



# HOUSEHOLD FOOD INSECURITY THE COST OF EATING WELL IN TIMISKAMING

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## LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I respectfully acknowledge that the Timiskaming Health Unit operates within the Robinson-Huron Treaty, Treaty 9, and unceded Indigenous territory, specifically within the traditional territories of Beaverhouse, Matachewan, Temagami, and Timiskaming First Nations. Today these lands encompass communities with the enduring presence of Algonquin, Anishnabai, Ojibwe, Cree, and Métis Peoples. I acknowledge that original Peoples have been stewards and caretakers of these lands and waters since time immemorial and acknowledge that they continue to maintain this responsibility for generations to come. With honour and respect, I say miigwetch to the original peoples of this area. **As a public health dietitian, I affirm my commitment and responsibility to reconciliation as I continue to learn, reflect, and take action towards health equity, food justice, food sovereignty, and advocating to address food insecurity.**

## OUTLINE

### I. Household Food Insecurity (HFI)

- Root cause
- Populations at risk
- Impacts on health
- Statistics

### II. Monitoring Food Affordability

### III. Effective Interventions and Key Recommendations

### IV. Q/A



Today, I will cover

- Household food insecurity
- Share the latest local data from Monitoring Food Affordability in Timiskaming.
- And present effective solutions and key recommendations
- I will answer any questions at the end

## HOUSEHOLD FOOD INSECURITY - DEFINITION



“Inadequate or insecure access to food due to **financial constraints**”



### Marginal

Worry about running out of food and/or limit food selection.

### Moderate

Compromise in quantity and/or quality of food consumed.

### Severe

skipping meals, reduce food intake and going day(s) without food.

**POVERTY**

Tarasuk V, Li T, Fafard St-Germain AA. (2022) Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). Retrieved from <https://proof.utoronto.ca/>

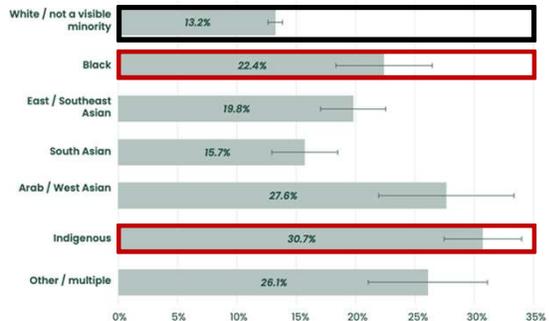


- I would like to start by sharing the definition of household food insecurity.
- Which is the “Inadequate or insecure access to food due to **financial constraints**”
- FI happens when a household does not have enough money to buy food because of insufficient income
- So, as you can see in the definition, the root cause of food insecurity is poverty.
- Food insecurity looks different in different households. It can range from worrying about running out of food to buying cheaper, more processed foods or even missing meals or going days without food due to lack of money.

# POPULATIONS AT RISK IN CANADA

- Working-age individuals with low income
- Social assistance as main source of income
- Single parent female-led households with children
- Employment insurance
- Home renters
- Specific cultural/racial groups: Indigenous, Black, Arab/West Asian households

Percentage of individuals living in food-insecure households by racial/cultural identity  
Indigenous status, 2021

