TO: Mayor and Members
   Board of Health

WARD(S) AFFECTED: CITY WIDE

COMMITTEE DATE: September 27, 2010

SUBJECT/REPORT NO:
Nutritious Food Basket (BOH10024) (City Wide)

SUBMITTED BY:
Elizabeth Richardson, MD, MHSc, FRCPC
Medical Officer of Health
Public Health Services Department

PREPARED BY:
Vicki Edwards 3632
Chwen Johnson 5020

SIGNATURE:

RECOMMENDATION:

(a) That the Board of Health correspond with the Premier of Ontario and the Minister of Community and Social Services to request that the Ministry of Community and Social Services include the following recommendations in their Poverty Reduction Strategy:

   (i) Introduce a $100 Healthy Food Supplement, and a Housing Benefit for those receiving Social Assistance; and,

   (ii) Implement Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program rates that reflect the real cost of healthy living, including nutritious food, and adjust index rates annually to reflect the current rate of inflation.

(b) That the Board of Health correspond with the Minister of Children and Youth Services to request the expansion of provincial Student Nutrition Programs to all elementary and secondary school students;

(c) That the Board of Health correspond with the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing and Minister of Minister of Human Resources & Skills Development

Vision: To be the best place in Canada to raise a child, promote innovation, engage citizens and provide diverse economic opportunities.

Values: Honesty, Accountability, Innovation, Leadership, Respect, Excellence, Teamwork
and Canada Mortgage & Housing Corporation requesting that funding for the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program be renewed.

(d) That the Board of Health and the Medical Officer of Health request that the President and Chief Executive Officer and the Director of Surveillance and Epidemiology of the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion (OAHPP) explore the development of a long-term system to monitor access to safe, nutritious and culturally-acceptable food.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) is a survey tool used to record the cost of 67 foods that represent a nutritious diet based on Canada’s Food Guide.

The estimated average cost of a Nutritious Food Basket in Hamilton for 2010 is $690.59 per month for a family of four.¹

The 2010 Nutritious Food Basket Scenarios Table (Appendix A to Report BOH10024) compares the average cost of food and rent for families and individuals who receive income from Ontario Works, minimum wage, Ontario Disability Support Program, and the Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement to families with a median Ontario wage.

When housing costs and other fixed living expenses are considered, many individuals and families with a limited income do not have adequate funds to purchase sufficient nutritious food on a consistent basis. This predisposes them to obesity and chronic disease.

This report recommends that the Board of Health advocate for adequate income levels that will allow all residents to buy nutritious food. Further advocacy for universal student nutrition programs, investments in affordable housing, and a monitoring system to relate food insecurity with risk factors and outcomes of chronic disease is recommended.

Alternatives for Consideration – See Page 8

FINANCIAL / STAFFING / LEGAL IMPLICATIONS (for Recommendation(s) only)

Financial: Ontario Works is cost-shared with the City (for 2010, the city’s portion is 19.4%. It will be lowered to 18.8% in 2011). If social assistance rates increase, this would increase the levy portion as well as the provincial portion, at whatever rate of increase was implemented.
HISTORICAL BACKGROUND (Chronology of events)

The Ontario Public Health Standards 2008, Chronic Disease Prevention Standards Requirement #2, states: The board of health shall monitor food affordability in accordance with the Nutritious Food Basket Protocol, 2008 (or as current) and the Population Health Assessment and Surveillance Protocol, 2008 (or as current).

The Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) is a survey tool that is a measure of the cost of basic healthy eating. It reflects an eating pattern that meets the recommendations from Canada’s Food Guide, and actual eating behaviours and food purchasing patterns reflective of the Canadian Community Health Survey 2.2 results.

The 67 foods surveyed represented:
- Vegetables and Fruit
- Orange Vegetables and Fruit
- Dark Green Vegetables
- Whole Grains/ Whole Wheat Products
- Non Whole Grain Products
- Milk and Milk Alternatives
- Meat, Poultry, Legumes, Eggs and Fish

A complete list of the foods surveyed appears on Health Canada’s website for the National Nutritious Food Basket.\(^2\)

The NFB reflects the average lowest price for a specified purchase size, regardless of brand, in the stores surveyed. The total cost includes an additional calculation of 5% to cover common food items used in meals (spices, seasonings, condiments, baking supplies, soups, coffee and tea).

