



There are people in Halton who cannot afford a nutritious diet

Each year, the Halton Region Health Department conducts the *Nutritious Food Basket Survey*, as mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, and each year the results show that low-income households struggle to pay rent and bills and to buy sufficient nutritious food for their families. The survey requires visiting six grocery stores throughout the region to price 67 food items to determine an average price of a nutritious diet in Halton. This year's survey was completed in May 2012.

While the provincial and federal governments make adjustments to minimum wage and various benefits and credits, low-income families still do not have enough income to meet their financial responsibilities. The following scenarios illustrate this point.

Households on fixed incomes

Low-income households often live in rental housing. Using the average costs of renting in Halton for 2011, here are five scenarios, outlining monthly expenses and income.

	Households on Fixed Incomes				
	Ontario Works Single man age 31	Ontario Works Single mother age 35 with a boy age 14 and a girl age 8	Ontario Works A family of 4: a man and woman age 35, a boy age 14 and a girl age 8	Ontario Disability Support Program Single man age 45	Old Age Security/ Guaranteed Income Supplement Single woman age 75
Income ^{1,2}	\$599	\$981	\$1,136	\$1,064	\$1,272
Additional Benefits and Credits ³	\$43	\$874	\$896	\$51	\$54
Total Monthly Income	\$642	\$1,855	\$2,032	\$1,115	\$1,326
Rent ⁴	\$802 (Bachelor)	\$1,113 (2 Bedroom)	\$1,334 (3 Bedroom)	\$971 (1 Bedroom)	\$971 (1 Bedroom)
Cost of a Nutritious Diet ⁵	\$261	\$590	\$779	\$261	\$192
Amount remaining to cover other basic monthly expenses	- \$412	\$152	- \$81	- \$117	\$163

(See next page for footnotes)

What can you do to help?

Educate yourself about the root causes of poverty.

Participate in coalitions to advocate for policies to reduce poverty and create a stronger social safety net for Canadians and Ontarians.

Volunteer in your community to support programs such as community kitchens, good food box programs, community gardens, and school nutrition programs.

Donate a variety of non-perishable foods items or money to food banks on a regular basis.

Watch the video "Let's Start a Conversation About Health . . . and Not Talk About Health Care at All".

www.halton.ca/healthequity



Resources

Call Halton Region to order the following resources:

- *Where to Get Food in Halton Region*
- *Best Buys in Canada's Food Guide*
- *How to Save Money on Food*
- *Where to Get Help in Halton*

For more information about poverty and food security issues go to:

- 25 in 5: Network for Poverty Reduction
www.25in5.ca
- Campaign 2000
www.campaign2000.ca
- Centre for Studies in Food Security at Ryerson
www.ryerson.ca/foodsecurity
- Food Banks Canada
www.foodbankscanada.ca
- FoodNet Ontario
www.foodnetontario.ca
- Food Secure Canada
www.foodsecurecanada.org
- FoodShare Toronto
www.foodshare.net
- Halton Food Council
www.haltonfoodcouncil.ca
- Halton Poverty Roundtable
www.haltonpovertyroundtable.com/
- Halton Region Health Department: Health Equity
www.halton.ca/healthequity
- Ontario Association of Food Banks
www.oafb.ca
- The Stop Community Food Centre
www.thestop.org

For more information, please call

Halton Region

Dial 311 or 905-825-6000

Toll free 1-866-4HALTON (1-866-442-5866)

TTY 905-827-9833

www.halton.ca

Households earning minimum wage

Even households that are earning minimum wage can find it impossible to meet all financial responsibilities:

	Households Earning Minimum Wage	Average Income for a Family in Halton
	One full-time minimum wage earner A family of 4: a man and woman age 35, a boy age 14 and a girl age 8 (one parent working \$10.25/hour for 40 hours/week)	Median Halton Income for family of four (After Tax) ⁷ A family of 4: a man and woman age 35, a boy age 14 and a girl age 8
Income	\$1,777	\$7,669
Additional Benefits and Credits ³	\$969	\$0
Income Deductions ⁶	-\$107	-\$468
Total Monthly Income	\$2,639	\$7,201
Rent ⁴	\$1,334 (3 Bedroom)	\$1,334 (3 Bedroom)
Cost of a Nutritious Diet ⁵	\$779	\$779
Amount remaining to cover other basic monthly expenses	\$526	\$5,088

1 Ontario Works Basic Needs and Maximum Shelter Allowance.

2 Ontario Disability Support Program Basic Needs and Shelter Allowance.

3 Additional Benefits include the Canada Child Tax Benefit, National Child Benefit Supplement, and Ontario Child Benefit. Additional credits include the GST Credit and Working Income Tax Benefit, where applicable. This number is 1/12 of the annual amount.

