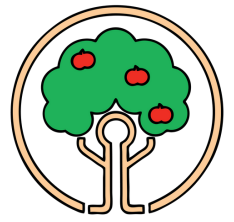


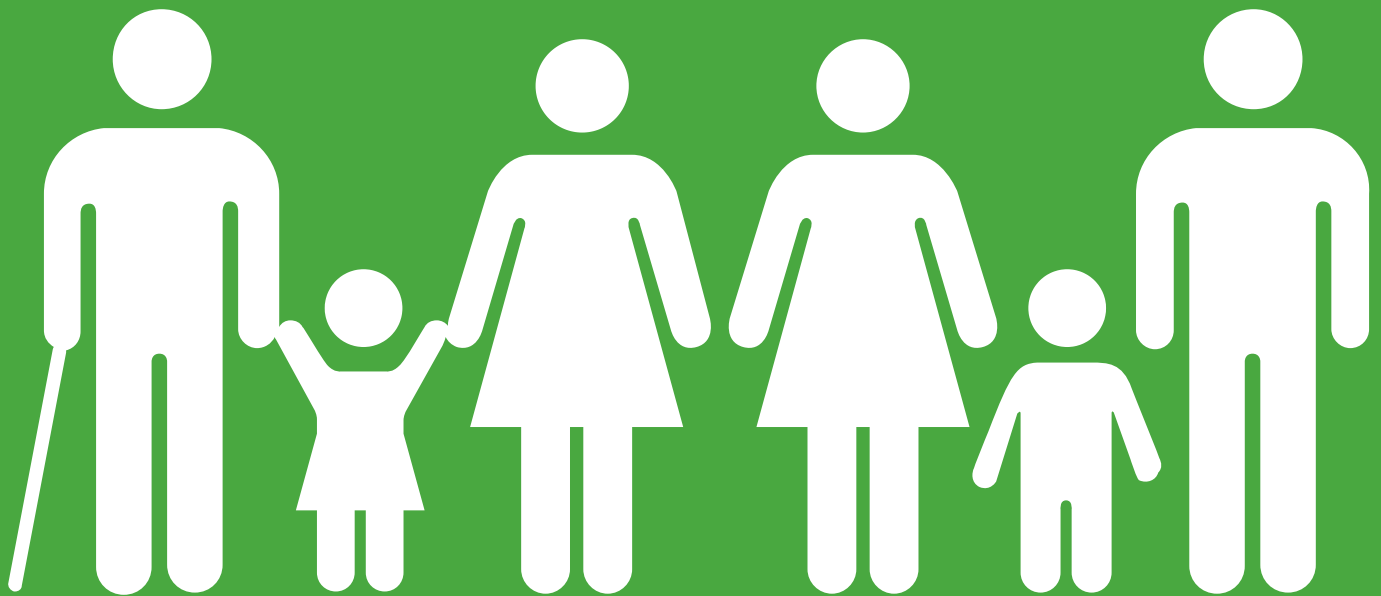
Renfrew County and District Health Unit
"Optimal Health for All in Renfrew County and District"



FOOD AFFORDABILITY

IN RENFREW COUNTY AND DISTRICT

2022



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Food Affordability

in Renfrew County and District, 2022



Each year Renfrew County and District Health Unit (RCDHU) monitors local food affordability. Some people are unable to securely access food due to financial constraints, resulting in food insecurity. **Food insecurity is a serious public health problem.** Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, monitoring was temporarily paused. As RCDHU shifts from a health protection to a health promotion and recovery approach, monitoring food availability has once again become a priority.

Key Findings

- Having a job does not mean someone is food secure.
- It is unlikely that low-income households can afford nutritious food.
- Approximately **one in six households*** are experiencing food insecurity in Renfrew County and District (RCD).
- Income-based solutions (e.g., basic income guarantee) are needed to combat food insecurity.



1 IN 6 HOUSEHOLDS
are experiencing food
insecurity in RCD

What Does Food Insecurity Mean?

Food insecurity occurs when a person is not able to regularly access safe and nutritious food.^{1,2} Insecure access to food often occurs due to financial constraints.¹⁻⁴ When incomes are low, **people may have to choose between eating well or paying for other basic necessities** like housing and utilities.^{1,3}

Food insecurity can range from worrying about having enough to eat, (referred to as marginal food insecurity), to not eating for entire days due to a lack of money (severe food insecurity).^{1,3,5}

**New data received*



In Ontario, food prices have **risen 16.5%** since October 2019.⁶

Food is becoming an increasingly costly expense.

