



Food Affordability in  
York Region:  
**The 2022 Nutritious  
Food Basket**

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## What is the Nutritious Food Basket?

Each year, York Region Public Health conducts the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) survey to determine the affordability of food in York Region. The NFB is a tool that calculates the cost of healthy eating for families and individuals. It provides a snapshot of the important role income plays in food affordability.

## How food affordability is measured

To calculate the cost of healthy eating, the lowest prices for a month's worth of food are collected from nine grocery stores across York Region. The [foods](#)<sup>1</sup> in the NFB reflect Canada's Food Guide<sup>2</sup> and do not include convenience foods, snack foods, or infant formula. In 2022, the prices of foods were collected in person and online as part of a pilot study. The NFB is not meant to be used for diet advice or as a menu-planning tool.<sup>3</sup>

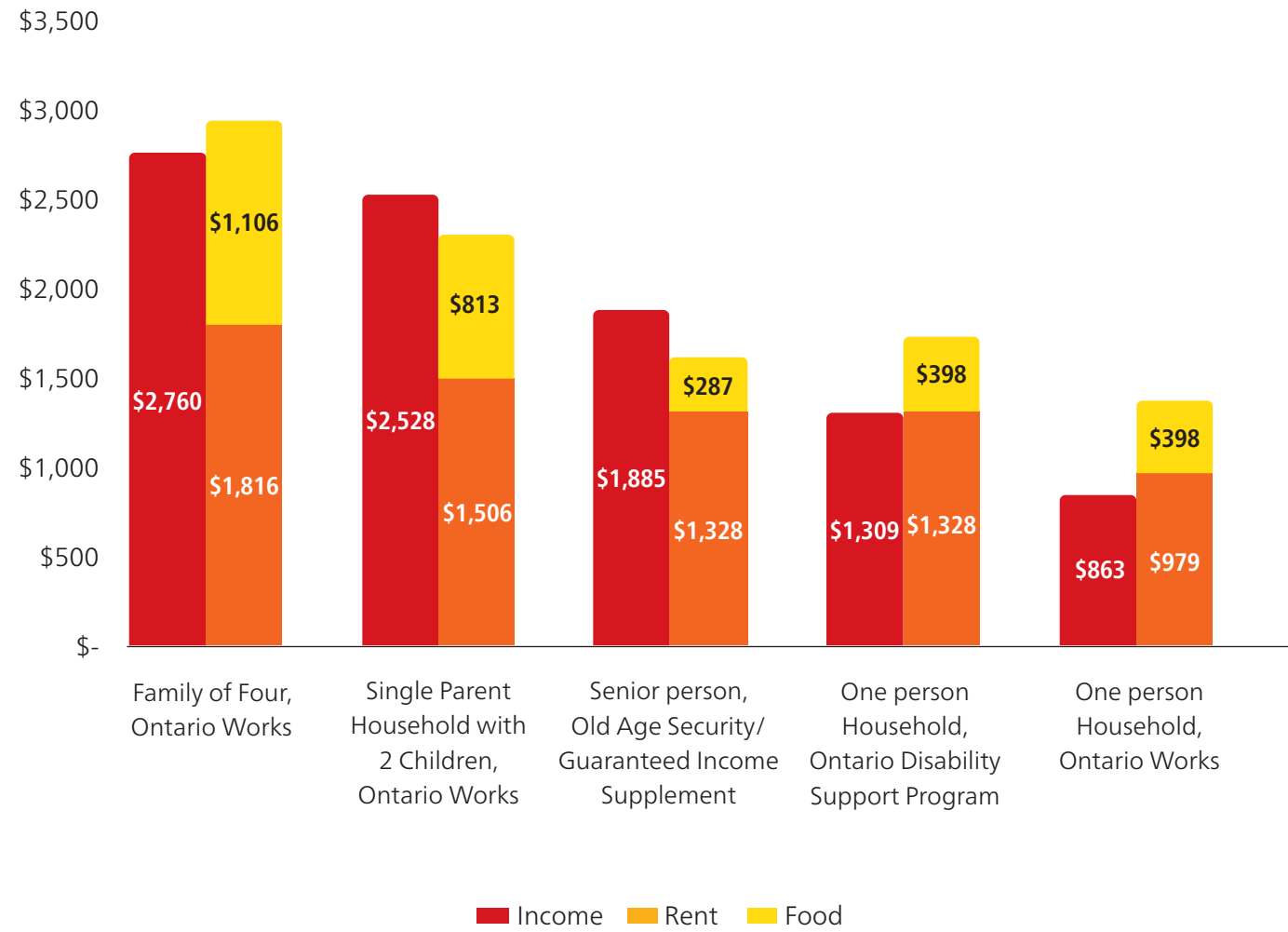
After the cost of healthy eating is calculated, it is compared to local rental rates and income from social assistance in several income scenarios. This provides real-world context to the cost of food, since housing is a basic need that makes up a large part of a household's monthly expenses. The average rental cost for different types of homes in York Region are obtained from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.<sup>4</sup> Social assistance programs included in the income scenarios are Ontario Works, the Ontario Disability Support Program, and the Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement. The scenarios assume the household has filed its taxes and has received benefits that contribute to its total income. The total income for each scenario includes the GST/HST credit, Ontario Trillium Benefit, and the Climate Action Incentive payment. For scenarios with children, the Canada Child Benefit is also included.

