

The Real Cost of Eating Well

in Hastings and Prince Edward Counties 2023



HASTINGS PRINCE EDWARD
Public Health



Acknowledgements

Hastings Prince Edward Public Health (HPEPH) collected data for the Real Cost of Eating Well 2023 Report on the traditional territory of the Anishinaabe, Huron-Wendat, and Haudenosaunee people. The land where this information was gathered remains unceded Indigenous territory.

We recognize the historical impacts of colonization, systemic racism, and oppression, acknowledging their profound effects on Indigenous communities, particularly in the realm of food security. The data presented in this report are a result of our commitment to understanding and addressing the complexities of health, social, and economic disparities within our community.

HPEPH is committed to continuous learning and actively working to dismantle the systems that perpetuate these inequities. This acknowledgment serves as a starting point for our ongoing commitment to recognizing the impact of historical injustices and fostering collaboration in our pursuit of health equity.

We would like to thank the staff at Hastings Prince Edward Public Health for their contribution to this report, namely:

Raghad Al Nobani, Registered Dietitian (Healthy Communities), Report and Data Collection Lead

Jennine Seaman, Registered Dietitian (Healthy Schools)

Lauren Lees, Health Promoter (Healthy Communities)

Hamzah Abid, Health Promoter (Healthy Communities)

Shannon Del Grosso, Health Promoter (Healthy Communities)

Victoria Law, Public Health Nurse (Foundational Standards)

Amanda Lau, Epidemiologist (Foundational Standards)

Sara Hart, Communications Coordinator

Suggested citation

Hastings Prince Edward Public Health. The Real Cost of Eating Well Report 2023. 2024 Mar.



Introduction

Household food insecurity is well recognized as a serious public health issue. HPEPH measures the cost of eating well using the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) tool. This tool provides health units across Ontario with a consistent approach to measure the cost of eating well in the region through local data collection of food cost. Food affordability is then monitored by taking into consideration local factors such as rental rates, various incomes, and expenses. HPEPH publishes the Real Cost of Eating Well report as a monitoring and advocacy tool, to increase awareness of food insecurity and promote income-based solutions when addressing food insecurity. This report is not intended to be used as a budgeting tool for eating well. The data can be used to monitor food affordability by relating the cost of the Nutritious Food Basket to individual and family incomes and expenses in Hastings and Prince Edward counties (HPEC).

Note: This report cannot be directly compared to The Real Cost of Eating Well report released in 2018, as costing methodology and procedures have changed.

The Cost of Eating Well report and the NFB are designed to monitor food affordability. The data released can help organizations:

1

Influence policy decisions related to income, supports, and poverty reduction.

2

Better understand the prevalence of food insecurity and its impacts on HPEC.

3

Advocate for equitable access to food for residents in HPEC.

The Nutritious Food Basket

To report on the cost of food for residents in HPEC, HPEPH used the NFB tool to collect the average food costs of sixty-one food items that follow eating patterns recommended by the Federal Government and Canada's Food Guide to minimize risk of disease. This provides staff with a shopping list that could be costed to determine the monthly cost of food for individuals and families in HPEC with quantities based on their age and needs.

The NFB tool includes foods such as:¹



Fruits and vegetables
(fresh, frozen, and canned)



Protein foods
(beef, pork, poultry, fish, dairy, beans, seeds, and tofu)



Whole grain foods (rice, oats, bread, and cereals)



Fats and oils

Note: An additional five per cent is added to the total cost of the NFB to account for meal preparation and cooking needs (e.g., spices and condiments).

The following costs are not included in the NFB:

- Snacks or prepared foods
- Cookware, utensils and other kitchen supplies
- Foods for religious or ethical diets (e.g., halal, kosher, vegan)
- Foods for special diets that address specific diseases or allergies (e.g., lactose free, nut-free)
- Infant formula and baby food
- Foods consumed outside the home
- Personal hygiene items (i.e., toothpaste and soap)
- Household cleaning supplies

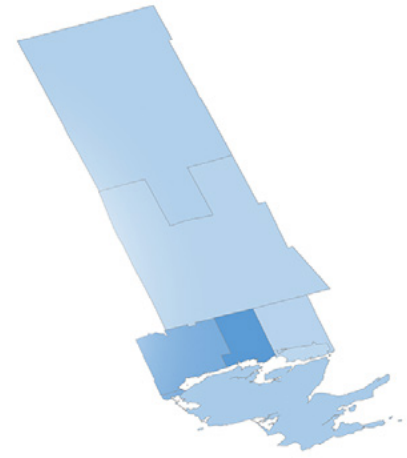
The NFB design and process assumes that:

- 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 that have fresh produce, meats, dairy products, and grain products.