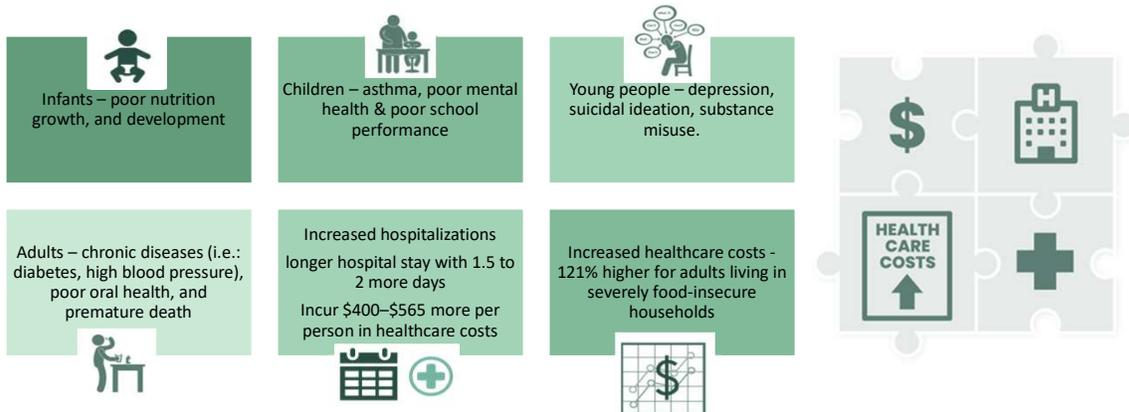


Ontario Dietitians in Public Health. (2020). Position Statement and Recommendations to Responses to Food Insecurity. [ps-eng-corrected-07april21\\_2.pdf](https://www.odph.ca/ps-eng-corrected-07april21_2.pdf) (odph.ca)  
 Tarasuk V, Li T, Fafard St-Germain AA. (2022) Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). Retrieved from <https://proof.utoronto.ca/>



- On this slide you can see the populations most at risk for FI in Canada.
- And I want to point out the risk is highest among working-age individuals with low income.
- 65% of food insecure households in Canada are in the workforce. This means that having a job is not sufficient to protect against food insecurity.
- Household on social assistance as their main source of income and home renters are also at an increased risk.
- And Black and Indigenous households have FI rates that are 2-3 times higher than white households, and this is due to Canada's long and ongoing history of colonialism and systemic racism.

## IMPACTS OF FOOD INSECURITY



Men, F., Gundersen, C., Urquia, M. L., & Tarasuk, V. (2020). Food Insecurity Is Associated With Higher Health Care Use And Costs Among Canadian Adults. *Health affairs (Project Hope)*, 39(8), 1377–1385.  
<https://doi.org/10.1377/hlthaff.2019.01637>  
<https://proof.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/health-impact-factsheet.pdf>  
Ontario Dietitians in Public Health. (2020). Position Statement and Recommendations to Responses to Food Insecurity. [ps-eng-corrected-07april21\\_2.pdf](https://www.odph.ca/ps-eng-corrected-07april21_2.pdf) (odph.ca)



So why does household food insecurity matter? Not being able to afford food has profound negative impacts on people’s physical and mental health and their ability to lead productive lives.

The impacts on health spans across all age groups.

Some examples include increased risk of poor growth and development in infants and children, chronic diseases, and premature death in adults.

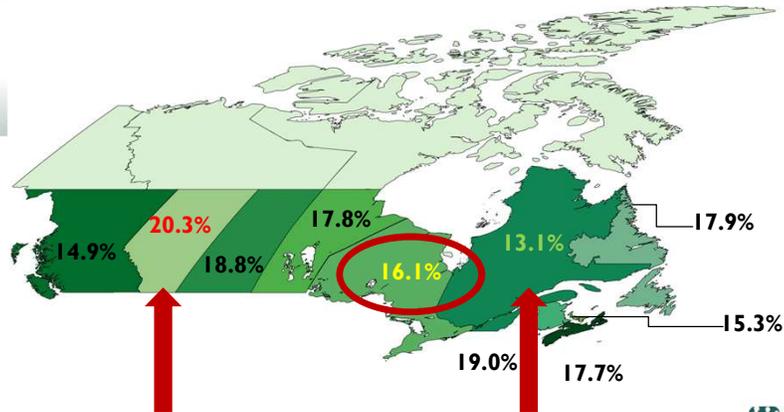
FI has a large burden on our healthcare system and contributes to increased healthcare costs with 121% higher costs for adults living in severely food insecure households.

## SNAPSHOT OF HFI - CANADA

**5.8**  
million  
people

**1.4**  
million  
children

lived in food-insecure  
households in 2021



Data Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Income Survey (CIS) 2020.  
\*Data on the territories from this survey is not available



- Let's look at some statistics...In 2021, 5.8 Million people including 1.4 million children in the 10 provinces lived in food insecure households.
- As you can see on the graph, some provinces are doing better than others, with the rates being as low as 13% in Quebec and as high as 20% in Alberta.
- Ontario stands in the middle with a rate of 16.1%.

