

*This report is an edited version of alPHa's 2007 Nutritious Food Basket Survey Final Report, which was distributed to alPHa members in October of 2007. Figures have been added for 2008, and the Report has been edited to inform advocacy efforts for the 2009 "Put Food in the Budget" campaign.*

## **Introduction**

The irrefutable association between low levels of income and poor health has been and continues to be clearly demonstrated throughout society, from the community to the global levels. While income is but one of a roster of social and economic determinants of health, it is one for which relatively clear government policy interventions can have a direct and immediate impact.

alPHa as an association and its individual members have been continually advocating for such interventions, including immediate increases to the minimum wage, disability and social assistance payments, and ending the National Child Benefit Supplement claw back.

In 2001, alPHa passed a resolution calling on the Government of Ontario to review and ensure that the Basic Allowance portion of social assistance payments allowed for adequate nutrition. Everyone has the right to enough nutritious food to eat. In 2005, alPHa further resolved to urge that the adequacy of Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program rates and the minimum wage be reviewed from a health perspective and that allowances for basic needs and shelter be based on actual current representative costs.

## **Survey Results**

Public Health Units (PHUs) in Ontario calculate the cost of a nutritious food basket for their area on an annual basis. In the 2007 survey, all PHUs were asked to provide the cost of the nutritious food basket for the last 5 years for a family of four. At that time, 29 of the 36 health units had responded and all said that they would like to support provincial advocacy with local advocacy. Data from 2008 have been added to the original tables, along with an additional chart that includes NFB results and Ontario Works incomes for both the index family of four and a single male adult, along with average rents as reported by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation. These figures clearly illustrate the challenge faced by recipients of social assistance to affording nutritious food and other basics, and were used to support advocacy for the "Put Food in the Budget" campaign.

The following chart summarizes the nutritious food basket cost information received for the index family of four (one adult of each gender, 25-49, a girl aged 7-9 and a boy aged 13-15) since 2003. It shows that the average weekly cost to feed a family of four a nutritious diet has increased steadily from \$122.50 in 2003 to \$139.10 in 2008 – an 11.36% increase over six years, including a 3.34% increase over the last year.

	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004	2003
Algoma	\$143.54	\$135.95	\$129.06	\$126.85	\$122.72	\$124.65
Brant (2006)	\$142.15		\$142.16		\$132.14	\$131.56
Chatham-Kent (2007)	\$128.31	\$128.35	\$128.48	\$121.97	\$120.22	\$116.45
Durham	\$140.77	\$137.93	\$135.74	\$126.65	\$115.92	\$121.50
Eastern	\$143.54	\$136.28	\$132.20	\$130.61	\$126.00	\$128.00
Elgin-St. Thomas	\$139.15	\$134.66	\$125.48	\$124.84	\$124.39	\$122.75
Grey-Bruce	\$145.38					
Haldimand-Norfolk	\$126.69	\$126.76	\$126.53	\$119.30	\$120.91	\$120.73
HKPR	\$140.77	\$135.96	\$132.80	\$129.37	\$126.05	\$126.26
Halton	\$133.38	\$127.02	\$120.89	\$120.96	\$123.20	\$117.45
Hamilton	\$135.46	\$131.04	\$120.55	\$122.93	\$118.64	\$118.30
Hastings-Prince Edward	\$137.31					
Huron	\$137.08	\$137.11	\$130.98	\$123.64	\$124.62	\$123.80
Kingston	\$141.69					
Lambton (2007)	\$126.92	\$126.92	\$127.00	\$123.91	\$117.06	\$116.03
Leeds - Grenville	\$137.77	\$130.65	\$126.48	\$123.30	\$122.76	\$123.09
Middlesex - London	\$139.38					
Niagara	\$134.54	\$131.07	\$126.78	\$123.24	\$120.32	\$114.68
North Bay	\$130.62	\$130.65	\$131.41	\$123.82	\$121.91	\$122.71
Northwestern	\$176.08	\$161.00	\$154.72	\$159.63		
Ottawa	\$140.08		\$129.88	\$132.96	\$123.78	\$132.15
Oxford	\$135.92	\$130.24	\$125.50	\$122.00	\$126.00	\$123.00
Peel	\$122.31					
Perth	\$136.62					
Peterborough	\$145.15	\$136.62	\$129.91	\$130.54	\$124.64	\$121.36
Porcupine	\$156.92	\$147.57	\$137.09	\$137.20	\$128.45	\$126.22
Renfrew	\$128.54					
Simcoe - Muskoka	\$133.38	\$129.80	\$123.95	\$122.85	\$116.82	\$118.13
Sudbury	\$140.31	\$130.89	\$139.93	\$128.73	\$117.82	\$118.91
Thunder Bay	\$156.92	\$143.96	\$143.79	\$138.90	\$123.24	\$131.38
Timiskaming	\$137.54	\$137.62	\$132.19	\$127.89	\$123.01	\$131.43
Toronto	\$136.15	\$133.04	\$124.35	\$124.62	\$120.95	\$118.24
Waterloo	\$141.23	\$133.35	\$120.78	\$120.06	\$111.91	\$112.58
Wellington – Dufferin - Guelph	\$137.54	\$133.67	\$130.97	\$129.55	\$126.99	\$125.65
Windsor-Essex	\$135.23	\$131.99	\$125.76	\$125.46	\$124.50	\$118.81
York	\$143.08	\$134.09	\$127.38	\$129.11	\$123.04	\$124.11
<b>AVG WEEKLY</b>	\$139.10	\$134.60	\$130.44	\$127.53	\$122.43	\$122.50
<b>Annual % increase:</b>	3.34%	3.19%	2.28%	4.17%	-0.06%	3.34%
<b><i>Increase over 6 years: 11.36%</i></b>						

