



2018

The Cost of Eating in Renfrew County and District



Renfrew County and
District Health Unit

"Optimal Health for All in Renfrew County and District"

www.rcdhu.com



Renfrew County and
District Health Unit

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The Nutritious Food Basket

Annually, Renfrew County and District Health Unit (RCDHU) monitors food affordability using the Nutritious Food Basket survey tool to measure the cost of basic healthy eating¹. The prices of 67 foods are surveyed at eight grocery stores in Renfrew County and District (RCD). The results of the Nutritious Food Basket survey are then used to prepare the annual Cost of Eating in Renfrew County and District report.

The list of food items surveyed does not include processed and convenience foods, special dietary foods, infant foods, or cleaning and personal hygiene products. It does not include the cost of eating out or extra food for celebrations. The survey assumes that people have the skills, time and equipment to prepare meals from scratch. The survey provides an estimate of the average cost of healthy eating based on Canada's food guide. It is not designed to be a budgeting tool.

Highlights from the 2018 Nutritious Food Basket survey

- The cost of feeding a family of four in RCD was \$200 per week (\$866 per month).
- The results show that it is unlikely that low income households can afford the costs of living, including a nutritious diet.



Income Scenarios Highlight Risks for Food Insecurity








Food insecurity is the inadequate or insecure access to food because of financial constraints. Housing, utilities and other basic expenses take priority, so food spending is reduced in an effort to accommodate.^{2,3}

As seen below, local income scenarios show how low income households struggle to pay rent (which may or may not include heat and hydro), pay bills and buy nutritious food.

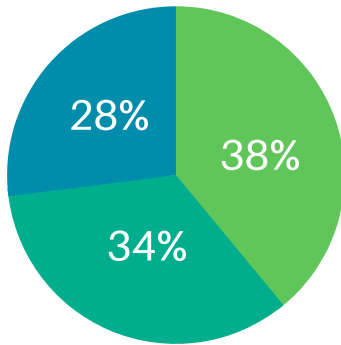
This situation is known as household food insecurity. Poverty is the root cause of food insecurity.

"Because the inability to afford such a basic necessity as food is tightly aligned with financial hardships, food insecurity is a highly sensitive measure of material deprivation (the inability to afford basic needs)".²

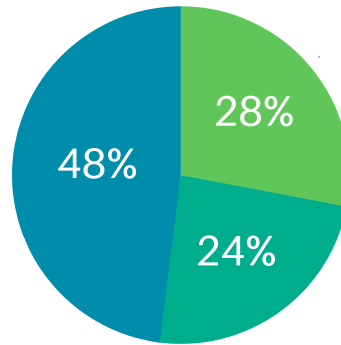
Table 1: Nutritious Food Basket Income Scenarios for RCD, 2018

| Scenarios | Total monthly income, including benefits and credits | Average monthly rent (may or may not include utilities) | Monthly cost of food (Nutritious Food Basket) | Remaining for other basic expenses |
|--|--|---|---|------------------------------------|
| Family of Four -Ontario Works  | \$2582 | \$996 | \$866 | \$720 |
| Family of Four -Full-Time Minimum Wage Earner  | \$3603 | \$996 | \$866 | \$1741 |
| Family of Four -Median Income  | \$7871 | \$996 | \$866 | \$6009 |
| Single Parent -Ontario Works -Woman age 36, girl age 8 and boy age 14  | \$2363 | \$811 | \$654 | \$898 |
| One Person -Ontario Works -Man age 40  | \$810 | \$572 | \$290 | -\$52 |
| One Person -Ontario Disability Support Program -Man age 50  | \$1251 | \$658 | \$290 | \$303 |
| One Person -Old Age Security/ Guaranteed Income Supplement -Woman age 70  | \$1694 | \$658 | \$212 | \$824 |
| Other basic expenses: heat and hydro; phone and internet; personal care and household cleaning items; insurance; child care and school essentials; transportation; clothing; eye, medical and dental care; gifts and entertainment. | | | | |