## SNAPSHOT OF HFI - ONTARIO



 **16%**  
of households  
in Ontario

**67%** of  
households  
receiving social  
assistance

**48%** of  
households  
have employment  
as their main income



**Food insecure**

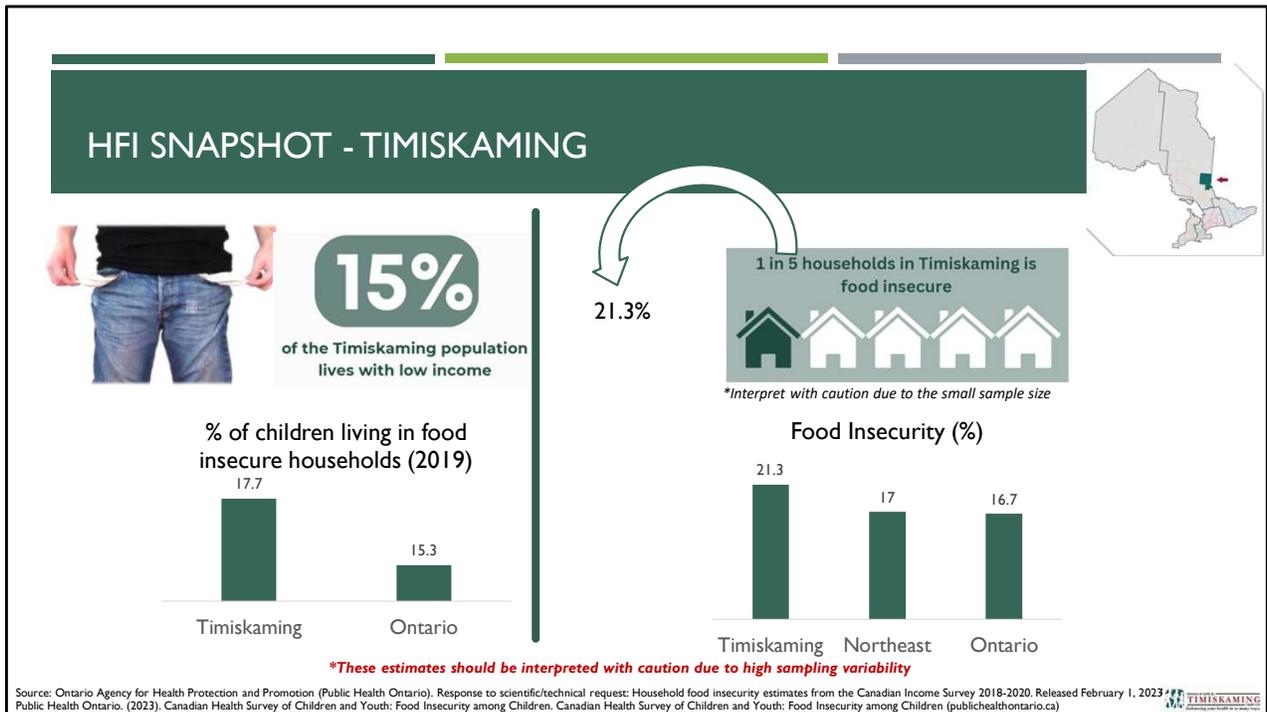
- Almost **1 in 6 households** is food insecure (2.3 M) Ontarians.
- **1 in 5 children** (20.6%) live in a food-insecure household



Data Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Income Survey (CIS) 2020  
Ontario Dietitians in Public Health. (2020). Position Statement and Recommendations to Responses to Food Insecurity. ps-eng-corrected-07april21\_2.pdf (odph.ca)



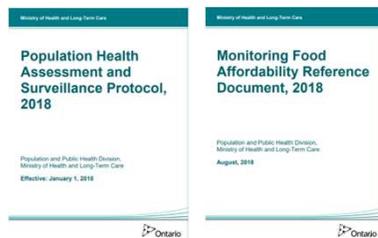
- In Ontario, 1 in 6 households experience food insecurity and 1 in 5 children live in food insecure households, amounting to half a million children.
- 67% of Ontario's households receiving social assistance such as OW or Ontario Disability Support Program are food insecure simply because the rates are not enough to cover the true cost of living.



