



A new survey shows that access to adequate food continues to be a real problem for many residents in Clarington and other municipalities in Durham Region. A recent survey by Durham Region Health Department has found that people living on low incomes in the Region cannot afford to eat a healthy diet. In fact, the most recent information from the Health Department indicates that 12 per cent of Durham Region's population lacks what it calls 'food security'.

Results from Durham Region's 2011 Nutritious Food Basket survey indicate that it costs \$708.11 to feed a family of four - yet the total monthly income for this family on social assistance is \$2,011.

"Once rent and bills such as transportation and child care are paid, there is little money left over for food – this raises serious concerns about poverty, hunger and food security," says Deborah Lay, a public health nutritionist with Durham Region Health Department. "In Ontario, up to 60 per cent of households living on social assistance report a lack of food security, making food security a critical public health issue that needs to be addressed."

Food security means being able to secure safe, healthy, personally and culturally acceptable food. Ms. Lay explains that "having food security can help to lower the risk of disease and reduce health care costs. "Poor nutrition leads to increased risk of chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer, as well as conditions such as low birth weight. It's better to prevent these conditions and diseases by ensuring people have enough money to buy nutritious foods."

Each year, the Health Department conducts a Nutritious Food Basket survey which is used to monitor the cost of a nutritious diet for individuals and families. The survey helps to determine the lowest available price for 67 food items, reflecting an eating pattern that meets the recommendations outlined in Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide and the Canadian

Community Health Survey.

“We know that the lower a household income, the more likely it is that a family will not have food security,” Ms. Lay added. “When people do not have food security, they suffer and so does the community.”

The Health Department says that a number of solutions can be adopted to support food security including:

- Having social assistance rates reflect the real cost of living and indexed annually to inflation.
- Increasing the minimum wage rate to \$11 per hour, indexed annually to inflation, to help better ensure that individuals who work full-time are not living in poverty.
- Creating an Ontario housing benefit that will help low income tenants pay their rent so they don't have to rely on food bank charities for food.
- Implementing a healthy food supplement of \$100 per month for social assistance recipients.

“Everyone can help to support food security,” Ms. Lay states. “Volunteering at a student nutrition program, educating yourself about the root causes of hunger, such as inadequate income and lack of affordable housing, or donating to a food bank, can provide a better understanding of the importance of food security and help to increase support for access to nutritious food for everyone.”