

# The Cost of Eating in Renfrew County and District 2019



Renfrew County and District Health Unit  
*"Optimal Health for All in Renfrew County and District"*



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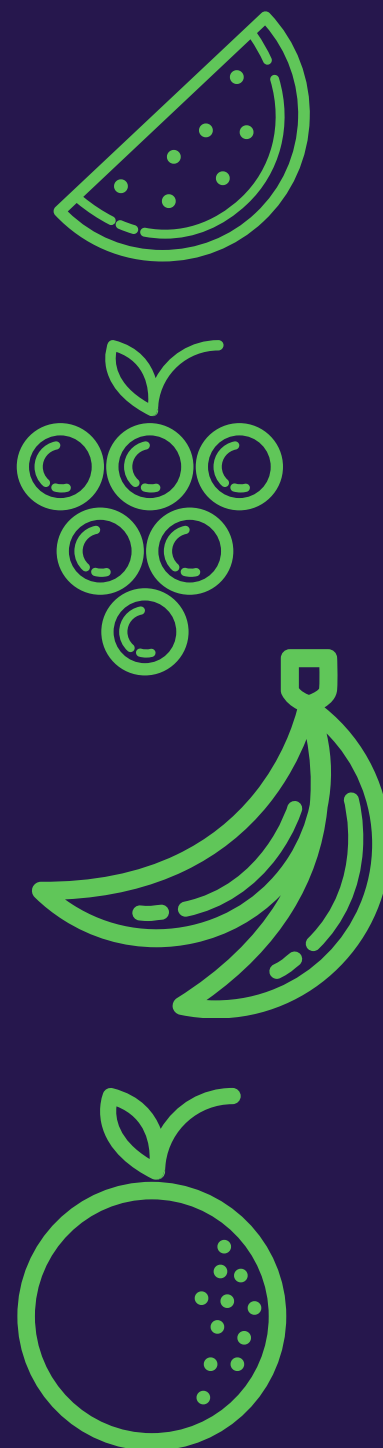
Renfrew County and  
District Health Unit

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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 eating.<sup>1</sup> 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 survey provides an estimate of the average cost of healthy eating based on Canada's food guide. The list of food items surveyed does not include processed foods, infant foods, or foods for special diets, such as gluten-free products. Cleaning and personal hygiene products such as laundry soap, shampoo and toothpaste are not included. The survey assumes that people have the food skills, time and equipment to prepare most meals from scratch. It is not designed to be a budgeting tool for individuals, families or organizations.



## Highlights from the 2019 Nutritious Food Basket

The cost of feeding a family of four in Renfrew County and District was **\$203 per week (\$879 per month)**. To monitor food affordability, Nutritious Food Basket costs are added to local average rent rates, and then compared to family or individual incomes. The results show that it is unlikely that low income households can afford the costs of living, including a nutritious diet. This situation is known as household food insecurity. Food insecurity is a prevalent and persistent public health problem, with **12 percent of households** in Renfrew County and District being food-insecure.<sup>2</sup>

# Income Scenarios Highlight Risks for Food Insecurity








## What is 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 cope.<sup>3,4</sup>

“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).<sup>3</sup>

**Table 1: Nutritious Food Basket Income Scenarios for RCD, 2019** shows how low income households struggle to pay rent, which may or may not include heat and hydro, pay bills and buy nutritious food.

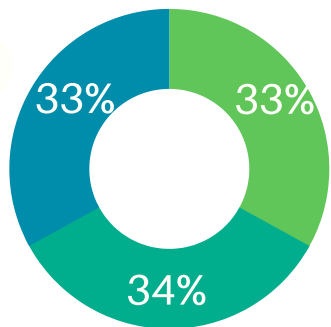
**Table 1: Nutritious Food Basket Income Scenarios for RCD, 2019**

Scenarios	Total monthly income <sup>5</sup> (including benefits and credits, after tax)	Average monthly rent <sup>6</sup> (may or may not include utilities)	Monthly cost of food <sup>7</sup> (Nutritious Food Basket)	Remaining for other basic expenses
<b>Family of Four</b> -Ontario Works 	\$2,623	\$864	\$879	\$880
<b>Family of Four</b> -Full-Time Minimum Wage Earner 	\$3,633	\$864	\$879	\$1,890
<b>Family of Four</b> -Median Income 	\$7,983	\$864	\$879	\$6,240
<b>Single Woman, Two Children</b> -Ontario Works 	\$2,401	\$867	\$664	\$870
<b>Single Man</b> -Ontario Works 	\$825	\$598	\$296	<b>-\$69</b>
<b>Single Man</b> -Ontario Disability Support Program 	\$1,272	\$755	\$296	\$221
<b>Single Elderly Woman</b> -Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement 	\$1,727	\$755	\$214	\$758