- When it comes to living with low income, 15% of Timiskaming population are affected.
- The majority are under 64 yrs. old.
- The latest data we have available tells us that about 1 in 5 households in Timiskaming or 21.3% experience some form of food insecurity compared to 16.7 % in Ontario and 17% in the Northeast region.
- The data may underestimate the actual rates of HFI, particularly among Indigenous populations.
- According to the Canadian Health Survey of Children and Youth - almost 18% of children in Timiskaming compared to 15.3% in Ontario live in food insecure households.

## OPHS MANDATE AND THU STRATEGIC PLAN

- **Mandate:** Since 1998, Ontario Public Health Units (PHUs) have been mandated to monitor food affordability using the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) survey.



### THU Strategic Plan (2019-2023)

#### We create, share and exchange knowledge

2

- We use the best available information, including local lived experience, to inform local programs and services
- We exchange information with communities and partners to broaden our understanding of local needs
- We create quality data to address gaps in knowledge and to identify changing local needs
- We share our knowledge with stakeholders to understand the causes and impacts of health inequities

#### We collaborate with partners to make a difference in our communities

3

- We nurture positive and effective relationships with community partners to improve public health
- We mobilize diverse and inclusive community resources in addressing the Social Determinants of Health and climate change to reduce health inequities
- We advocate for policy changes that make a difference in local communities

- Since 1998, Ontario Public Health Units (PHUs) have been mandated to monitor food affordability at a local level using the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) survey.
- The requirement to monitor food affordability is included within the 2 documents appearing on the left of the screen.
- Monitoring food affordability directly contributes to meeting requirements and expected outcomes in the Health Equity Foundational Standard of the OPHS 2018 and supports THU 2019-2023 strategic directions 2 and 3 (as appearing on the screen).

## MONITORING FOOD AFFORDABILITY NUTRITIOUS FOOD BASKET (NFB)

2019 - Health Canada updated the National NFB based on the new CFG

2022 - NFB tool was updated

2020 - the process of adapting the NNFB for use in Ontario began by the ODPH MFAO WG

Between May 16 and June 24, 2022 – 27 PHUs participated in pilot testing the new NFB tool

NFB: a standardized tool used by Ontario PHUs to monitor food affordability. It involves measuring the average cost of a basic nutritious diet that meets the 2019 CFG recommendations

Grocery stores are surveyed to determine the cost of the NFB, which provides an estimate of the cost of food.



- To monitor food affordability, Ontario PHUs use the NFB tool which is a standardized survey tool that measures the average cost of healthy eating based on the current national nutrition recommendations
- So, Grocery stores are surveyed to determine the cost of the NFB, which provides an estimate of the cost of food.
- I want to mention that the NFB tool was updated in 2022, therefore this data is not comparable to previous years.

# MFA DATA COLLECTION METHODS



## Income Data

- Incomes were calculated for May/June 2022, considering the highest possible entitlements based on income tax data from 2020.



## Food Data

- Food prices of **61 food items** from **10 local grocery stores**.
- A hybrid data collection model; **6 in-store** and **4 online stores** across Timiskaming.
- Food prices were collected over **2 consecutive weeks** between May 16 to May 27th, 2022.



## Rent Data

Bedroom Type	Average Monthly Rent (CAD)*
Bachelor	\$ 750
1-Bedroom	\$ 938
2-Bedroom	\$ 1,200
3-Bedroom	\$ 1,400

\*Average rent may or may not include heat/hydro.



To monitor food affordability, the monthly cost of food and rent are collected and compared to income scenarios.

3 types of data were collected

First, Income Data

Incomes were calculated for May/June 2022, considering the highest possible entitlements available to Ontario residents based on income tax data from 2020 and assuming residents had filed their taxes and had applied for all applicable tax benefits and credits.

Second, Food Data

In May 2022, the prices of 61 food items were collected over two consecutive weeks from ten local grocery stores through a hybrid data collection model that included six in-store and four online stores.

The data was pooled to derive an average cost for individual food items, which were then adjusted based on gender and age to calculate the monthly cost of food.