HPEPH acknowledges that the NFB is based on federal nutrition guidelines and the most recent update of Canada's Food Guide. It is important to note that eating patterns that are costed are not reflective of different cultures and religions nor do they take into consideration Indigenous foods and food procurement practices. HPEPH staff acknowledge this limitation and the corresponding impact on the data.

Store selection and data collection

In May 2023, HPEPH staff completed data collection for the NFB. Eleven grocery stores within different geographical regions of HPEC were surveyed to reflect rural and urban food prices and availability. Store selection was also based on population density, to ensure the grocery stores appropriately represented the population density of different communities within the region.



What is household food insecurity?

As defined by PROOF, a food insecurity policy research program funded by the University of Toronto, household food insecurity is the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints.² It is a serious public health problem in Canada. Food insecurity is understood as an issue closely linked to income but was previously thought to be an issue related to food accessibility or availability.

Levels of food insecurity³

Marginal food insecurity

Worry about running out of food and/or limited food selection due to a lack of money for food.

Moderate food insecurity

Compromise in quality and/or quantity of food due to a lack of money for food.

Severe food insecurity

Miss meals, reduce food intake, and at the most extreme, go day(s) without food.

Food insecurity in HPEC

Estimates released from the Canadian Income Survey (CIS) reveal the household food insecurity prevalence for HPEC is 23 per cent (two-year combined 2021-2022).⁴



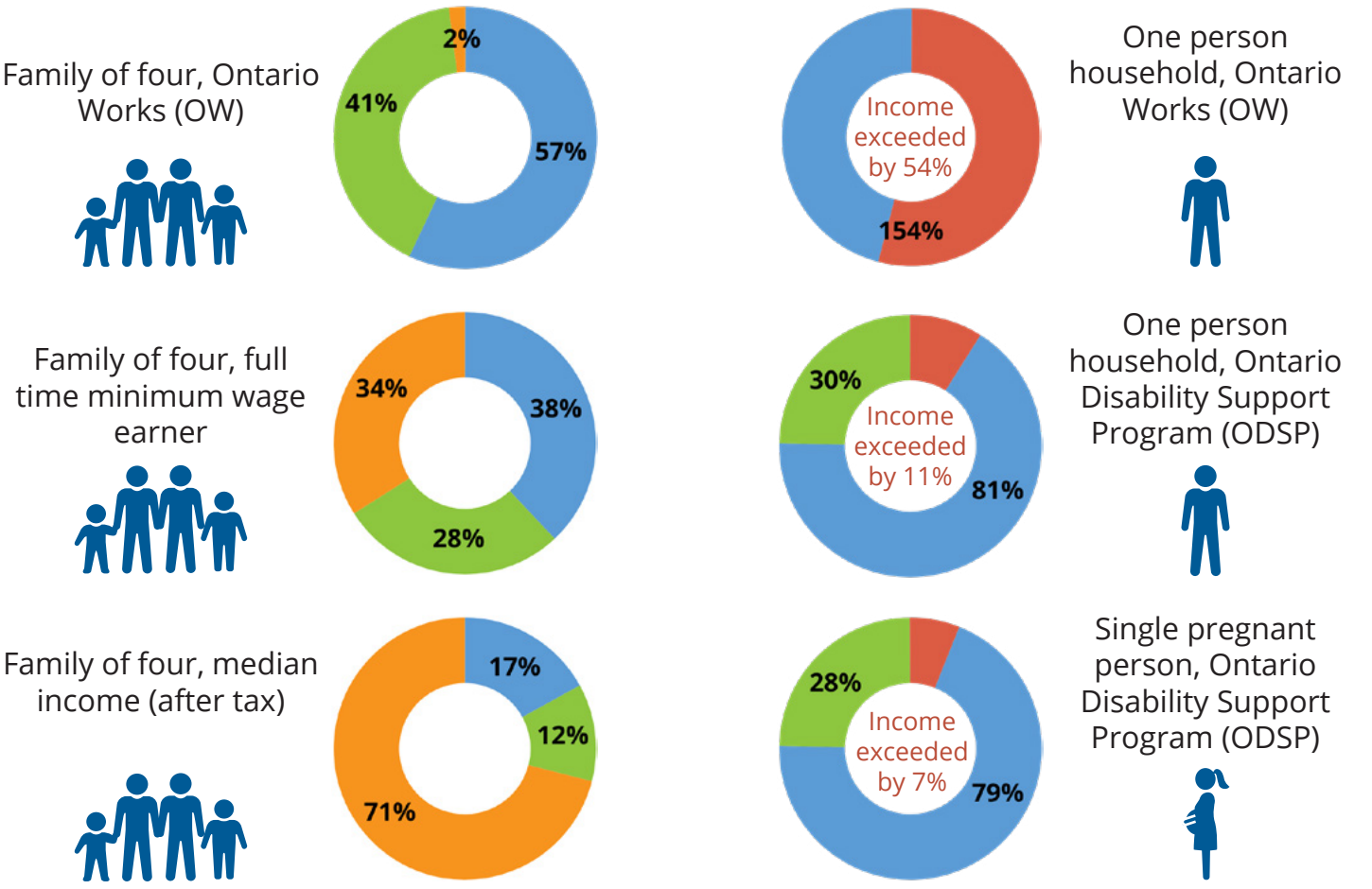
Almost one in four households in HPEC experience food insecurity.

