



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health and CEO

DATE: 2015 September 17

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## **2015 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 Prime Minister of Canada, the Premier of Ontario and the Ontario Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy requesting they prioritize consideration and investigation into a joint federal-provincial basic income guarantee.*
- 2. Send a letter to the Premier of Ontario requesting the province increase social assistance rates to reflect the rising cost of nutritious food & safe housing.*
- 3. Send a letter to all London and Middlesex County federal election candidates requesting they take Food Secure Canada's Eat Think Vote candidate pledge.*
- 4. Forward Report No. 50-15 re 2015 Nutritious Food Basket Survey Results and Implications for Government Public Policy to the City of London, Middlesex County & 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 incomes 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 health inequities that exist 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; and inform policy decisions. In 2015, 12 grocery stores in Middlesex-London were surveyed, including areas of variable economic status.

## Survey Results

In May 2015, the estimated local monthly cost to feed a family of four was \$860.67. This is a \$56.03 or 7.0% increase from the estimated cost in May 2014.

Table 1 highlights some real life situations for Middlesex-London residents utilizing 2015 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 2015*”, 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 2015**

	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)
Income (Including Benefits & Credits)	\$740	\$1193	\$1544	\$2196	\$2882	\$6952
Estimated Rent**	\$616	\$788	\$788	\$1175	\$1175	\$1175
Food (Nutritious Food Basket)	\$290.09	\$290.09	\$210.02	\$860.67	\$860.67	\$860.67
<b>WHAT'S LEFT?*</b>	<b>-\$166.09</b>	<b>\$114.91</b>	<b>\$545.98</b>	<b>\$160.33</b>	<b>\$846.33</b>	<b>\$4916.33</b>

\* 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.

\*\*Rental estimates are from *Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation Rental Market Statistics, Spring 2015*. Utility costs may or may not be included in the rental estimates.

## Opportunities for Action

Social determinants of health such as food access, income, housing and employment help explain the health disparities 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.

At the 2015 Annual General Meeting, the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) passed a [resolution](#) prioritizing government consideration and investigation into a basic income guarantee (BIG). The Canadian Medical Association’s General Council also passed a [resolution](#) supporting BIG last month. A BIG provides a basic minimum income for everyone and ensures an income sufficient to meet basic needs. It is recommended that the Board of Health send a letter of support to the provincial and federal government about prioritizing a BIG. A BIG would replace social assistance when implemented; however, in the meantime, it is recommended that the Board of Health urge the Ontario Government to increase social assistance rates to a level that reflects the rising cost of nutritious food and safe housing.

[Eat Think Vote](#) is a campaign led by [Food Secure Canada](#). The long-term goal is to ensure all Canadians have access to healthy, affordable food. Food Secure Canada is advocating for a national food policy that addresses healthy school food, hunger, support for new farmers and affordable food in the North. The campaign includes a [candidate pledge](#) and a [petition](#). The campaign's recommendations align with public health priorities, available evidence and public health messaging ([Appendix B](#)). It is recommended that the Board of Health send a letter to all London and Middlesex County federal election candidates requesting they take Food Secure Canada's *Eat Think Vote* candidate pledge.

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



Christopher Mackie, MD, MHSc, CCFP, FRCPC  
Medical Officer of Health and CEO

<p><b>This report addresses</b> 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</p>
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