The price of eating well in Ottawa
Definitions

Food security exists when all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.\(^1\)

Food insecurity is when one or more members of a household:

1. cannot afford balanced meals

2. go hungry by eating less or skipping meals, sometimes not eating for an entire day

3. do not have access to the variety or quantity of food that they need due to lack of money\(^2\)
Food insecurity is a serious public health issue

Children in food insecure households are more likely to:

- develop depression
- develop asthma later in life
- have issues with hyperactivity and inattention

Adults in food insecure households are more likely to:

- report poorer mental and physical health, and higher anxiety and stress
- suffer from oral health problems and chronic conditions such as diabetes

Food insecurity also makes managing chronic disease through diet more challenging, leading to higher healthcare costs.
Food insecurity statistics

Food insecurity is measured on a household level, not an individual level. Food insecurity ranges in severity from being concerned or anxious that food will run out before household members have money to buy more (marginal food insecurity), to compromising either quantity or quality needed for a balanced diet (moderate food insecurity), to going hungry, and/or going a whole day without eating (severe food insecurity).10

Ottawa Public Health reports food insecurity in Ottawa using Health Canada’s Household Food Security Survey Module, including moderate and severe food insecurity as those who are food insecure. A national report, Household Food Insecurity in Canada, 2014 uses a definition of food insecurity that includes marginal food insecurity. This means that Ottawa specific statistics in this document cannot be compared to Canadian statistics.11

Moderate and severe food insecurity in Ottawa

1 in 15 households in Ottawa report being moderately to severely food insecure.11

Who is at Highest Risk?

Low-income individuals:

- 20.2% of households living below the low-income cut off in Ottawa report being moderately to severely food insecure... ...compared to 3.5% of those above the low-income cut off.11

Recent Immigrants:

- 18.8% of households in Ottawa with recent immigrants report being moderately to severely food insecure... ...compared to 6.3% of Canadian-born households.11
Marginal, moderate and severe food insecurity in Canada

Canadian data for food insecurity, including marginal, moderate and severe food insecurity, highlights a number of disadvantaged populations.

**Indigenous households:**
25.7% (1 in 4) of off-reserve Indigenous households reported being marginally to severely food insecure, compared to 12% of all households in Canada.\(^{10}\)

**Children:**
1 in 6 children in Canada live in households that report being marginally to severely food insecure. Households with children are at a higher risk of being food insecure than those without (15.6% vs 10.4%).\(^{10}\)

**Single mother households:**
Canadian single mother families who have children under 18 years of age are more likely to experience food insecurity than any other type of household - at 33.5%.\(^{10}\)
The Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) survey measures the cost of basic healthy eating. Every year in May, Ottawa Public Health costs 67 food items in 10 grocery stores. These foods represent current nutrition recommendations and average purchasing patterns. Results from the survey are used to monitor both the affordability and accessibility of food in our city by relating the cost of the food basket to individual and family incomes.

SINCE 2009 THE COST OF THE NFB HAS Risen 18%

Monthly cost to feed a family of four in Ottawa: $868
What is included in the NFB?

The 67 items surveyed in the NFB fall under these categories:

- Vegetables and Fruit
- Grain Products
- Milk and Alternatives
- Meat and Alternatives
- Oils and Fats

Note that the pictures below are a sample and do not include all 67 items costed in the NFB.

What is not included in the NFB?

1. Essential items for personal care such as shampoo, toothpaste, women’s hygiene products, and other toiletries
2. Processed, convenience foods
3. Eating outside of the home such as buying food at work and eating out at restaurants
4. Infant foods
5. Foods needed for special diets such as allergen free foods

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NFB case studies

Single mother with two children on Ontario Works

Janelle has been relying on Ontario Works as the main source of income for herself and her two young children for the past year after being laid off and unable to find full-time work. If Janelle were to purchase nutritious food for her family and pay rent in her two-bedroom apartment, she would be left with $500 a month to cover expenses such as heat and hydro, bus passes, prescription medications, and clothing for her two children.

Janelle has to visit food banks in order to make ends meet each month and her mental health is impacted because of her high level of stress.

Single male on Ontario Disability Support Program

Amir has recently started relying on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) after an accident left him physically unable to work. Amir cannot afford to eat the same amount of nutritious food as he could before his accident when he had income from a career in construction. Doing so would leave him with a negative balance in his bank account. The money Amir receives from ODSP is prioritized for things like heating his home and transportation to and from his physiotherapy appointments. He is unsure how he will be able to maintain his health in the long-term.
The table below highlights how eating healthy may be impacted by different incomes and family scenarios. Rent and the cost of a nutritious diet are subtracted from monthly incomes, showing the amount of money left over for other basic expenses at the end of the month. Families on fixed or low incomes often need to compromise healthy eating to pay for fixed expenses such as rent, hydro, heat, transportation, etc.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Monthly Income*</th>
<th>Rent</th>
<th>Cost of a Nutritious Diet</th>
<th>What’s Left?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontario Works (Family of four)**</td>
<td>$2,582</td>
<td>$1,568</td>
<td>$868</td>
<td>$146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario Works (Single mother age 35, boy age 14, girl age 8)</td>
<td>$2,363</td>
<td>$1,232</td>
<td>$624</td>
<td>$507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario Works (Single man age 35)</td>
<td>$810</td>
<td>$836</td>
<td>$244</td>
<td>-$270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario Disability Support Program (Single man age 35)</td>
<td>$1,251</td>
<td>$1,023</td>
<td>$244</td>
<td>-$16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement (Single woman age 71)</td>
<td>$1,694</td>
<td>$1,023</td>
<td>$176</td>
<td>$495</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimum Wage (Family of four, one minimum wage earner)**</td>
<td>$3,603</td>
<td>$1,568</td>
<td>$868</td>
<td>$1,167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Income (Family of four)**</td>
<td>$7,871</td>
<td>$1,568</td>
<td>$868</td>
<td>$5,435</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Monthly income includes additional benefits and credits such as the Canadian Child Benefit and the Ontario Trillium Benefit.

**In this case, a family of four consists of a man and a woman both age 35, a boy age 14 and a girl age 8

Remaining monthly income after rent represents the money available for food and basic expenses, such as:

- Sports / Recreation Fees
- Heat & Hydro
- Transportation
- Medication Costs Related to Disease
- Clothing
- Special Occasions
- Eye, Dental and Personal Care
- Child Care
Poverty is the root cause of food insecurity

Emergency food provision in Canada is not a new concept and includes a variety of programs like food banks and meal programs. These programs were created to be short-term solutions to food insecurity.

Income based strategies
Collective efforts to implement long-term, income-based strategies that address poverty, the root cause of food insecurity, are needed to help solve this issue.

Examples:
- Guaranteed Minimum Income
- Increases in social assistance rates
- Strengthen employment standards to reduce unstable employment & improve working conditions

For more information, see The Ontario Dietitians in Public Health’s (formerly The Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health) position paper on income based strategies to address food insecurity.
Call to action

Learn more about the causes of food insecurity and its affect on health

Support for income based strategies that address poverty and will ensure secure and healthy food for all

Share this information with peers, colleagues, partner agencies, and your local members of parliament

Key Documents


References


