

York Region Nutritious Food Basket – 2018

Each year York Region Public Health conducts the Nutritious Food Basket Survey which is used to calculate the cost of basic healthy eating, based on suggested food intakes as outlined by [Canada's Food Guide](#) and information about eating behaviours from the Canadian Community Health Survey.

To determine the minimum cost of eating a healthy diet, the lowest prices for a week's worth of 67 basic, nutritious foods are collected from nine grocery stores across York Region. The list of items does not include convenience or prepared foods, snack foods or household items such as toilet paper and dish soap. The survey assumes that people have the necessary skills and ability to prepare and store food, and does not include the additional costs of eating out or cooking for additional friends or family.

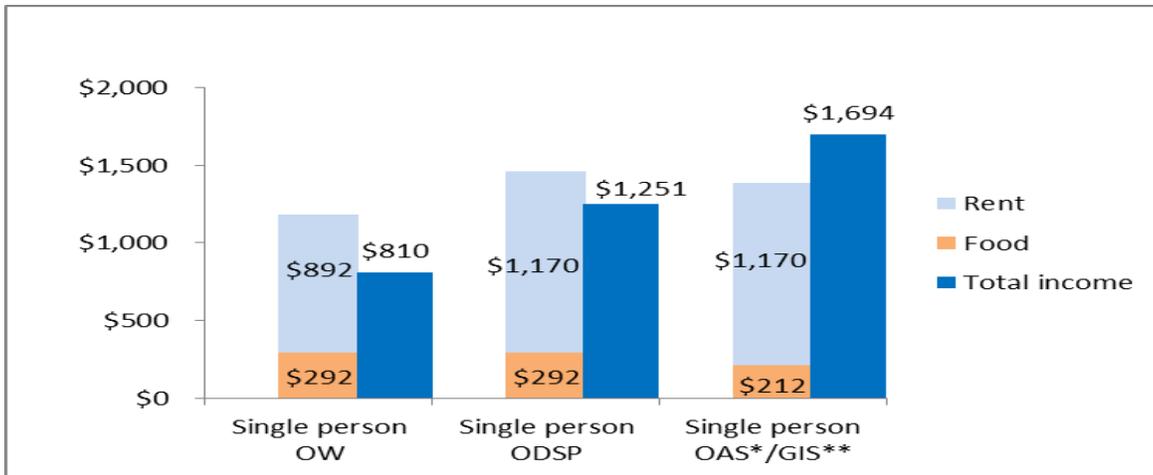
NUTRITIOUS FOOD BASKET INFORMATION

Nutritious Food Basket costs and rent costs are compared to family or individual incomes¹ to uncover the presence of potential food insecurity – inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints.²

Figures 1 and 2 on the next page compare monthly incomes with expenses for six low income family scenarios, using the average cost of rent in York Region³ and the 2017 cost of a Nutritious Food Basket. All of these households must use most or all of their income for housing and nutritious food. Based on the Nutritious Food Basket Survey and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation average market rents for York Region³, a family of four with one full-time minimum wage earner spends 68 per cent of their income just on food and rent, while a single parent with two children receiving assistance through Ontario Works would have to spend 82 percent of their income just on food and rent. The data show that rent and food costs would exceed income for a single person receiving assistance through the Ontario Disability Support Program and a single person receiving assistance through Ontario Works by \$211 and \$374 per month, respectively. On the other hand, seniors receiving the Old Age Security (OAS) and Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) have a bit of money left after paying for rent and food, a finding consistent with research indicating that the rate of Canadians experiencing food insecurity is half that among Canadians aged 65 to 69 years than it is among those aged 60 to 64 as a result of these federal public pensions.⁴



Figure 1: Monthly income compared to monthly rent and food costs for individuals – May, 2018

