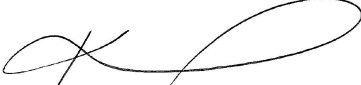




COMMUNICATION UPDATE

TO:	Mayor and Members Board of Health
DATE:	December 10, 2024
SUBJECT:	Monitoring Food Affordability and Food Insecurity in Hamilton (City Wide)
WARD(S) AFFECTED:	City Wide
SUBMITTED BY:	Kevin McDonald Director, Healthy Environments Division Public Health Services
SIGNATURE:	

The purpose of this Communication Update is to provide the Board of Health with results of food affordability monitoring in Hamilton from 2022 to 2024 and statistics on household food insecurity in Hamilton and Ontario from 2019 to 2023.

Background

Public health units are required by the Ontario Public Health Standards to monitor food affordability.¹ The Ontario Nutritious Food Basket, a survey tool based on the National Nutritious Food Basket², is used to estimate the cost of food. The Ontario Nutritious Food Basket includes 61 food items that are part of Canada's Food Guide³ (vegetables and fruit, whole grain foods, and protein foods) and that Canadians typically purchase.

Public Health Services annually conducts the Ontario Nutritious Food Basket survey in a sample of all major grocery store chains in Hamilton. The average cost for each of the 61 food items are totalled, with 5% added for miscellaneous items (e.g., spices and

¹ Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (2018). Monitoring Food Affordability Reference Document. <https://files.ontario.ca/moh-ohps-ref-monitoring-food-affordability-2018-en.pdf>

² Health Canada (2020). National Nutritious Food Basket 2019. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/food-nutrition-surveillance/national-nutritious-food-basket.html>

³ Health Canada (2019). Canada's Food Guide. <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/>

OUR Vision: To be the best place to raise a child and age successfully.

OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

condiments) to estimate the cost of eating according to national nutrition guidelines⁴. The weekly cost of the Ontario Nutritious Food Basket is calculated for 22 different age, sex, and lifecycle (pregnant and breastfeeding) groups. Results of 2024 food affordability monitoring are now available on the City of Hamilton website at: <https://www.hamilton.ca/people-programs/public-health/healthy-eating/monitoring-food-affordability-hamilton>.

Weekly Cost of Ontario Nutritious Food Basket in Hamilton

Ontario Nutritious Food Basket costs from 2022 to 2024 in Hamilton for all these groups and a reference family of four (two adults and two school-aged children) are shown in Appendix “A” to this Communication Update.

Using data collected in Hamilton in 2022 as a baseline, the weekly cost of the food basket for a reference family of four was \$247. The cost increased by almost \$19 (approximately +8%) to \$266/week in 2023. This increase is comparable to Canadian data indicating food prices increased by more than 10% from 2022 to 2023 – the highest year-over-year rate of food inflation since the 1980s.⁵ The cost of the food basket in Hamilton stabilized in 2024 to \$266.35, an insignificant difference in cost compared to 2023.

Monitoring food affordability in Hamilton

To monitor food affordability, household income estimates are compared to the cost of the Ontario Nutritious Food Basket and average market rental housing rates in Hamilton.

Appendix “B” to this Communication Update presents food affordability data from 2022 to 2024 for five low-income household scenarios in Hamilton. These scenarios demonstrate that families or individuals reliant on social assistance would not likely have enough money for all their basic needs including rent, food, transportation, phone, clothing, and personal care. In the case of single people, Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program are inadequate to cover just rent and food.

When incomes are too low to cover all the costs of living, households reduce the amount spent on groceries, either by reducing the quantity or quality of food purchased

⁴ Health Canada (2022). Dietary Reference Intakes. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/healthy-eating/dietary-reference-intakes.html>

⁵ Dalhousie University, University of British Columbia, University of Guelph, University of Saskatchewan (2023). Canada’s Food Price Report, 13th Edition. https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/sites/agri-food/Canada%27s%20Food%20Price%20Report%202023_Digital.pdf

or by substituting less expensive alternatives. In extreme cases, households may run out of food before there is any money available to purchase more.

Household food insecurity in Hamilton

Household food insecurity refers to the inadequate or insecure access to food due to household financial constraints.⁶ Statistics Canada monitors household food insecurity through large, population-representative surveys from which provincial- and regional-level household rates can be derived. Household food insecurity rates in Ontario and Hamilton over the period of 2019 to 2023 are presented in Appendix “C” to this Communication Update.

The rates of household food insecurity in Hamilton were relatively constant over the period of 2019 to 2022, at approximately one in five households, and were similar to those in Ontario. In 2023 there was a notable increase in the rate of household food insecurity to one in four households in both Ontario and Hamilton.

Household food insecurity has serious implications for health and wellbeing beyond just poor nutrition and diet. People living in food insecure households are much more likely than their food secure counterparts to be diagnosed with mental health disorders, chronic diseases (such as high blood pressure, heart disease, and diabetes) and infectious diseases. People who are food insecure are less able to manage chronic conditions and are more likely to experience poor outcomes including hospitalization or premature death. Reducing household food insecurity could offset considerable public health care expenditures and reduce the burden on health care resources.⁷

Should you have any questions, or require further information, please contact Heather Harvey, Manager Chronic Disease Prevention by email heather.harvey@hamilton.ca or (289) 253-8264.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix “A” to Communication Update – Monitoring food affordability and food insecurity in Hamilton: **Weekly cost of the Ontario Nutritious Food Basket in Hamilton, 2022 to 2024**

⁶ Li T, Fafard St-Germain AA, Tarasuk V. (2023) Household food insecurity in Canada, 2022. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). <https://proof.utoronto.ca/>

