

February 23, 2011

The Honourable Dalton McGuinty
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier McGuinty:

Subject: The Price of Eating Well Report 2010 – North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit

Enclosed with this letter is a copy of our annual *Price of Eating Well Report 2010*, and a provincial map highlighting the cost of healthy eating in the North Bay Parry Sound District within the context of provincial, northern and southern Ontario Nutritious Food Basket averages.

According to our 2010 Nutritious Food Basket data collection, the cost of healthy eating for a family of four in the North Bay Parry Sound District is \$168.34/week (\$728.91/month). When this cost is compared to our local rent rates, provincial income security programs and minimum wage rates, it is evident that those relying on social assistance or working for minimum wage simply do not have enough money for nutritious food, along with the other basic costs of living.

As a Health Unit, it is our role to promote healthy eating and the recommendations of *Canada's Food Guide*. However, we know these recommendations are out of reach for those with limited incomes. It is well documented that health is compromised in many ways when nutritious food is not affordable, including being more susceptible to developing chronic diseases. The North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit recognizes that income determines the quality of other social determinants of health, including food security. Because chronic disease prevention is part of our health unit mandate, we recommend that the provincial government examine its income security programs and minimum wage rates so that those living in poverty are able to access the nutritious foods they need for optimal health. In October 2009, our Board of Health recommended that the government of Ontario establish a committee to develop rational and just criteria for Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program rates. We commend your government for implementing this recommendation by appointing the Social Assistance Review Advisory Committee (SARAC). In May 2010, the SARAC released their recommendations, which strongly emphasized the need for a comprehensive review of Ontario's income security system.

On February 23, 2010, the North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit Board of Health passed a resolution supporting advocacy work in the areas of the social determinants of health and food security, recognizing the impact these factors have on health outcomes. In addition, our Board of Health urges your government to:

1. Support, in principle, the directions and process proposed by the Social Assistance Review Advisory Council (SARAC) for a comprehensive review of Ontario's income security system, and
2. Consult with Northern Ontario health units as key stakeholders in the social service sector, through the process established to review Ontario's income security system, and to complete this review as soon as possible.

Thank you for your commitment to reducing poverty in Ontario, as outlined in the 2008 report *Breaking the Cycle: Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy*. We trust that your government will continue to prioritize poverty reduction in Ontario.

Yours in Health,

Original signed by

Daryl Vaillancourt
Board of Health Chairperson

Original signed by

Jim Chirico, H.BSc., M.D., F.R.C.P. (C), MPH
Medical Officer of Health/Executive Officer

Enclosures (2)

Copied to:

- 1) The Honourable Margaret Best, Minister of Health Promotion & Sport
- 2) The Honourable Deb Matthews, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
- 3) The Honourable Madeleine Meilleur, Minister of Community and Social Services
- 4) The Honourable Monique Smith, MPP (Nipissing)
- 5) David Ramsay, MPP (Timiskaming- Cochrane)
- 6) Norm Miller, MPP (Parry Sound/Muskoka)
- 7) The Honourable Tony Clement, M.P. (Parry Sound-Muskoka)
- 8) Anthony Rota, M.P. (Nipissing-Timiskaming)
- 9) Leo DeLoyde, Chief Administrative Officer, District of Nipissing Social Services Administration Board
- 10) Janet Patterson, Chief Administrative Officer, Parry Sound District Social Services Administration Board
- 11) Ontario Boards of Health
- 12) Member Municipalities
- 13) Linda Stewart, Executive Director, Association of Local Public Health Agencies
- 14) Brenda Marshall, Manager, Healthy Living, NBPSDHU
- 15) Erin Reyce, Public Health Dietitian, Healthy Living, NBPSDHU

The Price of Eating Well Report 2010

How Much Does it Cost to Eat Healthy?

Every year in Ontario, Public Health Dietitians take part in a project called the *Nutritious Food Basket* (NFB). They visit grocery stores across their health unit districts to cost a set list of food items that follow *Canada's Food Guide* and reflect Canadian consumption patterns.

