



**MEMO / NOTE DE SERVICE**

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**TO: Board of Health for the City of Ottawa Health Unit**

**DESTINATAIRE : Conseil de santé de la circonscription sanitaire de la ville d'Ottawa**

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**26 octobre 2022**

**FILE NUMBER: ACS2022-OPH-COP-0001**

**SUBJECT: Monitoring Food Affordability in Ottawa: 2022 Nutritious Food Basket**

**OBJET : Surveiller l'abordabilité de l'alimentation à Ottawa : Panier de provisions nutritif 2022**

**PURPOSE**

The purpose of this memo is to update the Ottawa Board of Health on Ottawa Public Health's (OPH) 2022 Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) survey results and to highlight the data using a variety of income scenarios.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Food Insecurity**

- Food insecurity is the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints<sup>i</sup>. Poverty is the root cause of food insecurity.
- Food insecurity continues to persist in Ottawa; 1 in 7 households in Ottawa are food insecure<sup>ii</sup>.
- Food insecurity is closely linked to negative physical and mental health outcomes for adults and children and puts a strain on our healthcare system<sup>iii, iv</sup>.
- To address the root cause of food insecurity, solutions are needed that help people afford the cost of living such as:
  - o Social assistance programs that pay adequate benefits
  - o Jobs that pay a living wage
  - o A basic income guarantee
  - o Affordable housing, public transit and childcare
  - o Reduced income tax for the lowest income households & free income tax filing support

### **Nutritious Food Basket**

The NFB survey measures the cost of basic healthy eating. Results from the survey are used to monitor the affordability of food in Ottawa by relating the cost of the food basket to individual and family incomes. OPH conducts the NFB survey every year in May. OPH paused the NFB survey data collection in 2020 and 2021 due to COVID-19 priorities but has since resumed this work in 2022.

The national nutritious food basket (NNFB) is a survey tool used by various levels of government and other organizations to monitor the cost and affordability of healthy eating. Health Canada has updated the NNFB to be consistent with the 2019 Canada's Food Guide<sup>v</sup>. The basket includes 61 nutritious foods and their quantities for individuals in various age and sex groups. These foods were chosen based on Canada's Food Guide and reflect Canadian eating and purchasing patterns. Ontario derives its own NFB survey to support consistent data collection at a local level and updated the

Ontario costing tool in 2022 to reflect the changes made by Health Canada. The updated costing tool has some key differences from the previous costing tool including:

- Less foods; 67 (old) vs 61 (new)
- More plant-based protein foods
- More whole grains
- Less meat
- Less processed foods

In Ottawa, the NFB is based on the average lowest cost of 61 food items priced from 14 stores (12 urban and 2 rural) across the city. The 2022 NFB survey was completed between May 17 and June 6, 2022, through either on-line or in store data collection.

NFB foods included fall under these categories:

- Vegetables and fruit
- Protein foods
- Whole grains
- Fats and oils

Items not included in NFB include:

- Personal care items, e.g., shampoo, toothpaste, toilet paper, soap, personal hygiene products, diapers, etc.
- Processed and convenience foods
- Eating outside of the home, e.g., eating in restaurants
- Infant foods
- Special diet foods, e.g., allergen-free foods

The analysis of the results adds 5% to the basket cost to account for miscellaneous foods used in meal preparation, such as spices, condiments, and tea.

## DISCUSSION

The results of the 2022 NFB indicate that it costs \$1,088 per month to feed a family of four in Ottawa. Caution must be taken when interpreting and comparing the 2022 NFB results to past years as the costing tool was updated in 2022.

Annually, the local cost of the NFB plus rent are compared with different household incomes to assess whether income from these sources is adequate to cover the cost of basic necessities (See Table 1). The results of the NFB survey consistently show that individuals and families living on fixed or low incomes do not have enough funds remaining at the end of the month to afford their bills while also putting healthy food on the table. Families often choose between paying for fixed expenses (such as rent and utilities), other necessities (such as clothing, childcare, medication, transportation, and dental care) and buying groceries. In Table 1, the column “Funds remaining each month” represents the money left to pay for fixed expenses and other necessities.

Table 1: Income Scenarios in Ottawa

Family Scenario	Total monthly income	Average monthly rent (% income required for rent)	Cost of a Nutritious Diet	Funds remaining each month
<b>Family of Four, Ontario Works</b> 2 adults (male and female ages 31-50), 2 children (girl age 8, boy age 14)	\$2,760	\$1,881 (68%)	\$1,088	-\$209
<b>Family of Four, Minimum Wage Earner<sup>1</sup></b> 2 adults (male and female ages 31-50), 2 children (girl age 8, boy age 14)	\$3,973	\$1,881 (47%)	\$1,088	\$1,004

<sup>1</sup> Income is based on one minimum wage earner, 40hr/wk, \$15.00/hr (minimum wage in May 2022)

<b>Family of Four, Median Income (after tax)</b> 2 adults (male and female ages 31-50), 2 children (girl age 8, boy age 14)	\$9,323	\$1,881 (20%)	\$1,088	\$6,354
<b>Single Parent Household, with 2 Children, Ontario Works</b> 1 adult (female age 31-50), 2 children (girl age 8, boy age 14)	\$2,528	\$1,550 (61%)	\$762	\$216
<b>One Person Household, Ontario Works</b> 1 adult (male age 31-50)	\$863	\$1,059 (123%)	\$392	-\$588
<b>One Person Household, Ontario Disability Support Program</b> 1 adult (male age 31-50)	\$1,309	\$1,280 (98%)	\$392	-\$363
<b>One Person Household, Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement</b> 1 adult (female age 70+)	\$1,885	\$1,280 (68%)	\$293	\$312
<b>Married Couple, Ontario Disability Support Program</b> 2 adults (male and female age 31-50)	\$2,322	1,280 (55%)	\$593	\$449

**NEXT STEPS**

OPH will:

- Disseminate the 2022 NFB results through a webinar open to the public on November 23, 2022

- Release an online report to the public on food affordability and food insecurity in Ottawa on November 23, 2022
- Continue to monitor food affordability in Ottawa on an annual basis
- Raise awareness of food insecurity, its consequences and long-term solutions that help people afford the cost of living
- Monitor progress and seek opportunities to support the federal government's [Food Policy for Canada](#) which includes several elements such as a national school food program
- Collaborate with Community and Social Services and community partners on the development of a food strategy that aligns with the Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan

For more information, visit OPH's updated food insecurity [webpage](#) where the 2022 NFB infographic is now available

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<sup>i</sup> Tarasuk V, Li T, Farfard St-Germain A-A. (2022). Household Food Insecurity in Canada 2021. PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research. Available from: <https://proof.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Household-Food-Insecurity-in-Canada-2021-PROOF.pdf>

<sup>ii</sup> Ottawa Public Health. Food Security Status of Ottawa Households 2017. (2019) Ottawa.

<sup>iii</sup> Men F, Gundersen C, Urquia ML, et al. Food insecurity is associated with higher health care use and costs among Canadian adults. Health Affairs. 2020;39(8):1377-85. <https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2019.01637>

<sup>iv</sup> Tarasuk et al. Chronic physical and mental health conditions among adults may increase vulnerability to household food insecurity. J Nutr 2013;143(11):1785-93. doi: 10.3945/jn.113.178483.

<sup>v</sup> Government of Canada. National Nutritious Food Basket. 2022. <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/food-nutrition-surveillance/national-nutritious-food-basket.html>