The following table contains data on the monthly cost of a nutritious food basket for an adult male (age 25-49) as well as the index family of four (one adult of each gender, 25-49, a girl aged 7-9 and a boy aged 13-15). These are in turn related to average rents and expected family incomes based on current Ontario Works rates.

	<b>Monthly NFB (Adult Male 25-49)</b>	<b>Average Rent (Bachelor) (From CMHC Rental Market Reports - Fall 2008)</b>	<b>Income (\$580) Less Rent &amp; NFB</b>	<b>Monthly NFB 2008 (Family of 4)</b>	<b>AVERAGE RENT (3 Bed) (From CMHC Rental Market Reports - Fall 2008)</b>	<b>Income (\$1782) less Rent &amp; NFB</b>
Algoma	\$216.00	\$412.00	-\$48.00	\$622.00	\$726.00	\$434.00
Brant (2006)	\$229.00	\$557.00	-\$206.00	\$616.00	\$880.00	\$286.00
Chatham-Kent (2007)	\$209.00	\$451.00	-\$80.00	\$556.00	\$633.00	\$593.00
Durham	\$185.00	\$615.00	-\$220.00	\$610.00	\$1,030.00	\$142.00
Eastern		\$475.00		\$622.00	\$703.00	\$457.00
Elgin-St. Thomas	\$183.00	\$433.00	-\$36.00	\$603.00	\$772.00	\$407.00
Grey-Bruce	\$219.00	\$486.00	-\$125.00	\$630.00	\$770.00	\$382.00
Haldimand-Norfolk		\$664.00		\$549.00	\$750.00	\$483.00
HKPR	\$212.00	\$568.00	-\$200.00	\$610.00	\$958.00	\$214.00
Halton	\$209.00	\$721.00	-\$350.00	\$578.00	\$1,224.00	-\$20.00
Hamilton	\$212.00	\$501.00	-\$133.00	\$587.00	\$907.00	\$288.00
Hastings-Prince Edward	\$208.00	\$468.00	-\$96.00	\$595.00	\$1,105.00	\$82.00
Huron	\$208.00	\$524.00	-\$152.00	\$594.00	\$842.00	\$346.00
Kingston	\$216.00	\$558.00	-\$194.00	\$614.00	\$1,327.00	-\$159.00
Lambton (2007)		\$514.00		\$550.00	\$948.00	\$284.00
Leeds - Grenville	\$208.00	\$481.00	-\$109.00	\$597.00	\$724.00	\$461.00
Middlesex - London	\$210.00	\$525.00	-\$155.00	\$604.00	\$967.00	\$211.00
Niagara	\$176.00	\$505.00	-\$101.00	\$583.00	\$869.00	\$330.00
North Bay	\$198.00	\$485.00	-\$103.00	\$566.00	\$871.00	\$345.00
Northwestern		\$428.00		\$763.00	\$740.00	\$279.00
Ottawa	\$213.00	\$671.00	-\$304.00	\$607.00	\$1,227.00	-\$52.00
Oxford	\$204.00	\$485.00	-\$109.00	\$589.00	\$717.00	\$476.00
Peel	\$196.00	\$710.00	-\$326.00	\$530.00	\$1,147.00	\$105.00
Perth	\$205.00	\$474.00	-\$99.00	\$592.00	\$840.00	\$350.00
Peterborough	\$221.00	\$568.00	-\$209.00	\$629.00	\$1,235.00	-\$82.00
Porcupine	\$237.00	\$430.00	-\$87.00	\$680.00	\$816.00	\$286.00
Renfrew	\$195.00	\$515.00	-\$130.00	\$557.00	\$708.00	\$517.00
Simcoe - Muskoka	\$201.00	\$627.00	-\$248.00	\$578.00	\$1,051.00	\$153.00
Sudbury	\$211.00	\$469.00	-\$100.00	\$608.00	\$863.00	\$311.00
Thunder Bay	\$237.00	\$455.00	-\$112.00	\$680.00	\$844.00	\$258.00