The NFB does not include prepared convenience foods or household non-food items often purchased at grocery stores, such as toothpaste and toilet paper. It also assumes that people have the time, food preparation skills and equipment needed to cook with the relatively low-cost food staples from the NFB list.

The NFB estimates the cost of one week's worth of groceries. This information is used to raise awareness about the cost of healthy eating, and to develop and support policies that increase access to healthy food in our communities.



What Does This Mean for the People in our District?

Based on the 2010 *Nutritious Food Basket* for the North Bay Parry Sound District, the cost for a family of four (a mother, a father, a 14 year old son and an 8 year old daughter) to eat healthy for one week is about \$168.34 (\$728.91 monthly).



- A family of four living on Median Ontario Income¹ spends about 13% of their total income on food.^{2,3}
- A family of four, with one parent working for minimum wage and the other staying home with the children, spends about 29% of their income on food.^{2,3,4}
- A family of four relying on social assistance spends about 38% of their income on food.^{2,3,5}

Meet a Few People from our Community...

Steve and Mandy have an eight year old daughter and a fourteen year old son. Steve works full-time (40 hours per week) earning minimum wage while Mandy stays at home. The family's average monthly income is \$2,514.⁴ After paying rent for a 3-bedroom apartment (\$949/month)⁶ in Parry Sound, they have \$1,565 left.

To feed their family, Steve and Mandy need at least \$728.91/month.³ This leaves them with \$836.09 for all of their other costs of living for the month. Steve and Mandy may have to cut their food budget to cover these other expenses, which means they may not have enough nutritious food to eat.



Paul is 40 years old and lives in Sturgeon Falls. After being laid off from his job and not being able to find work, he was forced to apply for social assistance and receives \$606/month.⁵ After paying rent for a bachelor apartment (\$437/month)⁷, he has \$169 left.

To feed himself, he needs at least \$243.33/month.³ Paul does not have enough money for food, let alone his other costs of living.

Amanda is a single mom with two children (girl aged 7, boy aged 16) receiving social assistance (\$1,757/month).⁵ After paying rent for a 3-bedroom apartment (\$936/month)⁷ in North Bay, Amanda has \$821 left.

To feed her family, Amanda needs at least \$552.45/month,³ which means there is only \$268.55 left for all of the families other expenses. Amanda may not have enough money for food after covering all of the family's living expenses.

It is clear that those receiving social assistance or earning minimum wage do not have enough money to cover the basic costs of living, including:

- Heat and hydro
- Telephone service
- Laundry
- Toiletries and household cleaning products
- Insurance
- Costs associated with having children in school
- Transportation
- Clothing
- Debt payment
- Gifts
- Non-prescription drugs and dispensing fees for prescription drugs
- Banking service charges
- Child care
- Money to cover unexpected expenses



What Happens When There Isn't Enough Money for Food?

When low-income households struggle to pay rent and other living costs, their food budget is often cut because it is not a set bill to be paid. As a result, many people cannot afford the food they need to maintain a healthy diet. When there isn't enough money for nutritious food, people are more likely to get sick, be overweight, and develop chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes and high blood pressure. They are also more likely to be malnourished and experience higher levels of stress and depression. Children who don't have enough to eat tend to miss more school and can have trouble learning.

Finding Solutions to Create Community Food Security

Community food security involves working toward a local, sustainable food system where everyone has access to enough nutritious and safe food to maintain their health, while building community, supporting local food producers and preserving the environment.

What Can You Do to Help?

- Share your gardening skills, tools or donate growing space to local groups for community gardens.
- Start a community kitchen at your church or a nearby community centre. Community kitchens provide an opportunity for people to get together and cook, while learning new skills.
- Plant an extra row of vegetables in your garden to donate to a local meal program or food bank.
- Donate time, food or money to help support emergency food programs.
- Think about where your food comes from. Support Farmers' Markets and choose local, Ontario and Canadian foods more often than those imported from other countries.
- Help advocate for change. Join local poverty reduction and community food security work groups.



