

MIDDLESEX-LONDON BOARD OF HEALTH

REPORT NO. 48-25

TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Dr. Alexander Summers, Medical Officer of Health
Emily Williams, Chief Executive Officer

DATE: 2025 July 24

HOUSEHOLD FOOD INSECURITY: A PRIMER FOR MUNICIPALITIES

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Board of Health:

- 1) *Receive Report No. 48-25 re: “Household Food Insecurity: A Primer for Municipalities” for information; and*
 - 2) *Direct the Clerk to send Report No. 48-25 (including [Appendix A](#)) to the City of London, Middlesex County, lower tier municipalities within the County of Middlesex and all Ontario Boards of Health.*
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Report Highlights

- In 2023, 1 in 4 households in Middlesex-London were food insecure. This is a statistically significant increase from 2022.
- Food insecurity has a pervasive impact on health; and there is a need for income-based solutions.
- “Household Food Insecurity: A Primer for Municipalities” ([Appendix A](#)) provides a range of income-based strategies that London and Middlesex County can implement to help reduce food insecurity. The primer also includes affordability-based strategies, which can help reduce financial strain and contribute to more inclusive, resilient and healthy communities.

Background

Household food insecurity is defined as inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints¹. Food insecurity negatively impacts health and community well-being (e.g., increased barriers to employment and increased social isolation)¹⁻³.

The financial impact of food insecurity is broad and extends across all levels of government. For example, households with food insecurity have 23%-121% higher annual health care costs⁴. While health care funding primarily falls under provincial and federal jurisdictions, municipalities also shoulder significant costs. As reported by the Association of Municipalities in Ontario (AMO), in 2017, Ontario municipal governments contributed \$2.1 billion for health care costs⁵.

While food programs, such as community gardens and community meals, can offer temporary relief from hunger, they do not address the root cause. Research consistently shows that food insecurity is most effectively reduced through income-based solutions^{1,2}.

Food Insecurity in Middlesex-London

In 2023, one in four households in Middlesex-London were food insecure⁶ - the highest rate reported in Middlesex-London since the Canadian Income Survey started measuring food insecurity in 2019. This marked a statistically significant increase from 2022, with an estimated 151,477 residents living in food insecure households in 2023, compared to 107,835 residents in 2022.^{6,7}

As reported to the Board of Health in Q4 2024, the 2024 local Nutritious Food Basket results demonstrate decreased food affordability and inadequate income to afford basic needs for many Middlesex-London residents⁸. A single person receiving Ontario Works needs an additional \$522 monthly to afford local rent and food costs, plus additional funds for all other expenses⁸. [Report No. 82-24](#) includes additional household and income scenarios.

Municipal Strategies to Address Food Insecurity

MLHU established and chaired a provincial work group in partnership with the Ontario Dietitians in Public Health to develop resources and messaging aimed at reducing household food insecurity. The resulting municipal primer, adapted by MLHU for local municipalities, outlines strategies to address household food insecurity ([Appendix A](#)). Municipal governments are important partners in addressing food insecurity, and the primer provides a range of income-based strategies that London and Middlesex County can implement. The primer also includes affordability-based strategies, which can help reduce financial strain and contribute to more inclusive, resilient and healthy communities.

References are affixed as [Appendix B](#).

Next Steps

It is recommended that the Board of Health direct Health Unit staff to share “Household Food Insecurity: A Primer for Municipalities” ([Appendix A](#)) with the City of London, Middlesex County, lower tier municipalities within the County of Middlesex, and Ontario Boards of Health.

The Health Unit will continue to monitor food affordability as mandated by the [Ontario Public Health Standards](#) in the [Population Health Assessment and Surveillance Protocol, 2018](#). The 2025 surveillance data will be reported to the Board of Health in Q4 2025.

This report was written by the Municipal and Community Health Promotion Team of the Family and Community Health Division.



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This report refers to the following principle(s) set out in Policy G-490, Appendix A:

- The Population Health Assessment and Surveillance Protocol, 2018; and the Chronic Disease Prevention and Well-Being and Healthy Growth and Development standards, as outlined in the [Ontario Public Health Standards: Requirements for Programs, Services and Accountability](#).
- The following goal or direction from the [Middlesex-London Health Unit's Strategic Plan](#):
 - Our public health programs are effective, grounded in evidence and equity

This topic has been reviewed to be in alignment with goals under the Middlesex-London Health Unit's [Anti-Black Racism Plan](#) and [Taking Action for Reconciliation](#), specifically recommendations:

Anti-Black Racism Plan [Recommendation #37](#): Lead and/or actively participate in healthy public policy initiatives focused on mitigating and addressing, at an upstream level, the negative and inequitable impacts of the social determinants of health which are priority for local ACB communities and ensure the policy approaches take an anti-Black racism lens.