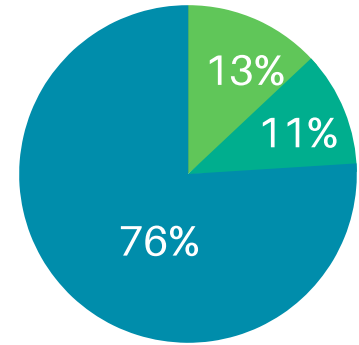
Proportion of Household Income



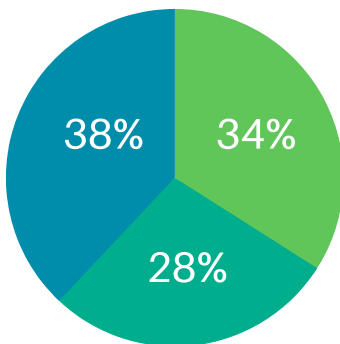
Ontario Works
Family of four*



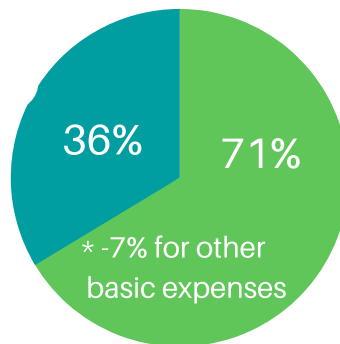
Full-time Minimum Wage
Family of four*



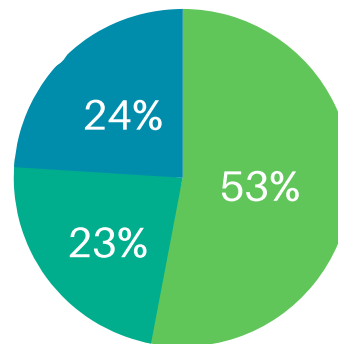
Median Income
Family of four*



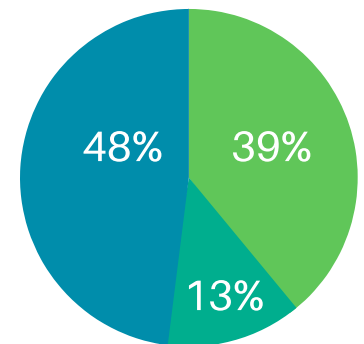
Ontario Works
Single Parent



Ontario Works
Single Man, Age 40

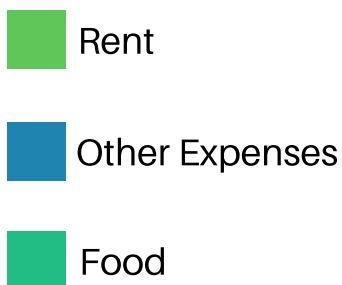


ODSP
Single Man, Age 50,



Guaranteed
Income Supplement
Single Female, Age 70

* Family of four: a man and a woman age 35, a boy age 14, and a girl age 8



Scenario Example

Consider the single male who must apply for Ontario Works assistance after being unable to find work. After paying rent for a bachelor apartment (\$572/month), he has \$238 left. He will need \$290 to buy enough nutritious food. He does not have enough money for food, let alone his other essential expenses.

Food Insecurity and Health

Food insecurity is a serious public health problem, with **twelve per cent** of households in Renfrew County and District being food insecure.⁴ Adults or children living in a food insecure household worry about not having enough to eat, compromise the quality or quantity of food eaten, or miss meals, sometimes for an entire day, depending on the severity of the food insecurity.⁵

Higher prevalence of food insecurity is reported among households with low incomes, children under eighteen years of age, among Indigenous Peoples or newcomers to Canada, and individuals living with one or more chronic, physical and/or mental health conditions.⁶

