

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Graham L. Pollett, MD, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health

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UPDATE ON THE NUTRITIOUS FOOD BASKET SURVEY RESULTS (2011) AND ONTARIO'S FOOD AND NUTRITION STRATEGY

Recommendation

It is recommended that Report No. 096-12 re Update on the Nutritious Food Basket Survey Results (2011) Ontario's Food and Nutrition Strategy be forwarded for information to London City Council and Middlesex County Council.

Nutritious Food Basket Survey

The Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) survey is conducted annually in May 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. Cost information based on the NFB can be used to:

- determine what the basic cost might be 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.

In November 2011, the weekly cost of the NFB in Middlesex-London was presented to the Middlesex-London Board of Health (Report 104-11). At that time, the Board of Health petitioned the Ontario Government to develop a comprehensive Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy, and to return to the practice of preparing a provincial Nutritious Food Basket summary report. In May 2012, the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care released the 2011 NFB survey data for the province.

Ontario Results

The weekly estimated cost to feed a family of four in Ontario increased 5% from May 2010 to May 2011. The cost increased to \$177.83 in 2011, from \$169.17 in 2010. This is similar to Middlesex-London, where the cost increased 5.4% in the same time period. See [Appendix A](#) for the weekly cost of the NFB for all Ontario health units and [Appendix B](#) for the weekly cost in Ontario by age and sex.

The weekly cost to feed a family of four differs geographically. The weekly cost to feed a family of four in 2011 was 8% more in northern Ontario as compared to southern Ontario. In 2011, the weekly cost was \$189.11 for northern Ontario as compared to \$174.71 for southern Ontario. Northern Ontario was defined as Algoma, North Bay-Parry Sound, Northwestern, Porcupine, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, and Timiskaming health unit regions. The remaining 29 health units formed Southern Ontario.

As specified in the Nutritious Food Basket survey protocol, the mix of stores and the approach to store selection may be quite different between health units, making between-health unit comparisons inappropriate.

Update on Ontario's Food and Nutrition Strategy Ontario's food system is in crisis. Many farmers have difficulty making adequate incomes farming, while consumers have difficulty accessing the food they need to be healthy. At the same time, food production and farming are the single largest employer in the province with much potential for further expansion and growth, while dietary improvements could greatly impact public health concerns.

One of the key recommendations from "Taking Action to Prevent Chronic Disease: Recommendations for a Healthier Ontario" (Public Health Ontario and Cancer Care Ontario, 2012) is the implementation of a whole-of-government, coordinated and comprehensive food and nutrition strategy for Ontario. A coordinated and comprehensive approach to food policies and programming would greatly improve the health, food security, and productivity of Ontarians, while contributing greatly to lowering the health and social costs to the province. It would also support "Ontario's Action Plan for Health Care" (Government of Ontario, 2012) which has set a goal to reduce childhood obesity by 20% over 5 years.

The Ontario Collaborative Group on Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (OCGHEPHA) in collaboration with various stakeholders has initiated work towards an Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy focusing on the areas of childhood obesity, chronic disease prevention and food security. The OCGHEPHA is a provincial collaboration of not-for-profit, public health and academic organizations dedicated to addressing population-based issues relating to healthy eating, physical activity, healthy weights and the determinants of health, including adequate access and availability of nutritious and culturally-appropriate foods.

In April and May 2012, an initial stakeholder consultation meeting was held on an early draft of the food strategy. Feedback was collected from farmers and farm groups, individuals and groups involved in community-based food programs, public health and nutrition professionals, food businesses, and government partners. The revised draft strategy was re-circulated in June for additional feedback.

In April 2012, the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH) sponsored an Association of Local Public Health Agencies (aLPHA) resolution calling for the development of a provincial food and nutrition strategy. The resolution, which was endorsed at the Association of Local Public Health Agencies annual meeting resolutions session in June, requests the Ontario government to provide leadership and resources required for a whole-of-government approach to provide the structure and processes for further coordination, development and implementation of an Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy.

Conclusion

Increasing food, shelter, and utility costs continue to leave individuals and families who receive government income assistance or who are earning minimum wage, little if any money for other costs including child care, medical expenses, transportation, and entertainment. Future advocacy efforts must address the urgent need for an adequately resourced government body invested with the mandate of a coordinated and comprehensive Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy.

This report was written by Ms. Kim Leacy, Public Health Dietitian, and Ms. Linda Stobo, Manager, Chronic Disease Prevention and Tobacco Control.



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<p>This report addresses the following requirement(s) of the Ontario Public Health Standards (2008): Foundational Standard 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10; Chronic Disease Prevention 2, 7, 8, 11, 12</p>