Note: Due to sampling variability, CIS food insecurity data for HPEC must be interpreted with caution.










Cost of food and rent

Households in Hastings and Prince Edward Counties, 2023






Refer to Appendix A for income breakdown.

Income Scenarios 2023⁵

Scenarios (Monthly)	Income (total)*	Food cost in HPEC (% of income)	Rent cost** (% of income) ⁶	Rent and Food Expenses (total)	Remaining income after food and rent***
Scenario 1 Family of four, Ontario Works (OW) 	\$2794	\$1147 (41%)	3 bedrooms = \$1580 (57%)	\$2727	\$67 (2%)
Scenario 2 Family of four, full time minimum wage earner 	\$4160	\$1147 (28%)	3 bedrooms = \$1580 (38%)	\$2727	\$1433 (34%)
Scenario 3 Family of four, median income (after tax) 	\$9284	\$1147 (12%)	3 bedrooms = \$1580 (17%)	\$2727	\$6557 (71%)
Scenario 4 Single parent with two children, Ontario Works (OW) 	\$2560	\$844 (33%)	2 bedrooms = \$1295 (51%)	\$2139	\$421 (16%)
Scenario 5 One person household, Ontario Works (OW) 	\$865	\$412 (48%)	Bachelor = \$913 (106%)	\$1325	\$(-460)
Scenario 6 One person household, Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) 	\$1369	\$412 (30%)	1 Bedroom = \$1109 (81%)	\$1521	\$(-152)
Scenario 7 Older adult, one- person household, Old Age Security/ Guaranteed Income Supplement (OAS)/ (GIS) 	\$1993	\$297 (15%)	1 Bedroom = \$1109 (56%)	\$1406	\$587 (29%)

Income Scenarios 2023⁵

Scenarios (Monthly)	Income (total)*	Food cost in HPEC (% of income)	Rent cost** (% of income) ⁷	Rent and Food Expenses (total)	Remaining income after food and rent***
Scenario 8 Married couple, Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) 	\$2433	\$685 (28%)	1 Bedroom = \$1109 (46%)	\$1794	\$639 (26%)
Scenario 9 Single pregnant person, Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) 	\$1409	\$392 (28%)	1 Bedroom = \$1109 (79%)	\$1501	\$(-92)
Scenario 10 Single parent minimum wage earner with two children under age 6 	\$4302	\$699 (16%)	1 Bedroom = \$1295 (30%)	\$1994	\$2308 (54%)

* Refer to Appendix A for breakdown of income

** May or may not include water and/or hydro. The Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) states that housing is considered 'affordable' if the cost is less than 30% per cent of a household's before-tax income. Refer to Appendix A for rental data sources.

***Remaining income/funds to cover all other costs and expenses such as (but not limited to): transportation, utilities, prescriptions, dental, vision, school supplies, clothes, and phone bills.

