

Report to/Rapport au:

**Ottawa Board of Health
Conseil de santé d'Ottawa**

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CITY WIDE/ À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE

Ref N°: ACS2013-OPH- HPDP-0009

**SUBJECT: PARTNERSHIP WITH POVERTY AND HUNGER WORKING GROUP—
WORKING TOWARDS IMPROVED ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD FOR
ALL**

**OBJET : PARTENARIAT AVEC LE GROUPE DE TRAVAIL SUR LA PAUVRETÉ
ET LA FAIM — EFFORTS POUR AMÉLIORER L'ACCÈS À UNE
ALIMENTATION SAINE POUR TOUS**

REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Board of Health for the City of Ottawa Health Unit receive this report for information.

RECOMMANDATIONS DU RAPPORT

Que le Conseil de santé de la circonscription sanitaire de la ville d'Ottawa prenne connaissance du présent rapport à titre d'information.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To assess the cost of healthy, nutritious food for individuals and families, Ottawa Public Health (OPH) conducts an annual survey of costs relating to filling a Nutritious Food Basket in the city. The survey measures the affordability and accessibility of healthy foods by monitoring the cost of 67 basic food items. According to the 2013 Nutritious Food Basket survey, it costs a minimum of \$789 a month to adequately feed a family of four in Ottawa. This represents a \$10 per week increase from last year.

For some with low incomes, the costs associated with healthy nutrition are prohibitive; there is not enough money to afford healthy food after paying for other essentials, such as housing, transportation and childcare. Adults who lack access to healthy food report poorer physical, mental and oral health. Children who experience hunger are more likely to have poorer health, as well as short and long term social outcomes, including academic performance.

OPH has been working with the Poverty and Hunger Working Group, a community-based coalition, to improve food security in Ottawa over the past two years. The working group, which is led by the Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres and includes representation from Just Food, Ottawa Community Housing, The Good Food Box, Coalition of Community Houses, The Social Planning Council, Ottawa Poverty Reduction Network and Groupe D'Action Francophone , focuses on increasing access to healthy foods in neighbourhoods with limited availability. In the last year the Poverty and Hunger Working Group has held thirty Good Food Markets, where affordable, nutritious fruits, vegetables and dry goods have been sold to residents in six Ottawa neighbourhoods.

In 2014, OPH aims to improve access to nutritious food through food skills education, increased breastfeeding rates, improved availability of healthy foods, and continued support of community action related to food security, including the Poverty and Hunger Working Group.

RÉSUMÉ

Afin d'évaluer le coût d'une nourriture saine et nutritive pour les individus et les familles, Santé publique Ottawa (SPO) effectue chaque année une enquête sur les coûts engagés pour remplir un panier de provisions nutritif dans la ville. L'enquête mesure l'abordabilité et l'accessibilité des aliments santé en surveillant le coût de 67 aliments de base. Selon l'Enquête sur le panier de provisions nutritif 2013, il en coûte au moins 789 \$ par mois pour nourrir adéquatement une famille de quatre à Ottawa, ce qui représente une augmentation de 10 \$ par semaine par rapport à l'année dernière.

Pour certaines personnes à faible revenu, les coûts associés à une saine nutrition sont prohibitifs. Elles n'ont pas assez d'argent pour se payer des aliments santé une fois les autres nécessités de la vie payées, comme le logement, le transport et la garde d'enfants. Les adultes qui n'ont pas accès à une nourriture nutritive ont une moins bonne santé physique, mentale et bucco-dentaire. Les enfants qui ont faim sont plus susceptibles d'être en moins bonne santé et aussi d'obtenir de piètres résultats au niveau social à court et à long terme, y compris le rendement académique.

Depuis deux ans, SPO travaille conjointement avec le Groupe de travail sur la pauvreté et la faim, une coalition communautaire, afin d'améliorer la salubrité alimentaire à Ottawa. Le Groupe de travail, qui est dirigé par la Coalition des centres de ressources et de santé communautaires d'Ottawa et compte des représentants d'Alimentation juste, de Logement communautaire d'Ottawa, de La boîte verte, de la Coalition des maisons communautaires, du Conseil de planification sociale, du Réseau pour la réduction de la pauvreté d'Ottawa et du Groupe d'action francophone communautaire, se concentre sur

l'amélioration de l'accès aux aliments santé dans les quartiers ayant un accès limité. Au cours de la dernière année, le Groupe de travail sur la pauvreté et la faim a tenu trente « bons marchés » où les résidents de six quartiers d'Ottawa peuvent acheter des fruits, des légumes et des marchandises sèches nutritifs et abordables.

