

# The Real Cost of Eating Well

in Hastings and Prince Edward Counties 2017

## Food is a basic human right.

Everyone has the right to access enough safe, nutritious, and culturally appropriate food in a way that is socially acceptable and dignified. This is known as food security.

## WHO CAN'T AFFORD HEALTHY FOOD?

Household food insecurity is the inadequate or insecure access to food because of financial constraints.

**POVERTY IS THE  
ROOT CAUSE OF  
FOOD INSECURITY.**

Hunger, food insecurity, and poverty can happen to anyone. In Ontario, the majority of food insecure households relied on wages or salaries from employment as their main source of income. Even when working, factors like part-time employment, lack of benefits, and lack of job security can make it hard for people to afford healthy food.

At the same time, the majority of households relying on social assistance as their main source of income experienced food insecurity.

## INCOME AFFECTS HEALTH.

Annual health care costs are 23-121% higher in food insecure households in Ontario.



When money is tight, people use their food budget to pay other expenses.



Families resort to cheap, low-nutrient food, emergency food services, and/or skipping meals.



Poor diets increase the risk of infections and chronic diseases like diabetes, heart disease, and cancers.



Children in low-income families are more likely to get sick, struggle in school, and develop depression later in life.



Higher provincial health care and social costs impact everyone.

# WHAT IS THE COST OF HEALTHY FOOD?

## Understanding the Nutritious Food Basket

Every May, dietitians from Hastings Prince Edward Public Health (HPEPH) calculate the price of the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB). The NFB is a standardized tool used by Ontario Public Health Units to measure the cost of a basic healthy diet according to Canada's Food Guide. Eight grocery stores within different geographical regions of Hastings and Prince Edward Counties (HPEC) are surveyed to reflect rural and urban food prices and availability.

The NFB design assumes:

- Most people have the necessary time, food skills, and equipment to be able to prepare most meals from scratch.
- Foods are purchased based on lowest available price, not need, preference or availability.
- People have access to quality grocery stores.

The following costs are not included in the NFB:

- Highly processed convenience and snack foods with little or no nutritional value.
- Foods for religious or ethical diets.
- Foods for special diets that address specific diseases or allergies.
- Infant formula and baby food
- Foods consumed outside the home.
- Personal hygiene items (i.e. toothpaste and soap).
- Household cleaning supplies.

## History and Future of the Nutritious Food Basket

The NFB is designed to monitor food affordability, and boards of health use the data for program planning, informing policy decisions, and supporting and promoting access to nutritious, safe, personally acceptable foods.

The NFB is not a budgeting tool or resource for people struggling to afford food. The report can be used to increase awareness that families and individuals living on low income jobs or social assistance cannot afford a basic nutritious diet after basic living expenses.

In the revised 2018 Ontario Public Health Standards the NFB food costing is no longer a requirement. HPEPH will continue to monitor food affordability using the existing NFB protocol as a discretionary population health and surveillance measure, but may not complete this activity annually. The new Standards will continue to mandate assessment of and action towards reducing health inequities, so that we can work toward equal opportunity for optimal health regardless of socially determined circumstances.

## NUTRITIOUS FOOD BASKET SCENARIOS HASTINGS AND PRINCE EDWARD COUNTIES, 2017

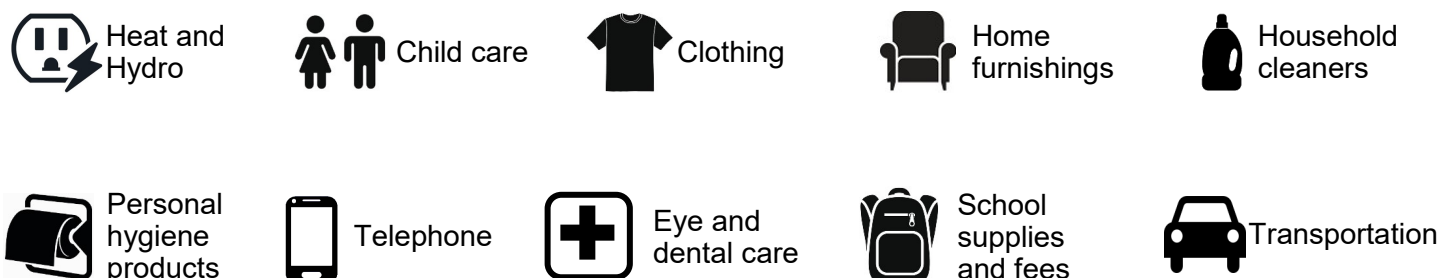
These scenarios illustrate that after paying for shelter and food, minimum wage earners and households on fixed incomes have very little, if any, money left over to cover other essential monthly expenses.

