

# The Cost of Eating Well

Monitoring Food Affordability in Algoma



*Algoma*  
PUBLIC HEALTH  
Santé publique Algoma

# Table of Contents

Food Insecurity .....	3
Monitoring Food Affordability in Algoma .....	5
2025 Nutritious Food Basket Results .....	7
Assessing Food Affordability with Income Scenarios .....	8
Income Scenarios for Algoma in 2025 .....	9
Actions for Individuals .....	13
Actions for Businesses .....	13
Actions for Municipalities .....	14
References.....	15

**For more information:**

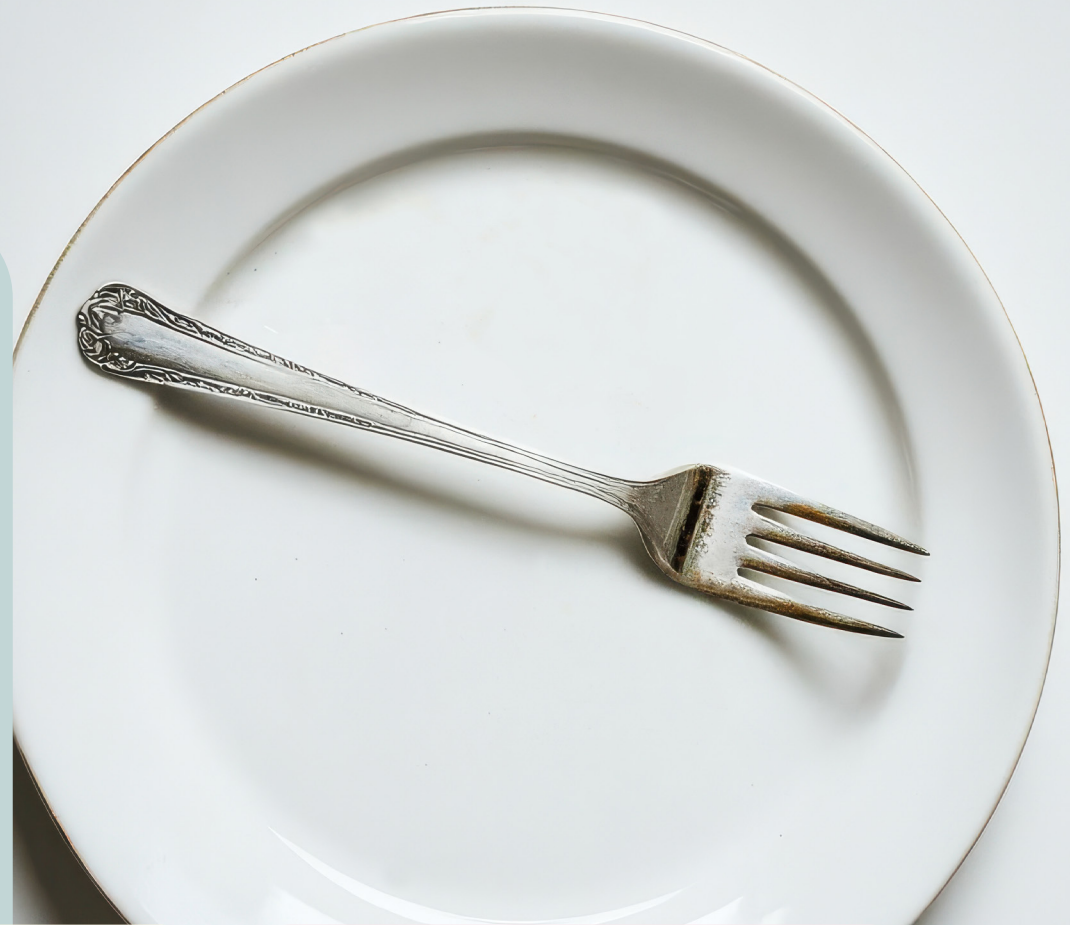
communications@algomapublichealth.com  
algomapublichealth.com  
705-942-4646



# Food is a basic human right.

For many households in Algoma, healthy eating is not affordable.

Food insecurity is inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints<sup>(1)</sup>. Experiences of food insecurity exist on a spectrum from marginal to severe.



## Marginal



Worrying about running out of food and/or having a limited selection of food

## Moderate



Not eating adequate quality or selection of food

## Severe



Not eating an adequate quantity of food or, at the most extreme, not eating for a whole day or more due to lack of money

# Food insecurity is an urgent public health issue.



Between 2023-2024, a record high of **25.6%** of households in Algoma were food insecure<sup>(2)</sup>.



The full extent of food insecurity is likely worse due to population gaps in data collection.