4 Halton Average Rents. Source: Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation Rental Market Report, October 2011.

5 Food Basket Cost calculated using weekly data for May 2012, using calculations outlined in the *Ontario Public Health Standards - Nutritious Food Basket Protocol & Guidance Document* (May 2010).

6 Income deductions include Employment Insurance Premium and Canada Pension Plan Premium. This number is 1/12 of the annual amount.

7 Statistics Canada. 2007. Ontario (table). 2006 Community Profiles. 2006 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 92-591-XWE. Ottawa. Released March 13, 2007. <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census06/data/profiles/community/Index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed July 13, 2012).

These scenarios illustrate that households on fixed incomes and minimum wage earners have little if any money left over to cover basic monthly expenses such as:

- Heat and electricity
- Telephone
- Laundry
- Toiletries and household cleaning products
- Insurance
- Transportation (bus pass, taxi or expenses associated with running and maintaining a car)
- Clothing for all family members
- Debt payment
- Gifts
- Non-prescription drugs and dispensing fees for prescription drugs
- Banking service charges
- Costs associated with having children in school
- Child care expenses
- Money to cover unexpected expenses

In reality, people usually choose to pay their rent and other fixed expenses e.g., heat, electricity, and transportation. Food becomes a “discretionary” expense, resulting in a diet of poor nutritional value.



What kind of effect can this have on health?

Not being able to afford a nutritious diet can affect health.

Poor Birth Outcomes

Nutritional inadequacy among pregnant women increases the likelihood of low birth weights. Babies born at a low birth weight are at greater risk of developing health problems and disabilities than babies of normal weights. In addition, low intakes of folate prior to and during pregnancy can increase the chances of babies with neural tube defects.

Reduced Learning and Productivity

Learning and productivity are reduced when people are hungry and/or malnourished. Adults are less productive in their work environments or while seeking work. Undernourished children are especially susceptible to illness, perform at lower academic levels, find it harder to concentrate in school, and have poorer psychosocial outcomes than their well-nourished peers.

Chronic Diseases

People in low-income households are more likely to suffer from chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and food allergies. They have difficulty managing these chronic medical conditions since they do not have enough money for therapeutic diets.

Lack of Nutrients

Several studies have shown that people who live in households that can't afford a sufficient nutritious diet often do not get enough of certain nutrients including folate, iron, zinc, magnesium, calcium, and vitamin A. This is more common in mothers because they compromise their own diets to make sure their children are fed.

Beyond food banks and charity

Many people think that food banks are the solution to this problem. Food bank operators try very hard to address this need, but they cannot accomplish this because:

- They have a limited selection of food since they rely on donations and drives.
- They do not have the facilities to store fresh food such as fruits, vegetables, milk, and meat.
- They must restrict the number of times recipients use their services because their supply is limited.
- Most people who cannot afford to feed their families will not access food banks.

Data from the Canadian Community Health Survey (2009/10) estimates that 5.0% of the population of Halton experienced some level of food insecurity during that year. This 5.0% suggests that 8000 households or 22,000 residents experienced food insecurity in Halton in 2010. In 2011 over 395,000 Ontarians turned to food banks on a monthly basis*.

Food banks were never meant to be the permanent solution to this problem. Since their inception, they were meant to be a temporary solution to the systemic problem of poverty.

* Ontario Association of Food Banks-Combating Hunger: A Snapshot of Hunger in Ontario in 2011 December 2011

Finding solutions

In addition to the nutritional benefits, community programs such as community kitchens, good food box programs, community gardens, and school nutrition programs provide social, psychological, and community benefits.

But these types of programs by themselves will not solve the issue of households not being able to afford a nutritious diet. The social safety net must be improved to address poverty, which is the root cause of food insecurity. Actions could include:

- Improving social assistance and minimum wage rates
- Establishing affordable housing policies
- Improving employment insurance coverage and benefits
- Providing accessible and affordable child care