Third, Rent Data

Monthly rent data was collected from local sources for multiple regions across Timiskaming, between September and October 2022.

An average was calculated for bachelor, one, two and three-bedroom rental units.

2022 Income Scenarios	Scenarios 1 through 8 descriptions	Monthly income	Average monthly rent (may or may not include heat/hydro)	Average monthly food	Total selected expenses	Funds remaining for other basic needs	Percentage of income required for rent	Percentage of income required to purchase healthy food	
Scenario 1	 <b>Family of Four, Ontario Works</b> - 2 adults (male and female, ages 31-50); two children (a girl, age 8, a boy, age 14); Ontario Works (OW).	\$2,780	(3 Bdr.)	\$1,400	\$1,152.2 <b>\$266/ week</b>	\$2,552	\$228	50%	41%
Scenario 2	 <b>Family of Four, Full-Time Minimum Wage Earner</b> - 2 adults (male and female ages 31-50), two children (a girl aged 8, a boy aged 14); income is based on one minimum wage earner, 40hr/wk., \$15.00/hr (minimum wage in May 2022).	\$3,993	(3 Bdr.)	\$1,400	\$1,152	\$2,552	\$1,441	35%	29%
Scenario 3	 <b>Single Parent Household with 2 Children, Ontario Works</b> - 1 adult (female age 31-50), two children (a girl aged 8, a boy aged 14); Ontario Works.	\$2,548	(2 Bdr.)	\$1,200	\$845	\$2,045	\$503	47%	33%
Scenario 4	 <b>One Person Household, Ontario Works</b> - 1 adult (male age 31-50); Ontario Works.	\$876	(Bachelor)	\$750	\$416	\$1,166	-\$290	86%	48%
Scenario 5	 <b>One Person Household, Ontario Disability Support Program</b> - 1 adult (male age 31-50); Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).	\$1,322	(1 Bdr.)	\$938	\$416	\$1,354	-\$32	71%	31%
Scenario 6	 <b>One Person Household, Old Age Security/ Guaranteed Income Supplement</b> - 1 adult (female age 70+); income based on Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement (OAS/GIS).	\$1,898	(1 Bdr.)	\$938	\$296	\$1,234	\$664	49%	16%
Scenario 7	 <b>Married Couple, Ontario Disability Support Program</b> - 2 adults (male and female aged 31-50); Ontario Disability Support Program.	\$2,343	(1 Bdr.)	\$938	\$692	\$1,630	\$713	40%	30%

\*\*Values are rounded to the nearest dollar. \*\*\*Food expenses include Household Size Adjustment Factor.

- Reading down the left-hand side of the table you will see 7 income scenarios with different households' sizes and income sources.
- All scenarios represent lower income households.
- Across the top of the table, you see the monthly income data compared to the monthly cost of rent, and monthly cost of food, and the funds remaining after paying for rent and food.

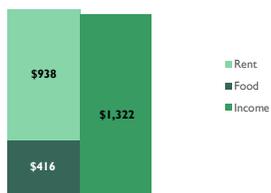
The results show, the cost of eating well in Timiskaming for a family of 4 is \$266 per week.

- If we look at scenario # 1 – A family of 4 ( 2 adults and 2 children) on OW, they will need to spend 50% of their income on rent and 41% on food. Leaving only \$228 for other basic expenses such as extracurriculars, recreation or school supplies.
- If we look at scenario #4 - One person household on OW, they will need to spend 86% of their income on rent and 48% on food leaving them with a debt balance of negative \$290 per month after paying for just rent and food. Leaving no money for other expenses.
- These example demonstrates the inadequacy of social assistance rates. I would also like to add that OWs has not been increased since 2018 and is not indexed to inflation.

## CASE STUDY

Joe is a 48-year-old man who got let go from his job at the local mine in Kirkland Lake due to long-term disability. He now relies on Ontario's Disability Support Program (ODSP) as sole source of income

### \$5 - ODSP



Comparing monthly income versus the cost of food and rent for one adult (male age 31-50); Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).

If Joe wants to purchase food for himself and pay the rent on his 1 – bedroom apartment in Larder Lake...