## How affordable is food in York Region?

For many low-income households in York Region, healthy eating is not affordable. Many of the scenarios in Figure 1 show that social assistance is not enough to pay for rent and food.

For a family of four, the monthly cost of food is \$1,106. This means a family of four, whose main income is from Ontario Works, would have to spend 40 per cent of their income to buy food. However, as Figure 1 shows, the cost of rent and food is more than income available, leaving the household \$162 in debt each month.

**Figure 1. Income Scenarios, 2022**



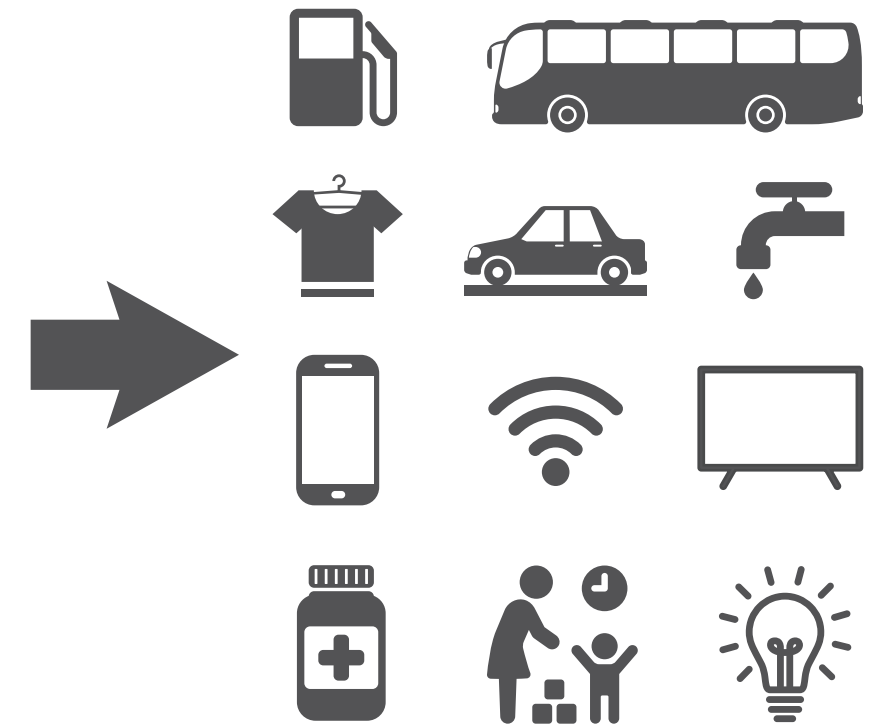
A senior receiving Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement would have to spend 85 per cent of their social assistance income on rent and food. While there is \$270 left over, in this scenario, the senior person is not eligible for the Canadian Pension Plan. Limited income, lack of affordable housing, and potential mobility and transportation challenges would make it difficult for a senior to pay for other living expenses.

This is the same for a single parent of two children who would have \$209 remaining after paying for food and rent. For a one-person household receiving assistance from the Ontario Disability Support Program or Ontario Works, income cannot cover the cost of rent and food.

When there is not enough money, there is pressure to go without other costly living expenses like childcare, internet, phone, and hydro (Figure 2). For instance, individuals living in severely food-insecure households are more likely to delay or not fill drug prescriptions because of medication cost.<sup>5</sup> These scenarios demonstrate that food affordability is largely tied to the amount of income available to a household.

**Figure 2. Money remaining to pay for other living expenses**

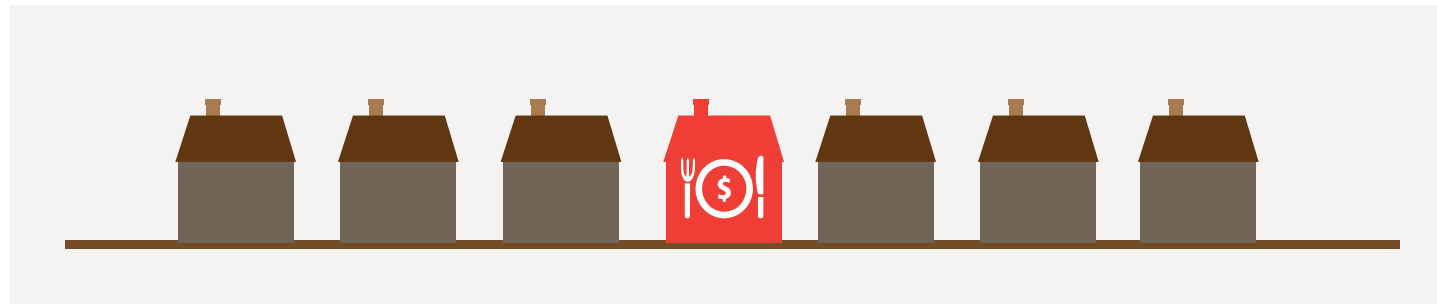
Family of 4, Ontario Works	-\$162
Single parent with 2 children	\$209
Senior person, Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement	\$270
One person, Ontario Disability Support Program	-\$417
One person, Ontario Works	-\$514



