

FOOD AFFORDABILITY

in Renfrew County and District (RCDHU), 2024



Each year, Renfrew County and District Health Unit (RCDHU) monitors local food affordability and food insecurity rates in Renfrew County and District (RCD).

Food insecurity occurs when a person is not able to consistently access safe and nutritious food because of limited finances. When incomes are low, people may have to choose between paying for food or paying for other necessities, like housing and utilities. Food insecurity can range from worrying about having enough to eat (marginal food insecurity) to not eating for entire days (severe food insecurity).

This is a serious health problem.

In RCD, the percentage of family income required to buy food has been increasing, especially for households living on fixed incomes. Approximately 1 in 4 households¹ (28.9%) are food insecure as compared to 1 in 6 from the 2023 report and 1 in 7 from 2022.



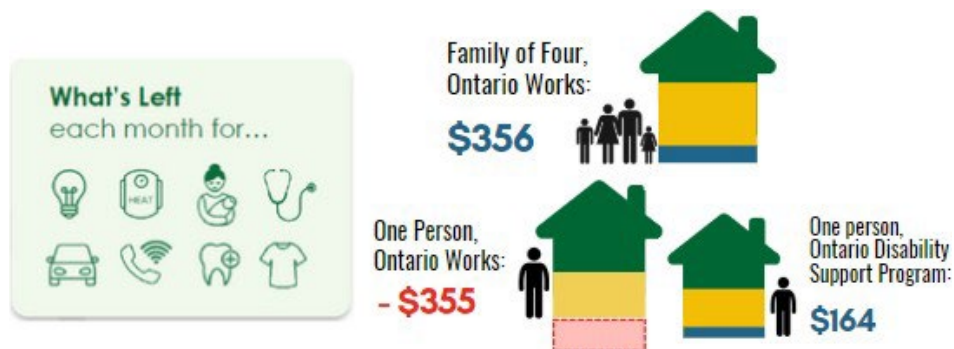
1 IN 4 HOUSEHOLDS
are experiencing food
insecurity in RCD

1 IN 3 CHILDREN
live in a food-insecure household in Ontario



Food Affordability Scenarios in Renfrew County and District

- RCDHU uses the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) tool to monitor food affordability across RCD. The NFB is a list of food items that make up a hypothetical grocery basket based on Canada's Food Guide (CFG). It is intended to model what a family might buy while following nutritional guidelines. For more information on how the monthly cost of food is calculated with the help of the Nutritious Food Basket, see the [Nutritious Food Basket and Income Scenario](https://www.canada.ca/en/health-). <https://www.canada.ca/en/health->
- Each year, RCDHU staff visit nine local grocery stores and collect prices for the same 61 food items. Food costs are then combined with housing rental rates and compared to various income situations to determine the local affordability of food.
- The following local income scenarios show the difficulties households with low-income experience when paying for housing and food.
- After paying for rent and food, the **remaining monthly income** is the amount available for all other necessities like utilities (e.g., heating and electricity), childcare, medical and dental bills, phone and internet services, transportation costs, clothing, etc.



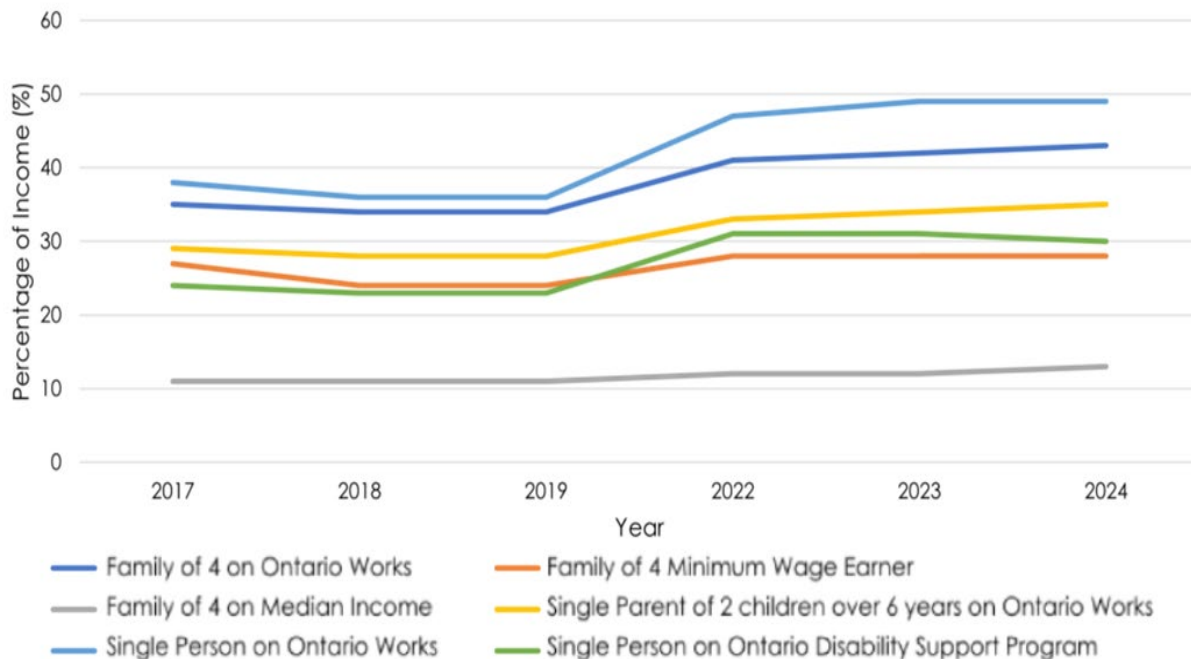
Results indicate that families with lower incomes struggle to afford food. This is due in part to high food prices and to incomes that are too low to cover basic necessities.

