



REPORT

2022 Nutritious Food Basket and Food Insecurity in Ottawa

Monitoring Food Affordability in Ottawa



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Introduction

Every year Ottawa Public Health (OPH) monitors the affordability and accessibility of food in Ottawa using the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) survey. The results of the NFB survey support advocacy efforts and policy change related to the cost of healthy eating. The goal of this report is to share the local 2022 NFB results, to conceptualize the data using a variety of income situations, and to provide the most recent local data on food insecurity.

Like most public health units in Ontario, OPH paused the NFB data collection in 2020 and 2021 due to the shift in priorities in response to the pandemic. As such, this is the first year that OPH is using the new NFB data collection survey that is consistent with the 2019 Canada's food guide. As a result, caution needs to be taken when comparing this year's data to the NFB from previous years.

Nutritious Food Basket (NFB)

The [National Nutritious Food Basket](#) (NNFB) is a survey tool used by various levels of government and other organizations to monitor the cost and affordability of healthy eating. Health Canada has updated the NNFB to be consistent with the 2019 [Canada's food guide](#) and to reflect Canadian eating and purchasing patterns.¹ Ontario derived its own NFB data survey tools (methodology manual and electronic data entry spreadsheet) to support consistent data collection at a local level.² The cost of the NFB is calculated using the average lowest cost of standard food items and their quantities needed for individuals in various age and sex groups. The NFB survey protocol changed in 2022, and here are the key differences. The previous version of the NFB survey tool, used in 2019 and prior, included 67 food items versus 61 food items in the updated version. The current survey includes more plant-based protein foods and whole grains and less meat, sugar, and salt. Some of the new foods introduced in the survey include hummus, tofu, soy beverage, greater variety of legumes, whole grains like brown rice instead of white rice, oatmeal, and plain yogurt instead of fruit bottom yogurt. Although many new foods were introduced, 42 of the 67 foods from the older survey remained unchanged.

2022 NFB foods fall under these categories:

- Vegetables and fruit
- Protein foods
- Whole grains
- Fats and oils

Items not included in the NFB include:

- Personal care items, e.g., shampoo, toothpaste, toilet paper, soap, personal hygiene products, diapers, etc.
- Processed and convenience foods
- Eating outside of the home, e.g., restaurant foods
- Infant foods
- Special diet foods, e.g., allergen-free foods, gluten-free foods, etc.



Data collection

Ottawa 2022 NFB data collection was part of a province wide pilot testing of updated tools and processes to monitor food affordability in Ontario. The *Monitoring Food Affordability Methodology* manual, the electronic data entry spreadsheet by Ontario Dietitians in Public Health² and the *Monitoring food affordability reference document* by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care³ were used to guide the NFB data collection and analysis.

There are 104 grocery stores across Ottawa categorized as large grocery stores that consistently carry the full range of fresh produce and meat, basic products such as eggs, milk, and bread, frozen foods, and dried/canned foods.⁴ In 2022, 14 grocery stores (12 urban and two rural) were selected. Sample selection considered geographic location and socio-economic status neighbourhood designation to ensure broad sample representation. The data collection was done between May 17 and June 6, 2022, using an online platform (if available) or an in-store data collection method. Eight stores were surveyed using an online platform and six stores were costed in-store. Where in-store surveys were conducted, stores were contacted in advance and permission was granted to conduct the survey. According to provincial NFB data collection guidelines, the NFB must contain the lowest cost of 61 specific food items. Each store was surveyed by two surveyors at the same time, who compared data to reduce errors and to ensure consistency in data collection.

Results of the Ottawa NFB

The cost of healthy eating is calculated for 22 different groups of people based on age, sex and life stage. The data costing spreadsheet was used to calculate the food amount and the associated cost for each of the demographic groups. The analysis of the results adds 5 per cent to the basket cost to account for miscellaneous foods used in meal preparation, such as spices, condiments, and tea. For the weekly and monthly costs of the NFB for various age groups see Table 1.

