

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Every year Public Health Services (PHS) conducts the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) survey as mandated by the Ontario Public Health Standards. NFB survey results are a measure of the cost of healthy eating and are applied to various family and individual income scenarios to assess the likelihood of being able to purchase nutritious food when the cost of housing is considered. Year after year the results of this analysis consistently show that households with low income are unlikely to have enough money to purchase basic nutritious food and are likely experiencing food insecurity (inadequate or insecure access to food because of financial constraints). In 2013-2014, 14.5% of Hamilton households, or approximately 1 in 7, experienced food insecurity.

Food banks, free meals, and community food programs such as community gardens, community kitchens and Good Fox Boxes may help relieve household food shortages in the short term but are not effective long term solutions for reducing food insecurity. The root cause of food insecurity is lack of income (poverty). Income responses are needed to effectively reverse household food insecurity.

The Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH) has released a position statement on responses to food insecurity and is urging all Ontario Boards of Health to endorse it. The key elements of the position statement are:

- Food insecurity is an urgent human rights and social justice issue.
- Food charity is an ineffective and counterproductive response to food insecurity.
- Poverty is the root cause of food insecurity.
- An income response is required to effectively address food insecurity.

OSNPPH recommends a Basic Income Guarantee that would provide all working-age people with sufficient income to meet basic needs including food, housing, clothing and transportation.

While Basic Income could be an effective response to food insecurity, implementation of a program in Ontario is years away. Because people who receive social assistance are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, there is an urgent need for social assistance reform to reverse this problem. Legislation to establish a Social Assistance Research Commission has again been introduced in the Ontario legislature.

Advocating for income responses to food insecurity aligns with system-wide actions identified in the Hamilton Food Strategy, as well as the Key Directions in the Health & Safe Communities theme of the Hamilton Community Vision 2016 – 2025.

Alternatives for Consideration – See Page 7

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.

FINANCIAL – STAFFING – LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Financial: There are no financial implications associated with Report BOH16050.

Staffing: There are no staffing implications associated with Report BOH16050.

Legal: There are no legal implications associated with Report BOH16050.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Ontario Public Health Standards (2008), Chronic Disease Prevention Standards Requirement #2, states: “The board of health shall monitor food affordability in accordance with the Nutritious Food Basket Protocol, 2008 (or as current) and the Population Health Assessment and Surveillance Protocol, 2008 (or as current).”¹

The NFB is an annual survey done in May that measures the cost of basic healthy eating based on the recommendations in Canada’s Food Guide. From May 9 to May 12, 2016, Registered Dietitians with PHS conducted food pricing for the 67 items in the Nutritious Food Basket in seven grocery stores across the City of Hamilton in accordance with the NFB Protocol.²

Since 2007, the Board of Health has used the NFB data to advocate for government increases to social assistance and affordable housing so that people living on lower incomes could have an adequate standard of living, including nutritious food.

In 2015, the Board of Health and Council supported the concept of Basic Income by corresponding with federal and provincial ministers urging joint federal-provincial investigation into a Basic Income Guarantee and acknowledging the announcement of a Basic Income pilot in the 2016 Ontario Budget. Establishment of a Social Assistance Research Commission was recommended in correspondence to the Minister of Community and Social Services.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS AND LEGISLATED REQUIREMENTS

None

RELEVANT CONSULTATION

The following have reviewed and/or contributed to the report:

- Housing Services Division, Community and Emergency Services Department provided data on the average market rental housing costs in Hamilton and wait list for affordable housing.
- Ontario Works Division, Community and Emergency Services Department support the concept of a Social Assistance Research Commission.

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.

ANALYSIS AND RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

Cost of the Nutritious Food Basket

The results of the NFB survey indicate the cost of nutritious food for 22 different age and sex groups (see Appendix B). The NFB cost for a reference family of four (male and female age 31-50, boy age 14 and girl age 8) in Hamilton in 2016 is \$184 per week or \$795 per month. NFB costs are applied to various individual and family income scenarios to analyze the feasibility of buying basic nutritious food when the cost of market rate rental housing is considered (see Appendix C).

