

2022

The Real Cost of Eating Well in Windsor-Essex

What is the cost of
nutritious food?

Why does it matter?

Why can't people
afford nutritious food?

Who can't afford
nutritious food?

What can individuals
and communities do?



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In Windsor-Essex County, the weekly cost of groceries for a family of four is now **\$241.66**. This cost remains unaffordable for many in Windsor-Essex.

When income is low and living expenses are high, people don’t have enough money to cover the costs of basic living, including nutritious food.

What is the cost of nutritious food?

Every year, the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit surveys the price of food items from grocery stores across the city and county. Using this data and a survey tool called the Nutritious Food Basket, we calculate the cost of one week’s worth of groceries.

In 2022, the weekly cost of groceries for a family of four in Windsor-Essex is **\$241.66 (\$1,046.39 per month)**. To arrive at this cost, 61 food items in eleven area grocery stores were priced by calculating the average of the lowest retail price form in-store and online shopping. The items included meet recommendations from Canada’s Food Guide, with the assumption that people have the time, skill, and equipment needed to cook low-cost staples.

Why does the cost of food matter?

When money is tight, people are often placed in the difficult position of cutting into their food budget to pay for other living expenses. They skip meals, eat fewer vegetables and fruit, drink less milk, and fill up on energy dense foods that cost less. The result of this diet over time is an increased risk of chronic illness, and poor growth and development in children.









Why can’t people afford enough nutritious food?

For people living on minimum wage, Ontario Works, or the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP), it is difficult to make ends meet. After paying rent, they still have to pay for other necessities such as:

- Heat and hydro
- Transportation, car maintenance, and gas
- Child care
- Phone
- Clothing
- Eye and dental care
- Home maintenance
- Costs for children in school
- Household cleaners and personal hygiene products

This means that little money is left for buying nutritious food. Too often, the amount is so little that people go hungry.

Consider these real-life situations for people living in Windsor-Essex County:

	Households with Children				Households without children			
	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4	Scenario 5	Scenario 6	Scenario 7	Scenario 8
	 Ontario Works	 Full-time Minimum Wage Earner	 Median Income	 Ontario Works	 Ontario Works	 ODSP	 Old Age Security/ GIS	 ODSP
Income								
Total Monthly Income (Including Benefits & Credits)	\$2,760.00	\$3,973.00	\$9,323.00	\$2,528.00	\$863.00	\$1,309.00	\$1,885.00	\$2,322.00
Expenses								
Estimated Monthly Rent*	\$ 1,367.00	\$ 1,367.00	\$ 1,367.00	\$ 1,154.00	\$ 775.00	\$ 976.00	\$ 976.00	\$ 976.00
Monthly Food Cost (NFB, 2022)	\$ 1,046.39	\$ 1,046.39	\$ 1,046.39	\$ 766.54	\$ 379.61	\$ 379.61	\$ 267.64	\$ 628.33
Monthly Income Remaining for Other Expenses**								
	\$346.61	\$1,559.61	\$6,909.61	\$607.46	\$ -291.61	\$ -46.61	\$641.36	\$717.67
<div><div></div><div>A single person living on Ontario Works could spend close to his entire income on the rent for a bachelor apartment. Little money left for food or other expenses.</div><div></div><div>The situation is not much better for a family of four on Ontario Works. After paying for rent and food, they have only \$346.61 left to cover all other expenses.</div></div>								
% Income Required for Rent***	50%	34%	15%	46%	90%	75%	52%	42%
% Income Required for Nutritious Food	38%	26%	11%	30%	44%	29%	14%	27%
% Income Required for Rent & Food	88%	60%	26%	76%	134%	104%	66%	69%

* Private Apartment Average Rents. www.cmhc-schl.gc.ca/en/data-and-research/publications-and-reports/rental-market-reports-canada-and-provincial-highlights

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

*** Housing that is more than 30% of the income is considered unaffordable housing.



Family of Four = 2 adults (male and female ages 31-50) and 2 children (girl age 8 and boy age 14).



Single Mother (age 31-50) and 2 children (girl age 8 and boy age 14).



Single Male (age 31-50).



Senior Female (age 70+).



For more details about the Nutritious Food Basket, contact the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit.

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Adapted with permission from the Huron County Health Unit.

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What can we do?

All people in Windsor-Essex should have access to a nutritious, adequate diet, and each of us has a role to play to ensure it. Start by educating yourself about what causes hunger and poverty, then get involved.

Advocate for:

- Improved social assistance programs and increasing minimum wage to living wage
- An increase in the number of employers who pay at least a living wage
- More affordable housing availability
- Municipal and provincial governments to increase funding for school nutrition programs
- Accessible and affordable child care

To become involved:

- Share your gardening skills or donate growing space to local groups, like the Windsor-Essex Community Garden Collective. To find out more, visit www.wegarden.ca.
- Donate time, food, or money to support our local emergency food programs such as food banks and meal programs. Visit www.wechu.org/donate for a list of nutritious food donations.
- Think about where your food comes from and buy local products when you can. Visit www.weheartlocal.ca to learn more about foods that grow locally and where to buy them.

To learn more about poverty-reduction strategies that could improve access to healthy food for all Canadians, visit www.dignityforall.ca. You can also sign on to Dignity for All's national campaigns to end poverty.

Food cost is an issue that affects our community. When people are short of money, they are unable to consistently afford nutritious foods, which can impact their health in the short and long-term.

That's why working to eliminate poverty is everyone's responsibility.

If you, or someone you know, is having difficulties accessing food, go to www.211ontario.ca or call 211 to find a local emergency food program that can help.

Ontario Dietitians in Public Health. (2020). Position Statement and Recommendations on Responses to Food Insecurity. Available from: odph.ca.