Children and adults living in food insecure households are more likely to suffer from physical and mental health conditions, leading to greater need for healthcare services, higher rates of hospitalization, and elevated risk of premature death<sup>(1,3)</sup>. Childhood exposure to severe food insecurity has been linked to increased risk of developing depression and suicidal ideation in adolescence and early adulthood<sup>(1,3)</sup>. Food insecurity also undermines community well-being by increasing social isolation.



Income is the strongest predictor of food insecurity among individuals and families in Canada<sup>(4)</sup>.



Nearly 60% of Ontarians experiencing food insecurity have income from employment, with 89% of those households having at least one earner with full-time permanent employment<sup>(5)</sup>.

This indicates that stable employment is no longer enough to guarantee food security.

Minimum wage in Ontario is currently \$17.60.  
Living wage for Northern Ontario is \$21.10<sup>(6)</sup>.



# Monitoring Food Affordability in Algoma

## The Nutritious Food Basket

Each year, Algoma Public Health (APH) conducts the Ontario Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) survey to determine the cost of healthy eating for families and individuals in Algoma.



The Nutritious Food Basket includes 61 food items consistent with Canada's Food Guide.

NFB data collection, management, and interpretation is led by APH Registered Dietitians (RD), with assistance from an RD-trained food surveyor.

NFB costing is conducted each year in May at eight full-service grocery stores across Algoma. The stores are representative across Algoma based on population and geographic distribution, including a mix of premium and discount stores. The costing is completed in-person or online.



The NFB includes an additional 5% cost to cover miscellaneous foods, such as spices, coffee, tea, and baking supplies, however, it does not include highly processed convenience foods, infant food or formula, food for special diets (e.g., gluten-free) or cleaning and personal hygiene products such as toothpaste, shampoo, toilet paper, menstrual products, and dish soap. Therefore, NFB data can be considered a modest estimate of food costs and likely underestimates the money needed to obtain essential items.

## Limitations

The NFB is not a meal planning or budgeting tool. It makes the following assumptions:



People have the time, ability, skills, space and equipment to prepare meals from scratch



Food is always chosen based on the lowest available price



People have access to grocery stores and can grocery shop regularly

The NFB is not inclusive of all religious and cultural groups, including Indigenous Peoples, as it does not reflect the full spectrum of ingredients, preparation, or procurement practices. APH recognizes this as a limitation of this data.

# 2025 Nutritious Food Basket Results

The 2025 NFB data indicates that the estimated monthly cost of eating for a single individual is \$423 and for a family of four is \$1207. These costs can be considered modest estimates for the cost of nutritious food.



**\$423**



**\$1,207**





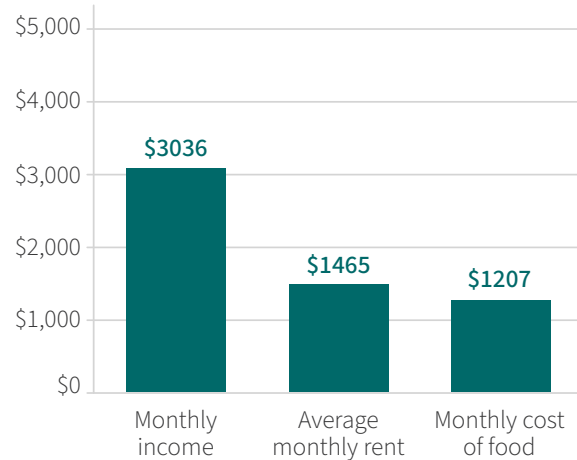
## Assessing Food Affordability with Income Scenarios

Income scenarios are used to provide real-world context for the NFB results by showing how much money is left after paying for food and rent to pay for other essential expenses (e.g. childcare, transportation, household bills, etc.).

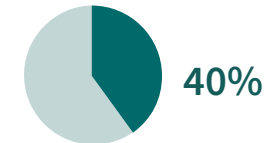
Housing is a basic, fixed cost that makes up a large part of a household's fixed monthly budget. The average rental cost for Algoma has been obtained from the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC)<sup>(7)</sup>. Algoma Public Health estimates that the CMHC data underestimates current market rates by 30-35%. This limitation should be considered when interpreting the income scenarios.

