

There are people in Leeds, Grenville & Lanark who cannot afford nutritious food

Each year, the Leeds, Grenville & Lanark District Health Unit conducts the *Nutritious Food Basket Survey*, as mandated by the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. The results show that low-income households struggle to buy enough nutritious food for their family after paying rent, bills, and other living expenses.

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.



Households on fixed low incomes

Families on fixed low-incomes often live in rental housing. Using the average costs of renting in Brockville for 2011, below are five scenarios, outlining monthly expenses and income.

	Households on Fixed Low Incomes				
	Ontario Works Single man age 24	Ontario Works Single mother age 35 with a boy age 13 and a girl age 7	Ontario Works A family of 4: a man and woman age 35, a boy age 14 and a girl age 7	Ontario Disability Support Program Single man age 45	Old Age Security/ Guaranteed Income Supplement Single woman age 75
Income ^{1,2}	\$592	\$971	\$1,124	\$1,053	\$1,192
Additional Benefits and Credits ³	\$43	\$865	\$887	\$50	\$53
Total Monthly Income	\$635	\$1,836	\$2,011	\$1,103	\$1,245
Rent ⁴ (not including hydro)	\$527 (Bachelor)	\$747 (2 Bedroom)	\$805 (3 Bedroom)	\$527 (Bachelor)	\$641 (1 Bedroom)
Cost of Nutritious Food ⁵	\$273	\$488	\$739	\$247	\$182
Amount remaining to cover other basic monthly expenses*	-\$165	\$601	\$467	\$329	\$422

Households earning minimum wage

Even households that are earning minimum wage may find it impossible to cover the costs of living:

Households Earning Minimum Wage	
One full-time minimum wage earner A family of 4: a man and woman age 35, a boy age 14 and a girl age 7 (\$10.25/hour for 40 hours/week)	
Income	\$1,777
Additional Benefits and Credits ³	\$887
Income Deductions ⁶	-\$106
Total Monthly Income	\$2,619
Rent ⁴ (not including hydro)	\$805 (3 Bedroom)
Cost of Nutritious Food ⁵	\$739
Amount remaining to cover other basic monthly expenses*	\$1,075

¹ Ontario Works and Maximum Shelter Allowance, rates effective May 2011

² Ontario Disability Support Program, Basic and Maximum Shelter Allowance, rates effective May 2011

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. Effective July 2010-June 2011. <http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/bnfts/clctr/menu-eng.html>

⁴ Rental Market Reports, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation Rental Market Report, April 2011.

⁵ Food Basket Cost calculated using weekly data for May 2011, using Nutritious Food Basket Protocol & Guidance Document, Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion, April 2009. Family size adjustment factors are included in the calculation.

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

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

- Heat and hydro
- 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
- Unexpected expenses

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





What is food insecurity?

Food insecurity exists when people **cannot** get enough food to eat that is safe, that they like to eat, and that helps them to be healthy in ways that make them feel good about themselves and their families.

There are 65,090 households in Leeds, Grenville and Lanark and 8.2% of households reported experiencing moderate to severe food insecurity at least once in the past 12 months, according to the Canadian Community Health Survey 2007.

What kind of effect can food insecurity have on health?

Not being able to afford nutritious food can affect health.

Poor Birth Outcomes

Poor nutrition among pregnant women increases the chance of having a low birth weight baby. These babies 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 chance of having a baby with a neural tube defect (NTD).

Reduced Learning and Productivity

Learning and productivity are reduced when people are hungry and/or malnourished. Adults with poor nutrition are less productive in their work environments or while seeking work. Undernourished children are more at risk of illness, perform at lower academic levels, and find it harder to concentrate in school 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, and high blood pressure. They have difficulty managing these chronic medical conditions since they do not have enough money for special foods needed to manage disease.

Lack of Nutrients

Several studies have shown that people who live in households that cannot afford nutritious food often do not get enough of some nutrients such as folate, iron, zinc, magnesium, calcium and vitamin A. This is more common in low-income mothers because they compromise their own diets to make sure their children are fed.



Beyond food banks and charity

Food banks are not a permanent solution to this problem, they were only meant to be a temporary solution to the systemic problem of poverty. Food bank operators try very hard to address food insecurity, but it is often difficult 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.

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, and psychological benefits.

But these types of programs will not solve the issue of households not being able to afford nutritious food. Improvements in the social safety net are needed to address the root cause of food insecurity – **poverty**. This 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.



For more information,
please visit the Health Unit website at
www.healthunit.org/nutrition
Or call the Health Action Line at
1-800-660-5853

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 nutritious and non-perishable food items or money to food banks on a regular basis.

Resources

Call the Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit to order the following free resources:

- Best Buys
- Cutting The Cost of Cooking
- Stretch Your Food Dollar
- How Much Does Healthy Eating Cost?

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

- Campaign 2000
www.campaign2000.ca
- 25 in 5: Network for Poverty Reduction
www.25in5.ca
- Centre for Studies in Food Security at Ryerson
www.ryerson.ca/foodsecurity
- FoodShare Toronto
www.foodshare.net
- FoodNet Ontario
www.foodnetontario.ca
- Food Banks Canada
www.cafb-acba.ca
- Ontario Association of Food Banks
www.oafb.ca

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