

Food Insecurity in Chatham-Kent



2022 Report

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The purpose of this report is to inform the public about food insecurity in Chatham-Kent and advocate for solutions to this serious public health problem. Community members and organizations are encouraged to share this report widely.

Food Insecurity

Household food insecurity (HFI) is the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints.¹

It is rooted in poverty: inadequate and insecure income, and material deprivation.⁴ Material deprivation is when people cannot access and meet their basic needs for living.

**“Household Food Insecurity” is used interchangeably with “Food Insecurity” throughout this report.*

When people experience food insecurity they either:

- **Worry** about running out of food or have limited food selection;
- **Compromise** the nutritious quality and/or amount of food;
- **Miss** meals, eat less food, or go days without food



Why?

Because they lack money to purchase appropriate food¹.

HFI is a serious public health issue nationally, provincially, and specifically in the Chatham-Kent (CK) region, that has worsened due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

**In Ontario, 1 in 6 households are food insecure¹,
while in Chatham-Kent, 1 in 5 households are food insecure².**



Who experiences Food Insecurity?

Food insecurity is experienced by people who have a lower income. This includes people who earn a minimum wage, and those on social assistance, or employment insurance¹.

In Ontario, 48.2% of food insecure households relied on employment as their main source of income¹. So while individuals may be employed, simply **having a job is not enough to ensure adequate and secure income to meet their basic needs**. This highlights an issue with the type of employment, including jobs that are precarious, part time, and/or low-paying¹.

In Canada, almost 7 in 10 households on social assistance are food insecure¹. This shows that current social assistance programs are inadequate to address food insecurity.

When income is already an issue, the risk of food insecurity increases for households with a female-lone parent compared to a male lone-parent, and for those who rent their home versus own¹. As well, racialized groups (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) are more likely to experience food insecurity compared with White households¹. This difference reflects a deeper connection to societal issues of systemic racism and colonialism¹.

Food Insecurity is a Public Health Problem

Food insecurity significantly impacts mental and physical health. Adults living in food insecure households are more likely to be diagnosed with chronic diseases, including mental health disorders, such as anxiety and depression, non-communicable diseases, such as diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, and chronic pain, and infections³⁻⁹. Children and adolescents are more likely to develop chronic conditions such as asthma, and mental health conditions such as depression, and suicidal thoughts¹⁰⁻¹². For adults that are food insecure, the risk of premature death is much greater than those who are food secure¹³.

Given the negative impacts on health, food insecurity contributes to increased public healthcare costs¹⁴⁻¹⁵. Conversely, **addressing the root causes of food insecurity can help reduce healthcare costs and support everyone in our community to reach their full potential for health and well-being.**

People who identify as being a part of an equity-seeking group (e.g. racialized, 2SLGBTQ+, and those with a disability) are more likely to experience food insecurity than others. **The higher prevalence is not because of any individual fault, but is more strongly linked to societal factors outside of their control** ¹⁶.

In Canada, individuals who identify as White have a lower prevalence of food insecurity than racialized groups (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour)¹. The highest prevalence is seen with Indigenous peoples, where 30.7% report living with food insecurity¹. This percentage does not include people living in Indigenous communities (government created reservations), institutions, those living in extremely remote areas with a very low population density, and people who are under-housed, so the prevalence may actually be much higher than reported.



Food insecurity is a health equity issue.

Health equity means that all people can reach their full health potential and should not be disadvantaged from attaining it because of their race, ethnicity, religion, gender, age, social class, socioeconomic status, or other socially determined circumstance.¹⁶

Monitoring Food Affordability

Since 1998, Public Health Units in Ontario have monitored the affordability of food using the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB). The NFB is a survey of grocery stores. It has 61 items that together form a nutritious diet based on the 2019 Canada's Food Guide (CFG)¹⁷. The NFB results generate the cost of eating a nutritious diet with 5% added to account for miscellaneous foods used in meal preparation, such as spices, condiments, and tea. Given the 61 items of the NFB are based on the CFG, cultural foods and other dietary needs, such as infant foods and gluten-free items are not considered. Therefore, this data can underestimate the actual cost of food for all population groups.

The NFB assumes that people:

- Have time, ability, food skills, and equipment to prepare meals from scratch;
- Have access to stores, literacy, and language skills to shop for the lowest priced items; and
- Shop every one to two weeks (which impacts package sizes purchased).

