

The 2022 Cost of Eating Well

Monitoring Food Affordability in
the North Bay Parry Sound District

01/01/2022

12/31/2022

North Bay Parry Sound District
Health Unit



Bureau de santé
du district de North Bay-Parry Sound

This report is about

food insecurity.

Food insecurity means a household does not have enough money to buy food.

It can range from worrying about running out of food, to limiting food choices, to reducing food intake and skipping meals due to not having enough money.

Food insecurity is a serious public health problem because it leads to poor health.

Food Insecurity and Health

The physical and mental health impacts of food insecurity are significant.¹ Living in a food insecure household is associated with a greater risk of developing a wide range of health issues such as diabetes, heart disease, chronic pain, poor oral health, depression, and anxiety.²⁻⁶ Children experiencing food insecurity are also at greater risk for health problems, particularly mental health problems that can last into adulthood.⁷⁻⁹

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Adults living in food insecure households are more likely to:

- Have difficulty managing chronic conditions³
- Not take prescription medications as prescribed due to cost¹⁰
- Have higher health care usage^{11,12}
- Die prematurely⁶

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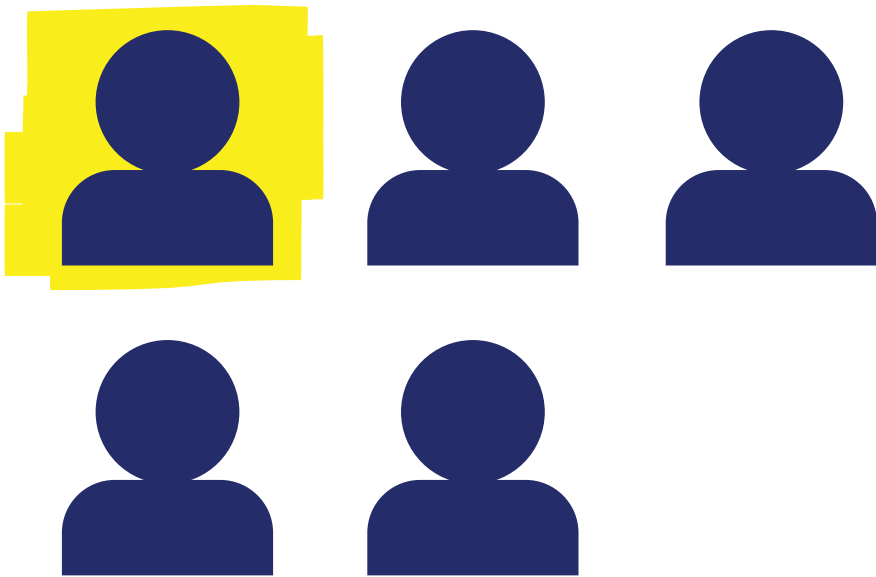
1 in 6 households in Ontario experience food insecurity.¹



That's over 2.3 million people.

1 in 5 children

**in Ontario live in
a food insecure
household.¹**



Food insecure households need more money to be able to pay for the costs of living, including food.

Monitoring Food Affordability

The Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) is a survey used in Canada to monitor food costs. It includes a list of food items based on Canada's Food Guide and Canadian purchasing habits.¹³ Public health units across Ontario use the NFB to estimate food costs locally. The results are used to monitor how affordable it is to eat according to Canada's Food Guide.

The Nutritious Food Basket includes¹⁴

Vegetables and fruit

Green beans, frozen
Broccoli, frozen
Peas, frozen
Green pepper, fresh
Romaine lettuce, fresh
Spinach, frozen
Winter squash, fresh
Carrots, fresh
Sweet potatoes, fresh
Potatoes, fresh
Corn, frozen
Mixed vegetables, frozen
Cabbage, fresh
Iceberg lettuce, fresh
Cucumber, fresh
Celery, fresh
Mushrooms, fresh
Onions, fresh
Tomatoes, canned
Tomatoes, fresh
Apples, fresh