Food insecurity impacts health^{7,8}

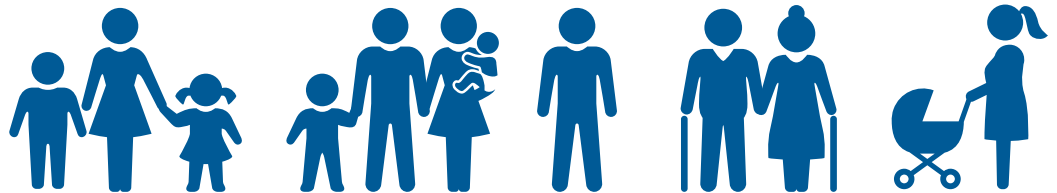
- Adults in food-insecure households are more likely to experience negative mental and physical health outcomes such as depression, diabetes, and cardiovascular diseases.
- Children in food-insecure households face a higher likelihood of developmental challenges and poor academic performance, as well as development of conditions such as asthma and depression.
- Individuals and families who are food insecure often have higher healthcare expenditures and have more difficulty managing diseases.



Risk of food insecurity is higher for:^{7,9}

- Renter households
- Households reliant on a low-income or social assistance
- Indigenous peoples and racialized groups
- Single mothers
- Households with children under the age of 18

Food insecurity is racialized. Groups who experienced and continue to experience a history of colonization, systemic racism and other forms of discrimination are disproportionately affected by food insecurity.



Affordable housing in HPEC

- Informal rental markets and online searches reflect a higher rental average than the numbers presented in this report. This means the true cost of living is likely greater than what is depicted here. The CMHC data does not provide a full picture, as current tenants are protected under Ontario's Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing Rent Increase Guideline.
- CMHC states that housing is considered affordable if it costs less than 30 per cent of a household's before-tax income.¹⁰
- High cost of living and insufficient incomes can impact one's ability to afford basic expenses. As a fixed expense, rent and utilities must be covered first and more elastic expenses such as food are sacrificed to ensure prioritization of expenses. A decrease in the available budget for food can impact a person's health as it can result in a decrease in nutrition value, intake, and overall quality of one's diet.



Income

There is a strong connection between income and food insecurity, with food insecurity being more prevalent among individuals with limited financial resources. In 2022, 60 per cent of food-insecure households reported their main source of income as wages, salaries, or self-employment in the prior year.⁷ A significant proportion of food-insecure adults depend on employment as their primary source of income. As demonstrated above through the income scenarios, even those engaged in the workforce are not exempt from the challenges of food insecurity. The data from the report underscores the urgent need to address income disparities by advocating for fair wages, increased social assistance rates, and supportive social policies to address food insecurity.

When incorporating living expenses such as food, shelter, and transportation, the Ontario Living Wage Network (OLWN) reported a living wage of \$20.60 for the Eastern region which includes HPEC.¹¹ During NFB data collection (May 2023), the Ontario minimum wage was set at \$15.50, with an increase to \$16.55 in October 2023.¹² As depicted in the income scenarios, the current minimum wage does not provide sufficient income, with severely limited funds remaining for basic expenses.



Food charity does not solve food Insecurity.

Food insecurity is not a food availability issue. Food insecurity is an income issue. While food banks and food charity programs play a crucial role in providing immediate relief to individuals and families experiencing food insecurity, they are temporary solutions that do not address the root causes of the issue. In 2023, Feed Ontario reported that “1 in 19 Ontarians relied on a food bank, a 41% per cent increase over 2019-2020”.¹³ In recent years, reliance on temporary or short-term food support has continued to increase. The PROOF 2022 food insecurity report emphasizes that relying solely on food charity does not lead to sustainable improvements in food access. While these initiatives often function as stopgap measures, offering short-term relief, they do not address structural inequalities and systemic factors that contribute to food insecurity. Policies addressing income disparities, housing, and employment opportunities are essential for creating lasting change.¹⁴ A combination of immediate assistance and relief, alongside income-based strategies and policies will provide sustainable long-term relief for those experiencing food insecurity. Acknowledging the current need for and importance of food charity but also recognizing the limitations of this approach as a long-term solution is vital when shifting towards systemic change when addressing food insecurity.¹⁵

Recommendations

Income-based strategies to address an income-based issue

Local residents

- Read Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH)'s [Position statement on food insecurity](#).
- To learn more about food insecurity, visit proof.utoronto.ca.
- Share this report with friends, colleagues, organizations, and municipal and provincial governments.
- Advocate to your local elected representatives for improved social supports and income-based policies.
- Vote for elected representatives who advocate for supports for food insecure households.