**He will have negative \$32 per month**



- Let's look at this case study that reflects scenario 5 in the previous table.
- Joe is a 48-year-old man who was terminated from his job at the local mine in Kirkland Lake when he could no longer walk due to long-term disability. He is now on ODSP as his primary source of income. If Joe wants to purchase food for himself and pay the rent on his 1-bedroom apartment in Larder Lake, he will have negative \$32 per month. As a result, Joe is starting to skip meals because he must pay other costs of basic living such as transportation, healthcare, and utilities.
- Again, this is another example that demonstrates the inadequacy of social assistance rates.
- I want to add that while the Ontario Disability Support Program was increased by 5% in 2022 and will be indexed to inflation going forward, however the current rates are not based on the costs of living.

## WHAT DOES THAT MEAN?



Money left at the end of the Month

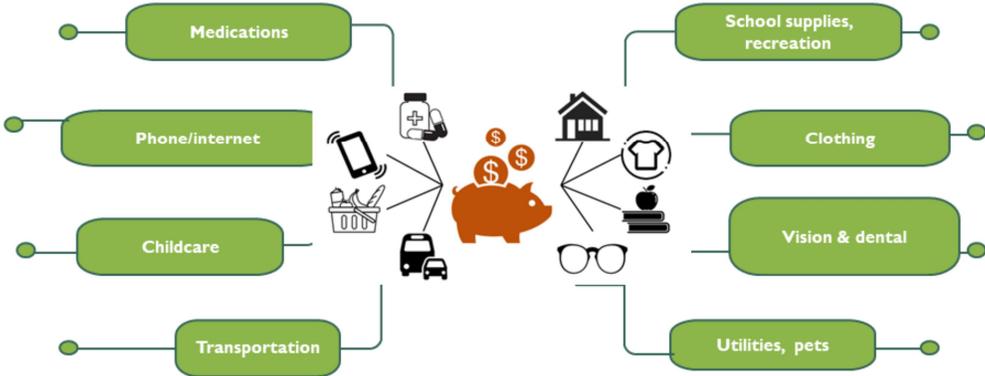


**OW:** Ontario Works  
**MW:** Minimum Wage  
**OAS:** Old Age Security  
**ODSP:** Ontario Disability Support Program



- This graph shows how much money is left after paying for rent and nutritious food every month in each of the 7 scenarios presented earlier.
- I want to highlight 2 scenarios, as you can see Scenario 4 & 5 in red have negative numbers. It is evident how these individuals would have to sacrifice something to be able to pay for their basic needs every month.
- And usually food is the first expense to be sacrificed, meaning they will choose to save money on food so they can use it for other basic needs.
- And This graph proves that individuals on social assistance programs are more likely to be food insecure.

# NO EXTRA MONEY LEFT TO PAY FOR...



As you can see, after paying for rent and food, there will be no extra money left to pay for other basic necessities such as the ones on the screen.

## FOOD CHARITY RESPONSES ARE INEFFECTIVE

Food charity and programs do **NOT** address the root cause

Food charity has been the primary response for governments to address HFI

### Limitations

- Temporary food relief
- Accessibility issues and limited operating hours
- Long line-ups
- Lack of transportation
- Undermines individuals' dignity
- Used only by one-quarter of households experiencing FI



Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH). (2020, December). Position statement and recommendations on responses to food insecurity. Retrieved from [https://www.odph.ca/upload/membership/document/2021-04/ps-eng-corrected-07april21\\_2.pdf](https://www.odph.ca/upload/membership/document/2021-04/ps-eng-corrected-07april21_2.pdf)



- Since the early 1980's when food banks were created, they have been the PRIMARY response to household food insecurity in Canada. So why is this a problem?
- Because despite great effort and dedication, they have multiple limitations:
- First, because of supply limitations, food banks are not able to meet client preferences, religious restrictions, and dietary needs.
- Second, access can be problematic.
- Third, the experience of accessing food charity, despite the best intention of staff, undermines people's dignity and can be stigmatizing.
- These challenges explain why FB are used by only one-quarter of households experiencing FI, and for those who use them, FI does not go away
- And yet despite all these arguments, we continue to see messages that promote food charity as the solution to food insecurity.

