

# FOOD AFFORDABILITY IN NIAGARA

RESULTS OF THE 2023 NUTRITIOUS FOOD BASKET SURVEY

# Recommendations

- That Regional Council, as the Board of Health, **ACKNOWLEDGE** food insecurity as an income problem requiring income solutions.
- That Regional Council, as the Board of Health, **BE DIRECTED** to send a letter to the federal and provincial governments, advocating for the implementation of evidence-based policy solutions to reduce food insecurity including: increasing social assistance rates, increasing minimum wage to a living wage, and implementing a study of a basic income guarantee project in Niagara to reduce poverty in a sustainable way.

# 2023 Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) Survey

- Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) is a survey tool used to monitor the cost and affordability of nutritious eating at the local level.
- 61 food items are included in the NFB that align with Canada's Food Guide, The survey is conducted in a selection of grocery stores that carry a full range of grocery items.
- In May 2023, the NFB survey was conducted in a sample of nine grocery stores across Niagara.
- The NFB provides an average cost of each food item across the grocery stores selected.

# Is income adequate for covering the cost of living?

- The NFB along with the average price of rent in Niagara is used to shed light on the cost of living compared to income that individuals receive from social assistance and/or job wages
- Total income, average monthly rent, cost of nutritious eating, and remaining funds after food and rent are calculated for a range of income scenarios.

# Family of Four, Minimum Wage Earner (full-time)

- Total income from wages and eligible government benefits (i.e., Canada Child Benefit, HST/GST credit) is \$4218
- Cost of food is \$1212 (29% of income)
- Cost of rent (three bedroom) is \$1366 (32% of income)
- \$1640 is left after rent and food for other necessities

# Family of Four, Ontario Works

- Total income from social assistance and eligible government benefits (i.e., Canada Child Benefit, HST/GST credit) is \$2873
- Cost of food is \$1212 (42% of income)
- Cost of rent (three bedroom) is \$1366 (48% of income)
- \$295 is left after rent and food for other necessities

# Single Parent (2 children), Ontario Works

- Total income from social assistance and eligible government benefits (i.e., Canada Child Benefit, HST/GST credit) is \$2636
- Cost of food is \$848 (32% of income)
- Cost of rent (two bedroom) is \$1258 (48% of income)
- \$530 is left after rent and food for other necessities

# One-person Household, Ontario Works

- Total income from social assistance and eligible government benefits (i.e., HST/GST credit) is \$851
- Cost of food is \$414 (49% of income)
- Cost of rent (bachelor) is \$833 (98% of income)
- \$-396 is left after rent and food for other necessities



# One-person Household, Ontario Disability Support Program

- Total income from social assistance and eligible government benefits (i.e., HST/GST credit) is \$1387
- Cost of food is \$414 (30% of income)
- Cost of rent (one bedroom) is \$1070 (77% of income)
- \$-97 is left after rent and food for other necessities

# One-person Household, Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income

- Total income and eligible government benefits (i.e., HST/GST credit) is \$2035
- Cost of food is \$299 (15% of income)
- Cost of rent (one bedroom) is \$1070 (53% of income)
- \$666 is left after rent and food for other necessities

# Household Food Insecurity (HFI) in Niagara

- HFI is “the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints”(PROOF).
- In 2022, approximately **one in five households** in Niagara are food insecure (20.7% of households).
- In 2019, 18.3% of children and youth one to 17 years of age live in food insecure households.

# Resident voices

According to residents, the primary problem with food security is income and affordability.

*“Notice less food in the house. Spend the same.”*

- Anonymous

*“A person I feed gave me a gift card for Foodland. We had a baby shower on Sunday and I had leftover fruit. I have been craving fruit salad. But it costs a lot to make. So today I used the \$25 coupon and went to Foodland. Bought a seedless watermelon (\$8), 3 kiwi (\$3), a pineapple (\$8), a bag of oranges (\$6), pineapple juice, bananas (not sure how much). Cost me \$40. That’s a basic fruit salad.”*

- Anonymous

*“Everything costs more. I used to be able to save a little from month to month, not anymore. People on a fixed income haven’t seen a decent increase ever, surely not a “living wage”. It’s hard to make ends meet. Now I can’t save for my final expenses. That worries me.”*

- Anonymous

# Food insecurity is a public health issue

- Individuals living in food insecure households are more at risk for chronic disease (diabetes, heart disease), infectious disease, poor oral health, and injury.
- Strong relationship between food insecurity and mental health for both adults and children exists.
- Negative impacts are greatest for those who are severely food insecure.
- Adults living in severely food insecure households are more likely to die prematurely from all causes except cancer

# HFI Solutions

- Charitable food programs are a temporary solution and do not address the root cause of food insecurity, income.
- HFI is an income-based problem requiring income-based solutions.
- PROOF (Food Insecurity Policy Research) are leaders in HFI research and suggest the following policy solutions:
  - Increase social assistance rates
  - Lowering/eliminating taxes for the lowest income bracket
  - Increase minimum wage
  - Provide a basic income guarantee

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