

# THE COST OF EATING WELL IN TIMISKAMING



Monitoring Food Affordability Report  
2022



Services de santé du  
**TIMISKAMING**  
Health Unit

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## Introduction

### Household Food Insecurity

Household Food Insecurity (HFI) is defined as “inadequate or insecure access to food due to lack of money.”<sup>3</sup> HFI is an issue of serious material deprivation tightly linked to poverty, which strongly predicts HFI. As the severity of food insecurity increases, households become increasingly sensitive to income.<sup>3</sup> Those who face financial constraints struggle to afford food; after paying for rent, utilities, childcare, and medications, little money is left to buy food, compromising the quality and quantity of the diet. Evidence shows that the risk of HFI decreases when income rises.<sup>3</sup>



**POVERTY**

HFI is divided into three main categories:

1. **Marginal Food Insecurity:** involves worrying about running out of food or having limited food options due to insufficient money for food;
2. **Moderate Food Insecurity:** indicates compromised food quality or quantity; and
3. **Severe Food Insecurity:** refers to reduced food intake or disrupted eating patterns, such as skipping meals or going without food for days.<sup>3</sup>

In Timiskaming, 15% of households live in low-income.<sup>21</sup> 1 in 5 households experience food insecurity,<sup>22</sup> with 17.7% of children under 18 are food insecure.<sup>15</sup> These estimates must be interpreted with caution due to the small sample size. The data may underestimate the actual rates of HFI, particularly among Indigenous populations, as it does not account for First Nations people living on reserve.<sup>20</sup>



### Populations at Risk for Household Food Insecurity

The risk of HFI is highest among low-income, lone-parent households, especially female-led ones with children under 18 years old, precarious workers, and households with employment insurance, workers' compensation or social assistance programs (Ontario Works (OW) or Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP)) as the primary source of income, home renters, and specific cultural/racial groups, most notably Indigenous, Black, and Arab/West Asians.<sup>3, 6, 11</sup>

### Impacts of Household Food Insecurity

Food Insecurity has profound impacts on physical and mental health, increasing the risk of infectious and chronic diseases such as Type II Diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, chronic pain, nutritional deficiencies, and early mortality.<sup>3</sup> It also affects school performance, increases the risk of asthma and depression in young people, and can lead to suicidal ideation.<sup>11, 19, 20</sup> Food-insecure individuals are more likely to be admitted to acute care, stay longer, and be readmitted. This impacts healthcare costs, which are 121% higher for adults living in severely food-insecure households than in food-secure households.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>23</sup> Food-insecure adults stay from 1.5 to 2 more days in the hospital and incur \$400–\$565 more per person in healthcare costs than food-secure adults.<sup>16</sup> Living in remote communities such as Virginia Town, Larder Laker, Elk Lake, Matachewan, and Bear Island of Timiskaming increases the risk of HFI,<sup>21</sup> with food insecurity rates for households living in very remote areas being 1.7 times higher for youth, 4.3 times higher for adults, and 5.1 times higher for older adults compared to those in urban and accessible areas.<sup>21</sup>

## Monitoring Food Affordability

Monitoring food affordability involves measuring and monitoring the cost of foods that reflect healthy eating recommendations to ensure access to nutritious, safe, and acceptable foods.<sup>1, 2</sup> The Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) survey tool is conducted by Ontario's Public Health Units (PHUs) to monitor food affordability.<sup>1</sup> The survey assesses the cost of basic healthy eating based on current national nutrition recommendations and food purchasing patterns.<sup>1, 2</sup> Food prices are collected from various grocery stores across PHU regions and are pooled to calculate the average price for individual food items.

## Data Collection Methods

### Income Data

Incomes were calculated for May/June 2022, considering the highest possible entitlements based on income tax data from 2020 and assuming residents had filed their taxes and had applied for all applicable tax benefits and credits (*See Table 2*).

### Food Data

The Timiskaming Health Unit (THU) monitors food affordability every two years using the NFB tool. In May 2022, THU measured the cost of eating well in Timiskaming. The prices of 61 food items were collected from ten local grocery stores through a hybrid data collection model that included six in-store and four online stores. Stores from Timiskaming's northern, middle, and southern parts were included. Food prices were collected by two surveyors, among which one was a Registered Dietitian, over two consecutive weeks from May 16 to 27, 2022. The data was pooled to derive an average cost for individual food items, which were then adjusted based on gender and age to calculate the monthly cost of food.

