



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health
FROM: Dr. Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health and CEO
DATE: 2017 November 16

2017 NUTRITIOUS FOOD BASKET SURVEY RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT PUBLIC POLICY

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board of Health:

- 1. Write to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care supporting maintaining local surveillance and monitoring of food costing by public health units within the modernized Standards for Public Health Programs and Services (SPHPS);*
- 2. Submit a letter to the Associate Deputy Minister of Health System Information Management and CIO of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, and the Director General of the Office of Nutrition Policy and Promotion at Health Canada, advocating for the Household Food Security Survey Module to be made a core module of the Canadian Community Health Survey; and*
- 3. Forward Report No. 060-17 re: “2017 Nutritious Food Basket Survey Results and Implications for Government Public Policy” and [Appendix A](#) to Ontario Boards of Health, the City of London, Middlesex County, and appropriate community agencies.*

Key Points

- The Nutritious Food Basket survey results for 2017 demonstrate that the incomes of many Middlesex-London residents are not adequate to afford basic needs.
- Food insecurity has a pervasive impact upon health, and there is a need for income-based solutions.
- Routine monitoring of food affordability across Ontario helps to generate evidence-based recommendations for addressing income inadequacy and food insecurity, and should remain a core requirement under modernized public health standards.
- Consistent monitoring of household food security is fundamental to evidence-based policy decision-making; therefore, the [Household Food Security Survey Module](#) should be made a core module of the Canadian Community Health Survey.

Background

Each year in May, in accordance with the Ontario Public Health Standards, public health units conduct the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) survey. The survey provides a measure of the cost of basic healthy eating and food affordability by comparing the local cost of the food basket and rental costs to various individual and family income scenarios. Poor nutrition increases the risk of chronic and infectious diseases, and negatively impacts the growth and development of children.

Survey Results

In May 2017, the estimated local monthly cost to feed a family of four was \$843.01. Estimated food costs are a snapshot of the prices at the time of data collection. Any increase or decrease year-to-year may or may not represent a significant change, especially in the context of other changes (e.g., utilities and housing costs, incomes). In general, food is affordable for Middlesex-London residents with adequate incomes; a family of four with average income spends only about 11% of its after-tax income on food.

Individuals and families with low incomes would need to spend up to 36% of their income to achieve a healthy diet, which leaves inadequate income for other basic necessities. Table 1 highlights scenarios for Middlesex-London residents, using 2017 income rates, rental costs, and food costs, demonstrating again that people with low incomes cannot afford to eat healthy after meeting other essential needs for basic living. [Appendix A](#), “Food Security in Middlesex-London (2017),” provides an overview of local food insecurity, income inadequacy, and opportunities for community action.

Table 1: Monthly Income and Cost-of-Living Scenarios, 2017

	Single Man Ontario Works	Single Man ODSP	Single Woman over 70 OAS/ GIS	Family of 4 Ontario Works	Family of 4, Minimum Wage Earner	Family of 4 Average Income (after tax)
Income (Inc. Benefits & Credits)	\$794	\$1,226	\$1,663	\$2,549	\$3,268	\$7,896
Estimated Rent**	\$621	\$802	\$802	\$1,166	\$1,166	\$1,166
Food (Nutritious Food Basket)	\$283.60	\$283.60	\$205.14	\$843.01	\$843.01	\$843.01
WHAT'S LEFT?*	-\$110.60	\$140.40	\$655.86	\$539.99	\$1,258.99	\$5,886.99

* 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 expenses.

**Rental estimates are from *Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation Rental Market Statistics*, fall 2016. Utility costs may or may not be included in the rental estimates.

Opportunities for Action

Routine monitoring of food affordability across Ontario helps to generate evidence-based recommendations for collective public health action to address income inadequacy and food insecurity. In 2016, the Board of Health sent a letter to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care supporting the inclusion of the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) standard in the modernized SPHPS ([Report 063-16](#)). The SPHPS Consultation Document includes no explicit requirement that public health units continue annual, systematic collection and analysis of the NFB survey information. Local food-cost monitoring data is critical for policy and program development as it relates to healthy eating and health equity. It is recommended that the Board of Health write to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care supporting the continuation of local surveillance and monitoring of food costing by public health units through a standardized protocol or guidance document under the modernized SPHPS.

The [Household Food Security Survey Module](#) (HFSSM), included on annual cycles of Statistics Canada's Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), has facilitated monitoring Household Food Insecurity (HFI) since 2005. Consistent monitoring of HFI is fundamental to population health research and evidence-based policy decision-making at all levels of government. HFI is especially important to help inform public health program delivery for food insecurity, food literacy, and health equity. Ontario is one of three provinces/territories that did not include this module in the 2015–16 cycle, and the lack of data will have ramifications for the assessment of the Ontario Food Security Strategy and the Ontario Basic Income Pilot. It is recommended that the Board of Health send a letter to Health Canada and the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care advocating for the HFSSM to be made a core module of the Canadian Community Health Survey.

This report was prepared by the Chronic Disease Prevention and Tobacco Control Team of the Healthy Living Division.



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