Monthly Expenses/Income	Income (including benefits & credits, after tax)	Rent (may or may not include utilities)	Food (Nutritious Food Basket)	Remaining income for other expenses
<b>Households with Children</b>				
Ontario Works (2 parents and 2 children)	\$2,549	\$1,400	\$839	<b>\$310</b>
Minimum Wage Earner (2 parents and 2 children)	\$3,268	\$1,400	\$839	<b>\$1,029</b>
Average Income (2 parents and 2 children)	\$7,896	\$1,400	\$839	<b>\$5,657</b>
Ontario Works (1 female parent and 2 children)	\$2,334	\$1,100	\$635	<b>\$599</b>
<b>Single Person Households</b>				
Ontario Works (1 man)	\$794	\$800	\$281	<b>-\$287</b>
ODSP (1 man)	\$1,226	\$950	\$281	<b>-\$5</b>
Senior OAS/GIS (1 woman)	\$1,663	\$950	\$206	<b>\$507</b>

Table 1: Nutritious Food Basket Scenarios for Hastings and Prince Edward Counties

### WHY CAN'T PEOPLE AFFORD HEALTHY FOOD?

For people living on minimum wage, Ontario Works, or the Ontario Disability Support Program, it is hard to make ends meet and afford other essential expenses such as:



# PERCENT OF INCOME

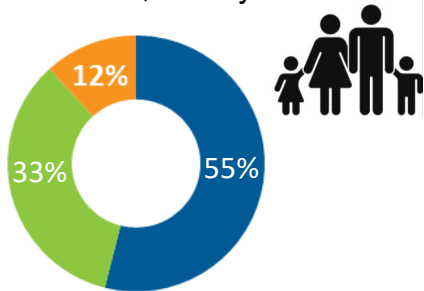
## HOUSEHOLDS IN HASTINGS AND PRINCE EDWARD COUNTIES, 2017

Rent

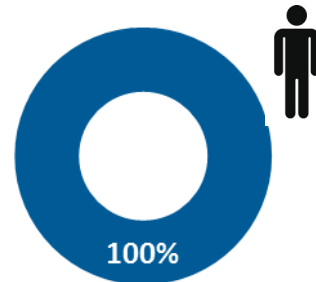
Basic Healthy Diet

Income Remaining for Other Expenses

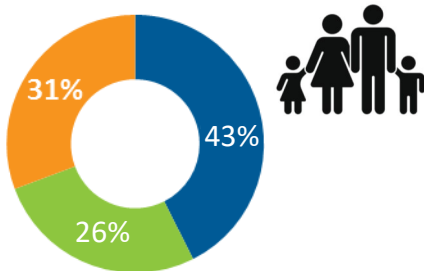
Ontario Works, Family of Four



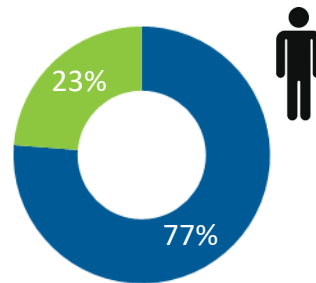
Ontario Works, Single Man



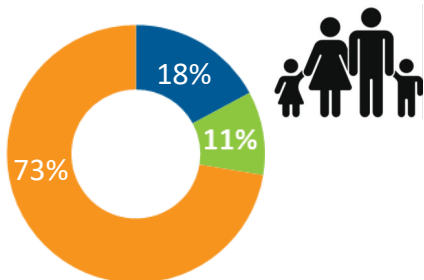
Minimum Wage, Family of Four



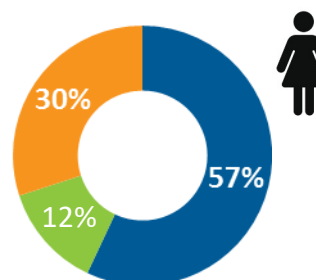
ODSP, Single Man



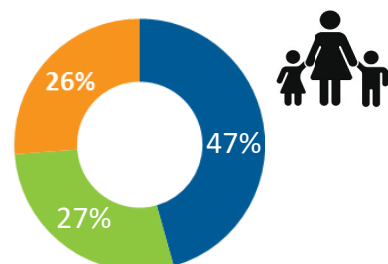
Average Income, Family of Four



Senior OAS/GIS, Single Woman



Ontario Works, Family of Three



Households reliant on social assistance are 11 times higher at risk for severe food insecurity, and spend a higher percentage of their income on shelter and food. This leaves very little remaining income for other essential expenses.