The food items on the survey require food preparation skills. The survey does not make allowances for special dietary needs of individuals, differences in activity levels, or cultural food choices. It does not allow for eating out or inviting friends or other family members over for a meal. The NFB does not include processed convenience foods, snack foods, foods of little nutritional value, or purchases commonly made at grocery stores such as laundry detergent, toilet paper, or soap.

From May 3 - 7, 2010, Registered Dietitians from Public Health Services conducted food pricing in seven grocery stores across the City of Hamilton in accordance with the Nutritious Food Basket Protocol.
The food prices are used to estimate the average cost of feeding up to 22 different age and gender groups and a reference family of four (a man and woman each aged 31 to 50 years; a boy, 14 to 18 years of age; and a girl, four to eight years old).

Food costing is used to monitor both affordability and accessibility of foods by relating the cost of the food basket to individual/family incomes.

For the past three years, the Board of Health has used the Nutritious Food Basket data to advocate for increases in social assistance and affordable housing that would allow people with limited incomes to buy nutritious food. Registered Dietitians in Public Health Services have developed a factsheet, “The Cost of Basic Nutritious Food” (Appendix B to Report BOH10024), and have updated it annually for the past three years. It is distributed locally to community organizations and/or groups involved in poverty reduction to inform and support their advocacy efforts.

The City has done much advocacy over the years, most recently by approving two reports by Community Services: “Adequacy of Ontario Works Assistance Rates and Economic Impact of the Ontario Child Benefit (CS10049)”, and “Ensuring Safe, Healthy and Adequate Food for those in Need (CS10045)”. Many other groups are advocating for similar initiatives to reduce poverty and improve access to nutritious food. Examples are the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, Hamilton Emergency Food Strategy Implementation Committee, and the Ontario-wide ‘Put Food in the Budget’ Campaign.

The importance of the social determinants of health have been recognized by council in adopting a position statement (Report BOH09008) in April 2009 that directs staff to include and integrate the social determinants of health in public health programs, services, and advocacy efforts.

The Hamilton Spectator’s special report, Code Red,3 exposed disparities in health and life outcomes between the most and least affluent neighbourhoods in Hamilton. This health mapping project has spurred community leaders to take action to change social and economic policies in the City to reduce health inequities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>POLICY IMPLICATIONS</th>
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</table>

Social assistance benefits are issued in accordance with rate schedules specified in the Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program Acts and Regulations.
RELEVANT CONSULTATION

The following people have reviewed and/or contributed to the report:

- Dave Brodati, Policy & Program Specialist, Housing & Homelessness Division, Community Services Department provided the housing costs, wait list numbers, approval of recommendation (d) wording and background information on the Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program.
- Members of the Food Security Workgroup, Ontario Public Health Association provided the Nutritious Food Basket Scenarios Template.
- Gillian Hendry, Director Social Housing & Homelessness and Brian Kreps, Manager, Homelessness, Community Services supported the recommendation for an increase in affordable housing and provided more specific wording for the recommendation, suggested adding the work of the Emergency Food System Planning group and the Community Food Security Stakeholder Committee to the report, and requested that several points in the report be clarified.
- Kerry Lubrick, Director of Employment & Income Support Division, Community Services Department, provided the 2010 percentages for the city’s share of Ontario Works costs, and encouraged further advocacy for social assistance to support recent reports from Community Services.
- Brenda Osborne, Director, CEO/City Housing Hamilton, Community Services, was consulted, but did not contribute any input.
- Tom Cooper, Director of the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction, was consulted, and forwarded the report on to members of the Emergency Food Strategy Implementation Committee. He did not contribute any new information this year.
- Donna Jean Forster and Crystle Numan representing the Emergency Food Strategy Implementation Committee were consulted, but did not offer any input.

ANALYSIS / RATIONALE FOR RECOMMENDATION

(include Performance Measurement/Benchmarking Data, if applicable)

Following the eating pattern in Canada’s Food Guide will help all people:

- Get enough vitamins, minerals and other nutrients
- Reduce the risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and certain types of cancer and osteoporosis.
- Achieve overall health and vitality.

