



Food Affordability in Brant

2023

BRANT COUNTY
HEALTH UNIT

Acknowledgements

We want to express our gratitude for the support of the Brant County Health Unit employees who contributed their time and expertise to the collection, analysis and interpretation of the data, and the production of this report, namely:

Lisa Vermeersch, Public Health Dietitian, the Nutritious Food Basket Survey Lead
Jennifer Rojas, Epidemiologist
Justine Swan, Health Promoter
Krysta Hajovic, Health Promoter
Mandy Samwell, Community Health Broker
Hilary Wren-Atilola, Director, Healthy Communities
Alexey Babayan, Director, Healthy Foundations

Suggested citation: Brant County Health Unit. *Food Affordability in Brant - 2023*.
Brantford: Brant County Health Unit, Special Report, November 2023.

For questions about this report, please contact:
Lisa Vermeersch, RD, Public Health Dietitian
Brant County Health Unit, 194 Terrace Hill Street, Brantford, ON N3R 1G7
Email: lisa.vermeersch@bchu.org

Key messages

- The Nutritious Food Basket survey demonstrates that low-income individuals and families in Brant are required to pay a significant proportion of their income on food and shelter, leaving them with limited or no funds to pay for other necessities.
- One in six households in Brant are considered food insecure (meaning they have inadequate access to nutritious food due to a lack of money).
- Long-term, income-based strategies are needed to help individuals and families afford the cost of living.

Introduction

The Brant County Health Unit (BCHU) monitors the affordability of food in Brantford and the County of Brant using the Nutritious Food Basket survey. This report summarizes the 2023 NFB survey results presenting them by various household income, rental and food cost situations to provide a comprehensive picture of the food affordability in the region. It also provides the most recent local data on food insecurity and recommended actions on addressing this issue in Brant.

Nutritious Food Basket

Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) is a survey tool used to monitor the cost and affordability of nutritious eating.¹ The tool enables calculating the average lowest cost of each food item (e.g., fruit, vegetables, protein foods, whole grains etc) for individuals in various age and sex groups, and the monthly cost of nutritious eating for different household types. The NFB is aligned with the 2019 Canada's food guide and reflects eating patterns to minimize people's risk of disease and optimize their health.^a

Data collection and analysis

BCHU followed the methodology developed by the Food Insecurity Workgroup of the Ontario Dietitians in Public Health to guide the NFB data collection and analysis.² Food prices were collected from 14 grocery stores (8 instore and 6 online) across Brant in May 2023. Stores were selected considering the availability of most food items in the NFB, the municipality (Brantford, the County of Brant) and population density to ensure a broad representation of local communities in the study.^b

The food cost for each age and sex group was used to calculate the monthly food cost for a number of household scenarios representing various populations (households with or without children, pregnancy etc.) and income sources (social assistance, minimum wage or median income etc.). Additionally, for each of these income scenarios the total monthly income^c and average monthly rent^d were obtained.²⁻³ Finally, funds remaining after paying for rent and food were calculated for each scenario. This approach helps to determine the affordability of food.

Results

- Individuals and families on low incomes are required to spend a higher share of their income to eat nutritious food. For example, a family of four and a single person household receiving assistance through Ontario Works would have to spend 41% and 48% of their incomes respectively on food (see Table 1).
- Low-income individuals and families are most likely to have limited or no funds left to pay for other necessities (e.g., phone bills, transportation, childcare, household or personal care items, medication etc.). The situation is dire for single person households living on social assistance who would be in debt to pay for just food and rent at the end of the month (see Table 1).

Table 1: Income scenarios in Brant, 2023

Income scenario	Monthly income	Monthly rent	Monthly food cost (% of income)	Funds remaining for other expenses
Households with children				
Family of Four, Median Income (after tax) 2 adults and 2 children	\$9,284	\$1,331	\$1,158 (12%)	\$6,795
Family of Four, Minimum Wage Earner 2 adults and 2 children	\$4,160	\$1,331	\$1,158 (28%)	\$1,671
Single Parent Household, Ontario Works 1 adult, 2 children	\$2,560	\$1,259	\$851 (33%)	\$450
Family of Four, Ontario Works 2 adults and 2 children	\$2,794	\$1,331	\$1,158 (41%)	\$305
Households without children				
Married Couple, Ontario Disability Support Program 2 adults	\$2,433	\$1,165	\$693 (28%)	\$575
One Person, Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement 1 senior adult	\$1,993	\$1,165	\$299 (15%)	\$529
Single Pregnant Person, Ontario Disability Support Program 1 adult	\$1,409	\$1,165	\$395 (28%)	-\$151
One Person Household, Ontario Disability Support Program 1 adult	\$1,369	\$1,165	\$416 (30%)	-\$212
One Person Household, Ontario Works 1 adult	\$865	\$885	\$416 (48%)	-\$436

