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Grey Bruce Public Health releases report on food affordability

A new Grey Bruce Public Health report, [posted this week to GBPH's website](#), highlights the struggles many Grey-Bruce families and individuals are facing to afford basic living expenses, such as sufficient food and rent, as incomes and social assistance rates fail to keep pace with escalating costs.

The report, *"The Cost of Eating Well & The Urgent Issue of Food Insecurity,"* finds the cost of groceries for a family of four in Grey-Bruce was \$301 a week or \$1,305 a month in 2023.

If that family receives Ontario Works, they would have to spend nearly half (47%) of their monthly income on food to meet Canada's Food Guide recommendations. After covering only rent and groceries, they would be left with only \$238 a month to cover all other expenses, including utilities, transportation, and medication.

A single adult had to spend about \$468 a month on food in 2023 to meet Canada's Food Guide recommendations, according to the report, which is more than half of the Ontario Works and shelter allowance for a single person.

"These scenarios clearly show that our social safety net is failing to meet basic, essential needs of housing and food," says GBPH Public Health Manager Jason Wepler.

The report also highlights the serious and lasting impacts of food insecurity and includes steps all levels of government and community partners can take to address the issue.

"Food insecurity is a problem of inadequate income, not solved by food," Wepler says.

"Improving the financial circumstances of food insecure households requires action from all levels of government and community leadership. More than half of those experiencing food insecurity are employed. We need to see innovative solutions and supports that ensure everyone can meet their basic needs."

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For the 2023 *Cost of Eating Well* report, Public Health used the Ontario Nutritious Food Basket survey to determine food affordability.

Public Health dietitians collected data on the lowest costs of 61 food items in 12 grocery stores from across Grey-Bruce. The items on the survey are based on Canada's Food Guide (vegetables and fruit, whole grain foods, and protein foods) and reflect Canadian eating and purchasing patterns. The survey assumes that people have the knowledge, equipment, and skills to prepare food mostly from scratch. Prepared convenience foods or non-food items, such as toiletries, were not included in the survey.

The results of the survey are shared in the report through a variety of income scenarios to demonstrate the difficult choices households with different income sources may face. Single individuals on Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) are both unable to meet core needs of housing and food. More than 100% of a single individual's income on Ontario Works is required for housing alone (112%), with nothing left to cover the \$469 needed for food each month.

Almost one in five Grey-Bruce households struggles to purchase the food they need and are food insecure.

A report, [Household Food Insecurity in Canada, 2022, by PROOF](#) shows the food insecurity issue may be worsening. In 2022, 18.7% of Ontario households lived with food insecurity, which refers to when a household has inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints. This is higher than 16.1% of Ontario households that experienced food insecurity in 2021.

Furthermore, the Canada Food Price Report is projecting overall food prices to increase by 2.5% to 4.5% in 2024. Without a corresponding increase in household income, this cost will force families to make impossible choices between shelter, food, medications, transportation, and other needs.

Food insecurity is an important social determinant of health that leads to heightened risks for infectious diseases, injuries, poorer mental health, and chronic diseases. These health impacts result in early mortality and inflated healthcare costs. Food security requires collaborative responses from public and private sectors. These responses can include implementing economic, social, and equity solutions and supports.

For More Information:

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