Municipal governments and community partners

- Support and increase access to local initiatives such as free income tax clinics. This ensures that individuals and families are able to access available tax credits and benefits.
- Increase collaboration and engagement within the community to determine local priorities and actions.
- Support community programs and social planning initiatives that are working to address food insecurity.
- Advocate for policies to:
 - Increase minimum wage rates to better reflect a living wage (cost of living is \$20.60 for Eastern Ontario, as stated by OLWN 2023 data).¹¹
 - Increase social assistance rates to better reflect the cost of living.

Provincial and Federal governments

- Continue national data collection and reporting on food insecurity through the Canadian Income Survey and the Canadian Community Health Survey. This should include ongoing analysis of disaggregated race-based food insecurity data.
- Establish targets for the reduction of household food insecurity and regularly report on progress toward their achievement as part of Opportunity for All – Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy.¹⁶
- Develop an updated definition of 'affordable housing' that is not based on the percentage of total income and considers other basic costs of living.
- Increase minimum wage rates to reflect the cost of living (\$20.60 for Eastern Ontario, as stated by OLWN 2023 data).¹¹

Appendix A: Data Sources and Background Information

Income

Income scenarios are annually prepared by Ontario Dietitians in Public Health.⁵ The scenarios created support the monitoring of food affordability in a variety of scenarios by demonstrating various incomes and expenses, as well as the cost of food, to better understand how income and housing impact food affordability, food security, and health of residents in the HPEC.

For scenarios 1-10, income estimates include the main source of income as stated (minimum wage through employment, median income, Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program and Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Security).⁵

Scenario References:

Scenario	Number of Adults	Number of Children	Main Source of Income
Scenario 1	2 adults	2 children	Ontario Works
Scenario 2	2 adults	2 children	One minimum wage earner, 40hr/wk, \$15.50/hr (minimum wage in May 2023).
Scenario 3	2 adults	2 children	Median after-tax income (Assumption of a dual income family with a split of 65% / 35% between partners)
Scenario 4	1 adult	2 children	Ontario Works
Scenario 5	1 adult	N/A	Ontario Works
Scenario 6	1 adult	N/A	Ontario Disability Support Program
Scenario 7	1 senior adult	N/A	Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement
Scenario 8	2 adults	N/A	Ontario Disability Support Program
Scenario 9	1 adult - pregnant	N/A	Ontario Disability Support Program
Scenario 10	1 adult	2 children	One minimum wage earner, 40hr/wk, \$15.50/hr (minimum wage in May 2023)

Income

All the income estimates and rates were collected in May 2023, when the NFB data collection was completed (with the exception of median income, as most recent data from Statistics Canada is from 2021) and include:

Family and tax benefit entitlements available to Ontario residents:

- Canada Child Benefit
- GST/HST credit
- Ontario Trillium Benefit
- Canada Worker Benefit
- Climate Action Incentive Payment
- Pregnancy/Breast-feeding Nutritional Allowance

The following were deducted (when applicable):

- Income tax
- Employment Insurance
- Canada Pension Plan

Note: Allowances and supports may differ based on income tax filing and application to all available credits and supports.

Food Cost

As explained in the Cost of Eating Well 2023 Report, the average food cost was calculated utilizing the Ontario Nutritious Food Basket. This basket includes 61 foods and average assumed quantities for individuals of various age and sex groups. This basket follows nutrition and dietary guidelines promoted by the federal government through Canada's Food Guide.¹ The basket demonstrates one

pattern of eating that is not representative of the diverse population, eating patterns, and approaches of people in Canada.

The cost of eating is considered an estimate, as an approach to monitoring food affordability in the region. This basket may not be representative of one's eating pattern and should be viewed as a costing example, rather than a guide to eating.

Rent

Rental rates are derived from the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) – rental market survey tables. This includes privately initiated structures with at least three rental units, which have been on the market for at least three months, for urban areas with populations of 10,000 or more.⁶ Belleville census metropolitan area (CMA) data was utilized, as rural rental data is only collected every five years on a provincial level by the CMHC. The CMHC data collection occurred in October of 2022 and the following estimates have been used for reporting rental expenses in the Cost of Eating Well report 2023:⁶

- Bachelor: \$913
- 1 bedroom: \$1109
- 2 bedrooms: \$1295
- 3 bedrooms: \$1580

Note: These estimates may or may not include utilities. The rental cost for a new tenant would likely be higher, as current tenants are protected from large annual rent increases due to Ontario's Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing Rent Increase Guideline. HPEPH acknowledges the limitations around rental data availability and encourages readers to interpret this estimate with caution, as informal rental searches reveal much higher rental rates in HPEC. This demonstrates the lack of affordable housing for HPEC residents and the impact this can have on one's food security and well-being.