Taking Action for Reconciliation [Supportive Environments](#): Establish and implement policies to sustain a supportive environment, as required, related to the identified recommendations.

Household Food Insecurity: A Primer for Municipalities

Household food insecurity refers to inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints.¹ For simplicity, household food insecurity will be referred to as food insecurity in this primer.

While food programs, such as community gardens and community meals, can offer temporary relief from hunger, they do not address the root cause. Research consistently shows that food insecurity is most effectively reduced through income-based solutions.¹

Food insecurity and poverty are pressing issues that municipalities can help address.

This resource provides a range of income-based strategies that municipalities can implement to make a meaningful impact in their communities. It also includes affordability-focused strategies, which can help reduce financial strain and contribute to more inclusive, resilient communities.



Adapted from:

"Food Insecurity: A Primer for Municipalities" developed by the Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH) Food Insecurity Workgroup (www.odph.ca).

Adapted by:

Middlesex-London Health Unit

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Food Insecurity: A Primer for Municipalities

Household Food Insecurity in Middlesex-London

Food insecurity means not having enough money for food.¹

In 2023, 25% of Middlesex-London households were food insecure.²

1 in 4



Food Affordability

After rent and food, many don't have enough left for all other monthly expenses.³

Single parent of 2 on
Ontario Works

 **\$257**

Single person on
Ontario Works

 **-\$522**

Wages

Having a job does not guarantee food security.

In 2022, over half (58.6%) of food-insecure households in Ontario depended on employment income.¹

Food Insecurity Takes a Toll on our Community

Physical and Mental Health



↑ risk of diabetes and heart disease¹

↑ risk of depression, anxiety, and mood disorders¹

Health Care Costs



23%-121% higher health care costs⁴

In 2017, Ontario municipal governments contributed **\$2.1 billion** for health care costs⁵

Community Well-Being



↑ barriers to employment⁶

↑ social isolation⁶

impede people's ability to advance in life⁶

Solutions

Food insecurity is an income problem that requires income solutions.

Municipalities can support policies and initiatives that improve the finances of households with low incomes and advocate for a stronger social safety net.

Income-Based Strategies



1. Support living wage certification

Ontario's minimum wage is less than a living wage. A living wage is the hourly pay a worker must earn to afford their basic needs and engage in their community based on regional living costs.⁷ Paying a living wage benefits employers (e.g., employee retention), employees (e.g., afford housing and food), and the community (e.g., money spent locally).^{8,9}

The minimal annual employer certification fee helps support the [Ontario Living Wage Network](#) to calculate the living wage and advance the living wage movement.

- Become a Living Wage employer and recertify annually (e.g., Township of Blandford-Blenheim, City of Waterloo, Corporation of the City of St. Catharines, The County of Huron, The Municipality of North Perth).
- Encourage local businesses to become Living Wage employers (e.g., provide education and awareness, incentives like public recognition of [local Living Wage employers](#), community engagement and support).
- Provide support for local businesses to become certified (e.g., practical guidance, marketing incentives, and policy support).

Resource: [Living Wage Certification Process](#)



2. Support free income tax filing clinics for households with lower incomes

Filing income taxes is essential to be eligible for subsidized housing and receiving federal government [benefits and credits](#). In 2023, nearly \$44 million was received in refunds, credits, and benefits entitlements by 11,070 individuals through free tax clinics in London, Ontario through the [Community Volunteer Income Tax Program](#).¹⁰

- Promote clinics and help to recruit volunteers (e.g., [London tax clinics](#), [Strathroy tax clinics](#)).
- Provide subsidized transportation to clinics (e.g., transportation vouchers).
- Provide community spaces for clinics at no cost.
- Support systems navigation at clinics (e.g., promote community resources and governmental benefits, and make referrals to community resources).
- Coordinate existing income tax clinics and improve client support at tax clinics by offering more [super clinics](#) in the community.
- Advocate for policies that simplify tax filing for community members living with a low income (e.g., automated system using existing information).
- Explore the promotion of [virtual tax-filing](#) in partnership with local organizations and [Prosper Canada](#).

Resource: [Guide to Hosting an Enhanced Free Community Volunteer Income Tax Program \(CVITP\)](#)



3. Work with the provincial and federal governments to advance income-based policies and income support programs

The current income support system in Ontario is not adequate for households to cover their basic needs and live with dignity.¹

- Support the advocacy work of local partnerships (e.g., endorse advocacy letters sent to the provincial and federal governments by local partnerships) (e.g., [United Way Elgin Middlesex](#)).

