduction strategy by including targets for reduction of food insecurity and policy interventions that improve the financial circumstances of very low income households.

Advocate to the federal government to:

- Strengthen the Canada Child Benefit and remove reductions for children aged six to 18 who are at greatest risk for food insecurity.
- Enhance the Canada Disability Benefit and automatically enroll recipients of provincial and territorial disability support programs.

Foster Collaboration and Collective Action

Raise awareness within the community about food insecurity and its connection to income.⁸

Engage and collaborate with community partners to promote long-term solutions to poverty and food insecurity by identifying local priorities for action, supporting community development and professional education, leveraging data, and advancing income-based solutions.

Declare food insecurity an emergency (e.g., [City of Brockville, 2025](#); [City of Kingston Council, 2025](#); [Mississauga, 2024](#); [Toronto City Council, 2024](#); [City of Brantford, 2025](#)).

Consider developing a municipal poverty reduction strategy ([Tamarack Institute Ending Poverty Network for Change](#)).





Improve Incomes

Support a living wage

A living wage is the hourly pay a worker must earn to afford their basic needs and engage in their community based on regional living costs.⁹

Learn about the benefits of [becoming a Living Wage employer](#).

Encourage local businesses to become Living Wage employers.

Continue to support local free income tax filing clinics for households with lower incomes.¹⁰

Filing income taxes is essential to be eligible for subsidized housing and to receive federal government benefits and credits.

Promote clinics and help recruit volunteers (e.g., [Perth Huron United Way Volunteering, Free Tax Clinics](#)).

Provide community spaces for clinics at no cost.

Support systems navigation at clinics (e.g., promote community resources and governmental benefits, and make referrals to community resources).

Make Life More Affordable

Support affordable housing

Affordable housing is essential for households to afford necessities like food. Municipalities play a key role in shaping housing affordability through land-use planning, investment, and policy advocacy.¹¹⁻¹⁴

Continue to strengthen land use planning policies to support affordable housing to increase the supply and diversity of housing options.

Continue to support and strengthen the [Housing First](#) approach.

Support expansion of non-market and not-for-profit housing including supportive housing, community housing, rent supports and affordable home ownership.

Collaborate with, and advocate to, provincial and federal governments to expand affordable housing supply through financial incentives and policy tools.

Improve access to local services and reduce barriers

Continue to provide subsidized and deeply discounted access to community gathering spaces, recreation, and municipal spaces (e.g., [Ottawa's Play Free](#), [Toronto](#), [Hamilton](#), [Kingston](#)).

Offer flexible service hours and virtual or phone access to services to decrease financial, time and travel barriers.



References

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4. Tarasuk V, Cheng J, de Oliveira C, Dachner N, Gundersen C, Kurdyak P. (2015). [Association between household food insecurity and annual health care costs](#).
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6. Right to Food (formerly Community Food Centres Canada) (2020). [Beyond Hunger: The Hidden Impacts of Food Insecurity in Canada](#).
7. Maytree. (2025). [Welfare in Canada: Ontario](#).
8. Ontario Dietitians in Public Health. (ND). [Food Insecurity](#).
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11. Canadian Centre for Housing Rights. (2022). [Policy Advocacy](#).
12. Whitzman C. (2024). [Homeward Bound: How to Create Deeply Affordable Housing](#).
13. Acorn Canada. (2025). [Ontario ACORN Provincial Platform](#).
14. Association of Municipalities of Ontario. (2022). [A Blueprint for Action: An Integrated Approach to Address the Ontario Housing Crisis](#).

Resources

1. Living Wage Foundation. (ND). [The Living Wage is good for business](#).
2. Living Wage Foundation. (ND). [The real Living Wage is good for people](#).

Contact municipal@hpph.ca for:

- a consult with HPPH staff
- evidence-informed strategies
- opportunities to collaborate



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1-888-221-2133