## INCOME-BASED SOLUTIONS ARE EFFECTIVE



Increasing social assistance rates & indexing to reflect the true costs of living

Increasing minimum wages and improving employment standards



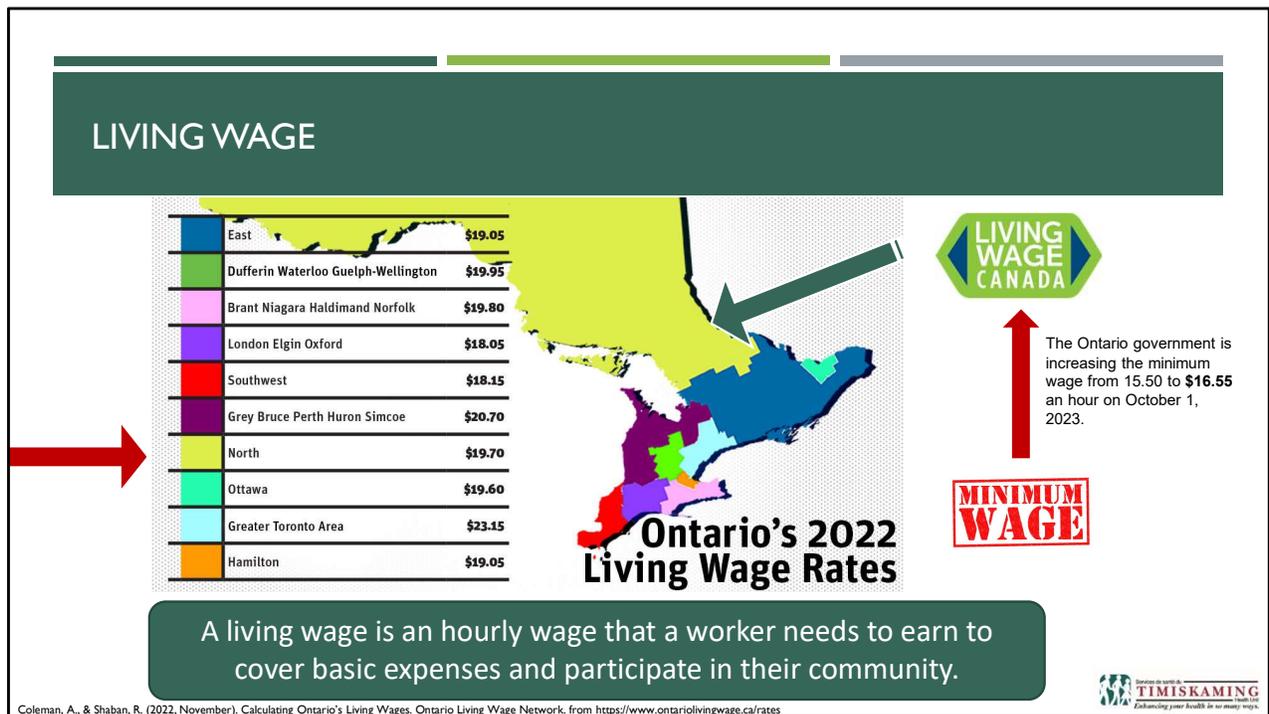
Basic Income Guaranteed

Jobs that pay a living wage



To tackle food insecurity, we need solutions that target its root cause which is poverty.

- Research has repeatedly shown that policies that improve the financial situation of low-income households reduce their risk of food insecurity
- Here are a few examples of effective income-based solutions:
- 1) Social assistance: As I mentioned earlier, 67% of Ontario households receiving social assistance are food insecure, and social assistance rates fail to reflect the true cost of living.
- Therefore, increasing social assistance rates and indexing them to reflect the true cost of living is essential.
- 2) Another effective example is implementing a BIG, this involves establishing an income floor below which no one can fall. Anyone who falls below the income floor automatically receives a monthly cash transfer to boost them back up. Evidence shows when substantial social assistance reforms were introduced in Newfoundland and Labrador between 2006 and 2012, the prevalence of household food insecurity among social assistance recipients dropped from 60% to 34%.
- There are multiple basic income pilots across Canada, which show how successful it is. In Ontario, despite it only being implemented for one year, we have seen that participants experienced a decrease food insecurity, improvements in mental and physical health and even a decrease in smoking and alcohol use.
- Also keep in mind, these income-based solutions are only part of the work that needs to be done.
- We also need to dismantle racism and white supremacy through a complete rethinking of the way our systems work.



