

# THE COST OF EATING WELL IN TIMISKAMING, 2024



As of January 1, 2025, the Timiskaming Health Unit and the Porcupine Health Unit have merged to become the Northeastern Public Health (NEPH). This report uses 2024 data from Timiskaming Health Unit only.

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## Executive Summary

### Purpose

The 2024 report on food affordability in Timiskaming highlights the severe impact of household food insecurity (HFI) and challenges of affording a nutritious diet. Currently, 1 in 5 households in the region<sup>1</sup> faces food insecurity, including 17.7% of children<sup>2</sup>. Vulnerable groups, including female-led single-parent households, Indigenous communities, people with disabilities, and those on social assistance have the highest risk.

### Key Messages

- **Income is the Strongest Predictor of Food Insecurity:** Low-income households often have to choose between affording food and covering other needs.
- **Social Assistance Rates Are Inadequate:** Recipients of Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) in Timiskaming spend over 80% of their income on rent and basic needs, leaving little room for food or emergencies. These programs are not enough because their funding has not kept up with the rising cost of living. Inflation and higher housing prices are key factors.
- **Minimum Wages Are Too Low to Cover Basic Needs:** Even with a full-time job, minimum wage workers struggle paying for necessities, leaving them at a greater risk of HFI. While in 2024, Ontario's minimum wage was \$16.55 per hour,<sup>3</sup> the living wage in Northern Ontario is estimated at \$23.98 per hour, showing a major gap.<sup>4</sup>
- **HFI Impacts Health:** It affects physical and mental health, education, and increases healthcare costs. Adults facing food insecurity spend \$400–\$565 more each year on health care and stay 1.5 to 2 days longer in hospitals than those who are food secure.<sup>5</sup>
- **Vulnerable Groups Face More Barriers:** Single parents, part-time workers, and people with disabilities or health issues, and those in remote locations, face more financial challenges, putting them at a higher risk of HFI. For example, residents in Timiskaming have higher food costs and limited access to grocery stores.
- **Policy Changes Are Needed:** Solutions such as Basic Income Guarantee (BIG), higher social assistance rates, living wages, and affordable housing address the root causes of food insecurity. We need advocacy for and awareness of these solutions to drive policy change.

### How Can Communities Take Action?

**Local Employers:** Provide living wages. Ensure employees have access to health benefits, paid sick leave, childcare support, and flexible hours.

**Municipalities:** Continue to implement the Timiskaming District Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan to address poverty, including strategies like basic income guaranteed (BIG), living wages, and affordable transportation.

**Provincial Government:** Legislate targets to reduce food insecurity as part of the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy. Align minimum wage with Ontario's living costs. Increase social assistance and

index it for inflation. Introduce supplementary allowances for specific needs like housing and childcare and consider BIG.

**Federal Government:** Implement income-based policies such as increasing tax credits, lowering tax rates for low-income households, expanding the Canada Child Benefit, and implementing BIG for adults aged 18-64.

**Schools:** Make sure all programs promote dignity, equity, and inclusion by assessing if activities might unintentionally make students experiencing food insecurity feel judged or excluded. Connect families to income-based supports by referring them to free tax clinics and local supports when possible.

**Community Groups:** Build stronger relationships with Indigenous communities to learn about their food security needs. Support Indigenous led solutions through collaboration. Advocate for income-based policies to address food insecurity.

**Media:** Raise awareness of HFI's prevalence, root causes, and health impacts to build public support for solutions.

**Healthcare providers:** Mandate Indigenous cultural safety training. Discuss how HFI affects health. Assess financial strain to better understand patients' needs and offer the appropriate support.

## Introduction

### What is Food Insecurity?

In Canada, we measure food insecurity at the household level. This is called household food insecurity (HFI). In this report, HFI and food insecurity will be used interchangeably. HFI occurs when households struggle financially and do not have enough money to afford enough food.<sup>6</sup> This can range from worrying about running out of food, to having limited food options, or even skipping meals to save money. People with limited financial resources may struggle to buy food after paying for rent, utilities, childcare, and medications. People who experience HFI face more than just hunger; they may also experience physical and mental health problems as a result.