### Rent Data

Due to the absence of Timiskaming rent data from the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation Rental Market Report (2022), monthly rent data was collected from local sources for multiple regions across Timiskaming, including Temiskaming Shores, Kirkland Lake, Englehart, Larder, and Matachewan, between September and October 2022 from multiple local sources. An average was calculated for one, two and three-bedroom rental units from the following sources (*See Table 1*):

- Canadian Mental Health Association (Cochrane-Timiskaming) - Kirkland Lake Housing Lists.
- The Temiskaming Speaker - Classifieds section.

- A short telephone key informant interview with the Housing and Community Outreach Coordinator - Homelessness Prevention Program at the District of Timiskaming Social Services Administration Board (D TSAAB).
- Facebook Marketplace and KL Construction Inc.

Table 1: Rent Data

Bedroom Type	Average Monthly Rent (CAD) <sup>1</sup>
Bachelor	\$ 750
1-Bedroom	\$ 938
2-Bedroom	\$ 1,200
3-Bedroom	\$ 1,400









## Nutritious Food Basket Results

Food and rent data were compared to eight household income scenarios (See Table 2 & Appendix A). Results showed the average cost of food for a family of four in Timiskaming to be \$1,152 per month. Eight income scenarios have been used. See Table 2 for details and criteria for each scenario.

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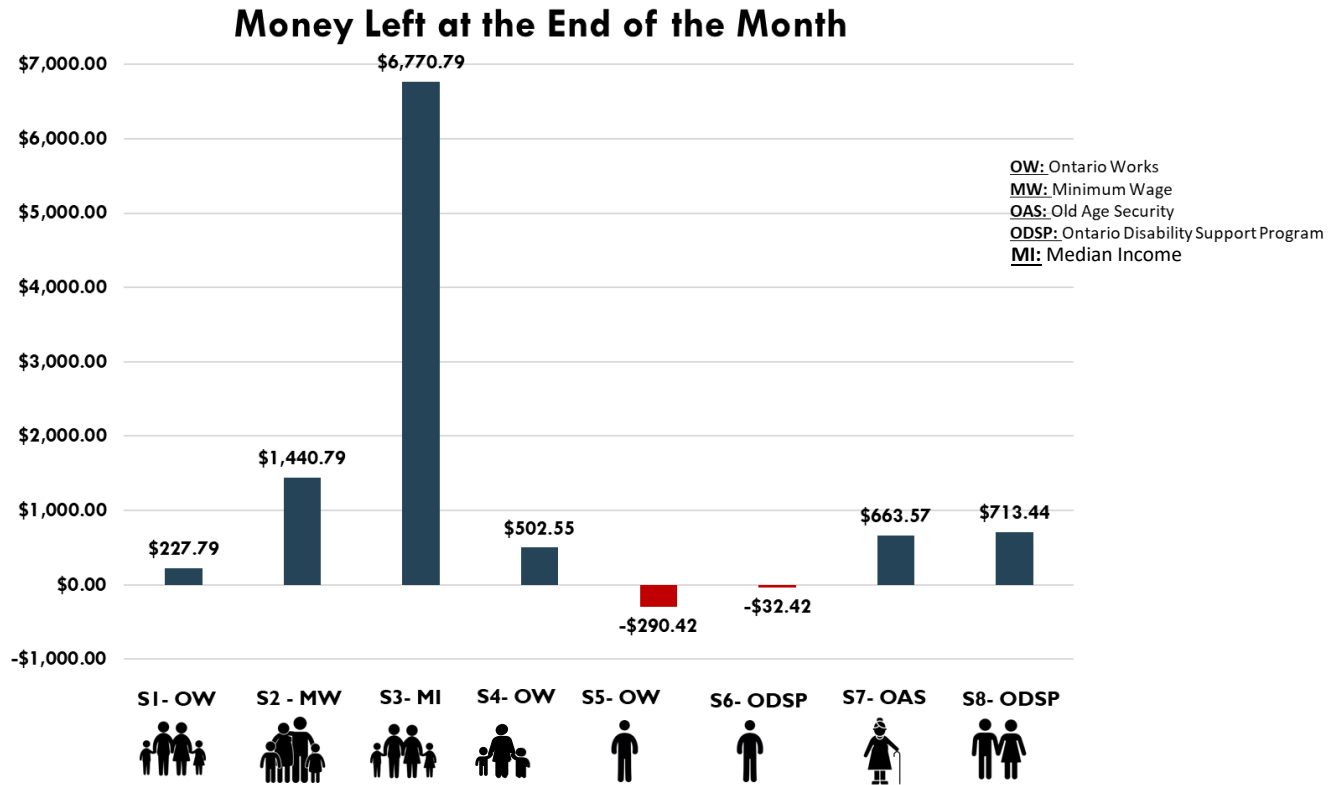
<sup>1</sup> Average rent may or may not include heat/hydro.