In addition, research shows that children who have access to nutritious food perform better in school, have less demand on the health system, and exhibit fewer negative psycho-social behaviours. 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9
A woman’s nutritional and overall health, before and during pregnancy, influences the health of her developing baby. Eating well, combined with taking a daily multivitamin with folic acid and iron, can give a woman the nutrients she needs to feel good, have energy, and support a healthy pregnancy. In addition, a woman’s nutrient intake affects the lifelong health of her baby.

The estimated average cost for a family of four to purchase the Nutritious Food Basket in Hamilton in 2010 is $690.59 per month. This is a decrease from 2009 when the cost was $701.89. Although rental costs have also decreased, and the social assistance and total income for families has increased in 2010, this improvement is not enough. Families still do not have adequate income to cover all basic expenses. Appendix A to Report BOH10024, Nutritious Food Basket Scenarios, compares the cost of food and rent to total income available in seven different family situations to illustrate this point.

Many families in Hamilton do not have sufficient income to buy nutritious foods. In 2007/08, 10.0% (+2.4) of Hamilton households reported that in the last 12 months they had experienced food insecurity (where they compromised the quantity or quality of food they consumed and/or changed their eating patterns) because they could not afford enough food. This number likely under-estimates the true prevalence of household food insecurity in Hamilton.

For those who must follow a strict budget, the choice is not between a generic and name brand product. It means the choice between food and hunger.

Lack of nutritious food has a huge impact on health. Individuals in food insufficient households are more likely to report poor general health, major depression and distress, and multiple chronic conditions including more heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, and food allergies.

Canadian adults and adolescents in food insecure households have lower intakes of fruits, vegetables and milk products, lower vitamin and mineral intakes, and a greater risk of inadequate nutrient intakes. The higher estimated prevalence of nutrient inadequacy is widespread and most marked for protein, vitamin A, thiamin, riboflavin, vitamin B-6, folate, vitamin B-12, magnesium, phosphorus and zinc.

The Canadian Community Health Survey 2.2 data indicates that Ontario men & women who reported food insecurity had significantly lower intakes of vitamin A, magnesium & calcium.

In 2009, 63% of Ontarians who accessed food from food banks did not consume the recommended daily servings of milk and milk alternatives, and 72.4% ate vegetables and fruit fewer than five times a day. Although a large number of Hamiltonians do not eat their daily intake of vegetables and fruit, (and this continues to be a public heath challenge,) this figure is considerably higher than the City average. A total of 49% of
adults in Hamilton do not consume their recommended daily servings of vegetables and fruit. However, those with lower incomes can not afford to buy more produce and thus do not have a choice.

There is growing evidence that families who cannot afford to buy adequate amounts of nutritious food respond by buying and consuming more energy-dense, nutrient-poor food products (fats, sweets and snacks), and that this is contributing to the rising incidence of obesity. Low household income is a marker for increased risk of overweight and obesity in Canadian children and youth. Obesity is one more risk factor for poor health and chronic disease.

Families need adequate incomes that allow them to buy nutritious food if they are to reduce their risk of health problems, limit nutrient deficiencies and decrease their incidence of obesity.

**Income and Housing**

A number of social determinants of health impact the ability to buy food. By far, the most significant factors are income and the cost of housing.

Income levels for too many people in Hamilton (18.1% of residents) are below the low income cut off measures. In fact, 26.4% of children under age six in Hamilton live in poverty. In June, 2010, there were 13,417 cases (families and individuals) that received Ontario Works financial and employment assistance in the City of Hamilton. The caseload has increased 9.5% since June 2009. 16,375 cases (individuals or families) received Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) benefits in the City of Hamilton in June 2010. The ODSP caseload is at the highest level since January 2007, and is up 5.4% compared to June 2009.

Hamilton food banks continue to grapple with system capacity issues. They experienced 18,600 visits in March 2010 alone. Of those who accessed food, 52% were receiving Ontario Works assistance and 20% were living on disability support. A $100.00 healthy food supplement and a housing benefit would allow residents to buy more of their own food rather than relying on charity. Nine percent of households that accessed food banks in March listed employment as their source of income. This indicates that neither social assistance nor the current minimum wage provides sufficient income to buy food after paying the rent and other fixed expenses.