HFI is divided into three levels:

1. **Marginal Food Insecurity:** Worrying about running out of food or having limited food options due to not having enough money for food.
2. **Moderate Food Insecurity:** Not having enough food or having poor-quality food.
3. **Severe Food Insecurity:** Skipping meals or going without food for days.<sup>6</sup>

Food insecurity in Canada is at its highest level in almost 20 years. In 2023, about 22.9% of Canadians faced food insecurity. This means approximately 8.7 million people, including 2.1 million children, lived in households experiencing food-insecurity.<sup>7</sup> From 2019 to 2023, the number of people living with severe food insecurity rose by 50%. Meanwhile, moderately food-insecure households increased by 23%.<sup>7</sup> In 2023, 24.5% of Ontario households experienced food insecurity, an increase of 5% from the previous year.<sup>7</sup> From November 2024 to January 2025, three major cities in Ontario - Kingston, Toronto and Mississauga - declared food insecurity an emergency.<sup>8</sup> This highlights the urgent need to act on addressing food insecurity both locally and nationwide.



### What are the latest numbers of HFI in Timiskaming?

In Timiskaming, 15% of households live in low-income,<sup>9</sup> 1 in 5 households experience food insecurity,<sup>1</sup> affecting approximately 18% of children.<sup>2</sup> These estimates must be interpreted carefully as the small sample size may underestimate the true rates of HFI. This is especially true among Indigenous groups, as the data do not account for those living on reserves who may be disproportionately affected by HFI.<sup>10</sup>

## Who is the Most at Risk?

- Single parents, especially mothers<sup>6, 11, 12</sup>
- People on social assistance (OW or ODSP)<sup>6, 11, 12</sup>
- People working low-wage or part-time jobs<sup>6, 11, 12</sup>
- Indigenous, Black, and Arab/West Asian communities<sup>6, 11, 12</sup>
- Renters and people in remote areas<sup>6, 11, 12</sup>

## Why Does It Matter?

Food insecurity has serious effects on health and well-being. It increases the risk of diseases such as Type 2 Diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and other conditions.<sup>13,14</sup> It also affects mental health, increasing the risk of anxiety and depression.<sup>15,16,17</sup> Children facing food insecurity are more likely to struggle in school and have higher rates of thoughts of suicide.<sup>2,15</sup> People experiencing food insecurity also spend more time in the hospital and have 121% higher healthcare costs than those who are food secure.<sup>18</sup> They stay 1.5 to 2 extra days in the hospital and cost \$400 to \$565 more than those with enough food.<sup>4</sup> People living in remote communities within Timiskaming such as Virginia Town, Larder Laker, Elk Lake, Matachewan, and Bear Island, face a greater risk of food insecurity. In these areas, the risk is:

- 2.7 times higher for youth,
- 4.3 times higher for adults,
- 5.3 times higher for older adults.<sup>9</sup>

## Monitoring Food Affordability

Monitoring food affordability means tracking the cost of nutritious foods to make sure individuals can access nutritious, safe, and acceptable options.<sup>19,20</sup> In Ontario, the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) survey is used to measure and monitor food costs. This survey helps monitor how affordable it is to eat well based on Canada's Food Guide and Canadians' shopping habits.<sup>19</sup> It includes 61 food items such as vegetables, fruits, whole grains, protein foods, canned goods and cooking oils.<sup>19,20</sup> The NFB does not include ready-to-eat foods, snacks, takeout, or personal items like cleaning supplies. Prices are collected from grocery stores and averaged for each food item.

## Data Collection Methods

### Income Data

Incomes were developed using income tax data from 2022 and government benefit calculations for 2024. These scenarios assume that individuals applied for all available benefits and tax credits (see Table 2).

### Food Data

Food prices were collected by two surveyors over two consecutive weeks from May 20<sup>th</sup> to 31<sup>st</sup>, 2024. Food price data was gathered from ten local grocery stores using a mix of in-store visits and online pricing. Stores from Timiskaming's northern, middle, and southern parts were included. 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. These stores were assessed using the Ontario Dietitians in Public Health Monitoring Food Affordability in Ontario Methodology.<sup>21</sup>

Rent Data

Since there was no local rental data available from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation for Timiskaming, rent data was collected from local sources, including:

- Keepers of the Circle Rental List
- Facebook Marketplace
- KL Construction Inc.

Averages were calculated for one, two, and three-bedroom units across multiple regions, including Temiskaming Shores, Kirkland Lake, Englehart, Larder Lake, and Matachewan (see Table 1).