Considering monthly costs for rent and food, individuals and families earning minimum wage or receiving social assistance (Ontario Works [OW] or the Ontario Disability Support Program [ODSP]) have little or no money left for other basic needs such as utilities (if not included in monthly rent), transportation, telephone, medical and dental costs, household and personal care items, childcare, clothing, footwear and school supplies. Low income households are forced to choose between paying for rent, food and other living expenses because they do not have enough money for all of their basic needs.

Figure 1 shows a comparison of income to rent and food costs for three family and three single-person households that are living on low incomes. All of these households must use all or most of their income for housing and nutritious food. The worst situation is the single person with income from OW whose rent and food costs exceed income by about \$100 per month. After food and rent, the single person receiving ODSP has less than \$200 left per month while the family of four living on OW has only \$367 remaining for all other expenses. The family of four with a full-time minimum wage earner appears to be well-off in comparison to the family with OW income, but still has only about \$1000 remaining each month for all expenses beyond food and rent – this is about one-fifth of what an average income family of four would have (see Appendix C).

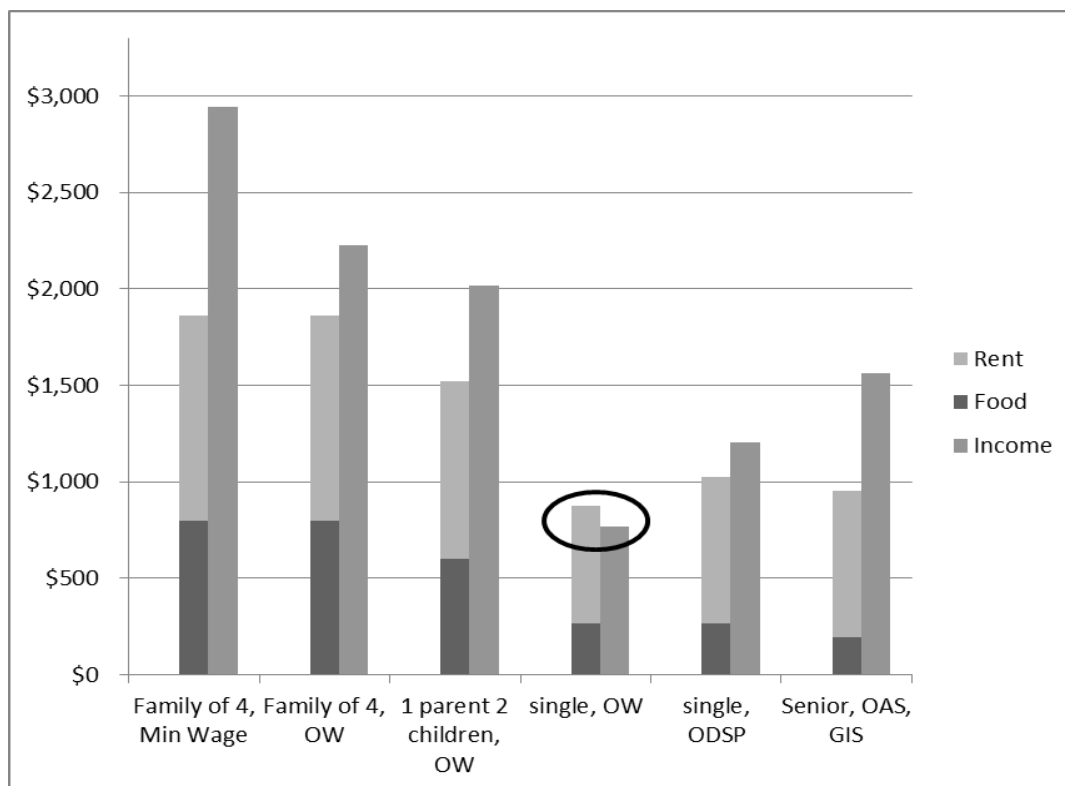
Greater access to affordable housing could help families and individuals living in these low-income situations to better meet their basic living needs. As of August 2016, there were 5,997 households on the wait list for social housing in Hamilton.

