



Media Release

Household Food Insecurity: No Money for Food is... Cent\$less!

For immediate release

Money for food not in the budget for many families

Timiskaming – About 9.4% households in Timiskaming are struggling to put food on the table. This is a situation known as food insecurity, one that has seen little change for more than a decade. Food insecurity, especially in its most severe form, takes a big toll on physical, mental and social health for everyone: children, teens and adults and leads to use of more health care services and higher health care costs.

The Timiskaming Health Unit's [THU] 2017 Nutritious Food Basket [NFB] results show that a slight increase in overall monthly income is still not enough for many families in Timiskaming, particularly those living with a lower income.

The NFB is an annual survey conducted by public health units in Ontario to measure and monitor the local cost of basic healthy eating. In 2017, although there was a small decrease in the average weekly cost of the NFB (from \$216.53 to \$218.27), the results continue to show that feeding a family of four in Timiskaming (and overall in Northeastern Ontario) is more expensive than areas in Southern Ontario.

And, it is still not enough to decrease their risk of facing food insecurity. For example, a single parent with 2 children living on Ontario Works would use 62% of its income for food and rent, with only 38% (\$900) left for expenses such as clothing, transportation, electricity or heat. Similarly, a family of four (2 parents and 2 children) on minimum wage would use more than half of their total monthly income (55%) for food and rent, leaving 45% (\$1478) for remaining expenses.

Families experiencing food insecurity adjust in different ways, some eating smaller portions and others going completely without food. As a Timiskaming individual shared, this issue takes a great toll on people's health, in particular mental health: *"At times when I have had to go without I always feel worn out and get depressed. I slept all day to avoid feeling hungry and trying to pass time until the end of the month"*. This and other testimonies from community members living with food insecurity can be found in a [THU report](#) released in 2016.

While food banks and community kitchens are ways the community tries to help those living in food insecurity, only policy solutions tackling income will fully address this issue. "Food banks and food donations are still very important to help families in the short-term. However they do not get to the root of the problem, which is inadequate income: a person living in poverty who goes to the food bank is still in poverty when they leave," added Laura Dias, Public Health Dietitian at THU.

Government has the greatest capacity to implement policy action to tackle poverty and, therefore, household food insecurity. Examples include increasing child benefits, work toward affordable housing, or improving employment conditions (such as fair wages).

This is why THU has launched the Cent\$less campaign encouraging everyone in Timiskaming to learn about the root cause of food insecurity—poverty—and advocate for proper solutions to address this issue. The [campaign website](#) includes a letter that can be sent to the leaders of the four main political parties, the local provincial candidates and local MPs, either [electronically](#) or via postcard. These letters remind government that investing in income policies is what will end both food insecurity and its costly consequences.

The website also features other campaign resources such as short informative videos, posters and a food map that shows all the charitable food programs available in the district. These resources will also be distributed in the community.



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With the provincial and municipal elections approaching, it is important to be informed about the issues affecting our community, understand our candidates' positions on them and know how to take action to influence those positions. One in ten of our community members are having trouble putting food on the table; we can all do our part to help our communities thrive.

For more information about household food insecurity visit the [Cent\\$less Campaign web page](#).

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Media Contact:

Laura Dias,

Public Health Dietitian

705-647-4305, Ext. 2265

Email: diasl@timiskaminghu.com