The Nutritious Food Basket Tool

RCDHU used the *Nutritious Food Basket* (NFB) tool to monitor food affordability across RCD. In June 2022, staff surveyed the price of the same 61 food items in eight local grocery stores.

Survey results showed the average monthly cost of food for a single person household is **\$408**. The cost for a family of four is **\$1,132**.

After calculating food costs, RCDHU incorporated housing rental rates¹ and different income scenarios to determine the local affordability of food. Overall, results suggested that **lower income households are likely struggling to afford nutritious foods**.

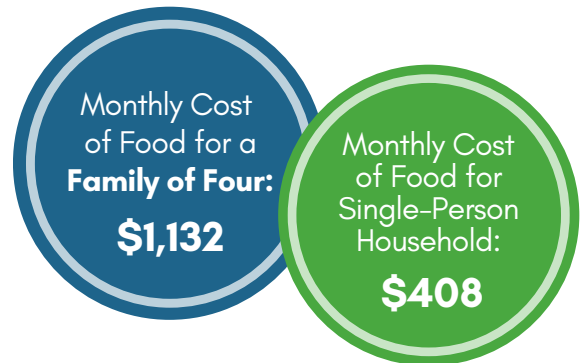


The Nutritious Food Basket tool is a list of food items that make up a hypothetical grocery basket consistent with foods found in Canada's food guide, and commonly consumed by Canadians. The basket was created to reflect an average household's purchasing pattern. It assumes that people have the time, food skills, and equipment to make meals from scratch.

The NFB does not include items such as premade foods, infant foods, cultural foods, foods for special diets (e.g., gluten-free), etc. Cleaning, and personal hygiene products are also excluded.⁷⁻⁹

Identifying Food Insecurity in RCD

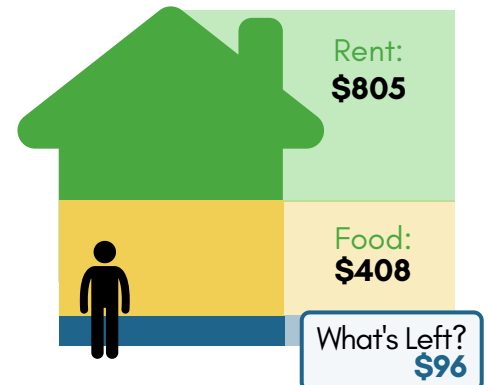
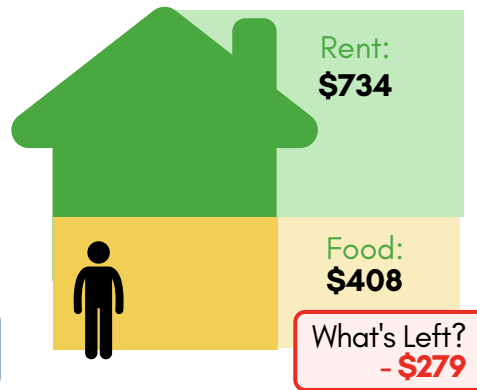
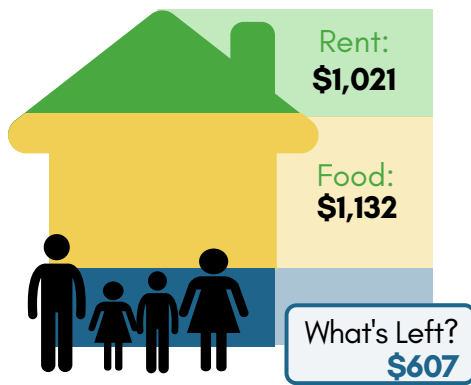
As seen below, local income scenarios show how low-income households struggle to pay rent, pay bills and buy nutritious food. The remaining monthly income (what's left) would be available for additional expenses such as: utilities like heat and hydro, childcare, medical and dental costs, phone, internet, transportation, clothing, pets, etc.



Family of Four, Ontario Works
Monthly Income: **\$2,760**

One Person, Ontario Works
Monthly Income: **\$863**

One Person, ODSP*
Monthly Income: **\$1,309**



* Ontario Disability Support Program

¹: Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation. 2021 Rental Market Survey Data Tables.