While these suggestions offer many benefits to our community, on their own they will not solve the issue of food insecurity. Improvements are needed to address the root causes of poverty, including:

- Improved social assistance and minimum wage rates
- More affordable housing policies
- Improved employment insurance coverage and benefits
- Accessible and affordable child care

Need more information?

To learn more about community food security, or to access a list of our local food-related initiatives through our *2010 Community Food Security Inventory*, visit www.healthunit.biz (click on healthy living, then healthy eating) or call 1-800-563-2808, and ask to speak to a Public Health Dietitian.

The Weekly Cost of the Nutritious Food Basket in the North Bay Parry Sound District 2010

How to Calculate the Cost of Healthy Eating for Your Family:

- Write down the age and gender of all the people you are feeding.

For example, Rob is feeding:

- Himself, 39 years old
- His son, 15 years old, and
- His daughter, 11 years old

- Find the age and gender for each family member in the chart and write down the cost to feed each person. Total those costs.

In Rob's case, this would be:

- | | |
|---------------------------|-----------------|
| • Man, 31 to 50 years old | \$ 46.83 |
| • Boy, 14 to 18 years old | \$ 53.47 |
| • Girl, 9 to 13 years old | <u>\$ 33.05</u> |
| Total cost: | \$133.35 |

- Since it costs a little more to feed small groups of people and a little less to feed larger groups, you may have to adjust the total cost calculated in Step 2.

If you are feeding:

- 1 person: increase cost by 20% (multiply by 1.20)
- 2 people: increase cost by 10% (multiply by 1.10)
- 3 people: increase cost by 5% (multiply by 1.05)
- 4 people: make no change
- 5-6 people: decrease cost by 5% (multiply by 0.95)
- 7 people or more people: decrease cost by 10% (multiply by 0.90)

	Age	*Cost/Week (\$)
Boy	2 to 3	\$22.67
	4 to 8	\$29.17
	9 to 13	\$38.40
	14 to 18	\$53.47
Girl	2 to 3	\$22.22
	4 to 8	\$28.28
	9 to 13	\$33.05
	14 to 18	\$39.33
Man	19 to 30	\$51.67
	31 to 50	\$46.83
	51 to 70	\$45.32
	>70	\$44.87
Woman	19 to 30	\$40.22
	31 to 50	\$39.76
	51 to 70	\$35.44
	>70	\$34.85
Pregnant Woman	≤18	\$43.66
	19 to 30	\$44.00
	31 to 50	\$42.92
Lactating Women	≤18	\$45.48
	19 to 30	\$46.45
	31 to 50	\$45.36

*Based on a family of four.

In Rob's case, he has to multiply the total cost of the nutritious food basket by 5% for his family of three:
 $\$133.35 \times 1.05 = \140.02 is the total cost to feed his family for 1 week.

- To determine the average monthly cost of the Nutritious Food Basket, multiply the weekly cost by 4.33.
 In Rob's case, $\$140.02 \times 4.33 = \606.29 is the total cost to feed his family for one month.

References:

¹ Median refers to the middle number that separates the higher half from the lower half

² A man and woman, aged 31-50 years, a boy 14-18 years of age, and a girl 4-8 years old

³ North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit: Nutritious Food Basket Survey

⁴ Monthly Income includes: (Income from Employment (\$10.25/hour at 40 hours per week) + Child/Family Benefits + Federal GST Benefits – Employment Insurance paid – Canada Pension Plan paid + Working Income Tax Benefit)

⁵ Social Assistance includes: Shelter Allowance + Basic Allowance + Child/Family Benefits + Federal GST Benefit

