




INFORMATION UPDATE

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| TO: | Mayor and Members Board of Health |
| DATE: | January 15, 2020 |
| SUBJECT: | Monitoring Food Affordability (City Wide) |
| WARD(S) AFFECTED: | City Wide |
| SUBMITTED BY: | Kevin McDonald Director, Healthy Environments Division Public Health Services |
| SIGNATURE: |  |

Public Health Services annually conducts food affordability monitoring, in accordance with Ministry of Health requirements. The results of food affordability monitoring in 2019 are available on the City of Hamilton website at <https://www.hamilton.ca/how-much-does-healthy-eating-cost>.

In 2019, City of Hamilton Public Health Services and other Ontario public health units noted a significant rise in the cost of the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB). For a reference family of four living in Hamilton, the weekly cost of the NFB in 2019 was \$202, which was a 10.6% increase from the weekly cost of \$183 in 2018. This is the largest year-over-year increase seen in Hamilton over the decade, coupled with a 27% increase in the NFB cost from 2010 to 2019 in Hamilton (see Appendix A).

NFB items with the greatest cost increase ($\geq 30\%$) in 2019 compared to 2018 included fresh vegetables and fruit (celery, broccoli, onions, cabbage, cucumber, romaine lettuce, cantaloupe) and canned salmon. Specific causes of price fluctuations can be difficult to determine, however: inflation; weather-related events both in Canada and globally due to climate change; and the cost of fuel, are likely to have the greatest impacts.¹ Food prices in Canada were forecasted in 2018 to increase by 3.5% in 2019¹ and have been forecasted to increase by 2% to 4% in 2020².

While food is reasonably priced in Hamilton relative to what consumers pay in other parts of Ontario and Canada and in other countries, many Hamiltonians cannot afford a basic, nutritious diet due to inadequate incomes. This is illustrated in the bar graphs shown in Appendix A which compare the cost of market rents plus the NFB to various

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OUR Mission: To provide high quality cost conscious public services that contribute to a healthy, safe and prosperous community, in a sustainable manner.

OUR Culture: Collective Ownership, Steadfast Integrity, Courageous Change, Sensational Service, Engaged Empowered Employees.

incomes. Households that allocate more than 30% of their monthly income on housing have a higher risk of food insecurity (inadequate or uncertain access to food due to financial constraints). Food is often a flexible expenditure that is sacrificed to pay for other necessities such as shelter, child care, and utilities.

In 2013-2014, 14.5% of households in Hamilton (approximately 1 in 7 households) experienced food insecurity. The rate of food insecurity in Hamilton has remained relatively constant since 2007 and is similar to all of Ontario. Food-insecure individuals, both adults and children, are likely to have poorer health. Adults living with food insecurity are more likely suffer physical and mental health problems while children and teens are more likely to have asthma and poor mental health.

Community food programs, such as food banks, community meals, and community kitchens can provide short-term relief for those in immediate need. The Hamilton Food Access Guide (available from: <http://foodaccessguide.ca/>) provides a comprehensive listing of programs and services. Public Health Services staff are currently working in collaboration with the Hamilton Public Library to revamp The Hamilton Food Access Guide for release in September 2020.

Policies, tax benefits, and programs that help individuals and families afford the costs of living are necessary long-term solutions to poverty and food insecurity. These include: income support programs that provide adequate benefits, jobs that pay a living wage (the living wage for Hamilton in 2019 is \$16.45), and free income tax filing support.

APPENDICES AND SCHEDULES ATTACHED

Appendix “A” to Information Update: How Much Does Healthy Eating Cost Hamilton?

REFERENCES

1. Charlebois S, Somogyi S, McGuinty E et al. Canada's Food Price Report 2019. Available from: <https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/management/News/News%20&%20Events/Canada%20Food%20Price%20Report%20ENG%202019.pdf>
2. Charlebois S, Somogyi S, McGuinty E et al. Canada’s Food Price Report 10th Edition 2020. Available from: <https://cdn.dal.ca/content/dam/dalhousie/pdf/sites/agri-food/Canada%20Food%20Price%20Report%20Eng%202020.pdf>

HOW MUCH DOES HEALTHY EATING COST IN HAMILTON?

Public Health Services annually conducts a survey of the cost of nutritious food in a sample of grocery stores in Hamilton using the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB). The foods included in the NFB, determined by Health Canada, are based on Canadian eating patterns and buying habits as well as their nutritional value.