En 2014, SPO vise à améliorer l'accès à des aliments santé par l'entremise de l'enseignement de compétences alimentaires, d'un taux d'allaitement accru, d'une meilleure disponibilité des aliments santé et d'un soutien continu aux actions communautaires associées à la salubrité alimentaire, y compris le Groupe de travail sur la pauvreté et la faim.

BACKGROUND

As reported in the [Access to Healthy Foods](#) (ACS2011-OPH-HPDP-0004) and [Access to Healthy Foods and Hunger Prevention](#) reports (ACS2012-OPH-HPDP-0010), food insecurity in Ottawa is a persistent issue that affects the most vulnerable residents. According to the most recent estimate (2011/2012), 7.7 per cent of Ottawa households reported two or more indicators of food insecurity due to lack of money, such as relying on only a few low-cost foods to feed children, not eating balanced meals; cutting meal size or skipping meals, or being worried that food would run out before money was available to buy more.

This remains unchanged since 2009-2010¹ and is consistent with the rest of Ontario, where 8.2 per cent of households reported some barrier to accessing food.² In Ottawa, it is estimated 49,000 residents sought services from a program supported by the Ottawa Food Bank in March 2013, which is reflective of typical monthly usage.³

To provide a snapshot of the cost of healthy eating, each year, Ottawa Public Health (OPH) conducts the Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) survey. The survey measures the cost of basic healthy eating and is used to monitor the affordability and accessibility of healthy foods in the city. The survey examines the cost of 67 basic food items representing current nutrition recommendations and average purchasing patterns. According to the 2013 analysis outlined in Document 1, it costs a minimum of \$789 every month to adequately feed a family of four, an increase of \$10 per week, which is equivalent to a six per cent increase over last year.

The NFB results over the last number of years indicate that low-income households continue to struggle to pay their bills, affecting their ability to put healthy food on the table. Families must often pay for fixed expenses, such as rent, transportation, and heat, with little left over to purchase groceries. For example, a family of four on Ontario Works receives a monthly income of \$2,112. Of that, on average, \$1,377 is used to pay the rent of a typical three-bedroom apartment. A minimum of \$789 is needed to afford a healthy diet for the family. Based on these estimates, at the end of the month – not taking into account other basic living expenses such as telephone, transportation, child care, household and personal care items, clothing, and school supplies – the family is short \$54.

This reality is worrisome and has significant public health implications. Adults who lack access to healthy food report having poor physical, mental and oral health and other chronic conditions. As well, children who experience multiple episodes of hunger are more likely to have poorer health, including higher incidence of asthma and other chronic conditions.⁴ Further, children who go to school hungry have poorer academic achievement.⁵

OPH's work to improve access to healthy foods is aligned with the [Healthy Eating Active Living](#) (HEAL) Strategy (ACS2012-OPH-HPDP-0003). Over the past year, OPH has been actively working on initiatives that improve food skills in vulnerable populations, increasing awareness of design elements of complete communities that include convenient access to shops and services with local access to healthy and fresh foods, and increasing the availability of healthy foods in neighbourhoods that lack access. Highlights include:

- Food skills outreach to over 17,000 residents at food banks, English as Second Language classes, local markets and community groups
- Recruiting and training 24 new Community Food Advisors, thereby increasing capacity to meet requests for appropriate food skills education
- Profiling innovative food system solutions at the Healthy Eating, Active Living Forum in June
- Implementing new guidelines for childcare providers on healthy eating and physical activity for infants, toddlers and preschoolers
- Achieving Baby Friendly Initiative designation, and in doing so, strengthening OPH and community capacity to support families to make sound decisions on how to feed their babies
- Continuing to work with partners such as the Poverty and Hunger Working Group to expand reach of the Good Food Markets, and increasing healthy food choices to residents who experience food insecurity

OPH's Partnership with the Poverty and Hunger Working Group

The Poverty and Hunger Working Group (PHWG) is an initiative of the Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres, which stems from the Coalition's Anti-Poverty Project. The PHWG was struck in 2011, to focus on food security and its impact on people experiencing poverty. It is composed of representatives of Ottawa's Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres, Just Food, Ottawa Community Housing, The Good Food Box, Coalition of Community Houses, The Social Planning Council, Ottawa Poverty Reduction Network, Groupe D'Action Francophone Communautaire, Ottawa Public Health, and the City of Ottawa.