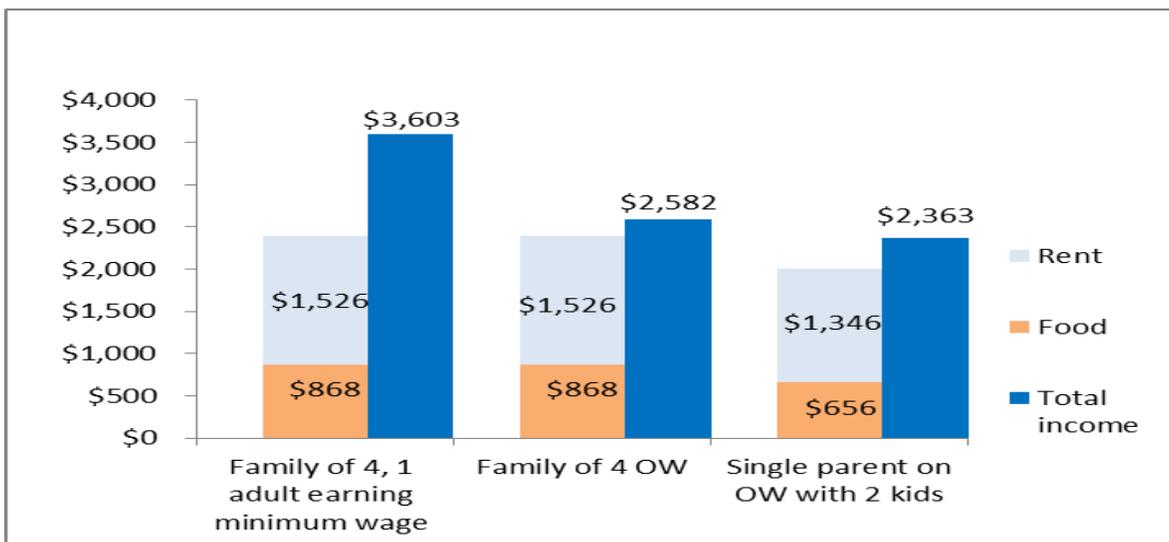


*OAS is the Old Age Security pension, a monthly social security payment available to most Canadians 65 years of age or older based on annual income.

**GIS is the Guaranteed Income Supplement which is paid to people receiving a full Old Age Security pension.

The food and nutritional requirements are less for a senior than for the single people in the first two columns.

Figure 2: Monthly income compared to monthly rent and food costs for families – May, 2018



Rent for the single person receiving OW is based on a studio (bachelor) apartment, while rent for the single person receiving ODSP and OAS/GIS is based on a one bedroom apartment. The National Occupancy Standards state that an individual may live in a studio apartment and be considered to be living in suitable accommodations.⁵ People living on ODSP or OAS/GIS receive slightly more income and are allocated a one bedroom apartment to allow space for assistive devices if necessary. Rent for the families with four people is based on a three-bedroom apartment, and rent for the family of three is based on a two-bedroom apartment, both of which are considered suitable housing according to the National Occupancy Standards.⁵

Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program and minimum wage amounts include the GST/HST credit and the Ontario Trillium Benefit, and the family amounts include the Canada Child Benefit (CCB), the National Child Benefit Supplement and the Ontario Child Benefit monthly amounts. The minimum wage amount includes the Working Income Tax Benefit and is reduced by the Employment Insurance and Canada Pension Plan deductions.

AFFORDABILITY OF HEALTHY EATING FOR FAMILIES ON A FIXED OR LIMITED INCOME

As the bar graphs above show, many individuals and families are unable to cover all of their essential costs and pay for basic healthy eating. People may have to compromise healthy eating to pay for other expenses such as:

- Heat and hydro
- Phone, internet or cable
- Laundry, toiletries and household cleaning products
- Insurance
- Transportation (bus pass, taxi or car expenses)
- Clothing
- Debt payments, banking service charges
- Non-prescription and prescription drug costs
- Child care, children's school costs.

When families do not have enough money to buy nutritious food, individuals may skip meals or opt for less nutritious foods, resulting in poor diets. This can have a significant impact on physical, mental and social health.