Negative Effects on Health

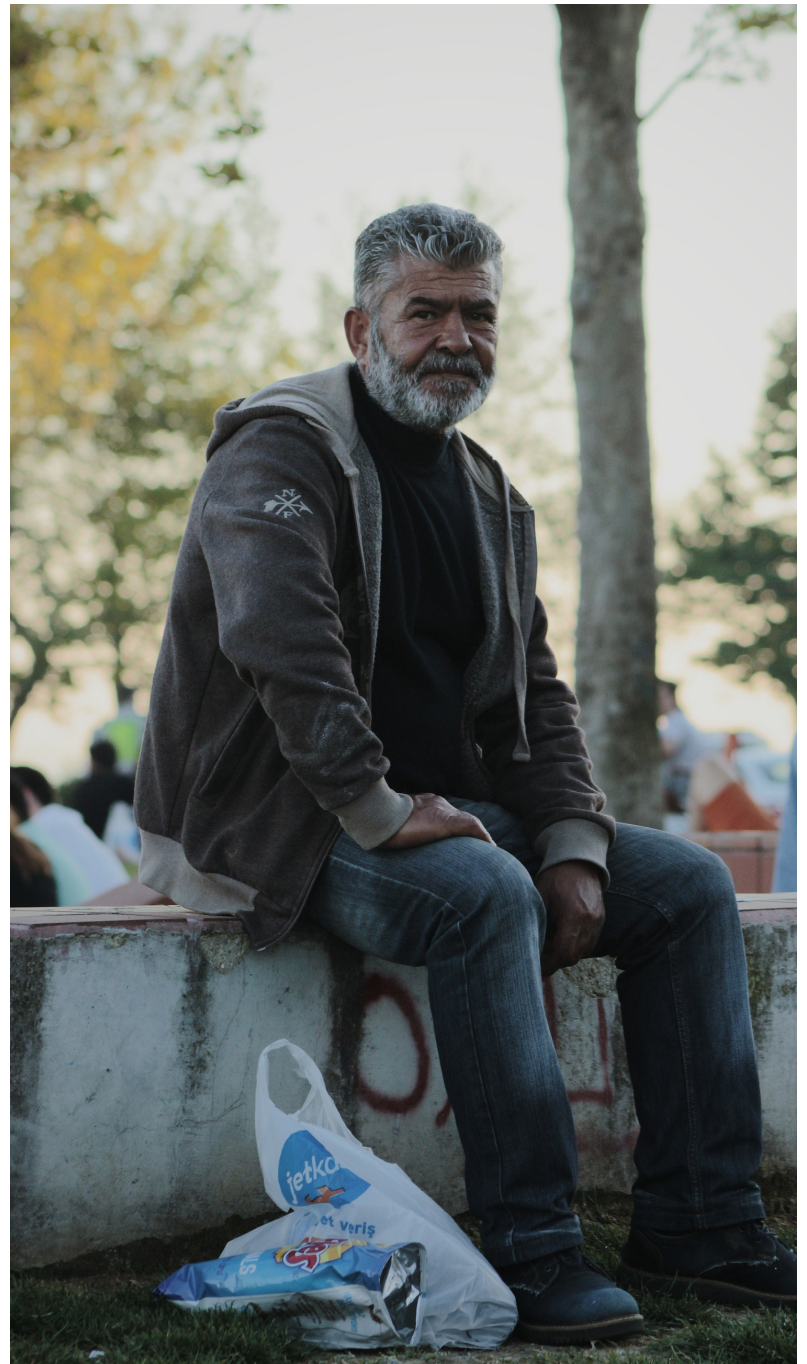
People in food insecure households:

Have poor mental, physical, and oral health. They are more likely to suffer from chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, and anxiety.⁷

Are more likely to become a high-cost user of health care.⁸

Are more likely to die than those who are food secure, with the risk of mortality increasing with the severity of the food insecurity.⁹

Specifically children age 18 months to eight years of age, are at increased risk of mental health problems. Teenagers are at greater risk of depression, social anxiety and suicide.¹⁰





Income-based **solutions** are required

Long-term, income-based strategies that address poverty, the root cause of food insecurity, are needed to help solve this issue. Food charity, in the form of food banks, soup kitchens and meal programs provides temporary emergency relief to some people who are food insecure – but food insecurity does not go away. The majority of food insecure households do not use these or other programs such as community kitchens, food buying clubs or community gardens.¹¹

Community food programs may help to address public health issues such as low vegetable and fruit consumption, but they are not an effective solution for food insecurity. There is no evidence that use of food charity programs increases food security.¹² A broader and longer-term strategy that addresses the causes of poverty including inadequate income, precarious employment and lack of affordable housing is needed.

Advocate for income-based **responses** to food insecurity

Income-based responses to household food insecurity are required to address the root cause, which is lack of money for basic needs within a household. Dietitians of Canada recommends a pan-Canadian government-led strategy, including:

- Improved income protection for households relying on precarious employment and low wages.
- Improved benefits for low income households with children under 18 years.
- Increased social assistance and disability pension rates geared to the actual cost of living.
- Basic income guarantee that would ensure sufficient income assistance to meet basic needs.
- Increased investment in subsidized, affordable and stable housing options.¹³

Use your voice to advocate for change. Share this information with peers, partner agencies and your local member of parliament.



Learn More

Educate yourself about the root causes of poverty and food insecurity. Understand that food banks are not a long-term solution. Support income-based strategies that address poverty and will ensure secure and healthy food for all. The following are some recommended readings:

- [PROOF, Research to Identify Policy Options to Reduce Food Insecurity](#)
- [Dietitians of Canada \(2016\): Position Statement on Household Food Insecurity](#)
- [Ontario Dietitians in Public Health \(2015\): Position Statement on Responses to Food Insecurity](#)
- [Ontario Dietitians in Public Health: No Money for Food is... Cent\\$less](#)

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