The cost of housing is the largest expense for most residents with low incomes, and a lack of affordable housing is a key cause of hunger in Ontario. Hamilton has a shortage of affordable rental housing and a long waiting list for social housing. The number of active applications on the Social Housing Waitlist for June 2010 was 5,281, the highest level since January 2007, up 10.9% from June 2009.
The Canada-Ontario Affordable Housing Program (COAHP) increases the supply of affordable rental housing for lower and moderate income households through capital funding for the construction of rental buildings. Housing providers may receive capital assistance to construct rental projects and must rent the units at or below 80% of the average market rent for that type of unit for at least 20 years. In Hamilton, 13 rental projects have been or are in the process of being constructed under the COAHP. Advocacy for renewed funding is needed to continue this program.

Student Nutrition Programs

Student Nutrition Programs provide healthy food and alleviate hunger for students. Nutritious food supports healthy growth and development, learning and lifelong healthy eating habits. Currently there are 126 Student Nutrition Programs serving 59 schools at 44 sites in Hamilton. More than 90 schools do not have and can benefit from universal Student Nutrition Programs. The Hamilton Community Foundation has put out a request for proposals for a consultant to explore a proposed model for a universal school-based nutrition program for our city.

Improving Monitoring of Ontarian’s Access to Healthy Food

Consistent, long-term monitoring of how different communities can or cannot access nutritious food is essential to evaluating interventions. The Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System which has a “Food Access and Security” module, and the Ontario Risk and Behaviour Surveillance System of the Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion would be important tools to ensure this data is available.

ALTERNATIVES FOR CONSIDERATION:
(include Financial, Staffing, Legal and Policy Implications and pros and cons for each alternative)

The Board of Health can choose not to advocate for access to nutritious food for those with low incomes. However, given the health outcomes associated with poor nutrition, and the significant number of Hamiltonians who live on an income below the low income cut off measures, this alternative is not recommended.

Financial: None.

Staffing: None.

Legal: None
CORPORATE STRATEGIC PLAN (Linkage to Desired End Results)


Skilled, Innovative & Respectful Organization
- More innovation, greater teamwork, better client focus

Financial Sustainability
- Delivery of municipal services and management capital assets/liabilities in a sustainable, innovative and cost effective manner

Intergovernmental Relationships
- Influence federal and provincial policy development to benefit Hamilton

Social Development
- Residents in need have access to adequate support services

Healthy Community
- Adequate access to food, water, shelter and income, safety, work, recreation and support for all (Human Services)

APPENDICES / SCHEDULES

Appendix A to Report BOH10024
Appendix B to Report BOH10024

References:
1 An average family of four includes a man and woman each aged 31 to 50 years; a boy, 14 to 18 years of age; and a girl, four to eight years old
2 www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/surveill/basket-panier/index-eng.php
An average family of four includes a man and woman each aged 31 to 50 years; a boy, 14 to 18 years of age; and a girl, four to eight years old.

This measure of food security is a *household measure*, so it does not determine the food security status of each individual member residing in the household. It cannot be assumed that all members of a household share the same food security status. The data are weighted using Statistics Canada's household weights that are representative at the provincial level. The weights may, or may not, be representative at the municipal level so estimates should be interpreted with caution. Estimates are likely conservative because certain high risk populations are not represented in the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS). Information was not stated for 4.9% of City of Hamilton households.


A Low Income Cut Off (LICO) is an income threshold below which a family will likely devote a larger share of its income (at least 20 percentage points more) on the necessities of food, shelter and clothing than the average family. On average, households living under the LICO may spend 63% or more of their after-tax family income on food, shelter and clothing. The LICO thresholds are based on the size of the household and the population of the area of residence. When the incomes in social assistance and minimum wage scenarios presented in Appendix A to Report BOH10024 are annualized, all fall below the Statistics Canada 2006 LICOs.

Incomes and Poverty in Hamilton. Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton, April 2009

Community Services Department, City of Hamilton. Retrieved on July 27, 2010 from  [http://www.hamilton.ca/CityDepartments/CorporateServices/FinanceBudgetTaxes/CommunityWellness.htm](http://www.hamilton.ca/CityDepartments/CorporateServices/FinanceBudgetTaxes/CommunityWellness.htm)

Community Services Department, City of Hamilton. Retrieved on July 27, 2010 from  [http://www.hamilton.ca/CityDepartments/CorporateServices/FinanceBudgetTaxes/CommunityWellness.htm](http://www.hamilton.ca/CityDepartments/CorporateServices/FinanceBudgetTaxes/CommunityWellness.htm)