- Advocate to the provincial government to:
 - a. Raise the minimum wage to be on par with the cost of living (living wage).
 - b. Increase social assistance rates to reflect the real cost of living (e.g., [Middlesex-London Board of Health, 2023](#); [Prince Edward-Lennox & Addington, 2025](#); [Niagara Region, 2024](#); [Prince Edward County, 2024](#); [Simcoe-Muskoka District Health Unit, 2025](#))
 - c. Index Ontario Works (OW) rates to inflation and increase the amount of income exempt from reduction of benefits to better support those working toward leaving the OW program (e.g., [Orangeville, 2023](#); [AMO, 2024](#))
 - d. Commit to not reduce or claw back any provincial assistance related to the implementation of the Canada Disability Benefit (e.g., [London, 2025](#)).
- Advocate to the federal government to:
 - a. Expand the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) by increasing the amount for lowest income households and equalizing the benefit for families with children over 6 years old (e.g., [Peterborough Public Health, 2024](#); [PROOF, 2023](#)).
 - b. Enhance the Canada Disability Benefit (CDB) by increasing the benefit amount and simplifying the application process by working with provinces and territories to automatically enroll recipients of provincial and territorial disability support programs (e.g., [Community Food Centres Canada, 2024](#)).
- Endorse basic income (e.g., [Municipality of Chatham-Kent Council, 2024](#); [Ottawa City Council, 2024](#); [numerous Ontario municipalities](#)) and advocate for the provincial and federal governments to collaborate to implement a basic income (e.g., [Kitchener City Council, 2024](#); [Region of Waterloo, 2023](#); [Halton Region, 2023](#); [Hamilton City Council, 2023](#)).

Resource: [PROOF – Identifying Policy Options to Reduce Household Food Insecurity in Canada](#)



4. Raise awareness within the community about food insecurity and its connection to income

- Utilize reports from public health units to obtain local data on food insecurity and food affordability (e.g., [Middlesex-London Health Unit, 2024](#))
- Engage with community partners to promote the need for long-term solutions to food insecurity (e.g., fund a forum)
- Communicate about food insecurity from a poverty reduction perspective (e.g., need for income-based solutions), and not as an issue of food access or food literacy (e.g., more food banks or food literacy programs)
- Declare food insecurity an emergency (e.g., [City of Kingston Council, 2025](#); [Mississauga, 2024](#); [Toronto City Council, 2024](#); [City of Brantford, 2025](#))

Resource: [Position Statement and Recommendations on Responses to Food Insecurity](#)



5. Create and support a municipal poverty reduction strategy

Municipal poverty reduction strategies address specific challenges and action plans tailored to the municipality complementing provincial and federal level strategies (e.g., [London \(2017\)](#); [Ottawa \(2025-2029\)](#); [Toronto \(2019-2022\)](#)).¹¹

- Provide funds to implement action(s) from a Poverty Reduction Strategy.
- Allocate higher amounts of funding towards food and housing insecurity.
- Actively engage people who have lived and/or have living experience of food insecurity and/or poverty.

Resource: [Tamarack Institute Ending Poverty Network for Change](#)



6. Provide leadership and support to local partnerships working to reduce food insecurity and/or poverty (e.g., Age Friendly London Network and Child & Youth Network, Middlesex-London Food Policy Council, Basic Income London)

- Explore forming a local partnership, if not already operating.
- Support the advocacy work of local partnerships (e.g., endorsing advocacy letters).
- Collaborate with community partners to determine local priorities for action to address food insecurity and poverty.
- Become a member of a local partnership.
- Provide funding (e.g., supporting a specific action item).

Resource: [Food Systems Planning in Canada: A toolkit of priority practices for planners](#)

Affordability-Based Strategies



7. Support affordable housing

Encouraging an adequate supply of affordable housing is critical to ensuring households can afford other basic necessities, such as food. Municipalities and regional governments play a critical role in shaping housing affordability through land use planning, investment, and policy advocacy.

Affordable housing is a priority for the City of London and Middlesex County (e.g., [Health & Homelessness in London, Ontario: A Whole of Community System Response \(2023\)](#), [The Housing Stability Action Plan for the City of London \(2019-2024\)](#); [Middlesex County's Homeless Prevention and Housing Plan \(2019-2024\)](#)).



8. Improve the affordability and accessibility of local public programs and services

- Invest in accessible and affordable transportation by providing subsidized transportation passes or subsidizing rural transportation services (e.g., [London, Toronto, Waterloo](#)).
- Offer childcare subsidies to eligible families, prioritizing individuals who are most financially in need (e.g., [London-Middlesex \(2024-2028\)](#), [Middlesex County, London, Kingston](#)).
- Provide discounted and/or subsidized recreation programs at municipal facilities (e.g., [Middlesex County, London, Toronto, Hamilton, Kingston](#)).
- Support and promote local financial literacy and counselling programs (e.g., [CPA Canada, London, Toronto](#)).
- Implement Community Connector and Community Navigator roles in municipalities, libraries, and other community organizations to support residents with applications to housing programs, social assistance, free income tax clinics, and other necessary supports (e.g., [Middlesex County Libraries, London Family Centres, Durham, Huron Perth](#)).

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