Table 2: 2022 Income Scenarios 1 through 8

Income Scenarios	Scenarios 1 through 8 descriptions	Monthly income	Average monthly rent (may or may not include heat/hydro)		Average monthly food	Total selected expenses	Funds remaining for other basic needs	Percentage of income required for rent	Percentage of income required to purchase healthy food
 Scenario 1	<b>Family of Four, Ontario Works</b> - 2 adults (male and female, ages 31-50); two children (a girl, age 8, a boy, age 14); Ontario Works (OW).	\$2,780	(3 Bdr.)	\$1,400	\$1,152	\$2,552	\$228	50%	41%
 Scenario 2	<b>Family of Four, Full-Time Minimum Wage Earner</b> - 2 adults (male and female ages 31-50), two children (a girl aged 8, a boy aged 14); income is based on one minimum wage earner, 40hr/wk., \$15.00/hr (minimum wage in May 2022).	\$3,993	(3 Bdr.)	\$1,400	\$1,152	\$2,552	\$1,441	35%	29%
 Scenario 3	<b>Family of Four, Median Income (after tax)</b> - 2 adults (male and female ages 31-50), two children (girl aged 8, boy aged 14). (Median income after tax)	\$9,323	(3 Bdr.)	\$1,400	\$1,152	\$2,552	\$6,771	15%	12%
 Scenario 4	<b>Single Parent Household with 2 Children, Ontario Works</b> - 1 adult (female age 31-50), two children (a girl aged 8, a boy aged 14); Ontario Works.	\$2,548	(2 Bdr.)	\$1,200	\$845	\$2,045	\$503	47%	33%
 Scenario 5	<b>One Person Household, Ontario Works</b> - 1 adult (male age 31-50); Ontario Works.	\$876	(Bachelor)	\$750	\$416	\$1,166	-\$290	86%	48%
 Scenario 6	<b>One Person Household, Ontario Disability Support Program</b> - 1 adult (male age 31-50); Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).	\$1,322	(1 Bdr.)	\$938	\$416	\$1,354	-\$32	71%	31%
 Scenario 7	<b>One Person Household, Old Age Security/ Guaranteed Income Supplement</b> - 1 adult (female age 70+); income based on Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement (OAS/GIS).	\$1,898	(1 Bdr.)	\$938	\$296	\$1,234	\$664	49%	16%
 Scenario 8	<b>Married Couple, Ontario Disability Support Program</b> - 2 adults (male and female aged 31-50); Ontario Disability Support Program.	\$2,343	(1 Bdr.)	\$938	\$692	\$1,630	\$713	40%	30%

\*Values are rounded to the nearest dollar; \*\*Food expenses are based on the 2022 Nutritious Food Basket data results for the Timiskaming Health Unit area, which includes Household Size Adjustment Factors. s

**Note:** Caution should be exercised when interpreting the 2022 NFB data, as it was collected during a pilot test of an updated process to monitor food affordability in Ontario. Comparisons between PHUs regions should be avoided as different grocery stores were costed in different PHU regions. Due to changes in costing processes and methodology, the 2022 data is not comparable to previous years; however, it still provides high-quality data that can be used as an advocacy tool to address the issue of food insecurity.