Hamilton Hunger Count 2010, Hamilton Food Share
Vision: To be the best place in Canada to raise a child, promote innovation, engage citizens and provide diverse economic opportunities.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scenario 1</th>
<th>Scenario 2</th>
<th>Scenario 3</th>
<th>Scenario 4</th>
<th>Scenario 5</th>
<th>Scenario 6</th>
<th>Scenario 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Family of Four, Ontario Works</td>
<td>Family of Four, Minimum Wage Earner (Full-time/Full-year)</td>
<td>Family of Four, Median ONTARIO Income (after tax)</td>
<td>Single Parent Household with 2 Children, Ontario Works</td>
<td>One Person Household, Ontario Works</td>
<td>One Person Household, ODSP</td>
<td>One Person Household, OAS/GIS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monthly Income</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Income from Employment</td>
<td>$1,777.00</td>
<td>$1,777.00</td>
<td>$221.00</td>
<td>$578.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basic Allowance</td>
<td>$438.00</td>
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<td>$341.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Shelter Allowance</td>
<td>$674.00</td>
<td></td>
<td>$620.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Old Age Security/Guaranteed Income Supplement (OAS/GIS)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>$1,170.00</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child/Family Benefits</td>
<td>$733.00</td>
<td>$724.00</td>
<td>$733.00</td>
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<td>Federal GST Benefit</td>
<td>$63.00</td>
<td>$63.00</td>
<td>$63.00</td>
<td>$21.00</td>
<td>$29.00</td>
<td>$31.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Employment Insurance paid</td>
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<tr>
<td>Canada Pension Plan paid</td>
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<tr>
<td>Working Income Tax Benefit</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total Income</strong></td>
<td>$1,908.00</td>
<td>$2,514.00</td>
<td>$5,775.00</td>
<td>$1,757.00</td>
<td>$606.00</td>
<td>$1,071.00</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Selected Monthly Expenses</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Average Monthly Rent (may or may not include heat/hydro)</td>
<td>$874.00</td>
<td>$874.00</td>
<td>$874.00</td>
<td>$767.00</td>
<td>$509.00</td>
<td>$509.00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>$690.59</td>
<td>$690.59</td>
<td>$690.59</td>
<td>$523.26</td>
<td>$230.70</td>
<td>$230.70</td>
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<td><strong>Total Expenses</strong></td>
<td>$1,564.59</td>
<td>$1,564.59</td>
<td>$1,564.59</td>
<td>$1,290.26</td>
<td>$739.70</td>
<td>$739.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monthly Funds Remaining</strong> (for other basic needs e.g. telephone, transportation, child care, household and personal care items, clothing, school supplies etc.)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>$343.41</td>
<td>$949.41</td>
<td>$4,210.41</td>
<td>$466.74</td>
<td>$133.70</td>
<td>$331.30</td>
<td>$386.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of income required for rent</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>44%</td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of income required to purchase healthy food</td>
<td>36%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>12%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>38%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: All dollars rounded to nearest whole number.
Scenario References:
Scenario 1 - 2 adults (male and female ages 31-50), 2 children (girl age 8, boy age 14); on Ontario Works (OW).
Scenario 2 - 2 adults (male and female ages 31-50), 2 children (girl age 8, boy age 14); income is based on one minimum wage earner, 40hr/wk, $10.25/hr.
Scenario 3 - 2 adults (male and female ages 31-50), 2 children (girl age 8, boy age 14).
NOTE: Income from employment is based on median after-tax income - couple households with children; however, EI and CPP contributions are calculated using median income - couple households with children. Assumption of a dual income family with a split of 65% / 35% between partners.
Scenario 4 - 1 adult (female age 31-50), 2 children (girl age 8, boy age 14); on Ontario Works.
Scenario 5 - 1 adult (male age 31-50); on Ontario Works.
Scenario 6 - 1 adult (male age 31-50); on Ontario Disability Support Program.
Scenario 7 - 1 adult (female age 70+); income based on Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement (OAS/GIS).