An updated standardized survey tool and methodology was developed by the Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH) in partnership with Public Health Ontario (PHO), to ensure a consistent tool was used to monitor food affordability across Ontario. In 2022, this new methodology was piloted.

Note: The 2022 NFB survey results will serve a new baseline, and should not be compared to previous years' results due to changes in the survey tool and methodology.









The main objective of the NFB results is to show that people with low incomes do not have enough money to buy food¹⁸, and the increasing cost of food is only making this problem worse¹⁹. The results are used at all levels of government to help advocate for changes to public

policy that will work to ensure that all community members have access to an adequate and secure income to support their basic needs, including nutritious food.

Household Income Scenarios in Chatham-Kent

After calculating the cost of the 61 items from 6 grocery stores in the Chatham-Kent (CK) region, the average monthly cost of food for CK was generated. The following are 8 income scenarios based on different types of households in Chatham-Kent.

2022 Nutritious Food Basket Income Scenarios for CK

Household Scenario	Total Income (Monthly) ^a	Avg. Rent (Utilities Included) ^b	Cost of Food ^c	Leftover Income (for other basic needs)
 Family of Four (Ontario Works) ⁱ	\$2,760.00	\$1,247.67 3BDR	\$1,050.36	\$461.97
 Family of Four 1 Full Time Minimum Wage Earner ⁱⁱ	\$3,973.00	\$1,247.67 3BDR	\$1,050.36	\$1,674.97
 Family of Four Median Income (After Tax) ⁱⁱⁱ	\$9,323.00	\$1,247.67 3BDR	\$1,050.36	\$7,024.97
 Couple (Ontario Disability Support Program)	\$2,322.00	\$807.00 1BDR	\$629.82	\$885.18
 Single Parent With 2 Children	\$2,528.00	\$1,275.40 2BDR	\$769.71	\$482.89
 Single Person (Ontario Works)	\$863.00	\$614.00 BACHELOR	\$380.76	-\$131.76
 Single Person (Ontario Disability Support Program)	\$1,309.00	\$807.00 1 BDR	\$380.76	\$121.24
 Single Person (Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement)	\$1,885.00	\$807.00 1 BDR	\$268.94	\$809.06

a Calculated for June 2022. Income tax information is based on 2020, and includes all tax benefits and credits one may apply for.

b Rental costs from Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporations' Average Market Rent (October 2021), and utilities are average estimate for 2 and 3 bedroom units in CK.

c 2022 Chatham-Kent Nutritious Food Basket

i 2 Adults on OW

ii 1 earner, 40hr/wk, \$15/hr (May 2022)

iii Income from employment based on median after-tax income- couples with children. EI and CPP contributions are calculated using median total income- couples with children. Dual income family with a split of 65% / 35% between partners.

The results indicate there is a huge financial pressure on families and individuals living on low incomes in Chatham-Kent. Research shows that nutritious food is often sacrificed so people can pay for a roof over their heads. These scenarios help to highlight that the problem is not about the cost of food, but rather the lack of secure and adequate income to pay for food because they need to pay for housing first.

While studies show that people who own a home are more protected from food insecurity compared to those who rent¹, people who have a mortgage are more prone to food insecurity than those without¹.

After paying for food and rent, people still need money to pay for other necessities such as childcare, clothing, transportation, medications, hygiene products, education supplies, internet, and phone plans, which results in a significant financial burden for those living on low incomes.

Addressing Food Insecurity

Food-Based Programs ... *Do Not Address Food Insecurity*

Community food programs such as community kitchens, community and school gardens, and student nutrition programs provide people with opportunities to build food literacy (knowledge, skills, confidence, and decision-making related to food and nutrition), and improve social connections²⁰. They were not created to address food insecurity.

Community food programs **do not** solve food insecurity because food insecurity is **not** a food problem, it is a problem of inadequate or insecure income.

This is directly connected to poverty.

.....

Food waste strategies **do not** solve food insecurity because food insecurity is **not** a food waste problem, it is a problem of inadequate or insecure income.

This is directly connected to poverty.

Food waste strategies, such as gleaning and redirecting excess food from grocery stores to food charities, do not address food insecurity²¹. They provide immediate relief for people who experience food insecurity that go to food charity organizations. These programs also do not address the root cause of food waste, which is an operation and production issue²¹.