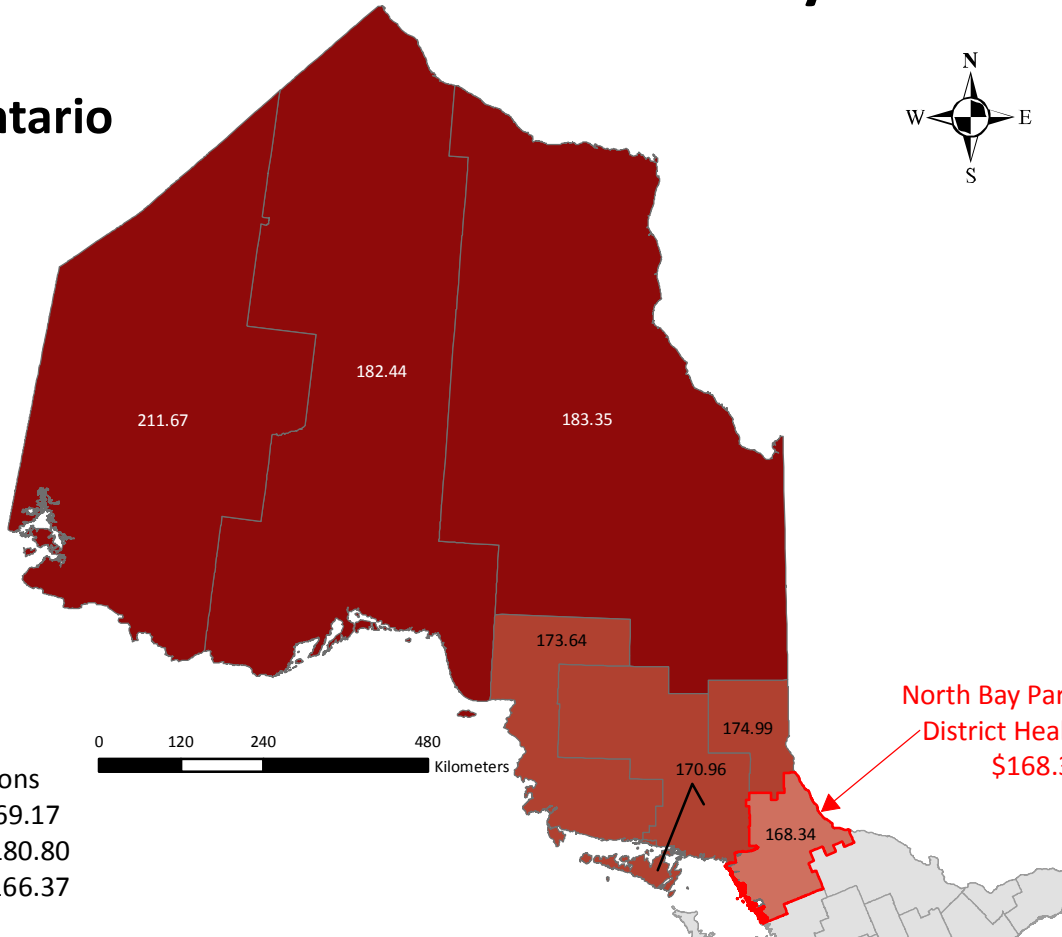
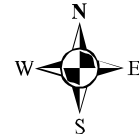
⁶ Parry Sound District Social Service Administration Board. Canada-Ontario affordable housing program extension: Maximum affordable rents & AMR 2009. Ontario: PSDSSAB.

⁷ Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (Spring 2010). Rental market report: Ontario highlights.

Some content in this report was adapted with permission of the Chronic Disease Prevention and Oral Health Division Halton Region Health Department from *The Price of Eating Well in Halton 2009*.

