

The 2018 Cost of Healthy Eating: North Bay Parry Sound District

What is the Nutritious Food Basket?

Annually, the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit monitors food affordability as required by the Ontario Public Health Standards (Ministry of Health and Long Term Care, 2018). The Nutritious Food Basket is the survey tool used to calculate the cost of a basic nutritious diet. 12 grocery stores are surveyed across the district to price food items according to Canada's Food Guide and Canadian purchasing patterns. The results of the Nutritious Food Basket survey are then used to prepare the annual Cost of Healthy Eating Report.

The list of 67 food items in the Nutritious Food Basket does not include processed and convenience foods, snack foods, foods that are purchased for religious or cultural reasons, or non-food household staples that are often purchased at grocery stores such as cleaning products or personal hygiene items. The survey does not consider the additional costs of eating out or special occasions such as holiday or birthday celebrations. The survey also assumes that people have the skills, time and equipment necessary to access, prepare and store the food.

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

In 2018, the cost for a family of four to eat a basic healthy diet for one week was \$204.26 or \$884.45 per month. To monitor food affordability, the cost of healthy eating is added to local rent rates, and then compared with a variety of income scenarios. Year after year, the results show that it is unlikely for low income households in our district to afford all the costs of living, including a nutritious diet.

The following income scenarios provide context for the cost of healthy eating in the North Bay Parry Sound District within different types of households.

What is left after monthly rent (which may or may not include heat and hydro) and food costs?

A 40 year old single man on Ontario Works:

- Has a monthly income of \$823.00
- Pays \$600.00 in rent for a bachelor apartment
- Pays \$297.63 for healthy food
- Would be in debt by \$74.63 per month after paying for rent and food.

A 40 year old single man on the Ontario Disability Support Program:

- Has a monthly income of \$1,264.00

- Pays \$773.00 in rent for a one bedroom apartment
- Pays \$297.63 for healthy food
- Would have \$193.37 left per month.

A family of four on Ontario Works:

- Has a monthly income of \$2,601.00
- Pays \$1,177.00 in rent for a three bedroom apartment
- Pays \$884.45 for healthy food.
- Would have \$539.55 left per month.

A single mother on Ontario Works with a son and daughter:

- Has a monthly income of \$2,382.00
- Pays \$964.00 in rent for a two bedroom apartment
- Pays \$668.29 for healthy food.
- Would have \$749.71 left per month.

A 75 year old single woman on Old Age Security/Guaranteed Annual Income Supplement:

- Has a monthly income of \$1,706.00
- Pays \$773.00 in rent for a one bedroom apartment
- Pays \$216.21 for healthy food.
- Would have \$716.79 left per month.

A family of four with a full-time minimum wage earner:

- Has a monthly income of \$3,622.00
- Pays \$1,177.00 in rent for a three bedroom apartment
- Pays \$884.45 for healthy food
- Would have \$1560.55 left per month.

A family of four earning the Ontario median income:

- Has a monthly income of \$7,871.00
- Pays \$1,177.00 per month in rent for a three bedroom apartment
- Pays \$884.45 for healthy food
- Would have \$5,809.55 left per month.

Note: Monthly incomes include additional benefits and credits. A family of four consists of a man and a woman, both age 35, a boy age 14, and a girl age 8. Rent rates are according to the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Association for North Bay, 2018. The Health Unit can provide references for income calculations. Please contact Erin Reyce, RD at 705-474-1400 ext. 5532 or erin.reyce@healthunit.ca for further information. See Appendix A to view the income scenarios in a chart format.

These scenarios only include monthly rent and a basic healthy diet. It is clear that households with limited income may not have enough money to cover living expenses such as heat, hydro, child care, transportation, telecommunications, insurance, out of pocket health costs such as prescriptions and dental care, costs associated with school, clothing, debt payments, and other cost of living.

Even with careful planning and budgeting, many low income families are unable to cover all of their necessary expenses and afford a basic healthy diet. When forced to decide, people pay for their fixed expenses first, such as rent and utility bills, and the grocery budget is compromised because it is considered a 'flexible' part of the household budget.

