

The 2023 Cost of Eating Well

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**Monitoring Food Affordability in
the North Bay Parry Sound District**
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01/01/2023 – 12/31/2023

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 is measured in Canada relative to household income.¹

In this context, 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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Almost 1 in 4
households in
the North Bay
Parry Sound
District are
food insecure.¹³



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 by health units in Ontario to estimate food costs. It includes a list of food items based on Canada's Food Guide and Canadian purchasing habits.¹⁴ The results are used to monitor how affordable it is to eat well.

Canada's food guide and the NFB do not reflect the dietary patterns of 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 these significant limitations of the NFB survey and reporting.

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The Nutritious Food Basket includes¹⁵

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

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The North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit completes the NFB survey at **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.

The Cost of Eating Well

How much does it cost to eat based on the Nutritious Food Basket?

2023 Household Monthly Food Costs



Family of Four

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

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\$1,202



Single Woman with 2 Kids

Woman 31–50
Boy 14–18
Girl 4–8

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\$885



Couple

Man 31–50
Woman 31–50

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\$718



Single Man

Man 31–50

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\$430



Older Single Woman

Woman 70+

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\$313



Pregnant Single Woman

Woman 31–50

=====
\$410

Is food affordable?

It depends on household income.

Food costs continued to increase in 2023.¹⁶
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

70% of households in Canada 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 are at extremely high risk of being food insecure.

The following household scenarios show the 2023 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
- =====



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 Ontario Works basic allowance and maximum shelter allowance, GST/HST credit, Ontario Trillium Benefit, and the Ontario Climate Action Incentive Payment.*

| | |
|----------------------------|-------|
| Monthly income:* | \$879 |
| Rent (bachelor apartment): | \$691 |
| Food: | \$430 |

-\$242



Single woman with 2 kids receiving Ontario Works

It is highly unlikely that the \$557 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 Child Benefit (CCB), which provides a seemingly significant amount of money monthly for low-income households. Yet, 1 in 4 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:* | \$2581 |
| Rent (2 bedroom apartment): | \$1139 |
| Food: | \$885 |

\$557



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 Ontario Disability Support Program basic allowance and maximum shelter allowance for two disabled people; includes GST/HST credit, Ontario Trillium Benefit, and, Climate Action Incentive Payment.*

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------|
| Monthly income:* | \$2454 |
| Rent (1 bedroom apartment): | \$927 |
| Food: | \$718 |

\$809

These scenarios focus on households with social assistance as their main source of income. However, **59% 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 2023 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.**

It is clear that social assistance rates in Ontario do not reflect the costs of living. This report contributes to existing evidence showing social assistance recipients are at great risk of living in extreme poverty and food insecurity, and developing associated health issues.

Ongoing data collection about food insecurity in Canada shows the problem is worsening.¹ Reducing food insecurity on a population level requires government policy action to increase incomes for the lowest income households.^{1, 20}

Income-based policy solutions to reduce food insecurity require government action.

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, 2022.

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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 345 Oak Street West,
North Bay, ON P1B 2T2

 1-800-563-2808
705-474-1400

 705-474-8252

 90 Bowes Street, Suite 201,
Parry Sound, ON P2A 2L7

 1-800-563-2808
705-746-5801

 705-746-2711

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