

New Brunswick Common Front for Social Justice Inc.
News Conference
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In New Brunswick, the Common Front for Social Justice (CFSJ) provides information to the public about the consequences of social and economic policies on people living in poverty. One of CFSJ's motivations to carry out advocacy work is rooted in Article 25 of the Charter of Human Rights which states: *"Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including **food**, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services..."* Minimum wage, social assistance rates and old age security pension place many New Brunswickers below the poverty line. Income from work has not kept pace with the rate of inflation. CFSJ is concerned that many poor people in New Brunswick (N.B.) are experiencing difficulty to cover one of their basic human rights, namely that of feeding themselves adequately.

The Common Front carried out a survey based on the **National Nutritious Food Basket** (NNFB) methodology developed by Health Canada. It measures the cost of healthy eating based on Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating but does not include foods that are not part of *Canada's Food Guide*. When an item was on sale, it was the one selected as this is the probable decision made by low-income people (See Annex A for a list of the 66 items surveyed).

Food cost represents an important percentage of the monthly budget of people living on limited means. The rising food cost is in strong contrast with the stable social assistance rates of the past few years. For example, for one person in the "transitional category", the social assistance rate went from \$494 per month in 2005 to \$537 in 2010. This is an 8.7% increase. Between 2005 and 2009, the Consumer Price Index for food in N.B. rose by 16%.

To keep up with the rising cost of nutritious food, social welfare recipients need to invest an increasing proportion of their revenue to purchase healthy food. The same is true for minimum wage-workers and seniors on old age security pension. This is illustrated in Figures 3 and Figure 4. Details for the calculations of these groups' income are presented in Annex B.

Food prices were surveyed in July 2006 in Saint John. CFSJ conducted another survey in that city in July 2010. **Out of the 66 food items which were part of the National Nutritious Food Basket in 2006, 49 of these were exactly the same in the 2010 food basket.** This provided a unique opportunity to observe which particular food items have had the greatest price increase during the four-year period.

Out of the 49 food items only seven costed less than in 2006

All the others, meaning 42 food items costed more.

For **milk products**, it was between 7.5%(milk) to 42.0%(cheese, mozzarella)

For **protein-rich products**, it was between 3.7% (hamburger) to 102.5%(tuna)

For **fruits** it was between 5.3%(grape) to canned apple juice (83.5%)

In the **vegetable**, it was for mix frozen vegetables (10.7%) to a high of 90.8% for green peppers

In **grain products**, all of them were higher, from oatmeal (5%) to soda crackers (80.8%) and whole wheat bread at 102.1%)

In **fat and oil**, margarine at 14.2% and canola oil at 29.8%

A food costing survey conducted by the Common Front for Social Justice (CFSJ) in July and August 2010 documented what many people living on limited income already knew from experience, namely that food is considerably more expensive now than four to five years ago.

Overall, people on social assistance, minimum wage workers and seniors on fixed income have an incredibly small amount of money to feed themselves adequately. Housing cost competes for a large portion of their monthly income. Some spend as much as 60% of their income on housing alone. With the current cost of nutritious food alone, they would need to spend from one third to one half of their allocation for food, leaving them empty-handed for all other necessities of life. An individual working at minimum wage, particularly if he or she works less than 40 hours per week, has difficulty making both ends meet. Many seniors on old age security pension live below the poverty line. If ill health sets in, bringing increases in health costs, they can no longer feed themselves adequately.

Economically speaking, it makes more sense to promote an excellent health status through adequate nutrition rather than to increase the budget of the Department of Health. Indeed, it is well documented that health care costs rise significantly when people live in poverty.

We have made five (5) recommendations which you will find on page 17 to 21.

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