Results

Table 1: Rent Data

Bedroom Type	Average Monthly Rent (CAD) <sup>1</sup>
Bachelor	\$ 975
1-Bedroom	\$ 1,228
2-Bedroom	\$ 1,358
3-Bedroom	\$ 1,643

Food and rent data were compared to thirteen household income scenarios (See Table 2). See Table 2 for details and criteria for each scenario.












Table 2: 2024 Income Scenarios 1 through 13

Income Scenarios	Scenarios Descriptions	Monthly income	Monthly Rent (\$) and (% of total income)		Monthly Food (\$) and (% of total income)		Funds remaining for other basic needs
<b>Scenario 1</b> 	<b>Family of Four, Ontario Works</b> - 2 adults (male & female, ages 31-50); two children (girl age 8, boy age 14); Ontario Works (OW).	\$2,938	\$1,643	56%	\$1,332	45%	<b>\$-37</b>
<b>Scenario 2</b> 	<b>Family of Four, Full-Time Minimum Wage Earner</b> - 2 adults (male & female ages 31-50), two children (girl age 8,	\$4,537	\$1,643	36%	\$1,332	29%	\$1,562

<sup>1</sup> Average rent may or may not include heat/hydro.

<sup>2</sup> The income scenarios tool used to calculate HFI data is inherently heteronormative in its structure, which does not align with the inclusive and equitable practices that the health unit strives to uphold. We are exploring alternative methods to better reflect the diverse realities of the households we serve. Our commitment is to continually improve our processes to ensure that our data accurately represents the experiences of all individuals, regardless of gender identity or family structure.