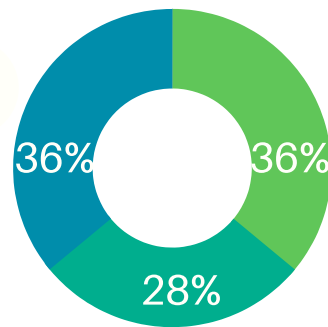
**Other basic expenses:** People still need to pay for utilities, phone and internet, personal care and household cleaning items, insurance, school essentials, transportation, clothing, medical and dental costs, gifts and entertainment.

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

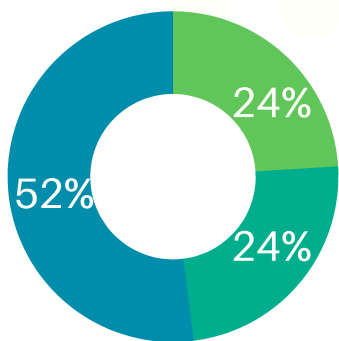
# Proportion of Household Income



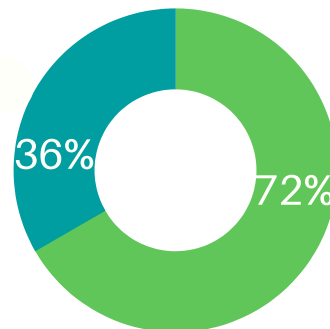
Ontario Works,  
Family of four\*



Ontario Works,  
Single Woman,  
Two Children

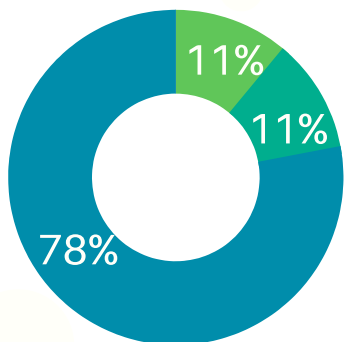


Full-time,  
Minimum Wage,  
Family of four\*

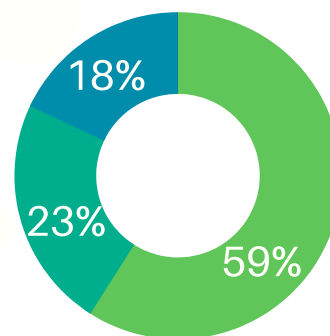


Ontario Works,  
Single Man

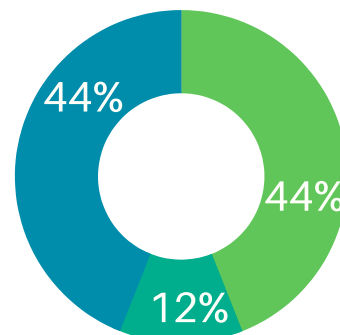
-8% for other  
expenses



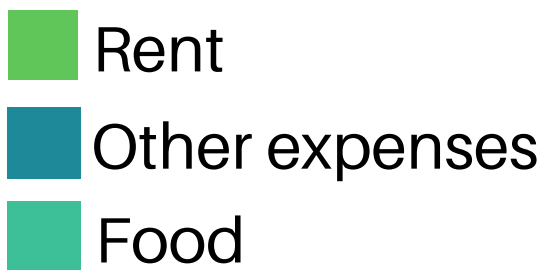
Median Income,  
Family of four\*



Ontario Disability  
Support Program,  
Single Man



Old Age Security/  
Guaranteed Income  
Supplement,  
Single Elderly Woman



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



## Food Insecurity in Renfrew County and District

Food insecurity is a prevalent and persistent public health problem, with **12 percent of households** in Renfrew County and District being food-insecure.<sup>2</sup> It ranges in severity from worrying about not having enough to eat (marginal food insecurity), to compromising the quality or quantity of food eaten (moderate food insecurity), to missing meals, sometimes for an entire day (severe food insecurity).<sup>8</sup>