2010 Nutritious Food Basket Costs by Health Unit

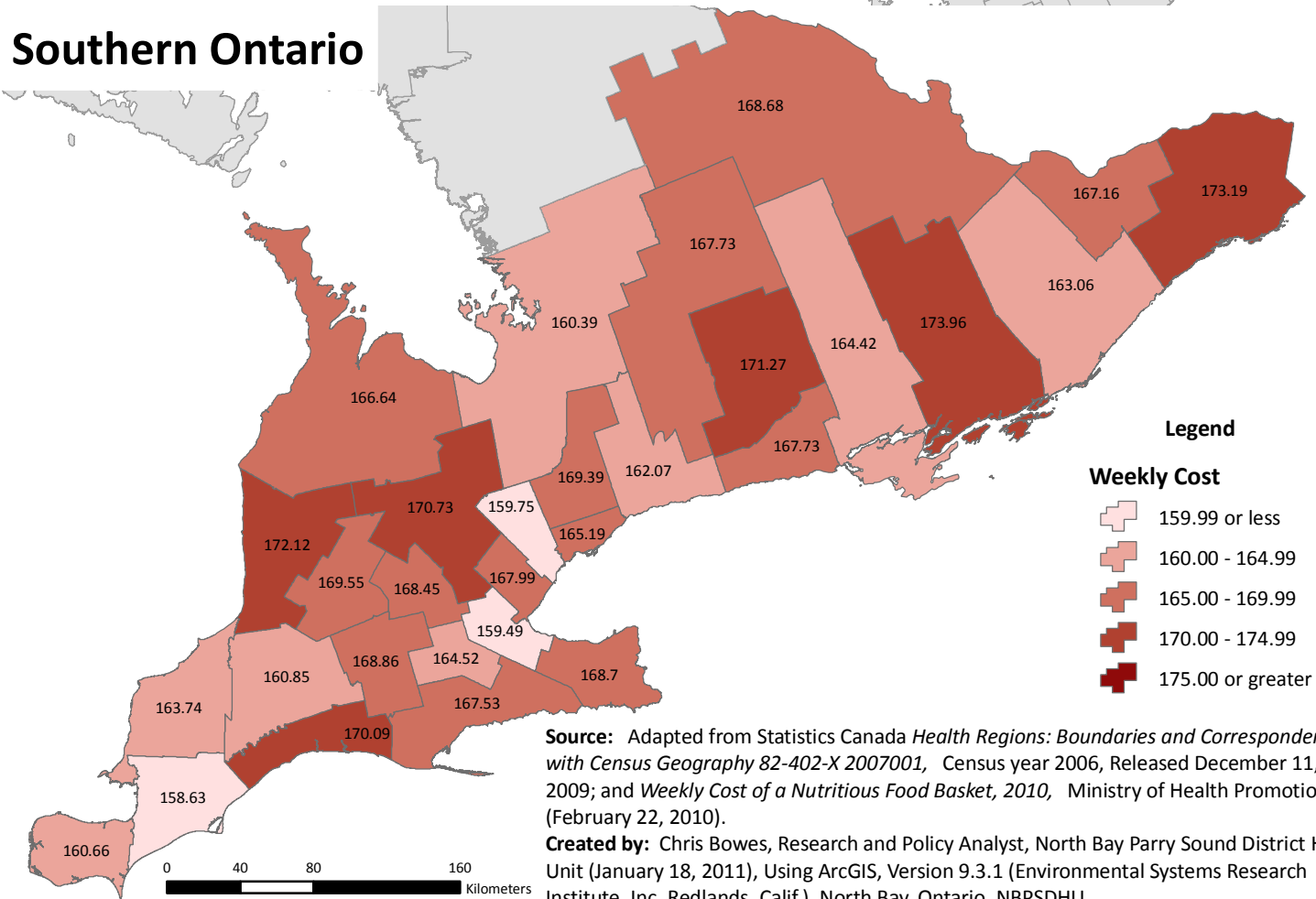
Northern Ontario



Regional Comparisons
 Ontario Average: \$169.17
 Northern Average: \$180.80
 Southern Average: \$166.37

**North Bay Parry Sound
 District Health Unit:
 \$168.34**

Southern Ontario



Source: Adapted from Statistics Canada *Health Regions: Boundaries and Correspondences with Census Geography 82-402-X 2007001*, Census year 2006, Released December 11, 2009; and *Weekly Cost of a Nutritious Food Basket, 2010*, Ministry of Health Promotion (February 22, 2010).
Created by: Chris Bowes, Research and Policy Analyst, North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit (January 18, 2011), Using ArcGIS, Version 9.3.1 (Environmental Systems Research Institute, Inc. Redlands, Calif.). North Bay, Ontario. NBPSDHU