# FOOD INSECURITY IN HASTINGS AND PRINCE EDWARD COUNTIES

Food insecurity is a serious social and public health problem in Ontario. People who are food insecure cannot afford to buy the foods they want or need for good health. Limited incomes are the main reason why people are food insecure in HPEC. In the past nine years of completing the NFB costing, housing and food costs have steadily grown, but increases to income have not kept up.

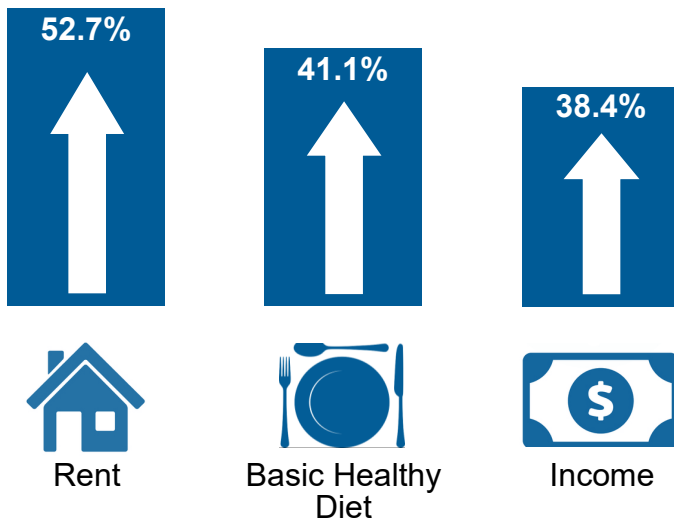


Figure 1: Estimated increases in rent, basic healthy diet, and income in HPEC, 2008-2017

## Who is food insecure in Ontario?

- 11.9%\* of households are food insecure
- 1 in 8 households do not have enough money to buy food
- 64% of households living on social assistance
- Aboriginal Canadians, households on fixed incomes, single mothers and people who do not own a home
- 58.9% of food insecure households are employed

\*Combined marginal, moderate and severe household food insecurity, 2013-2014 Canadian Community Health Survey

## Levels of Household Food Insecurity

Severity of food insecurity in households can be classified into three levels:

Level	Marginal	Moderate	Severe
Definition	Worrying about running out of food and/or limiting food selection.	Compromising quantity or quality of food consumed.	Reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns due to lack of food, at most extreme may go day(s)
Ontario	3.2%	5.9%	2.8%
HPEC	Not available	Combined 10.0%** (6.8-14.4)	

Table 2: Household food insecurity levels, 2013-2014 Canadian Community Health Survey

\*\* Use with caution

# A NOTE ABOUT FOOD INSECURITY DATA

## Interpret Local Statistics with Caution

The only measurement of household food insecurity in Canada is the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS). The CCHS results (called cycles) are released every two years. Information is collected by each province and then combined to report on Canadian health-related trends. Food insecurity is a mandatory measurement every other cycle, which means provinces only have to measure food insecurity every four years. For cycles in-between the mandatory collection of food insecurity data, provinces can decide to collect food insecurity data as an option. The province of Ontario declined to complete food insecurity measurement for the last CCHS cycle (2015-2016), which means updated data will not be available until the 2017-2018 cycle (released in 2019). Because of this, the most current data available is from 2013-2014.

When food security data is collected across the province, only a small number of households are sampled in HPEC. This small sample size results in a large confidence interval and can make data unreliable if used by itself (i.e. before combining it with data from across the province). For example, in 2013-2014 the number of HPEC households that were food insecure\* was 10.0%\*\* , but with a confidence interval of 6.8-14.4%. This confidence interval means the true estimate of food insecure households could range from 6.8% to 14.4%. Therefore we cannot report the exact level of food insecurity in our region and can only estimate that 10.0%\*\* of households are food insecure. Because of the wide confidence interval, local food insecurity statistics for HPEC cannot be considered statistically different from Ontario rates and cannot be separated into levels of severity.