⁷ PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research. What are the implications of food insecurity for health and health care? <https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/what-are-the-implications-of-food-insecurity-for-health-and-health-care/>

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Appendix “B” to Communication Update - Monitoring food affordability and food insecurity in Hamilton: **Food affordability monitoring in Hamilton, 2022 to 2024**

Appendix “C” to Communication Update - Monitoring food affordability and food insecurity in Hamilton: **Household food insecurity rates in Ontario and Hamilton, 2019 to 2023**

Appendix A: Weekly cost of the Ontario Nutritious Food Basket in Hamilton, 2022-2024

Group	Age (Years)	\$/Week		
		2022	2023	2024
Boys	2 to 3	37.18	40.19	40.00
Boys	4 to 8	42.16	45.76	45.46
Girls	2 to 3	37.18	40.19	40.00
Girls	4 to 8	41.69	45.23	44.96
Males	9 to 13	54.63	59.19	59.06
Males	14 to 18	75.51*	81.39*	81.46
Males	19 to 30	76.37	81.31	81.97
Males	31 to 50	71.93	76.76	77.41
Males	51 to 70	63.08	67.72	67.89
Males	Over 70	58.82	63.28	63.17
Females	9 to 13	53.95	58.49	58.39
Females	14 to 18	64.65*	70.06*	69.96
Females	19 to 30	58.83	64.46	63.64
Females	31 to 50	57.78	62.47	62.52
Females	51 to 70	53.03	57.53	57.46
Females	Over 70	50.72	55.22	54.90
Pregnant	Under 19	76.63*	82.31*	82.64
Pregnant	19 to 30	76.16*	81.42*	81.96
Pregnant	31 to 50	73.01*	81.11*	81.64
Breastfeeding	Under 19	74.54*	80.04*	80.41
Breastfeeding	19 to 30	75.96*	78.03*	78.56
Breastfeeding	31 to 50	66.98	71.54	72.02
Reference Family of Four	Two adults 31 to 50y; male 14y; and girl 8y	246.91*	265.84*	266.35

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*Costs for 2022 and 2023 are higher than previously reported due to adjustments to align with updated estimated energy requirements.

Appendix B: Food affordability monitoring in Hamilton, 2022 to 2024

Household scenario / Main source of income	Year	Total Monthly Income*	Average monthly rent**	Monthly cost of food***	Funds remaining for other expenses
Family of Four (2 adults, 2 school-age children) Ontario Works	2024	\$2,908	\$1,670	\$1,153	\$ 85
	2023	\$2,794	\$1,450	\$1,151	\$193
	2022	\$2,760	\$1,479	\$1,069	\$212
Family of Three (1 adults, 2 school-age children) Ontario Works	2024	\$2,670	\$1,543	\$ 859	\$ 268
	2023	\$2,560	\$1,335	\$ 860	\$ 365
	2022	\$2,528	\$1,271	\$ 796	\$ 461
Single person (working-age adult) Ontario Works	2024	\$ 881	\$1,017	\$ 402	\$ -538
	2023	\$ 865	\$ 920	\$ 399	\$ -454
	2022	\$ 863	\$ 915	\$ 374	\$ -426
Single person (working age adult) Ontario Disability Support Program	2024	\$1,465	\$1,326	\$ 402	\$ -263
	2023	\$1,369	\$1,142	\$ 399	\$ -172
	2022	\$1,309	\$1,095	\$ 374	\$ -160
Single person (older adult) Old Age Security/ Guaranteed Income Supplement	2024	\$2,069	\$1,326	\$ 285	\$ 458
	2023	\$1,993	\$1,142	\$ 287	\$ 564
	2022	\$1,885	\$1,095	\$ 264	\$ 526

Amounts are rounded to the nearest dollar.

* Income includes employment earnings, Basic Allowance + Maximum Shelter Allowance (Ontario Works/Ontario Disability Support Program), Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income, Ontario Guaranteed Annual Income System, Canada Child Benefit, GST/HST credit, Ontario Trillium Benefit, Canada Worker Benefit/Advanced Canada Worker Benefit, and Climate Action Incentive Payment (2022, 2023)/Canada Carbon Rebate (2024). Employment Insurance paid and Canada Pension Plan paid are deducted from minimum wage employment earnings

**Average monthly apartment rental costs provided by Housing Services Division, Healthy and Safe Communities Department, City of Hamilton, based on Rental Market Report, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Fall 2021, Fall 2022, and Fall 2023. The [Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation \(CMHC\) Rental Market Survey](#) is conducted in urban areas with populations of 10,000 or more. The survey includes both new and existing units in privately initiated structures with at least 3 rental units.

The cost for a new tenant would likely be higher, as current tenants are protected from large annual increases by Ontario's [residential rent increase guideline](#). Utility costs (e.g., heat, electricity, hot water) may or may not be included in rental amounts.

***Ontario Nutritious Food Basket survey data collected June 2022, May 2023 and May 2024 by Public Health Services, Healthy and Safe Communities Department, City of Hamilton (includes household size adjustment factors). Ontario Nutritious Food Basket costs for family of four for 2022 and 2023 are higher than previously reported due to adjustments to align with updated estimated energy requirements for males 14-18y.

Appendix C: Household food insecurity rates in Ontario and Hamilton, 2019 to 2023

Indicator	Geography	Year				
		2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
% food insecure households	Ontario	17.1	17.1	16.1	18.7	24.2*
% food insecure households	Hamilton	19.7	18.5	17.9	18.1	27.3*

*Statistically significant increase compared to previous years

Data source: Public Health Ontario (2024). Household Food Insecurity Snapshot: PHU (2019 to 2023). [Household Food Insecurity Snapshot | Public Health Ontario](#)