Bananas, fresh
Grapes, fresh
Oranges, fresh
Pears, canned
Strawberries, frozen
Peaches, canned
Cantaloupe melon, fresh

Unsaturated fats
Vegetable oil
Mayonnaise
Margarine

Protein foods
Fortified soy beverage
Tofu
Hummus
Chickpeas, canned
Kidney beans, canned
White beans, canned
Black beans, canned
Lentils, dry
Sunflower seeds
Peanuts, unsalted

Peanut butter, natural
Tuna, canned
Pink salmon, canned
White fish, frozen
Eggs, fresh
Chicken legs
Ground turkey
Pork chops
Beef, inside round roast
Mozzarella cheese, 16.5% M.F.
Milk, 2% M.F.
Plain yogurt, 1-2% M.F.
Whole grain foods
Brown rice
Quick rolled oats
Whole grain wheat flour
Whole wheat pasta
Whole wheat pita, roti
or chapatti
Whole wheat dinner roll
O-shaped oat cereal, plain
Shredded wheat, plain

The North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit records the prices of food items on the NFB list from **twelve** grocery stores across the district.

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The NFB does not include:

- Highly processed, ready-to-eat foods
- Convenience snack foods
- Foods for religious, cultural, celebratory or special dietary requirements or preferences*
- Infant food or formula
- Takeout or restaurant food
- Personal care items (e.g. diapers, toilet paper, toothpaste, etc.) or cleaning supplies often purchased at grocery stores

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Most NFB food items are whole, unprocessed foods that must be prepared. The NFB is a *very modest estimate* of food costs. It is not meant to be used as a budgeting tool. The NFB assumes people have the benefit of the knowledge, skills, time, and equipment needed to access, prepare, and store the foods on the list. In reality, this is not the case for many Canadians.

**Canada's food guide and the NFB are not inclusive for all religious and cultural groups, and they do not acknowledge traditional Indigenous foods and food procurement practices. The North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit recognizes this as a significant limitation of this data collection.*

It is **not possible**
to follow
Canada's Food
Guide without
enough money
to buy food.

Canada's Food Guide provides dietary guidance based on current global evidence about the connection between food and health.¹⁵ It is unacceptable that so many households are not able to follow Canada's Food Guide because they don't have enough money.

The Cost of Eating Well

How much does it cost to eat according to Canada's Food Guide, based on the Nutritious Food Basket?

2022 Household Monthly Food Costs*



Family of Four

Man 31–50
Woman 31–50
Boy 14–18
Girl 4–8

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\$1,125



Single Woman with 2 Kids

Woman 31–50
Boy 14–18
Girl 4–8

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\$828



Couple

Man 31–50
Woman 31–50

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\$673



Single Man

Man 31–50

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\$404



Older Single Woman

Woman 70+

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\$292

*NFB data is collected in May/June. The NFB was recently updated to reflect the 2019 Canada's Food Guide. Due to this change, NFB data from 2022 cannot be compared to past years. The 2022 NFB survey is considered a pilot year, as the revised NFB survey tool may change based on 2022 feedback to improve future data collection.

Is food affordable?

It depends on household income.

Food costs are increasing. Over several months at the end of 2022, Statistics Canada reported food cost increases of over 10 percent, inflation rates not seen since the early 1980's.¹⁶ Everyone feels the pinch of rising food costs, but low-income households do not have enough money to afford the difference.

Social Assistance and the Cost of Eating Well

67% of households in Ontario with social assistance as their main income are food insecure.¹

Households relying on social assistance (Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program) as their main source of income in Ontario are at extremely high risk of being food insecure.

The following household scenarios show the 2022 NFB food costs and local rent rates in the context of social assistance income.

The funds remaining must cover **all** other basic needs such as:

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Transportation

Utilities

Phone

Internet

Personal Care Products

Clothing

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Single man receiving Ontario Works

This person does not have enough money to cover rent and food in a month, or their other costs of living. Current social assistance rates in Ontario are not based on the real costs of living. There are few income supports in place for working aged adults without children, leaving them in extreme poverty should they be unemployed.