## Regional Rankings

If food insecurity levels for different health unit regions in Ontario have confidence levels that overlap, it means there is no statistical difference in food insecurity levels between those health unit regions. Therefore, any reports that rank food insecurity levels of health unit regions must be interpreted with caution.

## Understanding Statistical Information

For a better understanding of statistical concepts and limitations of available data to report food insecurity trends, please see Toronto Public Health's Survey Data Interpretation Guide ([www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/93c0-tph-survey-data-interpretation-guide-aoda.pdf](http://www.toronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/93c0-tph-survey-data-interpretation-guide-aoda.pdf)).

\* Combined moderate and severe food insecurity

\*\* Use with caution

Everyone should have access to nutritious, safe, adequate, and culturally acceptable food.

## How can you help?

**EDUCATE YOURSELF.** Food insecurity is more than a food problem.



Learn more about the root causes of poverty and food insecurity.



Understand that food banks are not a long-term solution.



Find out how food insecurity affects health care and social costs impact everyone.

**ADVOCATE FOR CHANGE.** Speak up. Your voice can make a difference.



Call for improved social assistance and minimum wage.



Support more affordable housing.



Encourage more affordable child care.

**SUPPORT LOCAL FOOD PROGRAMS.** Visit [www.foodaccess.ca](http://www.foodaccess.ca) for a list.



Volunteer to help.



Offer food.



Donate money.

## Resources

Food Access Guide for Hastings and Prince Edward Counties - [www.hpepublichealth.ca/healthy-living/healthy-eating](http://www.hpepublichealth.ca/healthy-living/healthy-eating)

Information on free and low cost food and meal programs in Hastings and Prince Edward Counties including emergency food services, food box programs, and community gardens.

PROOF, Research to Identify Policy Options to Reduce Food Insecurity - <http://proof.utoronto.ca/>

For more information on food insecurity in Ontario, including household characteristics, relationships between household income and source and food insecurity levels.

Ontario Dietitians in Public Health – Position Statement on Responses to Food Insecurity  
<http://bit.ly/2Ft3l3l>

Dietitians of Canada – Position Statement on Household Food Insecurity – [www.dietitians.ca/Dietitians-Views/Food-Security/Household-Food-Insecurity.aspx](http://www.dietitians.ca/Dietitians-Views/Food-Security/Household-Food-Insecurity.aspx)

Poverty Roundtable Hastings Prince Edward – [www.povertyroundtablehpe.ca](http://www.povertyroundtablehpe.ca)

Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy – [www.ontario.ca/home-and-community/realizing-our-potential-poverty-reduction-strategy-2014-2019](http://www.ontario.ca/home-and-community/realizing-our-potential-poverty-reduction-strategy-2014-2019)

Ontario Food Security Strategy - [www.ontario.ca/page/food-security-consultation](http://www.ontario.ca/page/food-security-consultation)

Food Secure Canada – [www.foodsecurecanada.org](http://www.foodsecurecanada.org)

Alliance of organizations working together to advance food security and food sovereignty through three goals: zero hunger, healthy and safe food, and sustainable food systems.

Food Banks Canada – [www.foodbankscanada.ca](http://www.foodbankscanada.ca)

Annual HungerCount report presents results from more than 4,000 food banks and food programs in every province and territory.

Ontario Association of Food Banks - [www.oafb.ca](http://www.oafb.ca)

Annual Hunger Report provides statistics gathered by the Ontario food bank network and Food Bank's Canada annual HungerCount survey, and analyses food insecurity trends and recommendations for change.

For more details about the Nutritious Food Basket, email [foodsecurity@hpeph.ca](mailto:foodsecurity@hpeph.ca).

Sources: Please contact Hastings Prince Edward Public Health for a detailed list of references.

We are committed to providing accessible publications, programs and services to all.  
For assistance please call 613-966-5500; TTY: 711 or email [accessibility@hpeph.ca](mailto:accessibility@hpeph.ca).  
For more information, please visit [www.hpepublichealth.ca](http://www.hpepublichealth.ca)