Table 1: Weekly and monthly costs of the NFB for age and sex groups in Ottawa

Group	Age	Weekly cost of the NFB ^a	Monthly cost of the NFB ^{a,b}
Boys	2 to 3	\$39	\$171
Boys	4 to 8	\$45	\$193
Males	9 to 13	\$58	\$251
Males	14 to 18	\$70	\$304
Males	19 to 30	\$80	\$346
Males	31 to 50	\$75	\$327
Males	51 to 70	\$66	\$287
Males	Over 70	\$62	\$269
Girls	2 to 3	\$39	\$171
Girls	4 to 8	\$44	\$191
Females	9 to 13	\$57	\$248
Females	14 to 18	\$57	\$248
Females	19 to 30	\$63	\$271

Group	Age	Weekly cost of the NFB ^a	Monthly cost of the NFB ^{a,b}
Females	31 to 50	\$61	\$266
Females	51 to 70	\$56	\$244
Females	Over 70	\$54	\$234
Pregnant	18 and younger	\$67	\$291
Pregnant	19 to 30	\$72	\$310
Pregnant	31 to 50	\$70	\$305
Breastfeeding	18 and younger	\$67	\$290
Breastfeeding	19 to 30	\$71	\$307
Breastfeeding	31 to 50	\$70	\$305
Family of four	Two adults 31 to 50; boy 14; girl 7	\$251	\$1,088

^a All numbers are rounded to the nearest whole number.

^b Monthly cost = weekly cost x 4.33.

The monthly cost of nutritious food in Ottawa for a family of four (assuming two adults, male and female ages 31-50 years old and two children, a girl 8 years of age and a boy 14 years of age) is \$1,088 per month (Table 1). For an individual living alone (assuming male 31-50 years of age), the cost of nutritious food is approximately \$392 per month. To calculate food expenses for a person living alone, 20 per cent (\$65) is added to the monthly NFB baseline of \$327 (Table 1). This is because living alone is more expensive than living and sharing expenses with others.

What is the **monthly cost of eating healthy** in Ottawa?



NFB income scenarios

Using the *Monitoring Food Affordability Income Scenarios Spreadsheet*,⁵ the local cost of the NFB plus rent are compared with household income from social assistance or minimum wage work to assess whether incomes from these sources is adequate to cover the cost of basic living needs.



The results of the income scenarios show that individuals and families living on fixed incomes do not have enough funds remaining at the end of the month to afford their bills while putting

healthy food on the table. Families often need to choose between paying for expenses such as rent, heat, childcare, transportation, medication, telephone, and clothing and buying groceries (Table 2).

Table 2: Income scenarios in Ottawa ⁵

Income scenario ^c	Monthly income ^d	Average monthly rent ^d (% of income required for rent)	Cost of a nutritious diet ^d (% of income required for food)	What's left? ^d
Households with children				
Family of Four, Ontario Works <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 adults (male and female ages 31-50), 2 children (girl aged 8, boy aged 14) 	\$2,760	\$1,881 (68%)	\$1,088 (39%)	-\$209
Family of Four, Minimum Wage Earner <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 adults (male and female ages 31-50), 2 children (girl aged 8, boy aged 14) 	\$3,973	\$1,881 (47%)	\$1,088 (27%)	\$1,004
Family of Four, Median Income (after tax) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 adults (male and female ages 31-50), 2 children (girl aged 8, boy aged 14) 	\$9,323	\$1,881 (20%)	\$1,088 (12%)	\$6,354
Single Parent Household, with 2 Children, Ontario Works <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 adult (female age 31-50), 2 children (girl aged 8, boy aged 14) 	\$2,528	\$1,550 (61%)	\$800 ^e (32%)	\$178
Households without children				
One Person Household, Ontario Works <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 adult (male age 31-50) 	\$863	\$1,059 (123%)	\$392 ^f (45%)	-\$588
One Person Household, Ontario Disability Support Program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 adult (male age 31-50) 	\$1,309	\$1,280 (98%)	\$392 ^f (30%)	-\$363
One Person Household, Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 adult (female age 70+) 	\$1,885	\$1,280 (68%)	\$280 ^f (15%)	\$325
Married Couple, Ontario Disability Support Program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 2 adults (male and female age 31-50) 	\$2,322	1,280 (55%)	\$652 ^g (28%)	\$390

^c The Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care has provided the income for the scenarios. These include benefits and credits.

^d Note, that all dollars rounded to nearest whole number.

^e To calculate food expenses for a family of three 5% is added to the monthly NFB.

^f To calculate food expenses for a person living alone, 20% is added to the monthly NFB.

^g To calculate food expenses for two people living together, 10% is added to the monthly NFB.