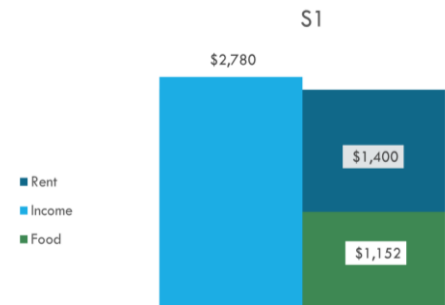
**Figure 9:** The amount of monthly money left for other necessities after buying food and paying rent. This graph highlights two scenarios (S5 & S6) where single-income households living on social assistance programs (OW and ODSP) are *negative*.

The examples below highlight two case studies based on income-based scenarios #1 and #6.

### Case Study 1 - Scenario # 1



Martha and Vince, both 40 years old, were proud small business owners who owned a popular Italian restaurant in New Liskeard that had to close. They are both currently on Ontario Works as their primary source of income. They have been unable to find stable jobs since. They have two children, a 14-year-old boy named Caleb and an 8-year-old daughter named Mikayla. As Caleb starts high school, he wants to start playing soccer in football this summer, and Mikayla wants to take dance classes with her friends. If the couple were to purchase nutritious food for their family and pay the rent on their 3-bedroom home, they would only have around \$228 (See Figure 9) for the rest of the month. They cannot afford necessities such as school supplies, utilities, phone bills, medications, and car insurance. They must prioritize other essentials before considering registering kids in extra-curricular sports. They try to mask their mental health symptoms but are getting more anxious as the school year approaches. When facing financial hardship, families often prioritize other basic needs over the quality and quantity of their diet, making it the first expense to be cut from their budget.

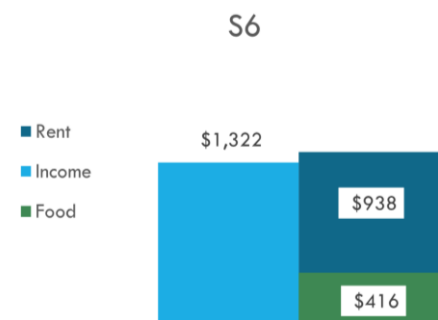


**Figure 1:** Compares the monthly income versus the monthly cost of food and rent for two adults (male and female ages 31-50) and two children (a girl aged 8 and a boy aged 14); Ontario Works (OW).

### Case Study 2 – Scenario # 6



Joe is a 48-year-old man who was terminated from his job at the local mine in Kirkland Lake when he could no longer walk due to long-term disability. He dedicated ten loyal years to this company. He has been single for a while and pays all the bills himself. He is now on ODSP as his primary source of income. If Joe wants to purchase food for himself and pay the rent on his 1-bedroom apartment in Larder Lake, he will have \$-32 per month (See Figure 9). The money left at the end of the month does not consider basic needs such as transportation, hygiene products, car payments, utilities, phone, clothing, healthcare (i.e., medications, dental, vision), pet care, furniture, and household supplies. Joe is still in monthly debt and struggles to afford food and the gas needed to drive from Larder Lake to Kirkland Lake to purchase food. As a result, Joe is starting to skip meals because he must pay his monthly rent, healthcare, utility bills and other costs of basic living.



**Figure 6:** Comparing monthly income versus the cost of food and rent for one adult (male age 31-50); Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).



## Discussion

As demonstrated in the scenarios above, households experiencing food insecurity are at risk of buying cheaper, more processed foods, or skipping meals, resulting in poorer physical and mental health.<sup>7</sup> The rising costs of food, rent, and other expenses exacerbate financial hardships for many people living in northern and remote areas. Living in Northeastern Ontario presents various challenges, such as a lack of transportation and a remote location. Many towns within the region, including Kirkland Lake, Englehart, Larder Lake, and Matachewan, have no access to a transit system, making it challenging for individuals to move around. Furthermore, some areas have no or limited access to grocery stores. For instance, the grocery store in Temagami is only open for four months a year, during summer.

