

# The Cost of Eating in BC— Little Money Left for Food

## Did you know?

- ❖ BC has the highest child poverty rate in Canada
- ❖ Welfare rates have dropped to their lowest level since the 1980s
- ❖ 52% of BC food bank users are on welfare
- ❖ Minimum wage is inadequate to provide a single person working full time a yearly income above the poverty line in most of BC
- ❖ People with low incomes have more health problems and die younger
- ❖ BC had a 3.1 billion dollar surplus in 2005
- ❖ Raising welfare rates by 50% would cost about 25% of BC's surplus.

## How do you know some families don't have enough money for food?

Dietitians working in public health price out a basket of food at a number of grocery stores throughout BC using Health Canada's food costing tool. The food basket includes 66 basic foods that require food preparation skills. The basket does not contain any non-food items such as personal care items or household supplies.

For the family on welfare, 99% of their disposable income is required to rent shelter and purchase the food basket. Families sacrifice quantity and quality of food to meet other costs of daily living. See table this page.

## What does it cost to feed a family?

It costs about \$653 a month to feed a family of four (two parents, two children).

## Does food cost too much in BC?

The cost of food is not the issue. For those families with low incomes, especially those on welfare, there is not enough money to buy healthy food.

- ❖ A family of four with one average income would need to spend about 15% of their income to buy the food basket

- ❖ The same family of four on a low income would need to spend 29% of their income to buy the same food basket
- ❖ The same family on welfare would need to spend 41% of their income on the food basket.

## How do poor families cope?

- ❖ Many families on welfare must rely on a food bank to help feed their family
- ❖ Low income families eat less fruit, vegetables, and milk products because they can't afford them
- ❖ Most families on welfare must live in unsafe neighbourhoods with poor housing and unhealthy conditions for children.

Monthly Costs	Family of 4 on welfare	Single Parent 2 children on welfare	Family of 4 low earned income	Family of 4 average income
Disposable income	\$1601	\$1491	\$2243	\$4290
Cost of shelter	\$934	\$934	\$934	\$1212
% income needed for shelter	58%	63%	42%	28%
Cost of food	\$653	\$477	\$653	\$653
% income needed for food	41%	32%	29%	15%
% income (\$) left for all other costs	1% (\$14)	5% (\$80)	29% (\$656)	57% (\$2425)

## What are dietitians in BC doing about poverty and hunger?

- ❖ Since 2000, *The Cost of Eating in BC* report has been published annually to show that many families do not have enough money to buy healthy food
- ❖ Recommendations in this report are brought to the attention of the government annually with a request for immediate action.

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# The Cost of Eating in BC— A Call To Action

**H**aving enough safe and healthy food is important for the health and future success of our children, our families and our seniors. Here are some ways you can help make this happen:

## Learn more about poverty issues

- ❖ Read *The Cost of Eating in BC 2006* report, available in the Resource Centre at [www.dietitians.ca](http://www.dietitians.ca)
- ❖ Read books such as "Policies of Exclusion, Poverty and Health, Stories from the Front", available from [www.wise-bc.org](http://www.wise-bc.org)
- ❖ Visit the web sites of the Endorsing Agencies of *The Cost of Eating in BC 2006*.

## Small actions do make a difference

- ❖ Visit RAISE THE RATES [www.raisetherates.org](http://www.raisetherates.org) and add your voice to the campaign
- ❖ Share this page and "Little Money Left for Food" with colleagues, friends or neighbours and brainstorm local action
- ❖ Join a community food coalition and learn more about food initiatives where you live
- ❖ Support co-operative and low cost housing projects
- ❖ Get political—speak out in the community and through the media about why we should all care about eliminating poverty
- ❖ Write a letter to your local Member of the Legislative Assembly and/or the provincial Minister responsible for the policies and programs that make poverty worse. Ask for:
  - ◆ fair welfare rates
  - ◆ higher minimum wage
  - ◆ affordable housing.

Those who are poor and cannot afford to buy healthy food are the best advocates for change. See Appendix C of *The Cost of Eating in BC 2005* report for some tips on writing a letter to government officials.

*"It is the right of everyone  
to have access to safe and  
nutritious food."*

—Source: FAO-United Nations, August 2002,  
Declaration of the World Food Summit

## Tough Choices: What would you do?

There are 9 days until your cheque comes and you have \$15 to buy food for you and your 2 boys. You know it is important to eat lots of fruit and vegetables. Fifteen dollars will buy you a bag of apples, a bag of oranges and some grapes, or a box of macaroni, 2 pounds of regular ground beef, a package of wieners and buns, 2 cans of tomato soup and 2 loaves of bread. What do you choose?



Your sister dies and you want to go to the funeral. The bus ticket is \$22 that you don't have—do you buy the bus ticket knowing you, and possibly your children, will go hungry this month?

*Published by:*



The *Cost of Eating in BC* report has been published annually since 2000 by Dietitians of Canada, BC Region and the Community Nutritionists Council of BC. The full report and those from past years are available online in the Resource Centre at [www.dietitians.ca](http://www.dietitians.ca)

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