Historical overview of NFB and income scenarios

Although the Ottawa NFB data shows that food prices Ottawa NFB results have been increasing over the years (Table 3), caution needs to be taken when comparing annual NFB data. Some of the limitations include that a new NFB data collection survey was used in 2022 and changes in sample selection. A preferred method would be to consider historical NFB data in the context of income scenarios (Table 4). Historical analysis reveals that after paying for rent and food, families and individuals relying on Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Programs (ODSP) are consistently going into a deeper deficit at the end of the month. Single parent households, people on old age security and minimum wage earners continue to be financially compromised. As inflation increases and the cost of food and rent increase, income from social assistance and precarious employment are not increasing at the same rate which places extra financial strain on individuals and families.

Table 3: Ottawa NFB between 2016 and 2022

NFB	2016 ^h	2017 ^h	2018 ^h	2019 ^h	2022 ⁱ
Family of four	\$863	\$873	\$868	\$901	\$1,088
A single person	\$291	\$294	\$244	\$303	\$392

^h Source: Ottawa Public Health, Nutritious Food Basket Reports, 2016-2019.

ⁱ Note, that a new NFB survey tool was introduced in 2022 and that there were no surveys conducted in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19.

Table 4: Money left after paying for rent and NFB between 2016 and 2022

Income scenario	Money left after paying for rent and NFB ^j				
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2022
Households with children					
Family of Four, OW	-\$26	\$219	\$146	\$138	-\$209
Family of Four, Minimum Wage Earner	\$687	\$938	\$1,167	\$1,148	\$1,004
Family of Four, Median Income (after tax)	\$5,195	\$5,566	\$5,435	\$5,498	\$6,354
Single Parent Household, with 2 Children, OW	\$190	\$473	\$507	\$420	\$178
Households without children					
One Person Household, OW	-\$324	-\$312	-\$270	-\$359	-\$588
One Person Household, ODSP	-\$57	-\$50	-\$16	-\$119	-\$363
One Person Household, Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement	\$381	\$467	\$495	\$419	\$325
Married Couple, ODSP	NA	NA	NA	NA	\$390

^j Source: Ottawa Public Health, Income Scenario Spreadsheet Reports, 2016-2022.

Food Insecurity

Food insecurity refers to the inadequate or insecure access to food due to a lack of money.⁶ Food insecurity ranges in severity from being worried about running out of food to not being able to afford a balanced diet to going hungry. Food insecurity is a serious problem in Canada that is closely linked to negative health outcomes for adults and children, leading to strain on our healthcare system.⁷ Those living in more severely food insecure households are most likely to experience the worst health impacts.^{8,9}

Food insecurity

is the inadequate or insecure access to food due to a lack of money. It is caused by poverty.



1 in 7 households

(13.9%) in Ottawa is food insecure.

Negative health impacts of food insecurity

Food insecurity is a problem that goes beyond an issue of food and its impact on health goes beyond diet and nutrition. When someone is experiencing food insecurity, they are likely compromising their spending on other basic needs as well, such as housing, utilities, prescription medications, dental care, childcare, telephone, internet, transportation, clothing, etc.

Food insecurity is strongly related to mental health. Adults and youth living in food insecure households have a greater risk of experiencing depression, anxiety disorders, mood disorders and suicidal thoughts.^{6,7,8} Children are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity. Children living in food insecure households are more likely to experience mental health problems such as hyperactivity and inattention and have an increased risk of developing depression and suicidal ideation as they age.^{10,11}

Food Insecurity affects health!

Food insecure households have higher rates of:

- poor mental health
- chronic conditions
- infections, poor oral health, and injury



Food insecurity is associated with higher rates of morbidity and mortality among Canadian adults.¹² Adults in food insecure households have higher rates of a wide variety of chronic conditions including diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and chronic pain.^{13,14,15} Those who are food insecure are more likely to be diagnosed with more than one chronic condition.¹³ Furthermore, food insecurity makes managing chronic conditions more challenging as individuals may struggle to adhere to therapeutic diets and afford medications.^{16,17}

Food insecurity is also associated with higher rates of infectious diseases¹⁸, poor oral health¹⁹, and injury²⁰ among adults.