	<b>Monthly NFB (Adult Male 25-49)</b>	<b>Average Rent (Bachelor) (From CMHC Rental Market Reports - Fall 2008)</b>	<b>Income (\$580) Less Rent &amp; NFB</b>	<b>Monthly NFB 2008 (Family of 4)</b>	<b>AVERAGE RENT (3 Bed) (From CMHC Rental Market Reports - Fall 2008)</b>	<b>Income (\$1782) less Rent &amp; NFB</b>
Timiskaming	\$208.00	\$411.00	-\$39.00	\$596.00	\$670.00	\$516.00
Toronto	\$205.00	\$764.00	-\$389.00	\$590.00	\$1,293.00	-\$101.00
Waterloo	\$212.00	\$562.00	-\$194.00	\$612.00	\$1,010.00	\$160.00
Wellington – Dufferin - Guelph	\$226.00	\$615.00	-\$261.00	\$596.00	\$1,112.00	\$74.00
Windsor-Essex	\$205.00	\$502.00	-\$127.00	\$586.00	\$879.00	\$317.00
York	\$218.00	\$750.00	-\$388.00	\$620.00	\$1,242.00	-\$80.00
<b>AVERAGES</b>	<b>\$209.55</b>	<b>\$538.31</b>	<b>-\$164.65</b>	<b>\$602.75</b>	<b>\$927.78</b>	<b>\$251.47</b>

**Notes:** *Average Rents are in most cases averages for the identified health unit as a whole, but where these were unavailable, statistics for the municipality where the health unit's central office is located are given. Monthly NFB amounts are rounded to the nearest dollar. Monthly NFB amounts for the Adult Male include a 15% adjustment to account for excess costs related to living alone.*

These data clearly illustrate that in no part of the province does a single adult recipient of Ontario Works social assistance have the means to afford healthy food and basic shelter requirements at the same time. These combined costs are in excess of the amount they can be expected to receive in all cases, from a minimum of \$39 in Timiskaming to a maximum of \$389 in Toronto. The average deficit between Ontario Works Payments and average costs of nutritious food and basic shelter is nearly \$165.

It may be tempting to conclude that families are slightly better off in this scenario, as the numbers above show that in most cases, they have money left over after paying for food and shelter from their monthly Ontario Works allowances. What is important to note however, is that these data do not include any other basic necessities such as utilities, transport, clothing, toiletries, or any other items that most of us consider the basics for living.

## **Conclusion**

Health inequalities are strongly related to social and economic ones, such as poverty, food insecurity, discrimination, inadequate housing and a host of others. They are the root causes of poor health, and addressing them will reduce preventable illness and premature death.

alPHa's members collect data on the cost of healthy eating throughout the province, under a mandate to promote access to sufficient, safe, nutritious and personally acceptable food in order to prevent chronic diseases, particularly within "priority populations" (defined within the Ontario Public Health Standards as "populations that are at risk and for whom public health interventions may be reasonably considered to have a substantial impact at the population level") to focus public health action.

The most effective action in this regard will be to ensure that the living wage and social assistance rates are more reflective of the true costs of adequate nutrition, shelter, transportation, clothing, personal care and other basics. To be unable to meet these costs is to live in poverty, which many argue is the most significant barrier to good health.