

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Bryna Warshawsky, Acting Medical Officer of Health

DATE: 2012 November 15

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## **NUTRITIOUS FOOD BASKET COSTING SURVEY RESULTS FOR 2012**

### **Recommendations**

*It is recommended that the Board of Health:*

- 1. Send a letter to the Premier of Ontario, the Right Honourable Dalton McGuinty, to endorse and support Windsor-Essex County Board of Health's recommendations to:*
  - a. Implement a monthly \$100 Healthy Food Supplement for social assistance recipients in Ontario as recommended by alPHA, the Social Planning Network of Ontario and the Stop Community Food Centre; and*
  - b. Partner with Ontario Collaborative Group on Healthy Eating and Physical Activity to support the implementation of the comprehensive, coordinated Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy.*
- 2. Forward for information Report No. 135-12 re "Nutritious Food Basket Costing Survey Results for 2012" to the City of London, Middlesex County, and appropriate community agencies.*

### **Key Points**

- The Nutritious Food Basket survey is conducted annually by all public health units in Ontario to measure the cost of basic, healthy eating.
- In May 2012, the estimated local monthly cost to feed a family of four was \$772.04. This is a 4.8% increase from the estimated cost in May 2011.
- The Nutritious Food Basket annual surveys repeatedly show that people with low incomes do not have an adequate baseline to afford healthy eating, after meeting other essential needs for basic living.
- Poor nutrition can lead to increased risk for chronic and infectious diseases, pregnancy outcomes with greater risk for low birth weight, and negative impacts on the growth and development of children.

### **Background**

Annually during the month of May, all Ontario health units conduct the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) survey in accordance with the requirements under the Ontario Public Health Standards. The survey provides a measure of the cost of basic healthy eating taking into consideration current nutrition recommendations and average food purchasing patterns of Canadians. The NFB results can be used to: estimate the basic cost for an individual or household to eat healthy; compare the basic cost of healthy eating with income and other basic living expenses; plan programs that promote access to nutritious, safe and personally acceptable foods; and inform policy decisions.

The Public Health Dietitians on the Chronic Disease Prevention and Tobacco Control Team conduct the Nutritious Food Basket Survey to provide a measure of the cost of food available to residents in Middlesex-London. In 2012, 12 grocery stores in Middlesex-London were surveyed, including areas of variable economic status.

## Survey Results

In May 2012, the estimated local monthly cost to feed a family of four was \$772.04. This is a 4.8% increase from the estimated cost in May 2011. [Appendix A](#) provides detailed information on the 2012 weekly cost of the Nutritious Food Basket in London and Middlesex County.

Table 1 highlights some real life situations for people living in this area utilizing the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) costing survey data. The NFB annual surveys have repeatedly shown that people with low incomes do not have adequate funds to afford healthy eating, after meeting other essential needs for basic living. Poor nutrition can lead to increased risk for chronic and infectious diseases, pregnancy outcomes with greater risk for low birth weight, and negative impacts on the growth and development of children.

**Table 1 – Monthly Income and Cost of Living Scenarios**

	Single Man on Ontario Works (OW)	Single Man on ODSP	Single Woman over 70 (Old Age Security / Guaranteed Income Security)	Single Mother Family of 3 on OW	Family of 4 Minimum Wage Earner	Family of 4 Medium Income After tax
Monthly Income Including Benefits and Credits	\$642	\$1115	\$1326	\$1855	\$2639	\$6360
Estimated Shelter Cost	\$570	\$721	\$721	\$896	\$1048	\$1048
Cost of a Nutritious Diet	\$215.55	\$215.55	\$158.65	\$556.53	\$772.04	\$772.04
<b>WHAT'S LEFT?*</b>	<b>-\$143.55</b>	<b>\$178.45</b>	<b>\$446.35</b>	<b>\$402.47</b>	<b>\$818.96</b>	<b>\$4539.96</b>
% Income Required for Shelter	89%	65%	54%	48%	40%	16%
% Income Required for Nutritious Diet	34%	19%	12%	30%	29%	12%


\* People still need funds for utilities, phone, transportation, cleaning supplies, personal care items, clothing, gifts, entertainment, internet, school supplies, medical and dental costs, and other costs.

**Notes:** Rental estimates are from Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation Rental Market Report – Ontario Highlights (Spring 2012). Utility costs may or may not be included in the rental estimates. Utility costs vary considerably based on age and condition of housing, type of heating, range of appliances, air conditioning or cooling, and household size.

## Opportunities for Action

Local and provincial efforts to improve access to healthy foods for people with lower incomes are ongoing. Local efforts concentrate on food access, developing food skills, and advocacy. In June 2012, the Windsor-Essex County Board of Health petitioned the provincial government to implement a \$100 Healthy Food Supplement for those on social assistance, as one small step to bring short-term relief to vulnerable citizens ([Appendix B](#)). In addition, the implementation of a comprehensive, coordinated Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy will help create more sustainable solutions involving partnership with key stakeholders. It is recommended that the Board of Health endorse these recommendations.

This report was prepared by Ms. Kim Leacy, Registered Dietitian, and Ms. Linda Stobo, Manager, Chronic Disease Prevention & Tobacco Control Team.



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Acting Medical Officer of Health

**This report addresses** the following requirements of the Ontario Public Health Standards (2008): Foundational Standard 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10; Chronic Disease Prevention 2, 7, 8, 11, 12