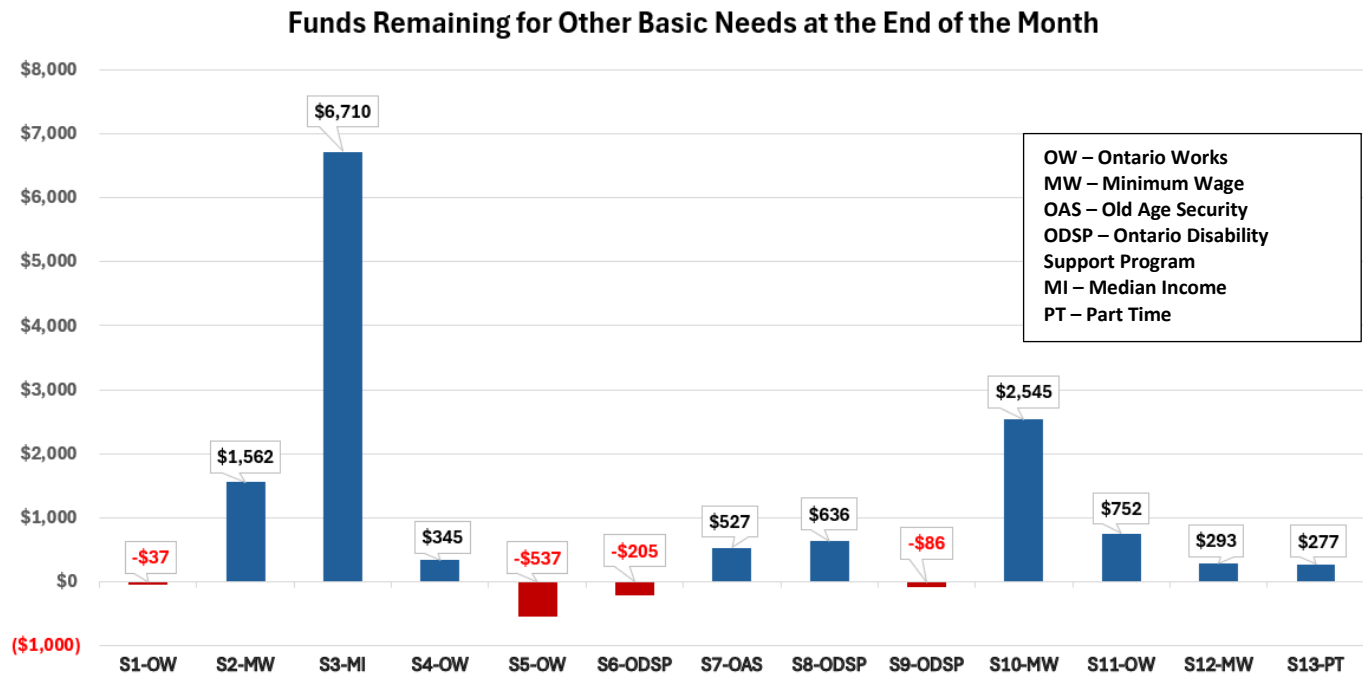
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Income Scenarios	Scenarios Descriptions	Monthly income			Monthly Rent (\$) and (% of total income)		Monthly Food (\$) and (% of total income)		Funds remaining for other basic needs
	boy age 14); income is based on one minimum wage earner, 40hr/wk., \$16.55/hr for 39 weeks & \$17.20/he for 13 weeks (minimum wage in 2024).								
<div>Scenario 3</div> <div></div>	<b>Family of Four, Median Income (after tax)</b> - 2 adults (male and female ages 31-50), two children (girl aged 8, boy aged 14). (Median income after tax)	\$9,685	\$1,643	17%	\$1,332	14%	\$6,710		
<div>Scenario 4</div> <div></div>	<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.	\$2,699	\$1,358	50%	\$996	37%	\$345		
<div>Scenario 5</div> <div></div>	<b>One Person Household, Ontario Works</b> - 1 adult (male age 31-50); Ontario Works.	\$899	\$975	108%	\$461	51%	-\$537		
<div>Scenario 6</div> <div></div>	<b>One Person Household, Ontario Disability Support Program</b> - 1 adult (male age 31-50); Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).	\$1,484	\$1,228	83%	\$461	31%	-\$205		
<div>Scenario 7</div> <div></div>	<b>Older Adults, One Person Household</b> - 1 adult (female age 70+); income based on Old Age Security & Guaranteed Income Supplement (OAS/GIS).	\$2,087	\$1,228	59%	\$332	16%	\$527		
<div>Scenario 8</div> <div></div>	<b>Married Couple, Ontario Disability Support Program</b> - 2 adults (male and female aged 31-50); Ontario Disability Support Program.	\$2,631	\$1,228	47%	\$767	29%	\$636		
<div>Scenario 9</div> <div></div>	<b>Single Pregnant Person, Ontario Disability Support Program</b> - 1 adults (female aged 19-30); Ontario Disability Support Program.	\$1,524	\$1,228	81%	\$382	25%	-\$86		
<div>Scenario 10</div> <div></div>	<b>Single Parent Household with 2 Children, Full-Time Minimum Wage Earner</b> - 1 adults (female aged 31-50), 2 children (girl age 3, boy age 4); minimum wage earner income, 40hr/wk., \$16.55/hr for 39 weeks & \$17.20/he for 13 weeks (minimum wage in 2024).	\$4,685	\$1,358	29%	\$782	17%	\$2,545		
<div>Scenario 11</div> <div></div>	<b>Single Parent Household with 2 Children, Ontario Disability Works</b> - 1 adult (female aged 31-50), 2 children (girl age 3, boy age 4); Ontario Works.	\$2,892	\$1,358	47%	\$782	27%	\$752		
<div>Scenario 12</div> <div></div>	<b>Family of Four Refugee Claimants, Full-Time Minimum Wage Earner</b> - 2 adults (male & female aged 31-50) with 2 children (girl age 8, boy age 14); minimum wage earner income, 40hr/wk., \$16.55/hr for 39 weeks & \$17.20/he for 13 weeks (minimum wage in 2024).	\$3,268	\$1,643	50%	\$1,332	41%	\$293		
<div>Scenario 13</div> <div></div>	<b>One Person Household, Part Time Precarious Employment in the Gig Economy</b> - 1 adult (male aged 31-50), working part-time ~30h/week.	\$1,713	\$975	57%	\$461	27%	\$277		



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\*Values are rounded to the nearest dollar; \*\*Food expenses are based on the 2024 Nutritious Food Basket data results for the Timiskaming area, which includes Household Size Adjustment Factors.




**Figure 1:** The amount of monthly money left for other necessities after buying food and paying rent. This graph highlights four scenarios (S1, S5, S6, S9) where households living on social assistance programs (OW and ODSP) are negative.

