

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
Thursday, September 15, 2011, Peterborough

## **Poverty and Hunger Still a Problem in Peterborough**

### ***Health Unit Calls for Immediate Action to Support Basic Right to Nutritious Food***

People living on low incomes cannot afford to eat a healthy diet in Peterborough City and County says the Peterborough County-City Health Unit.

The total monthly income for an individual on social assistance is only \$635. The market rent for a bachelor apartment in Peterborough is \$590. That leaves only \$45 left each month for food and other essentials.

According to a recent Nutritious Food Basket survey, it would cost \$261 per month for a single man to eat nourishing food, something that is clearly unaffordable and this raises serious concerns about poverty, hunger and food security. In Ontario, up to 60 per cent of all households living on social assistance report a lack of food security making this a critical public health issue that needs to be addressed.

Food security is necessary for good health. It lowers the risk of disease and helps reduce healthcare costs. When people do not have food security, it means they are not able to secure safe, healthy, personally and culturally acceptable food. An immediate solution and first step to resolving this issue would be to implement a Healthy Food Supplement of \$100 per month for social assistance recipients.

“Poor nutrition leads to increased risk of chronic and infectious diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancer, as well as conditions such as low birth weight,” says Dr. Rosana Pellizzari, Medical Officer of Health at the Health Unit. “It is better to prevent these conditions and diseases by ensuring people are financially able to purchase adequate and nutritious foods.”

The recent Nutritious Food Basket survey conducted annually by the Peterborough County-City Health Unit consists of visiting seven grocery stores throughout the region to price 67 food items to determine the lowest available price for healthy food at the grocery store. In Peterborough City and County the results show that people with a low income don't have adequate funds to afford healthy eating after paying for other essentials, such as rent, transportation and childcare.

*continued...*

## Communications Office

Peterborough County-City Health Unit  
10 Hospital Drive  
Peterborough, ON K9J 8M1  
(705) 743-1000, ext. 391  
[www.pcchu.ca](http://www.pcchu.ca)



“We know that the lower a household income is, the more likely it is that the family will not have food security,” says Susan Hubay, Public Health Nutritionist, who develops the annual Nutritious Food Basket for the Health Unit. “This is an issue that affects the rest of Canada as well.”

The 2004 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) showed that 8.8 per cent of Canadians worried about not having enough to eat, compromised the quality or variety of food eaten, or did not have enough to eat because of a lack of money. The survey, however, did not reach some vulnerable populations – on-reserve Aboriginals, persons living in northern Canada and remote areas of Quebec and Ontario, homeless people and other people without telephones. This trend of people lacking food security continues as the most recent Health Unit data from 2007-08 indicates that 7.3% per cent of our community population lack food security.

This problem also exists for households living on minimum wage. Up to 55 per cent of all Ontarians who experienced lack of food security had employment income.

Additional solutions to help ensure food security include:

- Social assistance rates need to reflect the real cost of living and be indexed annually to inflation.
- Increase minimum wage rates to \$11 per hour, indexed annually to inflation, so that those who work full-time are not living in poverty.
- Create an Ontario housing benefit that will help low income tenants pay the rent, so they don't have to turn to food bank charities to eat.
- Implement a comprehensive Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy that addresses both the sustainability of a healthy food supply and the needs of Ontarians, particularly those with low socioeconomic status.

All Ontarians, whether on social assistance or working for minimum wage, should have a liveable income in order to live in dignity and health.

### **About the Nutritious Food Basket:**

The Nutritious Food Basket survey is a tool for monitoring the cost of a nutritious diet for individuals and families over time. It includes 67 food items and is designed to reflect an example of an eating pattern that meets *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide* and eating behaviours reflective of the *Canadian Community Health Survey*.

-30-

**For further information, please contact:**

Brittany Cadence  
Communications Supervisor  
(705) 743-1000, ext. 391