



May 2023

Household Food Insecurity

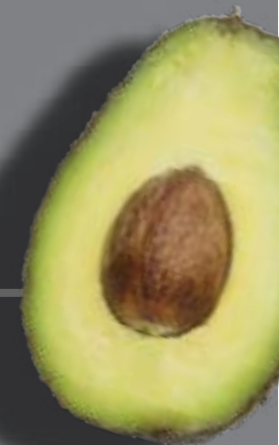
Perth-Huron



United Way
Perth-Huron



**Social Research &
Planning Council**



DEMOGRAPHICS

Approximately 80% of respondents identified as women and 19% as men. Men are underrepresented in this survey as they make up 49% of the population in Perth and Huron. The majority (59%) were 31–45 years old, 17% were 15–30 years old and 24% were over the age of 46. The ages of participants in this survey are compared to the overall population in Perth and Huron and outlined in the table one. Out of the 711 respondents, 13% self-identified as a person with a disability, almost 9% were Indigenous and approximately 7% were immigrants.

INTRODUCTION

In November 2022, United Way Perth-Huron's Social Research & Planning Council designed and implemented a survey to capture the characteristics of food insecurity in Perth County and Huron County, including the municipalities of Stratford and St. Marys. Our goal was to understand the nature and severity of household food insecurity regionally. Specifically, we hoped to investigate food insecurity caused by financial constraints (Proof, 2022).

We began by noting the 2021 Census showed that **14,320 individuals** (Statistics Canada, 2021) **in Perth and Huron live with low income** based on the Low-income measure, after tax (LIM-AT). With this number in mind, we set a target of a 500-person sample size to produce a 5% margin of error (meaning the results might be 5% less or greater than the reality).

Thanks to exhaustive promotion and community efforts, 1,125 surveys in both paper and digital formats were collected and 63% met the inclusion criteria. This report outlines key findings from the analysis of **711 responses** from this survey.

Please note that findings only discuss the portion of our population experiencing food insecurity, not the population as a whole

Table 1: Age of Participants and age of population

Age	Survey Respondents	Age	Perth-Huron Population
15-30 years of age	17%	15-30 years of age	17%
31-45 years of age	59%	31-45 years of age	17%
Over 45 years of age	24%	Over 45 years of age	49%

13%

Self-identified as a person with a disability

9%

Self-identified as Indigenous

7%

Self-identified as new-commers



HOUSEHOLD FOOD INSECURITY

Household food insecurity is the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints (Proof, 2022).

We asked survey respondents if they had been in situations in the last 12 months where the food they bought didn't last and there wasn't any money to get more. Thirty-nine per cent said this happened sometimes and 24% said this happened often. **This indicates that 63% of participants experience food insecurity.**