**Key Findings Across Scenarios**

- **Financial Struggles for Low-Income Households:** Households relying on Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) often do not have enough money after paying for rent and food. These programs do not provide enough money because the funding has not kept up with the rising cost of living, which affects individuals’ ability to meet basic needs. Scenarios 1, 5, 6, and 9 show how hard this makes it for families to afford basic needs.
- **Higher Risk for Single Parents and Pregnant People:** Single-parent households (e.g., scenarios 4, 10, and 11) and pregnant individuals (scenario 9) face compounded challenges as they need more food, have childcare costs, and do not get enough financial support.
- **A job is not enough:** Full-time minimum wage workers (scenarios 2, 10, and 12) still spend a large part of their income, 45% to 90%, on food and rent, leaving little money for other expenses. Jobs with unstable hours or low pay make it even harder to be financially stable (scenario 13).
- **Stability in Higher-Income Households:** People in households with higher incomes (scenario 3) spend less on food and rent, leaving them more money for other needs. This is very different from lower-income families, showing that higher incomes offer more financial security.

Case Study 1 – Single Parent on Ontario Works

 Maria, a 41-year-old widow, lives in Temiskaming Shores, Ontario, with her two children: Isabella, 8, and Lucas, 14. Her husband passed away two years ago, and since then, Maria has struggled both emotionally and financially. She owned a small retail business that was forced to close during the pandemic, leaving her without a steady income. Now, she relies on OW for financial support, but her income is not enough to cover all the bills.


Maria is battling chronic health issues after her husband’s passing, including depression and anxiety, which require ongoing medication that she must pay out of pocket. Managing financially is getting even harder as Lucas is starting high school and wants to join the soccer team this summer, and Isabella wants to take dance classes with her friends. After paying for food and rent on their 2-bedroom home, she only has about \$345 left for the rest of the month. Maria’s health also requires her to purchase prescription medications, such as antidepressants and anxiety medications, which further strain her already limited budget.

The family cannot afford essential things like school supplies, utilities, phone bills, medications, and car insurance. Maria must prioritize basic needs before considering any fun activities for the kids. Maria tries to hide her worries, but her anxiety gets worse, especially as the school year starts. Like many families in similar situations, food is the first thing they cut back on, making it even harder to get by. Maria does everything she can, but it’s hard to keep up with all the struggles she faces.



**Figure 2:** Compares the monthly income versus the monthly cost of food & rent for one adult and two children on Ontario Works.

Case Study 2 – Pregnant person on Ontario Disability Support Program

 Samantha is 25 years old and pregnant with her first child. She lives alone in Kirkland Lake and gets money from ODSP because she has a disability that prevents her from working. She has been getting ODSP since she was 22. Her pregnancy is high-risk, and her doctor has told her to avoid stress and not overdo it physically.

Samantha’s ODSP payment is not enough to cover everything she needs, especially after paying rent. During pregnancy, food need increases to support the mother and the growth of the baby and the cost of food exceeds what the extra pregnancy nutritional allowance provides. There are also extra costs for things like maternity clothes, prenatal vitamins, and baby items like a crib and stroller.



**Figure 3:** Comparing monthly income versus the cost of food & rent for a single pregnant person on Ontario Disability Support Program.

After paying for rent and utilities, Samantha has approximately \$256 left for the rest of the month which she must stretch across groceries, personal care, and any unexpected costs. If Samantha wants to purchase food for herself and pay the rent on her 1-bedroom apartment in Kirkland Lake, she will end up short by \$86 that month. She often has to make difficult decisions about which bills to pay and which ones to delay, and which basic needs to prioritize. As a result, Samantha is starting to skip meals because she must pay her monthly rent, utility bills and other costs of basic living while purchasing necessities in preparation for the baby.

## Discussion

Families experiencing food insecurity must often make hard choices such as buying cheaper, less nutritious foods or skipping meals to make ends meet, which can result in poor physical and mental health.<sup>5-7,12-17</sup> The rising costs of food, rent, and other expenses make it even harder for those living in northern and remote areas to get by. Towns like Kirkland Lake, Englehart, Larder Lake, and Matachewan don't have access to a public transit system, making it hard for people to get to grocery stores. In some areas, like Temagami, the only grocery store is open only for four months a year, during the summer, leaving residents with fewer options.