### Who experiences food insecurity?

Higher prevalence of food insecurity is reported among Canadian households with low incomes (e.g. social assistance, disability pension), with children under 18 years of age, among renters versus homeowners, Indigenous peoples or newcomers to Canada; and, with individuals living with one or more chronic physical and/or mental health conditions.<sup>9</sup>

Over four million Canadians, including 1.15 million children, are food-insecure.<sup>10</sup> Nearly one third of households reliant on social assistance as their main source of income experience serious levels of food deprivation.<sup>10</sup> These programs are not set up in ways that allow recipients to meet their basic needs.<sup>10</sup>

### Having a job is NOT enough!

While being on social assistance is a major risk factor for food insecurity, the majority of the food-insecure households in Canada were reliant on employment income. Over 60 percent of food-insecure households in Canada rely on wages and salaries as their main source of income. Low-waged jobs and precarious (e.g. part-time, contract), work mean people in the workforce often don't have enough income to be food-secure.<sup>10</sup>

# Food Insecurity and Health

Food insecurity **negatively** impacts physical, mental and social health. Adults in food insecure households:

- Have poorer mental, physical, and oral health. They have greater stress, and are more likely to suffer from chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure and anxiety.<sup>11</sup> They may find it more difficult to manage these conditions if a therapeutic diet is needed, or if they have to buy necessary medications.
- Are more likely to become a high-cost user of health care.<sup>12</sup>
- Are more likely to die than those who are food secure, with the risk of mortality increasing with the severity of the food insecurity.<sup>13</sup>





## Food Insecurity and Children

**Mental health** is profoundly important to growth, development, learning and resilience. Mental wellbeing protects people from adversities, and helps them to achieve their potential, work productively and contribute to society.<sup>14</sup>

Mental health consequences for children living in food-insecure households are profound. Living in a food-insecure home can result in weak parental-child attachment and maternal depression, both impacting mental health later in life.<sup>15</sup> Children from food-insecure families are more likely to experience persistent anxiety, depression, hyperactivity and inattention,<sup>16</sup> as well as low self-esteem and self-efficacy to make healthy choices, such as healthy eating or physical activity.<sup>17</sup>

Household food insecurity leaves an indelible mark on children's wellbeing that has been noted as a "modifiable risk factor for depression and related suicide ideation in late adolescence and early adulthood".<sup>18</sup> Reducing the burden of food insecurity in families could help decrease the burden of mental health problems in school-aged children and reduce social inequalities in development.<sup>19</sup>

## Food Insecurity Costs Ontario's Health Care System

Compared to those in food secure households, total annual health care costs for adults were:

- 23 per cent higher among those with marginal food insecurity.
- 49 per cent higher among those with moderate food insecurity.
- 121 per cent higher for those with severe food insecurity.<sup>20</sup>

Targeted policy interventions are necessary to address food insecurity, and in turn, reduce health care costs and improve overall health.<sup>20</sup>



## Food Programs Don't Address Food Insecurity

Food charities, such as food banks and soup kitchens provide food for people who cannot afford to buy their own; however, they only provide short-term hunger relief. They do not address the root cause of food insecurity – not enough money to buy food.

Programs, such as community gardens and collective kitchens, designed to improve food skills may encourage vegetable and fruit consumption, but they are not an effective solution for food insecurity. There is no evidence that use of food programs increases food security.<sup>21</sup> As well, the majority of food-insecure households do not use these or other programs such as collective kitchens, food buying clubs or community gardens.<sup>21</sup>



## Income Solutions are Needed!

Income-based responses to household food insecurity are required to address the root cause, which is lack of money for basic needs. Income responses are typically government policies such as pensions, tax exemptions/credits or social assistance programs. 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 that reflect the actual costs of living.
- Basic income guarantee that would ensure sufficient income assistance to meet basic needs.
- Increased investment in subsidized, affordable and stable housing options.<sup>22</sup>

# What Can You Do?

- Visit the **PROOF website** to learn more about poverty, household food Insecurity and the impacts on health.
- Download and share the **PROOF Fact Sheets**.
- Share the messages outlined in this report to help dispel myths about people living in poverty.
- Connect with your local MP and MPP to promote the importance of seeking policy-based solutions to increase incomes.
- Visit the **No Money for Food is... Cent\$less** webpage.



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