- Basic and maximum shelter allowance. OW and Ontario Disability Support Payment (ODSP) rates effective May 2010. Source: Social Assistance, Pension and Tax Credit Rates April to June 2010, Ministry of Community and Social Services.
- Rental Market Reports, Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Spring 2010. Some communities may need to add utility costs.
- Reference: Nutritious Food Basket Data Results 2010 For Your Health Unit - Includes Family size adjustment factors.
THE COST OF BASIC NUTRITIOUS FOOD

NUTRITIOUS FOOD IS ESSENTIAL FOR HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Following the eating pattern in Canada’s Food Guide will help us:

- Get enough vitamins, minerals and other nutrients,
- Reduce the risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, and certain types of cancer and osteoporosis, and
- Achieve overall health and vitality.

Well nourished children perform better in school, have better health and exhibit less negative psycho-social behaviour than children who are undernourished.

Eating well, combined with taking a daily multivitamin with folic acid and iron, can give a woman the nutrients she needs to feel good, have energy, and support a healthy pregnancy.

CAN PEOPLE IN HAMILTON AFFORD A NUTRITIOUS DIET IN 2010?

An average family of four* living in Hamilton, needs $159.49 a week, or $690.59 a month, to meet their nutritional needs.

Many families with a limited income cannot afford a nutritious diet.

Incomes of individuals and families receiving minimum wage or social assistance make it difficult to afford sufficient healthy food.

*Family of four: a man and woman each aged 31 to 50 years; a boy, 14 to 18 years of age; and a girl, four to eight years old.

BALANCING BILLS AND NUTRITION

In 2010, Registered Dietitians in Public Health Services conducted a Nutritious Food Basket survey in seven local grocery stores to determine the average lowest cost of a nutritious diet.

The 67 foods surveyed included:

- Vegetables and Fruit
- Orange Vegetables and Fruit
- Dark Green Vegetables
- Whole Grains/Whole Wheat Products
- Non Whole Grain Products
- Milk and Milk Alternatives
- Meat, Poultry, Legumes, Eggs and Fish

The Nutritious Food Basket does not include convenience foods, snack foods, or other purchases such as toilet paper or dish soap. It also makes the assumption that most people have the skills necessary to prepare and store foods, and does not include eating out or cooking for additional friends or family.

Most people will pay their fixed expenses such as rent, hydro and heat, first. When money is tight, it is challenging to cover any other basic monthly expenses such as telephone, transportation, toiletries, household items, medications, clothing, laundry, child care services, insurance, and unexpected items.
HOUSING AND FOOD COSTS IN 2010

People with low incomes often live in rental housing. In 2010, the average monthly rental cost for a three-bedroom apartment in Hamilton is $874. For a family of four receiving Ontario Works (OW) assistance, this represents 36% of their monthly income.

Many individuals and families receiving Ontario Works assistance, Ontario Disability Support Programs or working in minimum wage jobs do not have enough money left after paying the rent to purchase nutritious food on a regular basis.

A monthly budget for a family of four receiving Ontario Works:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Per Month/2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ontario Works Income</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Hamilton Rent (3-bedroom apartment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of Nutritious Food Basket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What's LEFT</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Estimated monthly income, and costs for a family of four (a man and woman each aged 31 to 50 years; a boy 14 years of age; and a girl eight years old) living in Hamilton.

Many families face a precarious balancing act every day. With the increasing cost of living, small changes in their income or expenses could make the difference between food and hunger.

FOOD INSECURITY AFFECTS HEALTH

Food insecurity is defined as a limited or uncertain availability of safe and nutritious foods, or the inability to acquire foods in a socially acceptable way.

A growing body of research has found a strong relationship between food insecurity and health issues:

- Adolescents and adults from food insecure households are at increased risk for nutrient inadequacy.
- Food insecurity may act as a risk factor for multiple chronic conditions including type 2 diabetes, heart disease, obesity, cancer, and high blood pressure.
- Food insecurity is associated with various mental health problems, and is predictive of depression in both adults and children.
- Children living in food insecure households are more likely to experience nutritional, behavioural, emotional, social, and academic problems than children living in food secure households (e.g. higher prevalence of iron deficiency anemia, low serum zinc levels, more likely to gain weight, higher risk for developing depression, more difficulty getting along with other children, greater levels of absenteeism from school, and lower academic scores).
EMERGENCY FOOD ACCESS

In March 2010, local food banks reported 18,600 visits. The number of people in need of emergency food continues to remain at very high levels. Food banks, soup kitchens and other emergency food access programs are temporary solutions for individuals facing poverty and limited access to nutritious food. Challenges faced by emergency food providers include:

- Limited selection and variety of foods due to reliance on donations from the public and industry
- Limited cold storage for fresh vegetables and fruit, milk or meat products
- Restrictions on the amount of foods that can be provided for each client

BUILDING A BETTER FUTURE

Promoting Long-Term Social Changes

Providing food access to all people in Hamilton means promoting positive societal changes. To ensure that future generations have access to safe and nutritious foods, we can advocate for:

- Affordable housing
- Improved employment insurance coverage and benefits
- Increases in minimum wage and social assistance to adequately meet the needs for food and shelter
- Accessible and affordable child care
- Safe pedestrian and transit routes to food stores (grocery stores, farms, farmers’ markets)

WORKING TOGETHER

Improving Emergency Food Access and Beyond

Some community strategies have been initiated to improve access to healthy nutritious food:

- The Hamilton Harvest program is growing fresh vegetables and fruit for emergency
food service providers.

- Community kitchens and community gardens provide people with social interaction and culturally appropriate foods.
- Student Nutrition Programs offer healthy food to students. After-school cooking clubs increase cooking skills and provide some nourishment.

These types of programs reach a small number of families in need, and will not by themselves solve the issue of households lacking the income to afford a nutritious food basket. They must be part of a broader strategy, with a stronger social safety net that reduces poverty.

### HOW CAN YOU HELP?

**Learn** more about poverty issues and hunger in Hamilton.

**Lead** in advocating for increased minimum wage and social assistance for those in need.

**Add** your voice to provincial advocacy campaigns such as Do the Math: [www.dothemath.thestop.org](http://www.dothemath.thestop.org)

**Endorse** the Five Principles and take action at the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction: [http://25in5.ca/take-action/](http://25in5.ca/take-action/)

**Write** your own message directly to relevant ministers.

**Look** for ways to support access to food: volunteer in community gardens, community kitchens, Good Food Box programs, or school nutrition programs.

**Policy change is necessary for a secure and accessible food system that is available to all.**
## Nutritious Food Basket Weekly Costs
### City of Hamilton, 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Food Cost per week ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>21.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-8</td>
<td>27.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>20.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-8</td>
<td>26.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-13</td>
<td>36.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-18</td>
<td>51.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-30</td>
<td>49.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-50</td>
<td>44.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-70</td>
<td>42.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 70</td>
<td>42.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9-13</td>
<td>31.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14-18</td>
<td>36.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-30</td>
<td>37.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-50</td>
<td>37.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51-70</td>
<td>33.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 70</td>
<td>32.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 and younger</td>
<td>41.24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-30</td>
<td>41.59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-50</td>
<td>40.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lactation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 and younger</td>
<td>42.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-30</td>
<td>44.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-50</td>
<td>43.11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### How to Calculate Your Weekly Cost

**Step 1:** Write down the gender and age of each person in the household.

**Step 2:** Use the Nutritious Food Basket Weekly Costs and write down the weekly food cost for each person.

**Step 3:** Add the weekly food costs together for the subtotal.

**Step 4:** Multiply the subtotal by the amount below for number of people in the household.
- 1 person - multiply by 1.20
- 2 people - multiply by 1.10
- 3 people - multiply by 1.05
- 4 people - make no change
- 5-6 people - multiply by 0.95
- 7 or more people - multiply by 0.90

**Step 5:** To find out the monthly costs, multiply your total by 4.33.

### “Example” Nutritious Food Basket Cost

#### in a 2-person household

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>37.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>26.47</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Subtotal:** 64.44

**Total (multiply x 1.10 for 2 people):** 70.88/month

**Total x 4.33:** 306.91/month

### “Example” Nutritious Food Basket Cost

#### in your household

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Subtotal**

**Total (multiply x ___ for ___ people):** /

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**Resources**

- [www.hamilton.ca/nutrition](http://www.hamilton.ca/nutrition)
- [http://foodnetontario.ca/wp](http://foodnetontario.ca/wp)
- [www.hamiltonfoodshare.org](http://www.hamiltonfoodshare.org)
- [www.hamiltonpoverty.ca](http://www.hamiltonpoverty.ca)
- [www.dotemath.thestop.org](http://www.dotemath.thestop.org)

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Contact (905)546-3630 or visit [www.hamilton.ca/nutrition](http://www.hamilton.ca/nutrition)