## Why Food Banks and Food Charity are NOT the Solution

In Canada, the government has and continues to address household food insecurity primarily through funding food charities. However, only 20.6% of people with severe food-insecurity use these services, as most people prefer to ask their family for money instead.<sup>22,23</sup> The number is even lower for people experiencing less severe food insecurity.<sup>22</sup> Food banks and community food programs only offer short-term help and do not address the underlying causes of HFI.<sup>22,23</sup> They can also create dependency and do not push for long-term changes, such as raising the minimum wage or improving social safety nets.<sup>23</sup> Additionally, food banks have several limitations including struggling to meet specific food preferences, dietary or religious needs, access challenges due to lack of transportation, long wait times, limited hours, and negative impact on people's dignity.<sup>12,23</sup> Food charities are a temporary fix for a much bigger issue.

## Common Myths about Food Insecurity

There are many misconceptions about food insecurity. Understanding the truth behind these commonly held beliefs is important to create effective solutions.

- i. **Myth: Older adults are the most vulnerable to HFI**
  - a. **Fact:** While some older adults experience food-insecurity, they generally face less severe food-insecurity than younger groups, such as single-parent households or families with children.<sup>24,25</sup> Programs like the Old Age Security (OAS) and the Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) provide a financial safety net.<sup>24,25</sup> Keeping in mind that the increased cost of living affects everyone, including those with fixed incomes, nutrition screening is still important to identify and address the specific needs of older adults.
- ii. **Myth: Increased access to food through food charity programs will reduce HFI.**
  - a. **Fact:** Even though there has been an increase in food bank use in Canada, food insecurity continues **because** charitable food programs like food banks provide temporary relief only.<sup>26,27</sup> They do not address the root issues of food insecurity which are poverty and inadequate income.<sup>27,12,25</sup> Many families experiencing food insecurity

do not use these programs because of perceived stigma, difficulties accessing them, or because food banks do not meet their cultural or health needs.<sup>22</sup>

- iii. **Myth: School food programs reduce HFI among children.**
  - a. **Fact:** School food programs, like the Student Nutrition Program, provide access to nutritious food for children during school hours but do not reduce food insecurity at home. Many children who live in households that experience food insecurity still go without enough food outside of school.<sup>28</sup> These programs may even increase children's worry about their families not having enough food, adding to the emotional impact of HFI.<sup>29</sup>
- iv. **Myth: Only unemployed people experience HFI.**
  - a. **Fact:** Many working adults experience food insecurity as low wages and the high cost of living make it hard to have enough money to afford food.<sup>6,12,30</sup> In 2022, 60% of food-insecure households depended on wages or salaries as their main source of income.<sup>31</sup> Food insecurity is more closely linked to income instability, job insecurity, and high living costs than to unemployment alone.<sup>31</sup>
- v. **Myth: Households experiencing food insecurity spend their money on unnecessary items or lack skills and motivation.**
  - a. **Fact:** Food-insecure households prioritize necessities like housing and utilities, leaving less money for food.<sup>32</sup> They work hard to make ends meet and have similar food skills to food-secure households. However, low income and financial stress make it hard for them to escape poverty. In Ontario, many food-insecure households are forced to make tough choices between food, shelter, and other basic needs. This issue cannot be solved by changing spending habits or improving food skills alone.
- vi. **Myth: Budgeting and food skills programs are helpful for everyone who experiences food insecurity.**
  - a. **Fact:** Most low-income families have similar food skills to those who are food secure and are twice as likely to shop with a food budget.<sup>33</sup> However, they often face additional challenges such as lack of transportation, unstable housing, lack of essential appliances, and insufficient food storage space.<sup>12</sup> Strategies like buying in bulk or shopping around for deals only work for those with more money to spend, not those facing moderate or severe food insecurity.<sup>33</sup> It's important to understand the specific needs of people experiencing food insecurity and provide support that works for their situation.<sup>33</sup>

## Income Based Solutions

### Raising Wages and Social Assistance Rates

Paying a living wage and increasing social assistance rates are crucial to help address HFI, especially in Ontario, where the cost of living has gone up significantly in comparison to wages.<sup>6</sup> A living wage is the amount of money a person needs to cover basic needs like food, shelter, and transportation, without relying on public assistance or food charities. In 2024, Ontario's living wage ranged from \$19.50 in London to \$26.00 in the Greater Toronto area, and \$20.30 per hour in Northern Ontario.<sup>4</sup> However, Ontario's minimum wage of \$17.20 per hour<sup>3</sup> is not enough to meet these needs, making it hard for workers to afford nutritious food as seen in scenario 2 (see Table 2). In Canada, 60% of those

experiencing food insecurity rely on income from employment, highlighting that low wages and unstable jobs are major contributors to HFI.<sup>31</sup> A staggering 67% of households in Ontario receiving social assistance experienced food insecurity, showing that the current support systems are not enough.<sup>12</sup> Raising social assistance rates and paying a living wage would help people afford nutritious food and reduce the need for emergency food programs. Without addressing these income gaps, food insecurity will continue to persist.