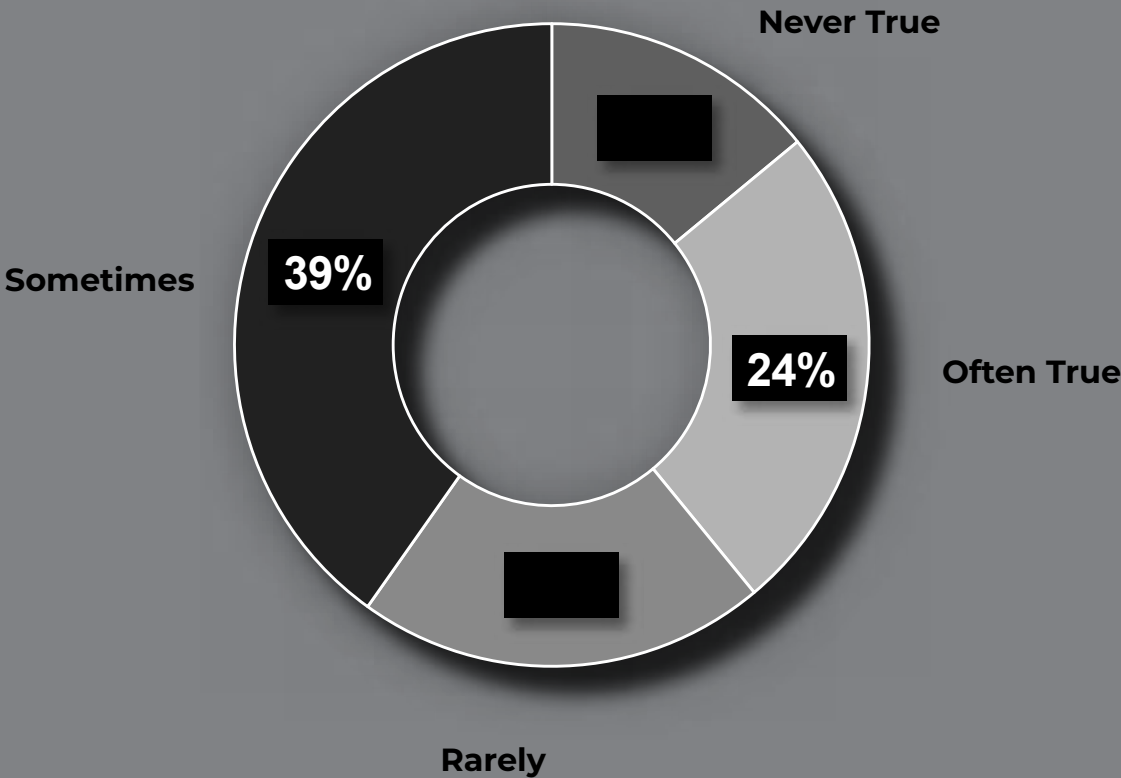


FIGURE 1: HAVE BEEN IN SITUATIONS WHERE THE FOOD YOU BOUGHT DIDN'T LAST AND THERE WASN'T ANY MONEY TO BUY MORE



ADULTS & CHILDREN EXPERIENCING FOOD INSECURITY PREVIOUS 12 MONTHS

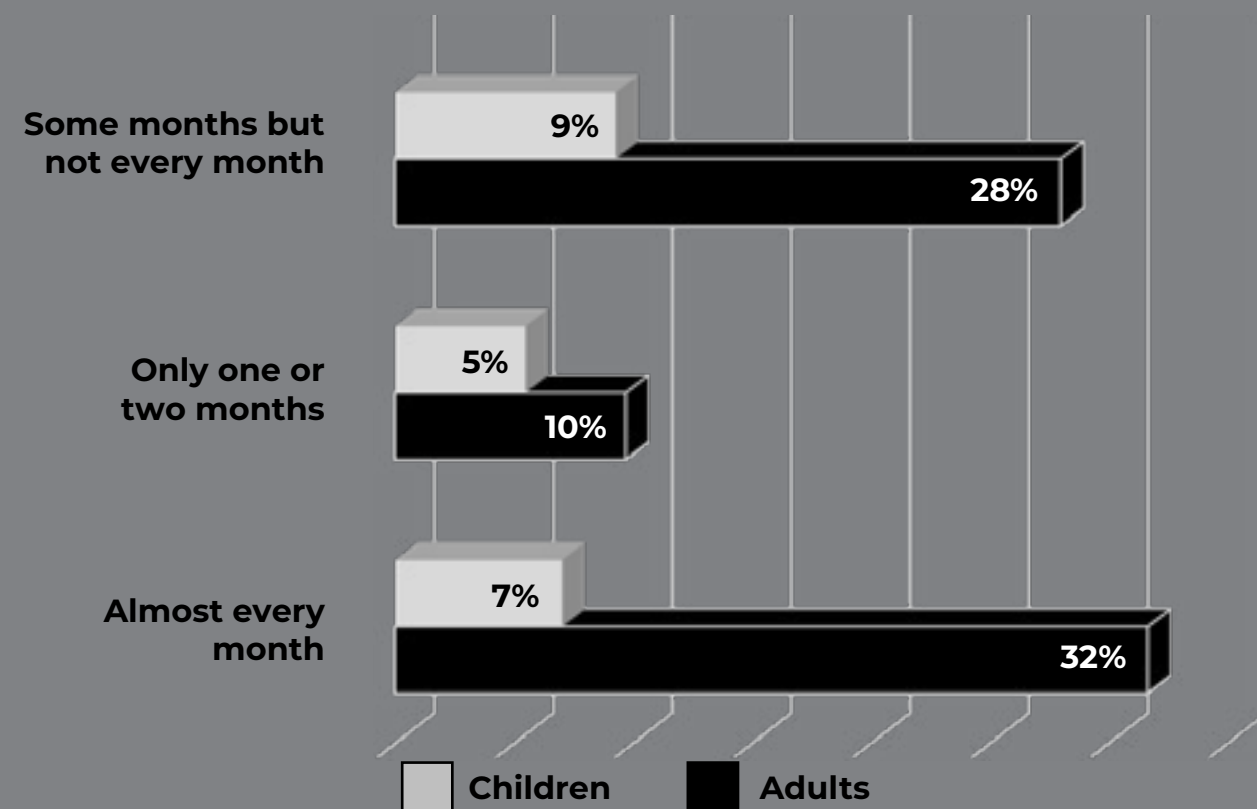


FIGURE 2: HAD TO CUT THE SIZE OF A MEAL OR SKIP MEALS

When asked if they had to cut the size of a meal or skip meals because there was not enough money to buy food, 32% indicated this happened almost every month and 28% said this happened some months. **Seven per cent of participants said they had to cut the size of their children's meals**, or their children had to skip a meal almost every month. Nine per cent said this happened some months but not every month