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.

Figure 1: Monthly Income Compared to Monthly Rent and Food Costs



Food Insecurity and Health

Food insecurity is defined as inadequate or insecure access to food because of financial constraints. It can range in severity from marginal (worrying about running out of food) to moderate (compromising quantity or quality of food consumed), to severe (reduced food intake and disrupted eating patterns due to lack of food).³

In 2013-2014, 14.5% of households in Hamilton (approximately 1 in 7) experienced some degree of food insecurity. For 11.2% of Hamilton households, the situation was moderate or severe.⁴

Because food insecurity results from a household’s inability to access food due to financial reasons, income level and source of income are strong predictors of food insecurity. In 2013-2014, 64% of Ontario households reliant on social assistance were food insecure.³ Wages, salaries or self-employment were the main source of income for 58.9% of food insecure households in Ontario in 2013-2014.³ This points to the changing nature of the work environment over the past few decades with increasing precarious (low paying and less secure) employment.⁵

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.

Household food insecurity significantly affects health and is a strong predictor of health care utilization and costs.^{6,7} Food-insecure adults are more vulnerable to chronic physical and mental illnesses, with the risk increasing with the severity of food insecurity. Exposure to food insecurity also leaves a lasting mark on children's well-being that continues into adulthood. Compared to adults in food secure households and after adjusting for other determinants of health such as education and income levels, total annual health care costs in Ontario were 23% higher for adults in households with marginal food insecurity, 49% higher among those with moderate food insecurity and 121% higher among those with severe food insecurity.⁷

Charitable Response to Food Insecurity

Community-based food charity, such as food banks and meal programs, has become the main approach through which communities attempt to address household food insecurity. The Hamilton Food Access Guide 2016⁸ lists 22 food bank programs and 23 free meal programs operating in the City.

There is increasing concern that the widespread existence of such programs may be unintentionally creating the perception that the problem of food insecurity is being adequately addressed. The OSNPPH, has released a Position Statement on Responses to Food Insecurity (see Appendix A) which suggests there is a link between the reduction in social programs and the growth of food charity and a reliance on community based charities.

The OSNPPH Position Statement emphasizes that while charitable food programs do help to address some of the most urgent food needs experienced by a small proportion of people who experience food insecurity, they do not address poverty (the underlying cause of food insecurity). It is important to note that food bank statistics do not reflect the true magnitude of food insecurity because research shows that only 25% of households experiencing food insecurity go to food banks and evidence suggests using food charity is a last resort.⁶

OSNPPH is requesting all Ontario Boards of Health to support their Position Statement which calls for an income response and identifies the Basic Income Guarantee as an effective response to food insecurity. A list of the organizations that have endorsed OSNPPH's Position Statement can be found in Appendix D.

Income Responses to Food Insecurity

Current evidence indicates the need for targeted and sustainable system-level income approaches to address the root causes of food insecurity.⁹ A Basic Income pilot project was announced in the 2016 Ontario Budget¹⁰, however full scale implementation would be years away.

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.

Because people who receive social assistance are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity, there is an urgent need for social assistance reform to reverse this problem. The establishment of a Social Assistance Research Commission has once again been proposed in a private members bill introduced by the MPP for Hamilton East (Stoney Creek).¹¹ The mandate of the Commission would be to annually define adequate social assistance rates based on the cost of basic necessities including food, shelter, transportation and clothing in defined economic regions of Ontario, which could better ensure adequate income to meet basic needs.

