



The Cost of Healthy Eating in the North Bay Parry Sound District: 2019

What is the Nutritious Food Basket?

Every year, the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit estimates the cost of healthy eating using the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB). Twelve grocery stores are surveyed across the district to record the price of food items that align with Canada's Food Guide and Canadian purchasing patterns. Sixty-seven food items are included, such as dairy products, meats, legumes, vegetables and fruits, pastas, cereals, and breads. It does not include prepared convenience foods, snack foods, foods purchased for religious or cultural reasons, or non-food items often purchased at grocery stores, such as cleaning products or personal hygiene items. The survey does not include food costs such as eating out, or holiday and birthday celebrations. It assumes people have the skills, time and equipment needed to access, prepare, and store the food. The NFB is a very modest estimate of household food purchasing. The results of the NFB survey are used to monitor food affordability in the North Bay Parry Sound District, as required by the Ontario Public Health Standards (Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, 2018).

What is the cost of healthy eating in the North Bay Parry Sound District?

In 2019, the cost of food for a family of four¹ for one week was \$216.24 or \$936.32² per month. To monitor food affordability, the cost of healthy eating is added to local rent rates, and then compared to a variety of income scenarios. Year after year, the results show it is unlikely that low income households in our district can afford the costs of living, including healthy food.

What is food insecurity?

Food insecurity means a household does not have enough money to buy food. It is a spectrum that ranges from worrying about not having enough money to buy food, to relying on lower cost, less nutritious foods, or skipping meals and going without food, due to not having enough money (Tarasuk et al., 2016). Poverty is the root cause of food insecurity (OSNPPH, 2015).

¹ Family of four includes a man and a woman, both age 40, a boy age 14, and a girl age 8.

² Weekly food cost of \$216.24 x 4.33 weeks in a month = \$936.32 per month

Food insecurity impacts health

Food insecurity is a serious public health problem because it greatly impacts health and well-being. Adults who are food insecure have poorer self-rated health and are more likely to suffer from chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and depression. Children who experience food insecurity have an increased risk of developing asthma and depression in adolescence and early adulthood. Being food insecure is also strongly associated with higher health care use (Tarasuk et al., 2016).

Food insecurity in the North Bay Parry Sound District

Approximately 1 in 7 households in the North Bay Parry Sound district experience food insecurity (North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit, 2017), compared with 1 in 8 households in Ontario (Tarasuk et al., 2016). Food insecurity is directly linked with income; the lower the household income, the higher the risk of food insecurity (Tarasuk et al., 2016). 58.9% of food insecure households in Ontario have income from employment, while 64% of social assistance recipients experience food insecurity. These numbers show that social assistance and minimum wage rates do not reflect the costs of living (Tarasuk et al., 2016).

Income scenarios³: What is left after monthly rent⁴ and food costs?

The following income scenarios provide context for the cost of healthy eating in the North Bay Parry Sound District for low income households. These scenarios only include monthly rent and basic food costs. Even with careful planning and budgeting, many low income households are unable to pay for the costs of living, including a basic healthy diet. Living expenses such as heat, hydro, child care, transportation, phone and internet, insurance, out of pocket health costs such as prescriptions, costs associated with school, clothing, debt payments and personal hygiene products add up fast. When there isn't enough money for everything, people have to make difficult decisions to prioritize what to pay for. Visit the [Health Unit website](#) for income scenarios in a chart format with the full list of references.

Mark: A 40 year old single man on Ontario Works⁵

Mark currently does not have a job and is receiving Ontario Works. His monthly income is \$838, and his rent is \$600 for a bachelor apartment in North Bay. After paying his rent, he only has \$238 left. The cost of healthy eating for Mark is \$314. As a single person receiving Ontario Works, he does not have enough money to buy food, or pay for his other living expenses after paying for rent.

³ Costs are rounded to the nearest dollar.