# NFB Income Scenarios for Algoma in 2025

## Family of 4, Ontario Works (OW)



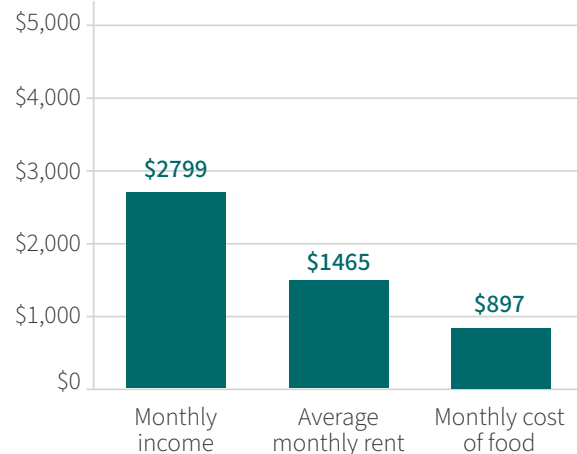
% of income required to purchase healthy food



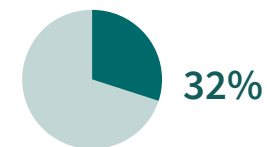
Amount leftover for other expenses

**\$364**

## Single parent, 2 school-age children, OW



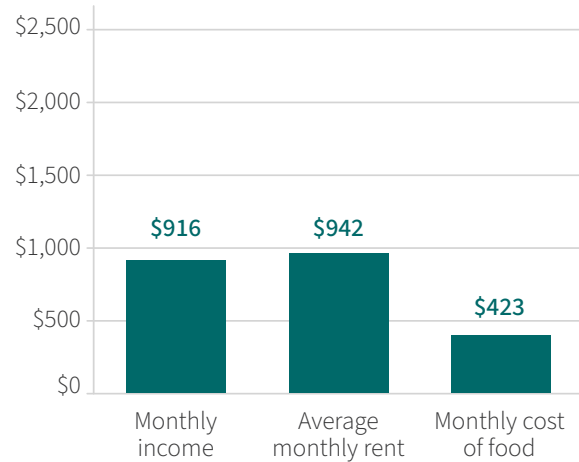
% of income required to purchase healthy food



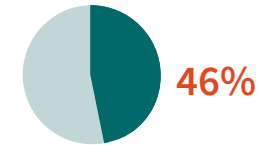
Amount leftover for other expenses

**\$437**

## Single person, OW



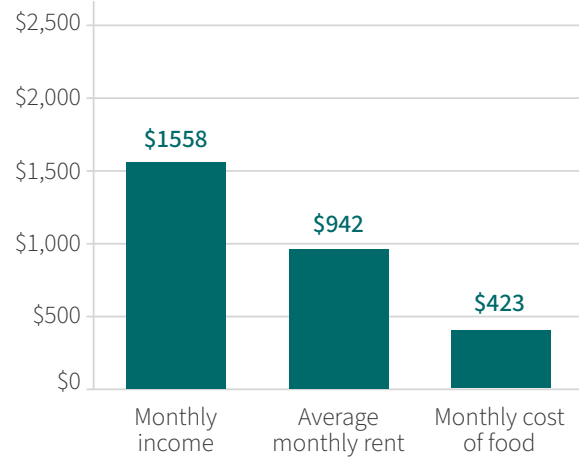
% of income required to purchase healthy food



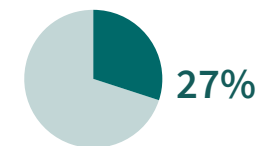
Amount leftover for other expenses

**-\$449**

## Single person, Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)



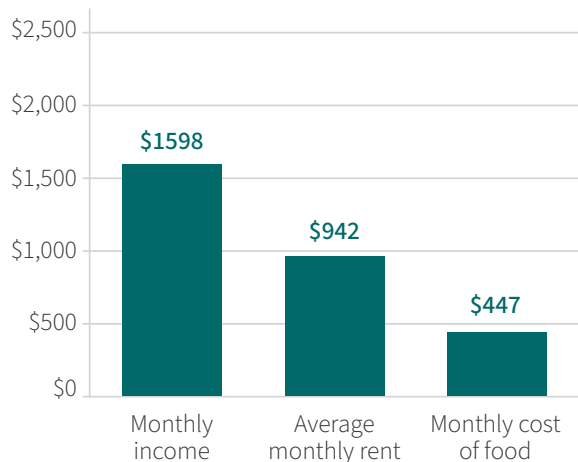
% of income required to purchase healthy food



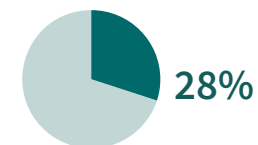
Amount leftover for other expenses

**\$193**

## Single pregnant person, ODSP



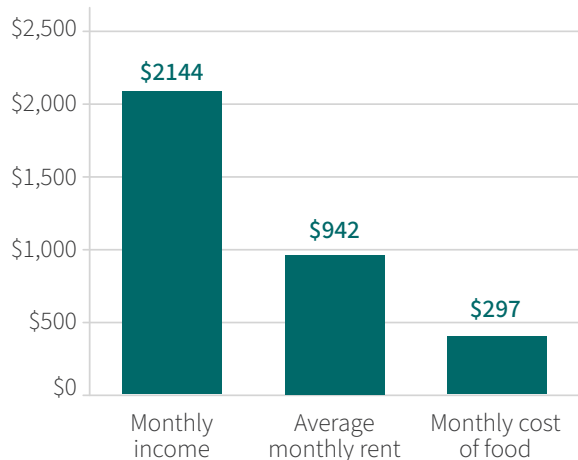
% of income required to purchase healthy food