### Food Charity does NOT Address the Root Cause of Food Insecurity.

Food charity has been the primary response for government funding to address the issue of HFI in Canada. Research indicates that only a small percentage (20.6%) of severely food insecure households use these programs and that most prefer to ask family members for money instead.<sup>17, 24</sup> The frequency of use by those who are marginally or moderately food insecure is even lower.<sup>24</sup> Noting that food banks and community-food programs provide only short-term relief and fail to address the root cause of HFI due to multiple limitations.<sup>24</sup> These include the inability to meet specific preferences and dietary or religious needs.<sup>11</sup> Additionally, accessing food banks can be challenging due to transportation issues, long wait times, limited hours of operation and the potential to negatively impact people's dignity.<sup>11</sup>

## Income Based-Solutions

### Paying a Living Wage and Increasing Social Assistance Rates

In Canada, having a job or relying on social assistance is not sufficient to avoid HFI, as almost 52% of those experiencing food insecurity rely on income from employment.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, the minimum wage has not kept pace with inflation, which places households dependent on minimum wage income at an elevated risk of HFI, as shown in Scenario #2 (*See Appendix 1 – Figure 2*). In Ontario, the [2022 living wage rate](#) in the North should be \$19.70 an hour.<sup>8</sup> However, the Ontario minimum wage is even lower, which exacerbates financial hardships for many.<sup>8</sup> As such, ensuring that jobs pay a living wage and provide benefits is crucial. Furthermore, in 2020, 67% of Ontario households receiving social assistance were food insecure.<sup>3, 11</sup> Therefore, increasing the income of households on social assistance programs is crucial to reduce the risk of HFI.<sup>12</sup>

### Implementing a Basic Income Guarantee

Providing a [Basic Income Guarantee \(BIG\)](#) effectively addresses poverty and food insecurity.<sup>13</sup> Research shows that the risk of food insecurity among low-income unattached seniors drops by 50% at age 65 due to the Older Age Security (OAS) and Guaranteed Income Supplement (GIS).<sup>12</sup> Additionally, participants who received a BIG in a 2017-2018 Ontario pilot study showed a decrease in rates of HFI and made healthier food choices.<sup>11</sup> Another 2006 pilot study in Newfoundland and Labrador demonstrated that income-based interventions significantly reduced HFI.<sup>11</sup>

## Conclusion

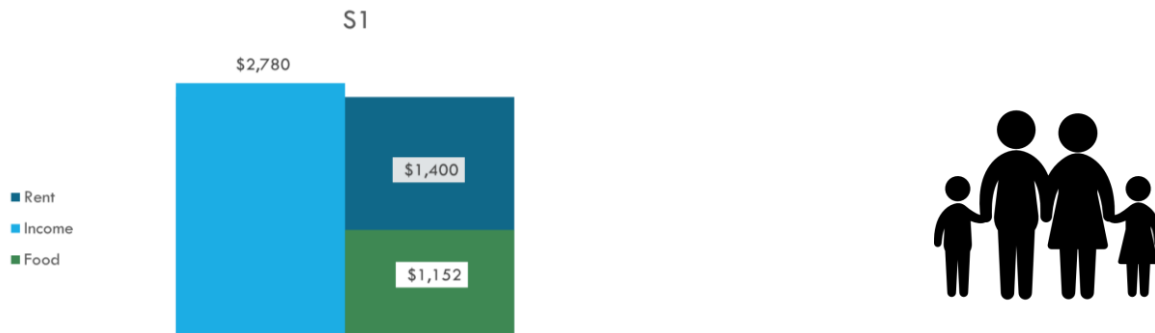
Food is a fundamental human right, and everyone in Canada should have the financial means to purchase nutritious food. Federal and provincial governments must take ownership of the problem and address food insecurity through income-based solutions rather than relying solely on food charity programs. To combat food insecurity and reduce poverty, implementing income-based solutions is necessary at the municipal, provincial, and federal policy levels. These effective strategies include implementing a Basic Income Guarantee policy, increasing social assistance rates, affordable housing, affordable childcare, and ensuring local jobs pay a living wage that reflect the true costs of living and offer benefits and employment stability.<sup>11</sup>

