

News Conference: December 16, 2016

Eat Well: A Challenge for Some

Results of a 2016 survey on the cost of food

In November of this year we surveyed the cost of food in 10 grocery stores in the Moncton, Saint John and Bathurst areas. We visited Sobeys, Atlantic Superstore, Coop-IGA, Foodland and Walmart.

Our survey used the Nutritious Food Basket, the tool developed by Health Canada to record the price of 67 food items (dairy products, protein-rich foods, fruit and vegetables, cereal products and fats and oils) in 10 food stores. This food basket does not include any sweets, cleaning products, personal hygiene items, etc.

Our survey shows that in November 2016, the cost of a Nutritious Food Basket was:

- ✓ \$3,540 a year (\$297 a month) for a single man;
 - ✓ \$5,615 a year (\$468 a month) for a mother and her son;
 - ✓ \$10,006 a year (\$834 a month) for a family of four.
- (pages 11-12 of the Report)

Our first observation is that individuals and families who receive social assistance or workers on the minimum wage cannot feed themselves adequately in our province.

According to our data, a single man on social assistance can only purchase 27% of the Nutritious Food Basket, the mother with a son can only purchase 39% of the Nutritious Food Basket, and the couple with two children can only purchase 31% of the Nutritious Food Basket.

For men and women receiving the minimum wage, the situation is a little better, but under no circumstances could they afford the full Basket. The single man could get 66% of the Nutritious Food Basket, the mother with a son could get 63% of the Basket, and the couple with two children could get less than half the Basket (42%).

We feel that it is important to stress that the Nutritious Food Basket costs less than it did in the spring because prices have dropped since the beginning of the fall of 2016. According to Sylvain Charlebois of Dalhousie University, food prices will increase from 3% to 5% next year.

Percentage of nutritious food basket that each can afford

	Social Assistance	Minimum Wage
Single man	27 %	66 %
Single mother, 1 child	39 %	63 %
Couple, 2 children	31 %	42 %

Our second observation is that the average cost of the Nutritious Food Basket is higher in Bathurst than in Saint John and even higher than in Moncton. The same Nutritious Food Basket cost \$32 more in Bathurst than in Moncton.

This is disturbing because the 2014 Median total income for Bathurst was \$27,270, \$5,479 lower than Moncton which was at \$32,740 for Moncton and \$4,990 lower than Saint John which was at \$32,260.¹ In December 2016, the unemployment rate in *Moncton-Saint John-Fredericton* was 7,3% while in Restigouche-Albert, which included Bathurst, it was 15,2%, so twice higher.²

Our third observation is that the average cost of the Nutritious Food Basket is lower in the Sobeys Stores (\$277) and that is the highest in the Atlantic Superstores (\$296). However, of all 10 stores, the Nutritious Food Basket is the cheapest in the Coop-IGA store in Dieppe. This store also had the lowest prices in our previous surveys.

The most surprising discovery is that in the Moncton-Dieppe region, the price for the Nutritious Food Basket was higher in Walmart (\$264) than in the Coop-IGA in Dieppe (\$241) and the same as in the Sobey's store (\$264).

Consequences

The situation of the approximately 36,900 people in N.B. living on social assistance is very serious. The clear majority of them have not had an increase in their base rate since 2014, which may mean that their health has deteriorated.

For workers earning the minimum salary, the situation seems less disastrous. However, there is definitely a problem when one realizes that none of the three cases (the single man, the single mother with one child or the couple with two children) would be able to purchase the Nutritious Food Basket.

¹ Cansim 111-0008, Statistic Canada

² http://srv129.services.gc.ca/ei_regions/eng/rates.aspx?id=2016#data

The numbers given above show that there are many people in N.B. who cannot afford a nutritious diet, consequently their health is compromised.

Food insecurity linked to a low income leads to a multitude of problems related to people's health and social well-being. Not having enough to eat has an impact on the social determinants of health, such as schooling, early childhood development and education. Food insecurity also contributes to chronic diseases such as heart conditions and cancer, the two most common chronic afflictions in N.B. In addition, people living in a situation of food insecurity are more likely to have mental health problems and other chronic conditions such as high blood pressure, heart diseases and diabetes.

Article 25 of the Declaration of Human Rights states that every person has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, **including adequate food**, clothing, housing, medical care and social services... The data in Figures 8, 9 and 10 clearly show that people who depend on social assistance and people receiving the minimum wage cannot feed themselves adequately.

It is urgent that our governments correct this situation.

Recommendations

Given the results of the 2016 survey on the cost of food and the repercussion on social and economic issues in N.B., the CFSJ makes the following recommendations:

1. That the Department of Social Development add a substantial amount of money to the next provincial budget in order to significantly raise the social assistance rates for the approximately 38,000 recipients.
 2. That the Department of Social Development enable recipients of social assistance to keep a much larger portion of the income they earn when they work part-time.
 3. That the government of N.B. change the very restrictive legislation imposed on people who are unable to work, preventing them from being recognized officially as invalids.
 4. That the government of New Brunswick put a tax on junk food.
 5. That the human rights commissioner, along with other provincial departments, develop an awareness campaign focussed on the necessity to reduce poverty in the province so as to respect human rights. The CFSJ suggests a campaign aimed at demolishing myths regarding people living in poverty.
 6. That the Minimum Wage Commission recommend that the minimum wage be increased progressively to \$15 an hour and then indexed so that workers can maintain their purchasing power.
 7. That chain stores (Superstore, Sobeys and Coop/IGA-Foodland) develop a policy to
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~~promote healthy food in their flyers that they put more basic nutritious foods on sale~~
and that they promote them more extensively.

8. That food stores make a concerted effort to purchase products from N.B. or from the Maritimes in order to help local farmers and local economies.
9. That electronic and print media encourage the promotion of healthy eating habits and the notion of food security in N.B.

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