Nutrition education programs on budgeting and food literacy do not solve food insecurity^{20,22}. Research shows that food insecure families are more likely to shop on a budget compared to food secure families because they have limited funds²². And families who are food secure are more likely to read nutrition labels because they can afford to choose the more nutritious product. There is also no difference between those who are food secure and food insecure when it comes to food skills²².

Nutrition education programs **do not** solve food insecurity because food insecurity is **not** a food literacy problem, it is a problem of inadequate or insecure income.
This is directly connected to poverty.

Food charity programs, such as food banks, soup kitchens, and food pantries, provide food to those who cannot afford it, but they are not long term solutions to food insecurity¹. These programs were created in the 1980s, as a short term solution following the recession, and can provide immediate food relief, and direct people to other community and social services²³⁻²⁴. However, research from Canada shows that the majority of food insecure households are not using food banks¹. This is because food banks fail to meet an individual's personal and cultural needs, can increase the stigma associated with food insecurity, and are often seen as a last resort²³⁻²⁴. The immediate needs of the COVID-19 pandemic has only further encouraged governments to direct funding to these types of charitable food supports²⁵.

Food charity programs **do not** solve food insecurity because food insecurity is **not** a food problem, it is a problem of inadequate or insecure income.
This is directly connected to poverty.



Addressing the Root of Food Insecurity

Food insecurity is directly connected to poverty.

We all need to advocate for income-based solutions that address food insecurity and ultimately, poverty. Income responses can effectively resolve food insecurity and improve population health.^{18, 26} For example, federal income supports for older adults, such as the Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement, have decreased food insecurity rates by 50% for those over 65 years of age.²⁷ Although this program was not created to target food insecurity, it shows that income solutions are effective.

Increasing Social Assistance

The income scenarios in this report show that current social assistance rates for Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program are not enough. Although the provincial government recently increased ODSP by 5%, it translates into only \$58 more per month for ODSP recipients, and no increases made for OW recipients²⁸.

Given major reforms have not been made to social assistance for the past twenty years, supportive policy options would include increasing social assistance rates by indexing them to inflation and matching them to the current costs of living²⁹.



Increasing Minimum Wage to align with Living Wage

The income scenarios in this report show that the current minimum wage rate of \$15/hr is not enough to cover the basic costs of living. People who earn a lower wage are also more likely to be in precarious jobs³⁰. These jobs are temporary, part-time, contract, or on-call without adequate benefits¹. The current 2022 living wage for Chatham-Kent based on the Southwest region is \$18.15 per hour³¹. As such, supportive policy options would include increasing minimum wage to reflect the living wage in order to reduce food insecurity²⁹.

Providing a Basic Income Guarantee

The income scenarios in this report show that people need an adequate and secure income. A Basic Income Guarantee (BIG) is an unconditional income transfer from the government to people with low incomes^{1, 32}. Providing a basic income can reduce poverty and allow everyone to meet their basic needs. The cost of implementing a BIG are minimal compared to the immense benefits it provides for individuals and families³².

Additional income-based solutions include;

- Lowering income tax for low-income households³³
- Increasing childcare benefits for eligible families³³
- Providing affordable and accessible housing, transportation, and childcare³³

What Can You Do?

1. **Learn** more about [food insecurity](#)

- [Tarasuk V, Li T, Farfard St-Germain A-A. \(2022\). Household Food Insecurity in Canada 2021. PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research.](#)
- [Tarasuk, V. \(2017\). Implications of a Basic Income Guarantee for Household Food Insecurity. PROOF: Food Insecurity Policy Research.](#)
- [PROOF. Indigenous Food Insecurity.](#)
- [No Money for Food is CentSless. Ontario Dietitians in Public Health.](#)
- [Ontario Dietitians in Public Health. \(2020\). Position Statement on Responses to Food Insecurity.](#)
- [Food Banks Canada. \(2022\). Hunger Count 2022: From a Storm to a Hurricane.](#)
- [The Basic Income Canada Network \(BICN\)](#)
- [Ontario Living Wage Network. \(2022\). Living Wage Rates.](#)



2. **Talk** to friends, family, and colleagues about the true cause of food insecurity

3. **Advocate** for income solutions to food insecurity

- Find more information here: www.odph.ca/what-can-you-do

This report addresses income-based solutions to food insecurity. We acknowledge that responses must also address several other social determinants of health to ensure everyone can reach their full health potential

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