Food insecurity impacts health

Food insecurity is defined as inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints. It includes worrying about running out of food, relying on lower cost, less nutritious foods, or skipping meals due to not having enough money. (Tarasuk et al., 2016). Poverty is the root cause of food insecurity (OSNPPH, 2015).

Food insecurity is a serious public health problem because it greatly impacts health and wellbeing. 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. In addition, being food insecure is strongly associated with being a high-cost health care user (Tarasuk et al., 2016).

Food insecurity in Ontario

In Ontario, approximately 1 in 8 households experience food insecurity (Tarasuk et al., 2016). This increases to approximately 1 in 7 households in the North Bay Parry Sound district (North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit, 2017).

Some households are at greater risk of experiencing food insecurity than others. Having children under the age of 18, especially those headed by a lone parent, is a significant risk factor; approximately 1 in 6 children in Ontario live in a food insecure household. Other characteristics include having a low income, being an unattached individual, being Indigenous, being Black, being a newcomer to Canada, renting rather than owning one's home and living with one or more chronic physical and/or mental health conditions (Dietitians of Canada, 2016).

The source of household income is also important. 58.9% of food insecure households in Ontario had income from employment. 64% of households reliant on social assistance experienced food insecurity (Tarasuk et al., 2016). These numbers show that current social assistance and minimum wage rates do not reflect the costs of living.

What is the solution?

Community responses to food insecurity such as food banks and meal programs provide some low income individuals and families with an emergency supply of some food items and/or meals. However, there is no evidence that use of food charity programs increases food security (Loopstra R and Tarasuk V, 2012). This is because they do not address the root of the problem, which is poverty (OSNPPH, 2015). In addition, only about 25% of individuals experiencing food insecurity will visit a food bank. For

many reasons, food charity programs will never be enough to truly address food insecurity (OSNPPH, 2015); the magnitude of the problem is simply too big.

The only long term solution to food insecurity is to reduce poverty rates with government policies related to income, such as increasing social assistance rates, the implementation of a basic income for all, and the creation of well paying, secure jobs with benefits. Advocacy efforts to provincial and federal governments are required to push for these types of policy changes to improve income security in Ontario and in turn, promote health and wellbeing for all.

What can you do?

- Learn more about food insecurity and poverty. Visit proof.utoronto.ca.
- Share the messages outlined in this report and help break down myths about people living in poverty. Reach out to your local MP and MPP about the importance of the policy initiatives related to increasing incomes, like increasing social assistance rates, the importance of the Basic Income Pilot Project, and the creation of well paying, secure jobs with benefits.
- Sign your local food charter 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

[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 or visit 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.](#)

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 \(PROOF\).](#)

Appendix A

2018 Income Scenarios for the North Bay Parry Sound District



	Households on Social Assistance					Households receiving a Basic Income (OBIP)		Household with Employment Incomes	
	Ontario Works Single man, age 40	Ontario Works Single mother, son, daughter	Ontario Works Family of Four	Ontario Disability Support Program Single man	Old Age Security/Guaranteed Annual Income Single Woman, age 75	OBIP Family of Four	OBIP Single Man, age 40	Minimum Wage Earner Family of Four (one earner)	Ontario Median Income Family of Four
Total Monthly Income	\$823.00	\$2,382.00	\$2,601.00	\$1,264.00	\$1,706.00	\$3353.00	\$1531	\$3,622.00	\$7,871.00
Rent (may or may not include heat/hydro)	\$600.00	\$964.00	\$1177.00	\$773.00	\$773.00	\$1177.00	\$600.00	\$1177.00	\$1177.00
Cost of a nutritious diet	\$297.63	\$668.29	\$884.45	\$297.63	\$216.21	\$884.45	\$297.63	\$884.45	\$884.45
Monthly Funds Remaining	-\$74.63	\$749.71	\$539.55	\$193.37	\$716.79	\$1291.55	\$633.37	\$1,560.55	\$5,809.55

Note: Monthly income includes additional benefits and credits. A family of four consists of a man and a woman, both age 35, a boy age 14, and a girl age 8. The Health Unit can provide references for income calculations. Please contact Erin Reyce, RD at 705-474-1400 ext. 5532 for further information.