How food insecurity is measured

In Canada, food insecurity is measured using a comprehensive and validated tool, the Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM). The HFSSM contains 18 questions which ask whether household members have experienced certain conditions over the past year. The

HFSSM distinguishes the experiences of adults from children as it is recognized that adults may compromise their food intake to ensure their children have enough to eat. Food insecurity is described on a scale ranging from marginal to severe including: ²¹

- Marginal food insecurity: being concerned about not having enough money to buy food.
- Moderate food insecurity: not being able to afford the quantity or quality of food needed for a balanced diet.
- Severe food insecurity: going hungry by eating less, skipping meals, or not eating for an entire day because of lack of money for food.

Food insecurity has been reported using either two (moderate food insecurity and severe food insecurity) or three (marginal food insecurity, moderate food insecurity and severe food insecurity) categories. For the purposes of this report, food insecurity refers to marginal, moderate, and severe food insecurity.

Since 2005, food insecurity has been measured through the inclusion of the HFSSM in the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), which collects health data of Canadians over a 2-year period. The HFSSM is not a mandatory component of the CCHS for every data collection cycle. As a result, some provinces and territories choose to opt out of measuring food insecurity when it is not mandatory, leaving gaps in data. The HFSSM was optional for the 2005, 2009/2010, 2013/2014 and 2015/2016 cycles of the CCHS. Ontario opted out of the HFSSM in the 2015/2016 cycle.

In 2018, food insecurity was identified as an indicator in Canada's Poverty Reduction Strategy.²² As a result, the HFSSM was added to the Canadian Income Survey (CIS) and is used to monitor household food insecurity on an annual basis.

For more information on the measurement of food insecurity in Canada, please see the 2021 Household Food Insecurity in Canada report by PROOF here: <https://proof.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Household-Food-Insecurity-in-Canada-2021-PROOF.pdf>.

Food insecurity in Ottawa

Food insecurity continues to persist in Ottawa. The most recent food insecurity statistics in Ottawa were reported in 2019 from the interim CCHS survey data that was collected in 2017.²³ This data indicates that:

- One in seven households (13.9 per cent) in Ottawa is food insecure.

Statistics for Ontario and Canada outlined in this report have been analyzed from the 2021 CIS survey by the PROOF research group.⁶

Food insecurity in Ontario

Ontario food insecurity data from the 2021 CIS survey suggests that:

- Approximately one in six households (16.1 per cent) in Ontario is food insecure, amounting to 2.3 million Ontarians.⁶
- One in five children in Ontario (20.6 per cent) live in a food-insecure household, amounting to half a million children.⁶



Populations most affected by food insecurity in Canada

Statistics from the 2021 CIS include data from the ten provinces but excludes the three territories. The following types of Canadian households disproportionately experience food insecurity:

- Households who have inadequate, insecure incomes: 67.2 per cent of households relying on social assistance (OW and ODSP) as their main source of income are food-insecure.⁶ However, having a job does not guarantee an adequate income. A 2014 study indicates that the following employed Canadians are most likely to report food insecurity: those with low-wage, short-term or precarious jobs, racialized workers, those working multiple jobs, and those providing for multiple people with a single income.²⁴
- Single parents and individuals living alone: 38.1 per cent of female lone-parent households, 20.9 per cent of male lone-parent households and 20.3 per cent of unattached individuals living alone experience food insecurity.⁶
- Households who rent their dwelling: 25.9 per cent of renters are affected by food insecurity.⁶

Food insecurity disproportionately affects racialized (non-white) and Indigenous Peoples. Data from the 2021 CIS including households in the 10 provinces indicates that:⁶

- 13.2 per cent of individuals living in food-insecure households identified as white.
- 15.7 per cent of individuals living in food-insecure households identified as South Asian.
- 19.8 per cent of individuals living in food-insecure households identified as East/Southeast Asian.
- 22.4 per cent of individuals living in food-insecure households identified as Black.
- 27.6 per cent of individuals living in food-insecure households identified as Arab/West Asian.
- 30.7 per cent of individuals living in food-insecure households identified as Indigenous.

After accounting for differences in socio-demographic and economic circumstances, households whose main income earner is Indigenous remain more food insecure than other racial/cultural groups.⁶

Indigenous population food insecurity

OPH recognizes the disproportionately high rates of food insecurity among Indigenous households on- and off-reserve across Canada are a result of historical and ongoing colonization.