More Income Scenarios in Renfrew County and District, 2022

	Monthly Income*	Estimated Monthly Rent**	Monthly Cost of Food	What's Left?
Households With Children				
Family of Four, Ontario Works	\$2,760	\$1,021	\$1,132	\$607
Family of Four, One Full-Time Minimum Wage Earner	\$3,973	\$1,021	\$1,132	\$1,820
Family of Four, Median Income (after-tax, in Ontario)	\$9,323	\$1,021	\$1,132	\$7,170
Single Parent Household with 2 Children, Ontario Works	\$2,528	\$995	\$832	\$701
Single Person Households				
One Person Household, Ontario Works	\$863	\$734	\$408	-\$279
One Person Household, Ontario Disability Support Program	\$1,309	\$805	\$408	\$96
One Person Household, Old Age Security / Income Guaranteed Income Supplement	\$1,885	\$805	\$293	\$787
Married Couple, Ontario Disability Support Program	\$2,322	\$805	\$678	\$839

*Includes benefits and credits

**May or may not include utilities

Please note: The Provincial Monitoring Food Affordability in Ontario methodology was changed in 2022. As a result, the data described in this report should not be compared to previous reports.

In RCD, approximately **1 in 6 (17%) households are food insecure**. This includes those who are marginally, moderately, and severely food insecure.

While being on social assistance is a major risk factor for food insecurity, being employed, receiving wages or having a salary does not mean that someone will not experience food insecurity. In 2021, roughly half of food insecure households in Canada reported wages, salaries, or self-employment as their main source of income.³

Though highly linked to income, food insecurity is also a reflection of an individual's circumstances. This includes factors such as homeownership, household makeup and membership in a marginalized community (e.g., Black, Indigenous, LGBTQ2IA+). For instance, households who rent and/or have children under 18 years of age are more likely to be food insecure.^{3, 10-15}



Roughly half of households experiencing food insecurity in Canada in 2021 reported wages, salaries, or self-employment as their main source of income.³

RCDHU continues to monitor local food affordability as data becomes available.

i. Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). Household food insecurity estimates from the Canadian Income Survey: Ontario 2018-2020. Toronto, ON: King's Printer for Ontario; 2023



Children Experiencing Food Insecurity

In Ontario, **one in five** (20.6%) children under the age of 18 live in a food-insecure household. In Canada, the prevalence of children or young adults being food insecure is **more than triple** that of adults 75 and older.³

This is a significant concern as food insecurity can have long-lasting negative impacts on a child's health.³

Significant Health Impacts

Food insecurity has a **significant impact** on health. Individuals who are food insecure are more likely to suffer from:^{1,3,15,16}

- poor physical health
- poor mental health
- diabetes
- high blood pressure
- depression

Children experiencing food insecurity are more likely to develop:^{1,13}

- asthma
- mental health conditions (e.g., anxiety, depression)
- low-self-esteem
- lack of self-confidence needed to make positive lifestyle choices (e.g., eating well, being active)

The effects of food insecurity on the mental and physical health of individuals places a **substantial burden** on the health care system, resulting in an increase in cost.^{1,17} For instance, those who are marginally food insecure and severely food insecure have 26% and 69% higher odds of being admitted to acute care compared to those who are food secure.¹⁷



The effects of food insecurity on mental and physical health places a **substantial burden** on the health care system.

Individuals who are **severely** food insecure have **69% higher odds** of being admitted to acute care, compared to individuals who are food secure.¹⁷

Solving the Problem of Food Insecurity

The solution to solving food insecurity is clear. Rather than focusing on the symptoms of food insecurity (e.g., lack of food) solutions need to be grounded in its root cause – **poverty**.^{1,3,13}

Policies that target poverty are needed, including policies that ensure:^{1,13,18}

- ✓ Adequate working incomes and benefits to pay for the basic necessities of living, like housing, food, and other expenses (e.g. living wage).
- ✓ Social assistance income (e.g., Ontario Works, Ontario Disability Support Program) that reflects the true cost of living.
- ✓ Tax subsidies, exemptions, and credits for low-income households.
- ✓ Guaranteed basic income for all.



The Ontario pilot study on a **basic income guarantee** resulted in **significantly decreased rates of food insecurity**.^{19,20}



Food Banks are not the solution

Emergency food programs, such as food banks and meal programs, **cannot** solve food insecurity. These programs can offer temporary relief, but those who access these services **continue to experience food insecurity**.^{3,13}

Statistics indicate that **only 20% of people who are food insecure access food banks**.²¹

How Can You Take Action?



We all deserve to have our basic needs met and live with dignity. Take a strong stance against food insecurity and **use your voice to advocate for change**.

- ➔ Send a letter to your MP or MPP to urge them to act on food insecurity. Find a template letter [here](#).
- ➔ Visit the [PROOF website](#) and [No Money for Food is... Cent\\$less](#) to learn more about poverty, household food insecurity and the impacts on health.
- ➔ Spread the word on food insecurity. Find resources to share by visiting [Ontario Dietitians in Public Health](#).
- ➔ Become a Living Wage Employer. Visit [Ontario Living Wage Network](#) for more information.

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