## Food insecurity in York Region

Food insecurity is the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints<sup>6</sup> or, put simply, not having enough money to buy food. The income scenarios in Figure 1 uncover the deeper problem of food insecurity. Household food insecurity is not the same as hunger. Those experiencing food insecurity range from worrying about affording food to eating less nutritious meals to going whole days without food.<sup>7</sup> According to the most recent Canadian Income Survey, in 2020 approximately 15 per cent of households in York Region experienced food insecurity in the past year.<sup>8</sup> This is about 1 in 7 households in York Region (Figure 3). In another survey about children and youth (ages 1 to 17), in 2019 11 per cent of children (approximately 23 500 children) lived in a food-insecure household in York Region.<sup>9</sup> Struggling to put food on the table is a reality for many York Region residents.

**Figure 3: In 2020, approximately 1 in 7 York Region households experienced food insecurity**



## Food insecurity is a public health issue

From a public health viewpoint, food insecurity stands in the way of people reaching their full health potential. Food insecurity is linked to poor mental and physical health. Adults living in food-insecure households have a greater risk of adverse health effects<sup>10,11</sup> including:



Heart disease



Poor dental health



Mood and anxiety disorders



High blood pressure



Depression

Children and youth living in food-insecure households are more likely to have hyperactivity (can't sit still), asthma, and depression later in life.<sup>12,13</sup> Severe food insecurity is related to poor diet quality<sup>14</sup> and greater risk of being hospitalized.<sup>15</sup> Food insecurity also makes it difficult to self-manage health conditions like diabetes and HIV.<sup>16,17</sup>

While food insecurity can affect people of all ages, many groups of people are unevenly impacted by food insecurity. These groups include low-income households, renters, families with children, social assistance recipients, and single female parents.<sup>18</sup> These groups reflect many of the households that cannot afford to eat healthy in Figure 1. Another group unevenly impacted by food insecurity are Indigenous households, who are more likely to experience food insecurity than other racial or cultural groups.<sup>18</sup> The food insecurity of Indigenous peoples can be traced back to colonial policies that disrupted Indigenous food systems by restricting access to traditional lands and waterways and banning hunting and gathering practices.<sup>19,20</sup> Supporting the food security of Indigenous peoples must be done alongside self-determination and with an understanding of the impacts of colonialism.<sup>21-23</sup> All people should be able to reach their full health potential without disadvantage due to race, income, or any other socially determined circumstance.

## Food programs won't solve food insecurity

Programs like food banks and soup kitchens are popular responses to food insecurity. However, providing food to those who face food insecurity does not address the root cause (i.e., low income). While food banks relieve hunger for a short time, people living in food-insecure households may or may not experience hunger. Research shows that only about 20 per cent of food-insecure households access a food bank.<sup>24</sup> Many food banks recognize that food insecurity is tied to poverty and other underlying issues such as low wages and lack of affordable housing.<sup>25,26</sup>

Food education programs are another response to food insecurity. There is a misconception that teaching budgeting and food skills to low-income residents can lessen the impact of food insecurity. Yet, research shows people experiencing food insecurity already apply many resourceful strategies to stretch their food supply while on a limited budget.<sup>27,28</sup> In fact, adults in food-insecure households are more likely to use budgets when shopping than food secure households.<sup>29</sup> Research also shows that adults living in food-insecure households have the same level of food skills, such as cooking and adjusting recipes, as those living in food-secure households.<sup>29</sup>

## Addressing food affordability and food insecurity

Food insecurity is not about a lack of food, it's about a lack of income. Likewise, income is a key factor in food affordability. Improving the social and economic conditions of families and individuals is essential to reducing food insecurity. Research supports policies that improve income such as jobs with living wages, basic income and increasing social assistance rates.<sup>10</sup>

**Everyone has a role to play in addressing food insecurity. Actions that individuals can take include:**



### Learn more about food insecurity

- [Video: Household Food Insecurity in Canada, 2021 – PROOF](#)
- [It's Not Just About Food – York Region Food Network](#)
- [Indigenous Food Insecurity - PROOF](#)
- [Fact Sheet Race and Food Insecurity – PROOF and FoodShare](#)
- [Position Statement and Recommendations on Responses to Food Insecurity - Ontario Dietitians in Public Health](#)



### Spread the word

- Talk to your family and friends about the link between income and food insecurity.
- Share what you have learned on social media.



### Volunteer at or host a free tax clinic

- Without filing for income tax many eligible people won't receive government benefits and aren't eligible for social assistance programs. Support your community by volunteering your time and skills at a [Free Tax Clinic](#).

### For More Information

Visit [York.ca/nutrition](https://www.york.ca/nutrition)  
Or contact Access York  
Phone: 1-877-464-9675  
TTY 1-866-512-6228 or 905-895-4293  
Email: [accessyork@york.ca](mailto:accessyork@york.ca)

Accessible formats or communication supports are available upon request.

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