Households whose main income earner is Indigenous are twice as likely to be food insecure compared to households whose main income earner is white.⁶ The situation is likely much worse, considering that:

- the data from the CIS does not include Indigenous Peoples who live on-reserve, which represents 40 per cent of Indigenous Peoples in Canada.²⁵



- the data from the 2021 CIS does not include the territories, where Indigenous food insecurity is known to be especially high.²⁶

It is important to note that CIS measurement of food insecurity in Canada is based on purchasing food and does not consider traditional Indigenous food practices such as fishing, hunting and gathering.²⁷ Colonization has created barriers to accessing traditional foods which are known to contribute to diet quality and other important cultural benefits.^{28,29} Furthermore, the price of food in Indigenous communities is much higher than in urban centres, making it very difficult for low-income Indigenous Peoples to purchase the food they need.²⁸

Food insecurity during the pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the financial status of millions of Canadians and has highlighted the importance of addressing food insecurity. With inflation at a 20 year high, the increased cost of living creates further challenges to make ends meet for many residents in Ottawa.³⁰

Data from the CIS suggests that household food insecurity has remained relatively stable throughout the pandemic, from 2019 to 2021.⁶ According to PROOF, “The lack of major change in household food insecurity rates from 2019 to 2021 warrants further research because this has been a time of both major economic disruptions and sweeping income supports, wage subsidies, and other temporary interventions at the federal and provincial levels to support households through the height of the COVID-19 pandemic”.⁶

Food Banks Canada reported that food bank usage in March 2022 represents a 15 per cent increase compared to March 2021, and a 35 per cent increase compared to March 2019. According to their annual report, the increase in usage since 2019 is the highest year over-year increase since the aftermath of the 2008 recession.³¹ Similarly, in 2022, the Ottawa Food Bank reported a 39 per cent increase in usage since 2017, with 2022 having the highest service figures in its 38-year history.³² It’s important to note that only about 20 per cent of households experiencing food insecurity access food banks and therefore food bank usage statistics underestimate the issue of food insecurity.³³

How to take action

Access to food is a basic human right. 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.

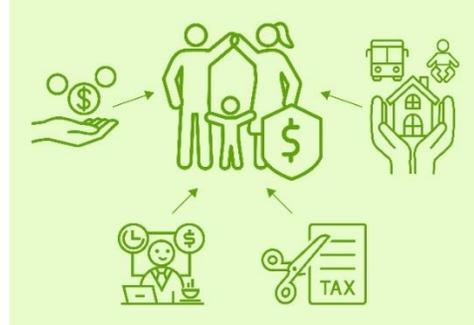
Emergency food provision in Canada includes a variety of programs like food banks and meal programs. These programs were created to be short-term solutions to food insecurity and do not address poverty, the root cause of food insecurity. Many struggle to make ends meet due to inadequate government supports (low social assistance rates) and precarious employment (temporary work, low wages, etc.). To meaningfully address this issue and tackle the root cause, policies, tax benefits and programs that help people afford the cost of living are needed.³⁴

How can you help?



1. Learn more about the causes of food insecurity and its effect on health (see “To learn more” below).
2. Contact your Councillor, Member of Provincial Parliament or Member of Parliament to express your support for solutions that help people afford the cost of living such as:

- a. Social assistance programs that pay adequate benefits.
- b. Jobs that pay a living wage.
- c. A basic income guarantee.
- d. Affordable housing, public transit, and childcare.
- e. Reduced income tax for the lowest income households.
- f. Free income tax filing support.



3. Contact your Councillor, Member of Provincial Parliament, or Member of Parliament to express your support for the establishment of publicly funded food programs such as a national school food lunch program.
4. Share this information with peers, colleagues, partner agencies and your local members of parliament.
5. Become a [Living Wage Employer](#). Living Wage Employers recognize that paying a living wage constitutes a critical investment in the long-term prosperity of the economy by fostering a dedicated, skilled and healthy workforce.



To learn more

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Community resources

If you or someone you know is experiencing food insecurity, here are some resources that can help you and your family:

GoodFoodLink.ca

Please consult this one-stop web-based resource for all things related to food in the Ottawa region: <https://goodfoodlink.ca/>

Ottawa Food Bank – Find Food Lookup Tool

Please consult Ottawa Food Bank’s “Find food” lookup tool to find the community food bank that’s closest to you: [Get Help - Ottawa Food Bank](#)

Ottawa Public Health – Mental Health Resources

If you are concerned about your mental health, speak to your health care provider or check out the Mental Health and Substance Use Resources List: [Mental Health and Substance Use Health Resource List - Ottawa Public Health](#)

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