### Implementing a Basic Income Guarantee

A [Basic Income Guarantee \(BIG\)](#) program would address poverty and food insecurity.<sup>12,25,34</sup> It would provide financial security by ensuring that people have enough money to meet their basic needs, like food, housing, and healthcare, without the barriers and stigma associated with current social assistance programs. When people receive guaranteed income, they can afford nutritious food, as they no longer worry as much about unpredictable or insufficient wages.<sup>34</sup> Pilot projects in Ontario and Newfoundland and Labrador show the effectiveness of income interventions. For instance, Newfoundland and Labrador's reforms, including indexing social assistance to inflation and increasing the special diet allowance, reduced HFI from 59.9% to 33.5%.<sup>12,25,34</sup> Programs like Old Age Security (OAS) and Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS) have already proven that providing a steady income floor can reduce the risk of food insecurity by 50% among low-income unattached older adults when they turn 65.<sup>25</sup> By ensuring that all Canadians have the financial resources to thrive, a basic income guarantee would be a key step in creating a more equitable society.

### Conclusion

Food is a basic human right, and no Canadian should have to choose between paying rent and putting food on the table. HFI is a complex issue that cannot be resolved through short-term charity-based solutions alone. Food banks may offer temporary relief, but they do not tackle the root causes of food insecurity—poverty and low wages. To effectively combat food insecurity in Canada, the federal and provincial governments must implement long-term, income-based solutions. This includes paying a living wage, increasing social assistance rates, and introducing a BIG program. Such policies would provide households with enough money for their basic needs and reduce their dependence on food charities. Making housing, childcare, and other services more affordable, along with providing stable jobs that pay enough to cover living costs, would also help reduce food insecurity. By addressing the root causes of food insecurity through systemic reforms, we can create a fairer and better society for everyone living in Timiskaming. However, this requires collective action—**we all have a role to play** in this effort. Local employers can offer living wages and benefits and municipalities can adopt poverty-reduction plans to reduce food insecurity. Schools can ensure dignity and equity in their programs, while community groups strengthen relationships with Indigenous communities to understand and address their food security needs. The media can raise awareness of food insecurity's prevalence and its effects on health, and healthcare providers can support cultural safety training and assess financial strain to better understand and support their patients. Only through a unified approach can we create sustainable, systemic change and ensure that every Canadian has access to the food they need to thrive.

### How Can Communities Take Action?

**Local Employers:** Support living wages and offer employees access to health benefits, paid sick leave, childcare support, and flexible hours.

**Municipalities:** Continue to implement the Timiskaming District Community Safety and Wellbeing Plan to address poverty through strategies like BIG, living wages, and affordable transportation.

**Provincial Government:** Legislate targets to reduce food insecurity as part of the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy, align minimum wage with Ontario's living costs, raise social assistance supports and index them to inflation, and introduce supplementary allowances for specific needs like housing and childcare and explore BIG.

**Federal Government:** Implement income-based policies (e.g., increasing tax credits, lowering tax rates for low-income households, expanding the Canada Child Benefit, and implementing BIG for 18-64 years old adults).

**Schools:** Ensure dignity, equity, and inclusion in programs by assessing whether activities may unintentionally make students experiencing food insecurity feel judged or excluded and connect families to income-based supports by referring them to free tax clinics and local community supports whenever possible.

**Community Groups:** Build stronger relationships with Indigenous communities to understand their food security needs, collaborate on sustainable solutions, and advocate for income-based policies to address food insecurity.

**Media:** Raise awareness of how common HFI is, its root causes, and its effects on health to build public support for solutions.

**Healthcare providers:** support Indigenous cultural safety training, openly discuss how HFI affects health, and assess financial strain to better understand patients' needs and offer the right support.

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