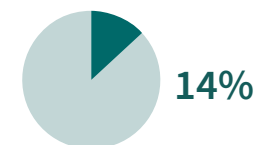
Amount leftover for other expenses

**\$209**

## Single person, OAS/GIS/GAINS\*



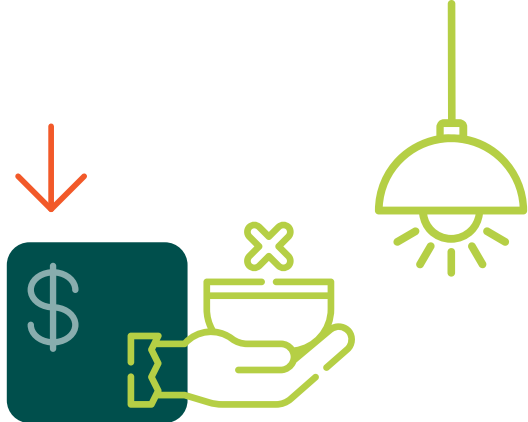
% of income required to purchase healthy food



Amount leftover for other expenses

**\$905**

\*OAS - Old Age Security | GIS - Guaranteed Income Supplement | GAINS - Ontario Guaranteed Annual Income System



Imagine having to choose between putting food on the table and keeping the lights on.

Across the six scenarios, social assistance rates are not sufficient to pay for rent, food, and other household necessities. A single individual receiving Ontario Works would be in debt of \$449 each month after paying for food and rent. A single parent with two children over the age of six on Ontario Works would only have \$437 leftover to cover essential expenses like transportation, school supplies, medications, heat and hydro, internet, etc. **This is not enough.**

## What's left after rent and food to cover:



Childcare



Transportation



Heat & hydro



Phone & internet



School supplies



Clothing



Hygiene products



Home furnishings



Activities



Medications & health products



Cleaning products



Emergency expenses

# Addressing Food Insecurity in Algoma

Evidence-based strategies focused on income and affordability are required to achieve an Algoma where every citizen is food secure<sup>(1,4)</sup>.



## Actions for Individuals



- ✔ Learn more about food insecurity and become an advocate for effective food insecurity solutions.
  - [Ontario Dietitians in Public Health – Position Statement and Recommendations on Responses to Food Insecurity](#)
  - [Household Food Insecurity in Canada - PROOF](#)



- ✔ Share the reality of food insecurity and the need for income-based solutions with your family and friends.



## Actions for Businesses

- ✔ Become a living wage employer through the Ontario Living Wage Network. Paying a living wage can help employees meet their needs and allow them to participate in their community.
- ✔ Help foster local economic resilience for households by providing stable jobs with livable wages and benefits.



## Actions for Municipalities

Municipalities across Algoma are facing the interconnected challenges of food insecurity, housing instability, and poverty in their communities. Some strategies municipalities can consider to meaningfully address food insecurity and poverty in their communities include:

- ✔ Provide leadership and support to local partnerships working to reduce food insecurity and/or poverty (e.g. Algoma Food Security Network, Wawa and Area Food Strategy).
- ✔ Support or host an income tax filing clinic in your community by volunteering services and providing free spaces to hold clinics.
- ✔ Actively engage people who have lived and/or living experience of food insecurity and/or poverty in identifying challenges and solutions and integrate findings into Municipal Official Plans and Community Safety and Well Being plans.



- ✔ Advocate to the provincial and federal government on income-based policies and income support programs.
  - **Ask the provincial government to:**
    - ◆ Increase minimum wage and social assistance to reflect the real cost of living.
    - ◆ Collaborate with the federal government to implement basic income.
    - ◆ Establish and report on targets for food insecurity reduction.
  - **Ask the federal government to:**
    - ◆ Expand the Canadian Child Benefit for lowest income households and Canada Disability Benefit by enhancing the benefit amount.
    - ◆ Vote in favour of Bill S206: An Act to develop a national framework for guaranteed livable basic income.

# References

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3. PROOF. What are the implications of food insecurity for health and health care? [Cited 2026 Feb 12]. Available from [What are the implications of food insecurity for health and health care? - PROOF](#)
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5. Wei, M. F., St-Germain, A. A. F., Li, T., & Tarasuk, V. (2025). What Predicts Permanent Full-Time Job Holders Being Food Insecure? Canadian Public Policy, 51(4), 443-459.
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7. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Rental Market Survey. [2025, Row/apartment/ Sault Ste. Marie]. [Cited 2026 Feb 12]. Available from [Full view](#)