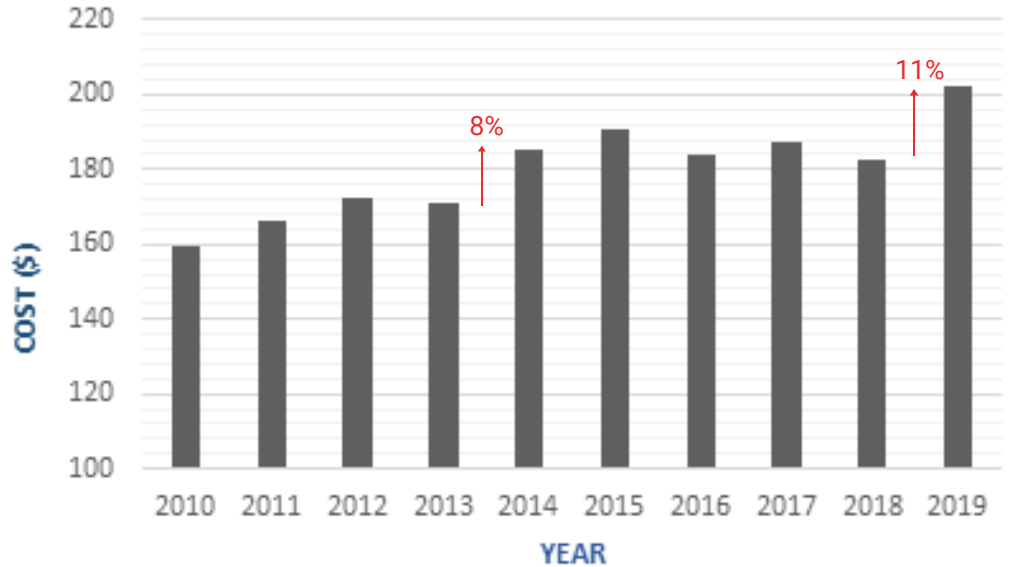


Weekly cost of the NFB for a reference family of four

Annual fluctuations in the cost of the NFB are usually



2 to 4% (increase or decrease) except from 2013 to 2014 when the cost increased about 8% and from 2018 to 2019 when the cost increased almost 11%.



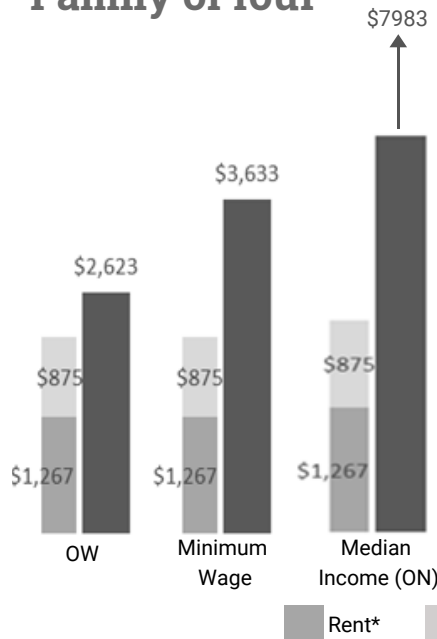
Monitoring food affordability in Hamilton 2019

Food affordability is monitored by comparing monthly costs of the NFB plus average market rents to family and individual incomes.

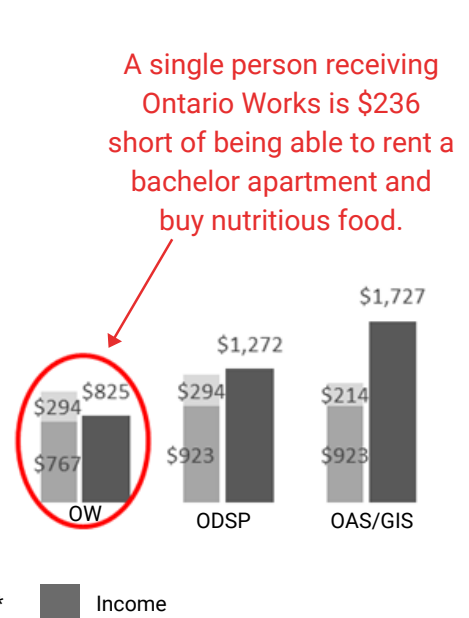
For all income scenarios, except family of four with median Ontario income, very little income is left for all other living expenses such as:

- utilities
- clothing
- phone
- transportation
- child care
- school supplies/expenses
- vision and dental care
- personal care (hair cuts, hygiene products)

Family of four



Single Person



*Average monthly market rent rates provided by Housing Services Division, City of Hamilton, July 2019
 **Cost of the Nutritious Food Basket, Hamilton, May 2019