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Percentage of Family Income Required to Buy Nutritious Food in RCD,
by Family Type



Food Insecurity is a Public Health Concern

The widespread nature of food insecurity is a serious public health concern. Food insecurity is an important marker of material deprivation and a social determinant of health. Food insecurity **has long-lasting negative physical and mental health impacts** for adults and children.²

Negative Health Impacts

Individuals who are food insecure are more likely to suffer from conditions such as:

- High blood pressure
- Diabetes
- Depression

Food insecurity makes it harder for people to manage chronic illnesses, leading to more healthcare needs and costs, including longer and more frequent hospital stays. For instance, those who are marginally food insecure and severely food insecure have 26% and 69% higher odds of being admitted to acute care compared to those who are food secure.³



Who is Most at Risk?

Food Insecurity Can Affect Anyone

Individuals receiving social assistance are at higher risk of experiencing food insecurity. In Canada, 69.9% of households receiving social assistance report experiencing food insecurity.⁴

Being employed, receiving wages, or having a salary does not fully protect people from food insecurity. Almost two thirds (60.2%) of food-insecure households in Canada indicated wages, salaries, or self-employment as their main source of income.⁴

Besides income, individuals may experience a disproportionately high rate of food insecurity if they:⁴

- Live in rental housing
- Are a single female parent
- Are a member of a racialized group
- Identify as Indigenous, non-white households

Children and Food Insecurity

According to the most recent information, one in three (30.7%) children under the age of 18 in Ontario live in a food insecure household. Female lone-parent families are very likely to be food-insecure, with 46% of people in these families affected by food insecurity.⁵



Food insecurity is a significant concern, as it can have long lasting negative impacts on a child's health. Children experiencing food insecurity are more likely to develop:²

- Asthma
- Mental health conditions (e.g., anxiety, depression)
- Low self-esteem
- Lack of self-confidence needed to make positive lifestyle choices (e.g., eating well, being active)



Food Insecurity is a Result of Poverty

Rather than focusing on the symptoms of food insecurity (e.g., lack of food) solutions need to be grounded in its root cause - poverty.

Policies shown to reduce food insecurity:

- Public pensions (Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Security, and Guaranteed Income Supplement) with benefits that keep older adults out of poverty and indexed to inflation.
- Increasing the Canada Child Benefit for low-income families with children under age 18.
- Increasing social assistance rates.
- Reducing income taxes for low-income households.

Want more information?

- [Food Insecurity Policy Research \(PROOF\)](#)
- [Ontario Living Wage Network](#)
- [Basic Income Canada Network](#)

References

1. Household Food Insecurity Snapshot PHU (2019 to 2023) [Internet]. Public Health Ontario. 2024 [cited 2024 Oct 30]. Available from: <https://www.publichealthontario.ca/en/Data-and-Analysis/Health-Equity/Household-Food-Insecurity>
2. What are the implications of food insecurity for health and health care? [Internet]. PROOF. [cited 2024 Sep 30]. Available from: <https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/what-are-the-implications-of-food-insecurity-for-health-and-health-care/>
3. Men F, Gundersen C, Urquia ML, Tarasuk V. Food Insecurity Is Associated With Higher Health Care Use And Costs Among Canadian Adults. *Health Affairs*. 2020 Aug 1;39(8):1377–85.
4. Who are most at risk of household food insecurity? [Internet]. PROOF. Available from: <https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/who-are-most-at-risk-of-household-food-insecurity/#:~:text=In%202022%2C%2069.9%25%20of%20households,afford%20food%20and%20other%20necessities.>
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