Food insecurity in Brant

The NFB results demonstrate that many low-income individuals and families in Brant have inadequate access to nutritious food, a problem known as **food insecurity**. The prevalence of household food insecurity in Brant is 17.7%, which amounts to about 1 in 6 households experiencing food insecurity.⁴



1 in 6 households are food insecure.

Households with food insecurity are more likely to experience poor oral health, infectious diseases, depression, anxiety, heart disease, hypertension, chronic pain, and increased risk of diabetes.⁵

What can be done?

- Share this report with your colleagues, partner agencies, and members of local, provincial and federal governments.
- Acknowledge that charitable food programs (e.g., food banks) have not shown a meaningful decline in the prevalence of household food insecurity, as they fail to address the underlying issue of inadequate income.⁶
- Advocate for policies and programs that improve the financial conditions of low-income households, such as: a basic income guarantee, adequate social assistance benefits, increased minimum wage, affordable housing, public transit and childcare.
- Support local free income tax clinics to reduce the millions of dollars of unclaimed tax credits and entitlements due to households not filling out their income tax.
- Become a [Certified Living Wage Employer](#).
- Implement protocols to screen and support clients experiencing food insecurity and poverty in general, such as [Poverty: A Clinical Tool for Primary Care Providers](#).
- Support programs that bring the community together to get, grow, learn about and eat food in Brant that is accessible to all. More information can be found at FeedBrant.ca.

Notes

^a The NFB does not include religious or cultural foods, infant food, special diet foods, processed or convenience foods, personal care items, personal hygiene products, toilet paper, or laundry detergent.

^b The health unit obtained permission from the selected stores to collect the food cost data in their premises. Each store was surveyed by two staff members to reduce errors and ensure consistency in data collection.

^c Total income includes income from employment as well as applicable federal/provincial income supports programs (e.g., Canada Child Benefit, Ontario Child Benefit, GST/HST Credit, Old Age Security, Canada Worker Benefit, Ontario Trillium Benefit, etc).

^d Rental costs are based on the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC) Rental Market Survey, which is conducted in urban areas with populations of 10,000 or more. The survey includes both new and existing units in privately initiated structures with at least 3 rental units. The cost for a new tenant would likely be higher, as current tenants are protected from large annual increases by Ontario's residential rent increase guideline. Utility costs (e.g., heat, electricity, hot water) may or may not be included in the rental amounts.

References

1. Health Canada.(2020). *National Nutritious Food Basket*. Government of Canada. Available from: <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/food-nutrition/food-nutrition-surveillance/national-nutritious-food-basket.html> [Cited November 10, 2023].
2. Ontario Dietitians in Public Health Food Insecurity Work Group. (2023). *Monitoring Food Affordability in Ontario Income Scenarios Spreadsheet*. Ontario Dietitians in Public Health.
3. Canadian Housing and Mortgage Corporation (2022). *Primary Rental Market Statistics*.CMHC. Available from: <https://www03.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/hmip-pimh/en/TableMapChart/Table?TableId=2.1.31.2&GeographyId=35&GeographyTypeId=2&DisplayAs=Table&GeographyName=Ontario#2%20Bedroom> [Cited November 13, 2023].
4. Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (Public Health Ontario). (2023). *Household Food Insecurity Snapshot PHU (2019 to 2022)*. Available from: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/Data-and-Analysis/Health-Equity/Household-Food-Insecurity> [Cited November 17, 2023]
5. PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research. (n.d). *What are the implications of food insecurity for health and health care?* PROOF. Available from: <https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/what-are-the-implications-of-food-insecurity-for-health-and-health-care/> [Cited: November 10, 2023].
6. PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research. (October 13, 2022). *Food insecurity: A problem of inadequate income, not solved by food*. PROOF. Available from: <https://proof.utoronto.ca/resource/food-insecurity-a-problem-of-inadequate-income-not-solved-by-food/> [Cited November 13, 2023].