Income responses to food insecurity are recommended in the Hamilton Food Strategy (page 65, Recommendation 1)¹² and Hamilton's Community Vision (Theme 3: Healthy & Safe Communities).¹³ Recommendations include advocating for adequate incomes, focus on food skills, job creation and fair wages, address the social determinants of health and facilitate physical and economic access to healthy, local sources and nutritious food for residents.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION

The Board of Health can choose not to support and advocate for income responses to food insecurity.

Financial: No financial implications.

Staffing: No staffing implications.

Legal: No legal implications.

Pro: No follow-up action is required.

Con: This would not demonstrate support of the Hamilton Food Strategy system-wide goal of strengthening advocacy to eliminate poverty to improve individual and household food security nor the Healthy & Safe Community theme of Hamilton's Community Vision 2016–2025.

ALIGNMENT TO THE 2016 – 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN

Strategic Priority #1

A Prosperous & Healthy Community

WE enhance our image, economy and well-being by demonstrating that Hamilton is a great place to live, work, play and learn.

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.

Strategic Objective

- 1.5 Support the development and implementation of neighbourhood and City wide strategies that will improve the health and well-being of residents.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix A to Report BOH16050	Position Statement on Responses to Food Insecurity, Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH)
Appendix B to Report BOH16050	How Much Does Healthy Eating Cost in 2016?
Appendix C to Report BOH16050	2016 Hamilton Nutritious Food Basket Scenarios
Appendix D to Report BOH16050	Organizations endorsing OSNPPH Position Statement on Responses to Food Insecurity

REFERENCES

1. Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Ontario Public Health Standards 2008, Revised October, 2015.
http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/docs/oph_s_2008.pdf
2. Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care (2014). Nutritious Food Basket Protocol.
http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/publichealth/oph_standards/docs/nutritious_food_basket.pdf
3. Tarasuk V, Mitchell A, Dachner N (2016). Household food insecurity in Canada, 2014. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). <http://proof.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Household-Food-Insecurity-in-Canada-2014.pdf>
4. Applied Research and Evaluation, Planning and Business Improvement, Public Health Services, City of Hamilton. Household Food Security Status, City of Hamilton and Ontario, 2007-08, 2009-10, 2011-12 and 2013-14. May 2016.
5. PEPSO - Poverty and Employment Precarity in Southern Ontario (2015). The Precarity Penalty: The impacts of employment precarity on individuals, households and communities – and what to do about it.
https://pepsouw.t.files.wordpress.com/2012/12/precarity-penalty-report_final-hires_trimmed.pdf

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.

6. Tarasuk V and Shimmin C (2016). 5 Things Canadians Need to Know About Food Insecurity. <http://proof.utoronto.ca/5-things-canadians-need-to-know-about-food-insecurity/>
7. PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research (2016). The Impact of Food Insecurity on Health. <http://proof.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/health-impact-factsheet.pdf>
8. Information Hamilton. City of Hamilton 2016 Food Access Guide. http://www.foodaccessguide.ca/food_access_guide.pdf
9. Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health Food Security Workgroup (2015). Income-Related Policy Recommendations to Address Food Insecurity. <https://www.osnpnh.on.ca/upload/membership/document/recommendations-document-final.pdf>
10. Ontario Ministry of Finance. 2016 Ontario Budget. <http://www.fin.gov.on.ca/en/budget/ontariobudgets/2016/bk5.html>
11. Legislative Assembly of Ontario. Bill 6, Ministry of Community and Social Services Amendment Act (Social Assistance Research Commission), 2016 http://www.ontla.on.ca/web/bills/bills_detail.do?locale=en&Intranet=&BillID=4117
12. Hamilton Food Strategy – Healthy, Sustainable, and Just Food For All (2016). <https://d3fplf1m7bbt3.cloudfront.net/sites/default/files/media/browser/2016-09-01/hamilton-food-strategy-2016.pdf>
13. Hamilton Community Vision (2016). <https://www.hamilton.ca/city-initiatives/priority-projects/hamilton-community-vision>

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.