**Income is based on OW basic allowance and maximum shelter allowance, GST/HST credit, Ontario Trillium Benefit, and the Ontario Climate Action Incentive Payment.*

Monthly income:*	\$876
Rent (bachelor apartment):	\$650
Food:	\$404

-\$178



Single woman with 2 kids receiving Ontario Works

It is highly unlikely that the \$688 remaining after paying for rent and food will be enough to cover this family's monthly expenses. Parents in Canada are eligible for the Canada/Ontario Child Benefit (CCB), which provides a seemingly significant amount of money monthly for low-income households. Yet, 1 in 5 children in Ontario live in a food insecure household, suggesting the CCB does not provide enough money to protect against food insecurity.

**Income is based on Ontario Works basic allowance for one recipient and two dependents and maximum shelter allowance for a family size of three, Canada and Ontario Child Benefit, GST/HST credit, Ontario Trillium Benefit, and the Climate Action Incentive Payment.*

Monthly income:*	\$2548
Rent (2 bedroom apartment):	\$1032
Food:	\$828

\$688



Couple receiving Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)

People receiving ODSP get more money per month than those receiving Ontario Works, as they are not expected to become employed and may have additional costs associated with having a disability. However, ODSP income is not enough to protect against poverty and food insecurity.

**Income is based on recipient and spouse both disabled; includes GST/HST credit, Ontario Trillium Benefit, and, Climate Action Incentive Payment.*

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Monthly income:*	\$2343
Rent (1 bedroom apartment):	\$862
Food:	\$673
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\$808

These scenarios focus on households with social assistance as their main source of income. However, **48% of households experiencing food insecurity in Ontario have income from employment** as their main source of income.¹ This shows that current minimum wage rates, and/or lack of stable work hours, put lower income earners at risk for food insecurity.

Notes about the income scenarios:

- Rent rates are based on information collected quarterly from the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation.¹⁷ It may or may not include utilities such as gas, hydro and water. The rent estimates are very modest based on what is known about the current rental market in Ontario.
- Income is calculated based on all income transfer payments the household is eligible for. It assumes income taxes have been filed. Quarterly benefits are divided and included as part of the monthly income.
- Income data is from May/June 2022 to be consistent with when the NFB data was collected.
- To view more details about the income scenarios, visit myhealthunit.ca/foodinsecurity

Food insecurity only tells part of the story.

Evidence continues to show that food-based programs do not reduce food insecurity because it is an income problem much bigger than just food.

Households who struggle to pay for food also struggle to pay for the other costs of living.

The compromises food insecure households make because they do not have enough money include, but go far beyond, food-related decisions.

These households spend less on food and the other costs of living such as housing and transportation than food secure households.^{18,19}

Social assistance rates are **too low.**

The 2022 income scenarios from the North Bay Parry Sound District clearly demonstrate that social assistance rates in Ontario do not reflect the costs of living. This contributes to existing evidence that shows social assistance recipients are at great risk of living in extreme poverty and food insecurity, and developing associated health issues.

There is ongoing data collection and reporting about food insecurity in Canada.¹ It repeatedly shows the problem is not improving, and calls for more effective government policies that increase the incomes of low income households to reduce food insecurity on a population level.^{1,20} The findings of the 2022 North Bay Parry Sound District income scenarios support this call to action.

Income-based policy solutions to address food insecurity require government action, and a commitment to poverty reduction.

Additional resources

Food insecurity: A Problem of Inadequate Income, Not Solved by Food.

Factsheet. Discusses why food programs do not reduce food insecurity, and the importance of looking at the bigger picture related to household income.

Provincial policy levers to reduce household food insecurity.

Factsheet. Shares provincial level income-based policy measures proven to be effective at reducing food insecurity on a population level.

Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021.

Report. Provides the most current Canadian data on food insecurity.

Social Determinants of Health: The Canadian Facts, 2nd Edition

Report. Discusses income and food insecurity as important social determinants of health.

Food Insecurity: North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit webpage


Webpage. Provides local information about food insecurity from the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit.


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