References

1. Health Canada. National Nutritious Food Basket [Internet]. Ottawa: Government of Canada. Health Canada; 2020 [cited 2023 Nov 22]. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/food-nutrition-surveillance/national-nutritious-food-basket.html>
2. PROOF. Household Food Insecurity in Canada – PROOF [Internet]. Toronto: PROOF - Food Insecurity Policy Research; [cited 2023 Nov 21]. Available from: <https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/>
3. Plunkett-Latimer J, Caron N. Canadian Income Survey: Food insecurity and unmet health care needs, 2018 and 2019 [Internet]. Ottawa: Statistics Canada; 2022 [cited 2023 Nov 20]. Available from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75f0002m/75f0002m2021009-eng.htm>
4. Public Health Ontario. Household Food Insecurity Snapshot [Internet]. Toronto: Public Health Ontario. Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion; 2023 [cited 2023 Oct 31]. Available from: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/Data-and-Analysis/Health-Equity/Household-Food-Insecurity>
5. Ontario Dietitians in Public Health Food Insecurity Work Group. Monitoring Food Affordability in Ontario Income Scenarios Spreadsheet. 2023. Ontario Dietitians in Public Health
6. Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Rental Market Survey: Belleville, 2022, Private Apartment Average Rents, by Zone and Bedroom type – Belleville CMA [Internet]. Ottawa: Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation.; 2023 [cited 2023 Jun 28]. Available from: <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/professionals/housing-markets-data-and-research/housing-data/data-tables/rental-market/rental-market-report-data-tables>
7. Li T, Fafard St-Germain AA, Tarasuk V. Household Food Insecurity in Canada, 2022 [Internet]. Toronto: PROOF; 2023 [cited 2023 Nov 23]. Available from: <https://proof.utoronto.ca/>
8. PROOF. What are the implications of food insecurity for health and health care? [Internet]. Toronto: PROOF; 2022 [cited 2023 Nov 15]. Available from: <https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/what-are-the-implications-of-food-insecurity-for-health-and-health-care/>
9. Uppal S. Food insecurity among Canadian families [Internet]. Ottawa: Statistics Canada; 2023 [cited 2023 Dec 11]. Available from: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/75-006-x/2023001/article/00013-eng.htm>
10. Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. About Affordable Housing in Canada [Internet]. Ottawa: Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation.; 2018 [cited 2023 Nov 3]. Available from: <https://www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/professionals/industry-innovation-and-leadership/industry-expertise/affordable-housing/about-affordable-housing/affordable-housing-in-canada>

References

11. Coleman A. Calculating Ontario's Living Wages. [Internet]. Kitchener: Ontario Living Wage Network; 2023 [cited 2024 Feb 1]. Available from: <https://www.ontariolivingwage.ca/documentation>
12. Government of Ontario. Minimum Wage [Internet]. Toronto: King's Printer for Ontario; 2023 [cited 2023 Nov 23]. Available from: <https://www.ontario.ca/document/your-guide-employment-standards-act-0/minimum-wage>
13. Feed Ontario. HUNGER REPORT 2023 - Why Ontarians can't get ahead [Internet]. Toronto: Feed Ontario; 2023 [cited 2024 1]. Available from: https://feedontario.ca/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/FEED_OntarioHungerReport23.pdf
14. PROOF- Food Insecurity Policy Research. What can be done to reduce food insecurity in Canada? [Internet]. Toronto: PROOF; 2022 [cited 2023 Nov 20]. Available from: <https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/what-can-be-done-to-reduce-food-insecurity-in-canada/>
15. Ontario Dietitians in Public Health. ODPH Position Statement on Responses to Food Insecurity [Internet]. Ontario Dietitians in Public Health; 2020 [cited 2023 Jun 21]. Available from: <https://www.odph.ca/odph-position-statement-on-responses-to-food-insecurity-1>
16. Government of Canada. Canada's first poverty reduction strategy - Canada.ca [Internet]. Ottawa: Government of Canada; 2022 [cited 2023 Dec 13]. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/poverty-reduction/reports/strategy.html>

Accessibility

We are committed to providing accessible publications, programs, and services to all. To request this document in an alternate format, call 613-966-5500; TTY: 711, 1-800-267-6511; email accessibility@hpeph.ca, or visit hpePublicHealth.ca.