### What Can You Do?

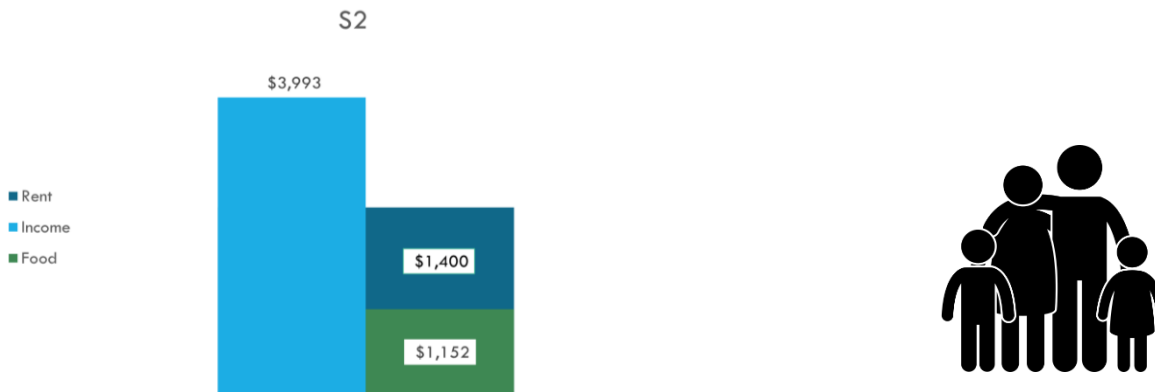
1. **Be informed:** learn more about food insecurity, understand the populations at an increased risk and the impact of HFI.
2. **Advocate for change:** write to your local government and use the template letter on the [ODPH website](#) to advocate for income-based solutions.
3. **Spread the word in your community:** raise awareness about food insecurity and share with family, friends, and colleagues.

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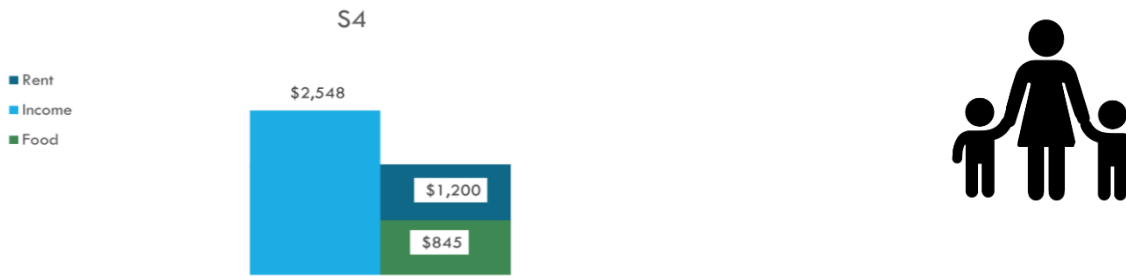
**Figure 1:** Comparing monthly income versus the cost of food and rent, two adults (male and female, ages 31-50), two children (a girl, age 8, a boy, age 14); Ontario Works (OW).



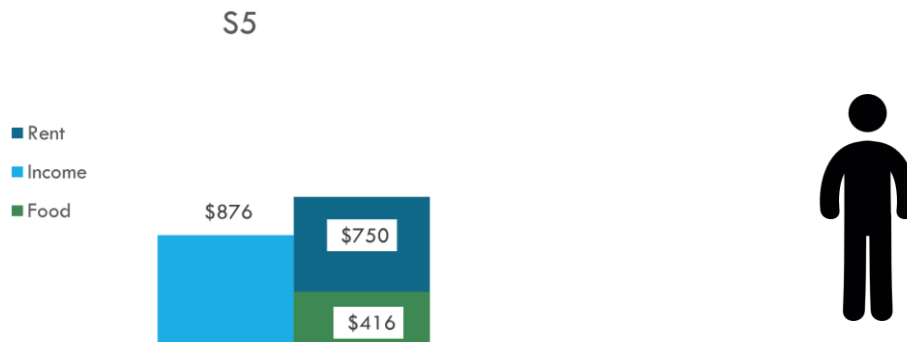
**Figure 2:** Comparing monthly income versus the cost of food and rent for two adults (male and female, ages 31-50) and two children (a girl, age 8, and a boy, age 14); income is based on one minimum wage earner, 40hr/wk., \$15.00/hr (minimum wage in May 2022).