- As you can see on this graph, in the north, to cover the costs of living, people would need to earn \$19.70 an hour as per the Ontario's 2022 living wage rates.
- In Ontario the minimum wage is currently \$15.5 an hour and will increase to \$16.55 an hour starting Oct 1<sup>st</sup>, 2023.
- Despite the increase in MW there is still a gap between the current minimum wage and a living wage, which places households dependent on minimum wage income at an elevated risk for FI.
- Therefore, it is important to ensure that jobs pay a living wage, provide benefits, and employment stability.

## RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THU

1. Continue to monitor food affordability and report on prevalence and severity of food insecurity
2. Support ongoing awareness-raising, education, and training opportunities for staff, community partners, and the public about HFI to dismantle racist systems and reduce health inequities.
3. Collaborate with community partners from various sectors to determine local priorities for action to address HFI
4. Support Indigenous cultural safety, anti-oppression, and anti-racism trainings
5. Engage meaningfully with Indigenous communities to understand what food insecurity and food sovereignty mean to them
6. Call on all level of government to implement income-based policies and programs
7. Advocate for municipalities, local businesses, and organizations to become Certified Living Wage Employers
8. Promote and/or support free income tax clinics.

Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH). (2020, December). Position statement and recommendations on responses to food insecurity. Retrieved from [https://www.odph.ca/upload/membership/document/2021-04/ps-eng-corrected-07apr#21\\_2.pdf](https://www.odph.ca/upload/membership/document/2021-04/ps-eng-corrected-07apr#21_2.pdf)

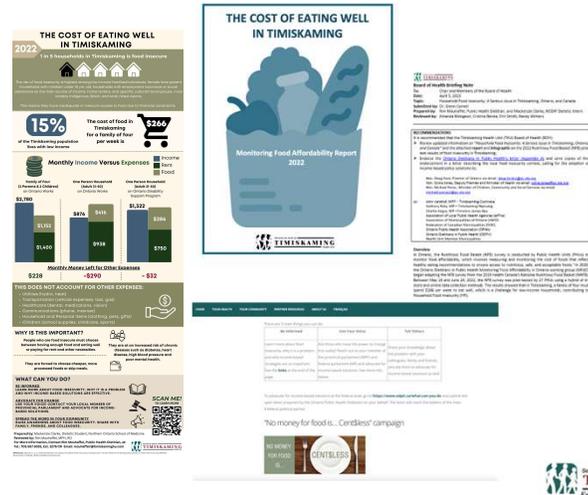
### Recommendations:

To address HFI, the Timiskaming Health Unit is recommended to:

1. Continue to Monitor food affordability and report on the prevalence and severity of HFI
  2. Support ongoing awareness-raising, education, and training opportunities to reduce health inequities.
  3. Collaborate with community partners from various sectors
  4. Support Indigenous cultural safety training
  5. Strengthen relationships and engage in meaningful dialogue with local Indigenous communities to better understand what food security and sovereignty mean to them
  6. Call on for all levels of government to implement income-based policies and programs such as the examples explained earlier
  7. Advocate for municipalities, local businesses, and organizations to become Certified Living Wage Employers and recertify annually.
  8. Promote and/or support free income tax clinics.
- With your endorsement of the letter attached to the BN in your packages, we will look into incorporating these recommendations into our work

## THU'S ACTION ABOUT HFI

- Monitoring Food Affordability
- Advocacy
- Education
- Research



In terms of what THU is currently doing

- We continue to monitor food affordability
- We advocate for income-based solutions
- and provide education and raise awareness about HFI
- We are also conducting qualitative research in collaboration with local partners to inform local public health actions related to HFI

Here are a few examples of our latest media communication including an infographic, a report for MFA and a newly updated website.

## QUESTIONS



Thank you for listening. Now, I will open the floor for questions. 😊

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## References

# THANK YOU

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