⁴ Monthly rent may or may not include heat and hydro. Numbers are taken from the 2018 Rental Market Report, Ontario Highlights: Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation

⁵ Assuming income taxes have been filed, income includes basic and shelter allowance from Ontario Works, Ontario Trillium Benefit and GST/HST credit (issued quarterly but reflected here as monthly)

John: A 40 year old single man on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)⁵

Due to an injury, John is not able to work. His monthly income from ODSP is \$1,284.00 and his rent is \$773.00. The cost of healthy eating for John is \$314, so he does not have much money left after paying for food and rent. While his financial situation is slightly better than someone receiving Ontario Works, he has to carefully prioritize his spending to make ends meet, and often has to make do without basic essentials.

Ashley: A 40 year old single mother on Ontario Works⁶

Ashley is a single mother of two children (boy aged 14, girl aged 8) and receives Ontario Works. Her income is \$2420. She is renting a two bedroom apartment for \$946 per month, which does not include utilities. After paying for rent and food costs, Ashley has \$747.75 left. She finds it difficult to make ends meet with her monthly expenses such as heat, hydro, phone, costs associated with her children being in school, and transportation. Single mothers are at a higher risk of being food insecure than households with two parents, with approximately one in three lone female parent households experiencing food insecurity (Tarasuk et al., 2016).

What is the solution to food insecurity?

Community responses to food insecurity such as food banks and meal programs can provide some low income households with an emergency supply of food. However, there is no evidence that use of these programs reduces food insecurity (Loopstra R and Tarasuk V, 2012) because they do not address the root of the problem, which is poverty (OSNPPH, 2015). Also, most households experiencing food insecurity do not go to food banks (PROOF, 2018). For many reasons, food charity programs will never be enough to reduce food insecurity in the long term; the magnitude of the problem is simply too big (OSNPPH, 2015).

Government policies that increase incomes are required to reduce food insecurity in Ontario, such as higher social assistance rates and minimum wage rates, and/or a basic income program, and the creation of well paying, secure jobs with benefits (PROOF, 2018). Advocacy efforts to provincial and federal governments are needed for policy changes to improve income security in Ontario and in turn, promote health and well-being for all.

⁶ Assuming income taxes have been filed, income includes basic and shelter allowance from Ontario Works, Ontario Trillium Benefit and GST/HST credit (issued quarterly but reflected here as monthly), and the Ontario Child Tax Benefit

What can you do?

- Learn more about food insecurity and poverty. Visit proof.utoronto.ca.
- Share this information with others and help break down myths about people experiencing food insecurity.
- Reach out to your local MP and MPP to discuss the importance of the policy initiatives related to increasing incomes, such as higher social assistance and minimum wage rates, investigating a basic income program, and the creation of well paying, secure jobs with benefits.
- Sign up for updates from your local food charter groups to stay up to date on food insecurity advocacy initiatives and events happening in your community:
 - [Nipissing & Area Food Roundtable](#)
 - [Parry Sound & Area Food Collaborative](#)

Additional resources

[2020 Nutritious Food Basket Income Scenarios: North Bay Parry Sound District](#)

[PROOF](#): Food Insecurity Policy Research.

[Ontario Dietitians in Public Health \(ODPH\)](#): Position Statement on Responses to Food Insecurity.

Dietitians of Canada: [Household Food Insecurity](#).

Call the [North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit](#) at 705-474-1400 or 1-800-563-2808 and ask to speak with a Public Health Dietitian.

References

Dietitians of Canada. (2016). [Executive Summary: Addressing Household Food Insecurity in Canada. Position Statement and Recommendations](#).

Food Insecurity Policy Research (PROOF). (2018). Household Food Insecurity in Canada. Available from: <https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/>.

Loopstra R, Tarasuk V. (2012). The Relationship between Food Banks and Household Food Insecurity among Low-Income Toronto Families. *Can Pub Pol*. 38(4):497-514.

Ministry of Health and Long Term Care. (2018). [Population Health Assessment and Surveillance Protocol; Ontario Public Health Standards](#).

North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit. (2017). Food Insecurity. Internal report: unpublished.

Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health Food Security Workgroup. (2015). [Position Statement on Responses to Food Insecurity](#).

Tarasuk, V, Mitchell, A, Dachner, N. (2016). [Household food insecurity in Canada, 2014. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity \(PROOF\)](#).