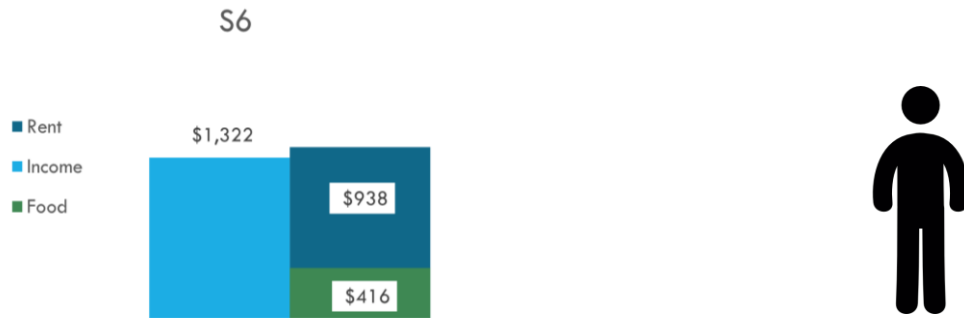
**Figure 3:** Comparing monthly income versus the cost of food and rent for two adults (male and female ages 31-50) and two children (girl aged 8, boy aged 14). (Median income after tax)



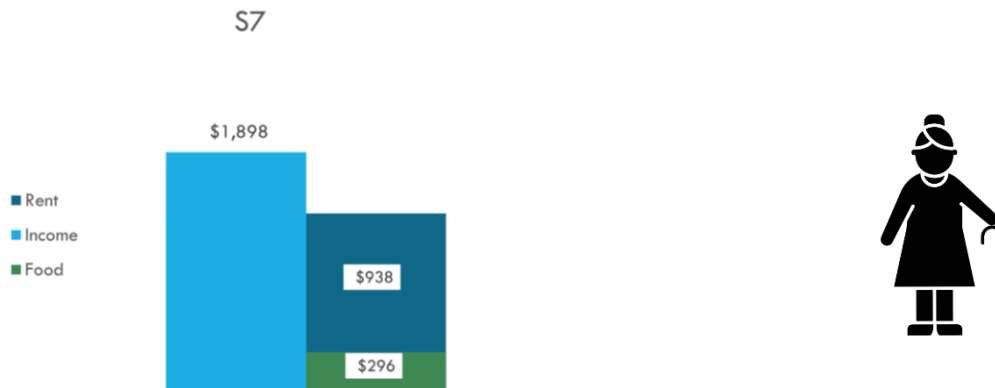
**Figure 4:** Comparing monthly income versus the cost of food and rent for one adult (female aged 31-50) and two children (a girl aged 8, a boy aged 14); Ontario Works.



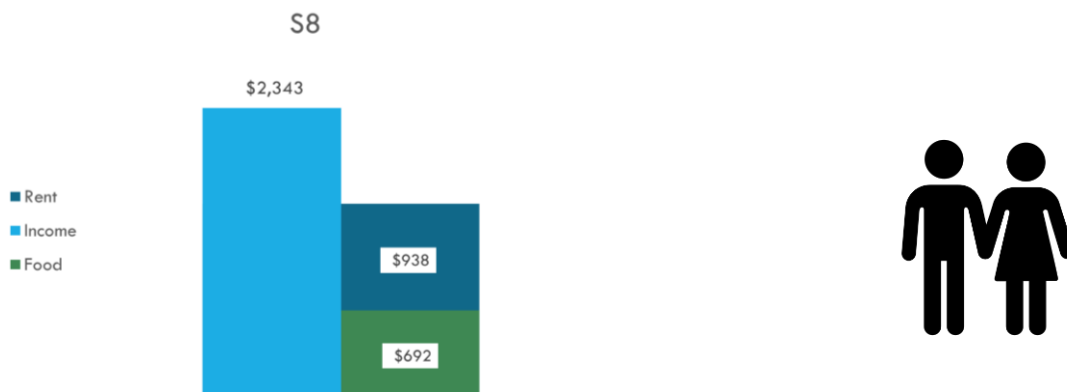
**Figure 5:** Comparing monthly income versus the cost of food and rent for one adult (male age 31-50); Ontario Works.



**Figure 6:** Comparing monthly income versus the cost of food and rent for one adult (male age 31-50); Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP).



**Figure 7:** Comparing monthly income versus the cost of food and rent for 1 adult (female age 70+); income based on Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement (OAS/GIS).



**Figure 8:** Comparing monthly income versus the cost of food and rent for two adults (male and female aged 31-50); Ontario Disability Support Program.