



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health
FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health and CEO
DATE: 2014 September 18

2014 NUTRITIOUS FOOD BASKET SURVEY RESULTS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR GOVERNMENT PUBLIC POLICY

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board of Health:

- 1. Send a letter to the Premier of Ontario, the Right Honourable Kathleen Wynne, commending her for taking the initiative to update the provincial poverty plan and requesting that the province increase social assistance rates to reflect the rising cost of nutritious food and safe housing.*
- 2. Forward Report No. 053-14 re 2014 Nutritious Food Basket Survey Results and Implications for Government Public Policy to the City of London, Middlesex County, and appropriate community agencies.*

Key Points

- The Nutritious Food Basket survey is conducted annually by all public health units in Ontario to measure the cost of basic, healthy eating.
- The annual survey results repeatedly demonstrate that social assistance rates are not adequate for our most vulnerable Middlesex-London residents to afford basic needs.
- Social determinants of health such as food access, income, housing and employment explain part of the wide health inequities existing within and across societies; these determinants are strongly influenced by public policy decisions.

Background

Annually during the month of May, all Ontario public health units conduct the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) survey in accordance with the requirements under the Ontario Public Health Standards. The survey provides a measure of the cost of basic healthy eating taking into consideration current nutrition recommendations and average food purchasing patterns of Canadians. The NFB results can be used to: estimate the basic cost for an individual or household to eat healthy; compare the basic cost of healthy eating with income and other basic living expenses; plan programs that promote access to nutritious, safe and culturally acceptable foods; and inform policy decisions.

A Public Health Dietitian on the Chronic Disease Prevention and Tobacco Control Team is responsible for the data collection and analysis of the Nutritious Food Basket survey to provide a measure of the cost of food available to residents in Middlesex-London. In 2014, 12 grocery stores in Middlesex-London were surveyed, including areas of variable economic status.

Survey Results

In May 2014, the estimated local monthly cost to feed a family of four was \$804.64. This is an \$18.14 or 2.3% increase from the estimated cost in May 2013.

Table 1 highlights some real life situations for Middlesex-London residents utilizing 2014 income rates, rental costs and food costs. The NFB annual survey repeatedly demonstrates that people with low

incomes cannot afford to eat healthy, after meeting other essential needs for basic living. [Appendix A](#), “*The Cost of Healthy Eating 2014*”, provides an overview of the affordability of food costs in relation to basic needs and profiles opportunities for community action.

Table 1 – Monthly Income and Cost of Living Scenarios for 2014

	Single Man on Ontario Works (OW)	Single Man on ODSP	Single Woman over 70 (Old Age Security / Guaranteed Income Security)	Family of 4 Ontario Works	Family of 4 Minimum Wage Earner	Family of 4 Median Income (after tax)
Monthly Income (Including Benefits and Credits)	\$709	\$1179	\$1513	\$2158	\$2748	\$6954
Estimated Monthly Rent	\$585	\$757	\$757	\$1146	\$1146	\$1146
Food (Nutritious Food Basket)	\$225.51	\$225.51	\$163.72	\$804.64	\$804.64	\$804.64
WHAT'S LEFT?*	-\$101.51	\$196.49	\$592.28	\$207.36	\$797.36	\$5003.36

* People still need funds for utilities, phone, transportation, cleaning supplies, personal care items, clothing, gifts, entertainment, internet, school supplies, medical and dental costs and other costs.

Notes: Rental estimates are from *Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation Rental Market Statistics, Spring 2014*. Utility costs may or may not be included in the rental estimates. Utility costs vary considerably based on age and condition of housing, type of heating, range of appliances, air conditioning or cooling and household size.

Opportunities for Action

A poverty awareness project, being led by local and provincial partners, will build awareness and support for healthy public policy among local decision makers to help reduce poverty and food insecurity. More information about this project is detailed in [Report No. 054-14](#).

Social determinants of health such as food access, income, housing and employment help explain the wide health inequities existing within and across societies; these determinants are strongly influenced by government public policy decisions. Poor nutrition can lead to increased risk for chronic and infectious diseases, increased risk of low birth weight pregnancies, and negative impacts on the growth and development of children. In 2012, 69.5% of Ontario households receiving social assistance were food insecure. Social assistance rates are not adequate for our most vulnerable Middlesex-London residents to afford basic needs. It is recommended that the Board of Health advocate to the Ontario Government to increase social assistance rates to a level that reflects the rising cost of nutritious food and safe housing.

This report was prepared by Ms. Kim Leacy, Registered Dietitian, Ms. Claire Paller, Program Evaluator, and reviewed by Ms. Linda Stobo, Manager, Chronic Disease Prevention & Tobacco Control Team.



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This report addresses the following requirements of the Ontario Public Health Standards (2014): Foundational Standard 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10; Chronic Disease Prevention 2, 7, 11, 12