

Finding solutions

In addition to the nutritional benefits, community food action programs such as community kitchens, the Good Food Box, community gardens, gleaning, and school nutrition programs provide social, psychological and community benefits.

But these types of programs by themselves will not solve the root causes of households not being able to afford a nutritious diet. They must ultimately be accompanied by a stronger social safety net that:

- Improves social assistance and minimum wage rates;
- Establishes affordable housing policies;
- Eliminates the National Child Benefit adjustment to social assistance for families;
- Improves employment insurance coverage and benefits; and
- Provides accessible and affordable child care.



Adapted from *The Price of Eating Well in Halton 2007*, Halton Region Health Department.

For more information, please call
Thunder Bay District Health Unit
807-625-5956
Toll free: 1-888-294-6630
www.tbdhu.com

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 food programs and activities.
- Donate a variety of non-perishable food items or money to food banks on a regular basis.

Resources

Call the Thunder Bay District Health Unit to order the following resources:

- *Where to Get Food in Thunder Bay*
- *Best Buys in Canada's Food Guide*
- *Eat Well for Less*

Or go to www.nwofood.com to find out about food security in the Northwestern Ontario Region.

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

- www.campaign2000.ca
- www.25in5.ca
- www.toronto.ca/health/th/tfpc_index.htm
- www.ryerson.ca/foodsecurity
- www.foodshare.net
- www.FoodNetOntario.ca
- www.cafb-acba.ca
- www.oafb.ca
- www.foodsecure.ca



The Cost of Eating Well in the District of Thunder Bay

2009

There are people in the District of Thunder Bay who cannot afford a nutritious diet

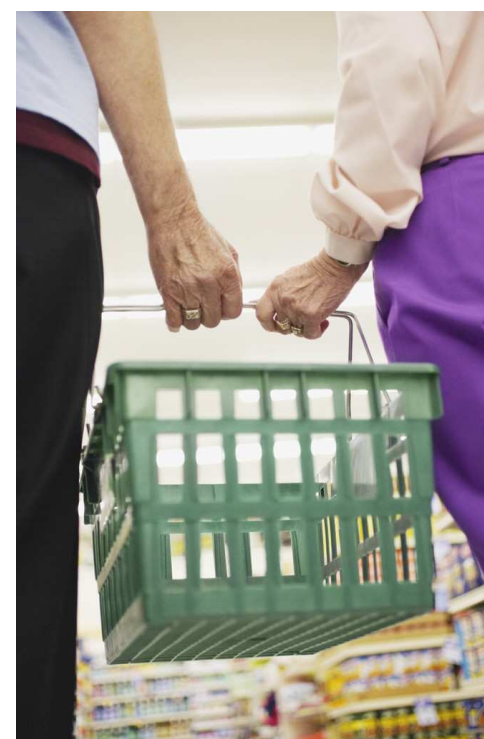
Each year, the results of the Thunder Bay District Nutritious Food Basket Survey show that low-income households struggle to pay rent, the bills and to buy enough nutritious food for their family. The survey requires pricing 67 basic food items from five stores in the City of Thunder Bay and one in the District to determine the average price of a nutritious diet for the District of Thunder Bay. The survey was last completed in May 2009.

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.

The scenarios on the following page illustrate that households with social assistance and minimum wage incomes 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 maintaining a vehicle)
- Clothing for all family members
- Debt payments
- Gifts
- Non-prescription drugs and dispensing fees for prescription drugs
- Banking service charges
- Costs associated with having children in school
- Money to cover unexpected expenses

In reality, people usually choose to pay rent and other fixed expenses such as heat, hydro, and transportation. Food becomes a "flexible" expense, resulting in a diet of poor nutritional value.



Comparison of Household Income and Expenses

Low-income households often live in rental housing. Using the average costs of renting in Thunder Bay for 2008, here are seven scenarios outlining monthly income and expenses.

	Households on Social Assistance						Households with Employment Incomes	
	Ontario Works Single Man age 40	Ontario Works Single Mother age 40 with a daughter age 8 and a boy age 14	Ontario Works A family of 4: A man and woman age 40, a boy age 14 and a girl age 8	Ontario Disability Support Program Single man age 40	Old Age Security/ Guaranteed Income Supplement ^a Single woman age 70+	One full-time Minimum Wage Earner A family of 4: a man and woman age 40, a boy age 14 and a girl age 8 (\$9.50/hour for 40 hours/week)	Ontario Median Income ^b A family of 4: a man and woman age 40, a boy age 14 and a girl age 8	
Income	\$572.00	\$984.00	\$1106.00	\$1020.00	\$1169.00	\$1647.00	\$6175.00	
Additional Benefits and Credits ^{c,d}	\$20.00	\$698.00	\$698.00	\$27.00	\$30.00	\$727.00		
Income Deductions ^e						-\$95.00	-\$394.00	
Total Monthly Income	\$592.00	\$1682.00	\$1804.00	\$1047.00	\$1199.00	\$2279.00	\$5781.00	
Rent ^f (not including heat + hydro)	(Bachelor) \$467.00	(2 Bedroom) \$719.00	(3 Bedroom) \$836.00	(Bachelor) \$467.00	(1 Bedroom) \$589.00	\$836.00	\$836.00	
Cost of a Nutritious Diet ^g	\$249.57	\$512.89	\$705.47	\$249.57	\$183.54	\$705.47	\$705.47	
Amount remaining to cover other basic expenses including heat + hydro	-\$124.57	\$450.11	\$262.53	\$330.43	\$426.46	\$737.53	\$4239.53	
Percentage of income required for rent	79%	43%	46%	45%	49%	37%	14%	
Percentage of income required to purchase healthy food	42%	30%	39%	24%	15%	31%	12%	

a. OAS/GIS rates May 2009.

b. Based on the Ontario Median Income, 2005. Reference: Statistics Canada, 2007. Ontario (table). 2006 Community Profiles. 2006 Census.

c. Basic and maximum shelter allowance. OW rates effective August 2008. ODSP rates effective July 2008.

d. Where applicable, includes maximum Canada Tax Benefit, National Child Benefit Supplement and Maximum monthly Ontario Child Benefit from July 2008 - June 2009.

e. Employment Insurance and Canada Pension Plan.

f. Based on Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Private Apartment Average Rents in Thunder Bay, October 2008.

g. Based on Nutritious Food Basket, 2009.



What effect can this have on health?

Not being able to afford a nutritious diet can affect health.

Low Birth Weight

Poor diet among pregnant women increases the likelihood of low birth weights. Those babies who survive are at greater risk of developing health problems and disabilities than babies of normal weights. Also, low intakes of folate before and during pregnancy can increase the chances of babies with neural tube defects.

Reduced Learning and Productivity

Learning and productivity are reduced when people are hungry and/or malnourished. Adults are less productive in their work environments or while seeking work. Undernourished children are especially susceptible to illness, perform at lower academic levels, find it harder to concentrate in school, and have poorer psychosocial outcomes 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, high blood pressure, and food allergies. They have difficulty managing these chronic conditions since they do not have enough money for therapeutic diets.

Lack of Nutrients for Good Health

Several studies have shown that people who live in households that can't afford a sufficient nutritious diet often do not get enough of certain nutrients including folate, iron, zinc, and vitamin A. This is more common in mothers because they compromise their own diets to make sure their children are fed.

Beyond food banks and charity

Many people think that food banks are the solution to this problem. Food bank operators try very hard to address this need, but they cannot because:

- They have a limited selection and amount of food since they rely on donations and drives;
- They often 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;
- Most people who cannot afford to feed their families will not access food banks.