THE HEALTH EFFECTS OF FOOD INSECURITY

Health is closely linked with household food insecurity.⁶ Studies show that adults in food insecure households have higher rates of diabetes, heart disease and depression, poorer mental and physical health, including oral health, and greater stress. They are also more likely to suffer from chronic conditions such as hypertension and mood and anxiety disorders. Food insecurity also makes it difficult to manage existing chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes and HIV.⁷ Additionally, children in food insecure households are at greater risk of asthma and depression.⁸ Finally, people in food insecure households are more likely to become higher-cost users of health care than people in food secure households.⁹

FOOD INSECURITY RATES AND FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH IT

The Canadian Community Health Survey's Food Security Survey Module measures uncertain, insufficient or inadequate food access, availability and utilization due to limited financial resources, and the compromised eating patterns and food consumption that may result.¹⁰ Using the Canadian Community Health Survey's Food Security Survey Module data, 7 per cent +/- 1 per cent (approximately 24,700) of York Region households experienced food insecurity between 2009 and 2014.¹¹ The experience of food insecurity varies among households and ranges from the inability to afford a balanced diet, and concerns about running out of food due to insufficient income, to missing meals in the most extreme cases.²

Low income

In York Region, growth in the low income population has out-paced growth in the total population. The number of low-income residents grew by almost 61 per cent between 2000 and 2012 while the population of York Region grew by 49 per cent during the same period.¹²

In 2015, 14.0 per cent (157,690) of York Region residents lived with low income.¹³

Housing and precarious employment

More than half (52 per cent) of York Region renters spent more than 30 per cent of their income on rent, based on the 2016 census.¹⁴ And 27 per cent spent more than 50 per cent of their income on rent.¹⁵ In Canada, housing is considered affordable if shelter costs account for less than 30 per cent of before-tax household income.¹⁶

It is possible that even people in subsidized housing will experience food insecurity. While housing subsidies improve the stability and security of housing for eligible individuals and families, these programs do not ensure household food security.¹⁷ Researchers suggest the need for a redefinition of housing affordability to take into account the adequacy of incomes once people have paid for their shelter.¹⁸

Some forms of housing can be more protective than others. For example, people who own their homes have less food insecurity.¹⁹ Twenty-eight per cent of home owners spend more than 30 per cent of their income on housing¹⁴ but home ownership has been found to be somewhat protective of household food insecurity.¹⁹

Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (PEPSO) examined employment precarity and household wellbeing and found that "people who have insecure employment and live in low-income households are twice as likely to find it difficult to make ends meet or to run out of money to buy food, compared to workers with secure employment who live in low-income households."²⁰ When job precarity was studied in three southern municipalities in York Region (Markham, Richmond Hill and Vaughan) in 2011 and 2014, 43 per cent per cent of workers were in temporary and contract (19.4 per cent) or "other" (23.9 per cent) types of employment. The "other" category included full-time employment but either received no benefits beyond a wage or were unable to confirm they would be with their current employer for at least 12 months, self-employed with employees or in full-time employment but their hours varied from week to week and in some cases could be less than 30

hours.²¹ The York Region 2016 Census Release Report, *Labour and Journey to Work*, reveals that 47 per cent of York Region residents worked “part-year, part-time”.²²

FOOD PROGRAMS DON'T ADDRESS FOOD INSECURITY

Food programs are designed to provide food for those in need. These often originate as citizen responses to food needs, and aim to provide healthy food or support the improvement of food skills. Examples include food banks, student nutrition programs, community gardens and community kitchens. Interventions designed to improve food skills and gardening for food may have important public health benefits, such as increasing fruit and vegetable intake,²³ and adolescents cooking ability has been found to be positively associated with better nutritional indicators, better mental health indicators, and stronger family connections.²⁴ However, research shows that skilled food selection and preparation cannot compensate for inadequate incomes when addressing food insecurity.²³

FINDING SOLUTIONS

The Nutritious Food Basket costing reveals that for many families in York Region, incomes are inadequate to purchase a minimum healthy diet. Similarly, data from the Canadian Community Health Survey show that over twenty four thousand York Region households have concerns about running out of food or miss meals due to insufficient incomes. Food insecurity is related to higher rates of diabetes, heart disease and depression, and poorer mental, physical and dental health, and greater stress. People from food insecure households become higher-cost users of health care than those in food secure households.

Programs such as food banks, community meal programs and emergency food access programs provide short-term relief to those who are in need. But the factors associated with food insecurity, which must be addressed to reduce food insecurity rates, are inadequate incomes, expensive housing and precarious employment.

After the costing of the Nutritious Food Basket in May, 2017, some relevant changes were made to incomes in Ontario. Social assistance rates were increased, and the minimum wage was increased. The next costing of the Nutritious Food Basket will be an opportunity to see impact of these changes for the different family scenarios represented in the Nutritious Food Basket bar graphs.

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