The PHWG stands out from similar groups in other cities, especially because of its diverse membership and deep ties in many Ottawa neighbourhoods. OPH has been an

active participant on the PHWG since its inauguration and now sits as co-chair of the group. As well, the PHWG is intended to further the work of the Community Development Framework (CDF), with systemic change in the area of food security as a priority. The work of the PHWG also aligns with the Ottawa Food Policy Council's action plan priority to increase access to healthy food for people living in poverty, particularly those living in food deserts.

Over the past two years, the PHWG has focused on facilitating access to healthy foods in neighbourhoods known to have limited availability. In 2012, the PHWG launched the Good Food Markets project. Good Food Markets – pop-up markets that sell affordable, nutritious fruits, vegetables and dry goods – have been run as a pilot project for the past two years. The foods are selected based on residents' needs and cultural preferences, purchased in bulk and sold on a cost-recovery basis.

In 2012, eight markets were held in four neighbourhoods and 86 per cent of attendees were very satisfied with the Good Food Markets. This led to significant expansions in 2013, with over 30 markets held in six neighbourhoods. Once again feedback showed that the majority (83 per cent) were very satisfied.

The PHWG, as a contribution to the Community Development Framework, helped to organize the 2013 city-wide learning forum, *Come and Get it! Connecting Neighbourhoods with Food*. This event was attended by more than 160 residents and service providers. The goals were to celebrate and share successes in increasing access to nutritious food as well as provide an opportunity to discuss how to work together to improve nutritious food access in neighbourhoods. Almost all (96 per cent) of participants who completed the written evaluation indicated that they will use the information from the forum in their neighbourhoods.

DISCUSSION

Over the next three years, the PHWG has plans to increase the frequency of existing Good Food Markets and add new market sites. In the process, the group will increase the amount of local food sold at the markets, with emphasis on affordability and cultural appropriateness.

In addition to working with partners, such as the PHWG, OPH will continue to improve access to healthy foods through complementary activities at programmatic, planning and policy levels. As noted as an objective in the HEAL Strategy, efforts to engage a “whole of community” approach includes working with municipal and community partners on food skills education and improving supportive physical and social environments across food systems.

Ottawa is fortunate to have passionate and committed local champions working to reduce hunger and improve access to healthy foods. OPH commends the PHWG on its efforts and notes that the PHWG's work aligns well with OPH's current priorities related to increasing access to healthy foods. OPH will continue to support the PHWG on these shared priorities and offers ongoing commitment to the work that the group is doing.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal impediments to receiving this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

There are no technological implications related to this report.

BOARD OF HEALTH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The recommendations in this report support the Board of Health Strategic Priorities: C1 Increase access to services for populations facing health inequities and A2 Increase integration with other City departments and community agencies.

TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES

The recommendations in this report support the 2010-2014 Term of Council Priorities under “Healthy and Caring Communities.”

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

[Document 1](#) – Hunger in Ottawa Infographic, 2013

DOCUMENTS À L’APPUI

[Document 1](#) – La faim à Ottawa Infographie, 2013

DISPOSITION

Ottawa Public Health will continue to implement to work with the Poverty and Hunger Working Group as described in this report.

¹ Canadian Community Health Survey 2009/2010, Statistics Canada, Share File, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

² Canadian Community Health Survey 2011, Statistics Canada, Share File, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

³ Howard, M. Agency Relations Manager. Personal Communication. 4 Nov 2013.

⁴ PROOF: Research to Identify Options to Reduce Food Insecurity [Internet]. Available from: <http://nutritionalsciences.lamp.utoronto.ca/>

⁵ Jyoti, D., Frongillo, E.A., Jones, S.J. Food insecurity affects school children’s academic performance, weight gain, and social skills. J. Nutr. 2005 135: 12 2831-2839.