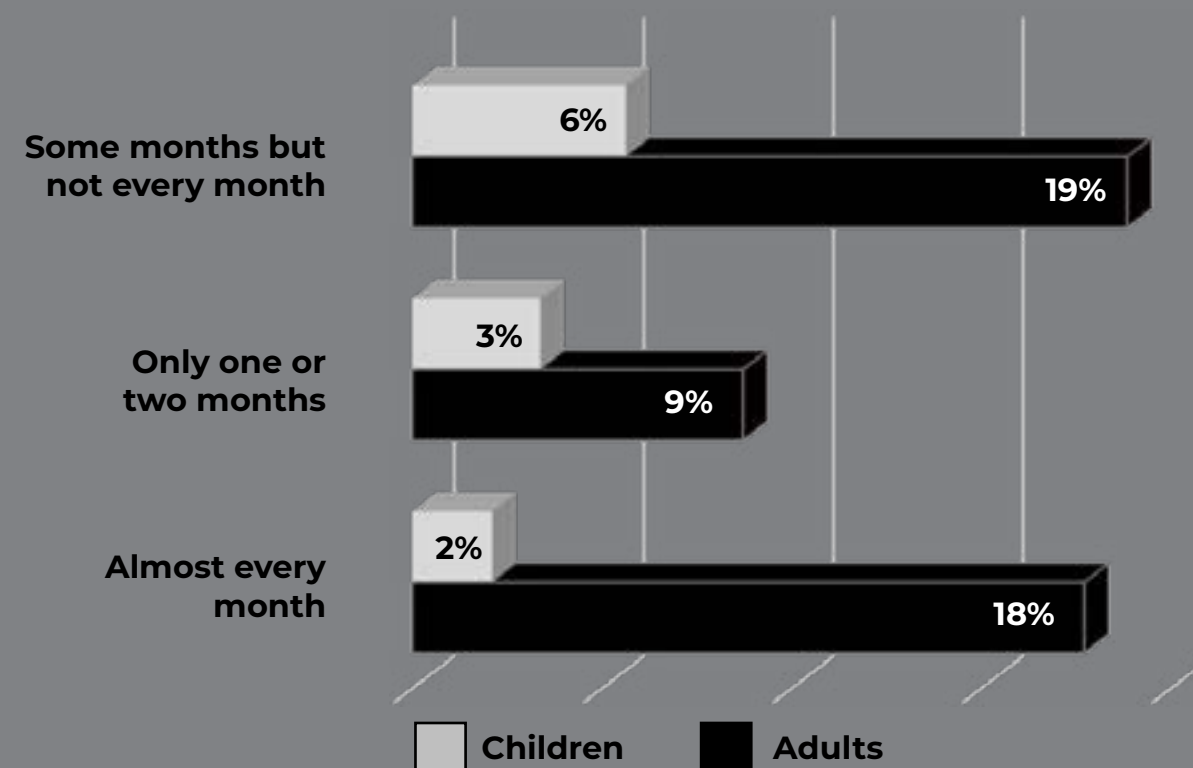


FIGURE 3: SKIPPED A WHOLE DAY OF FOOD

When asked if they ever **went an entire day** without eating because there was not enough money to buy food, 18% of respondents said it happened almost every month and 19% said it happened some months. Two per cent said their children had to go a whole day without food almost every month and 6% said this happened some months.

LIVING CONDITIONS

That increase risk of food insecurity

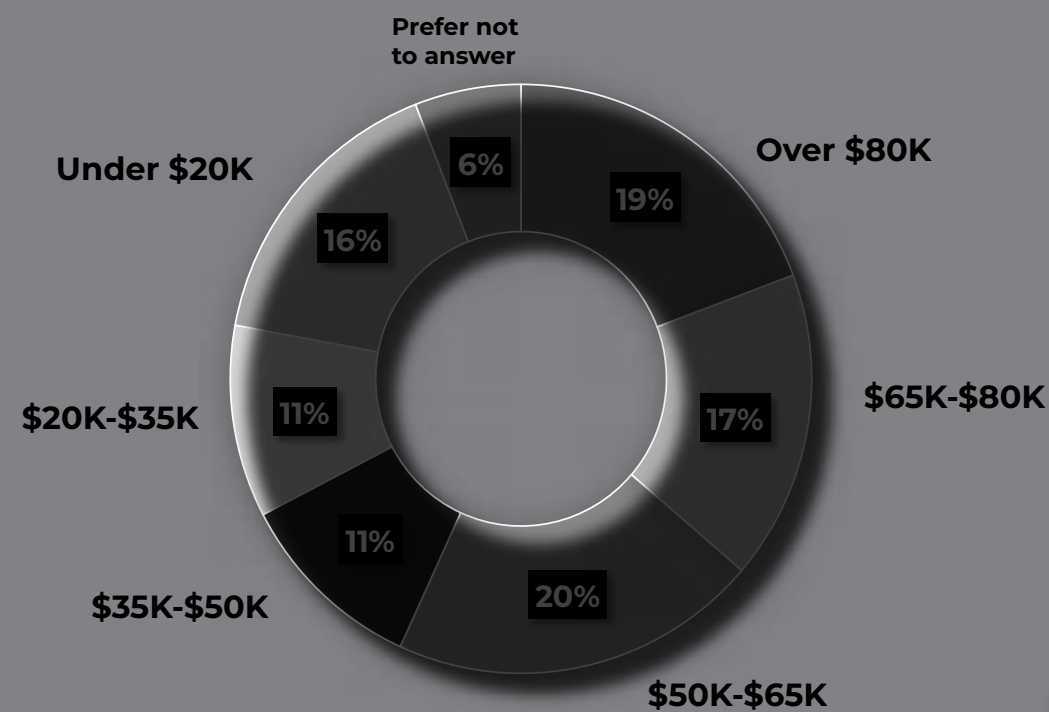
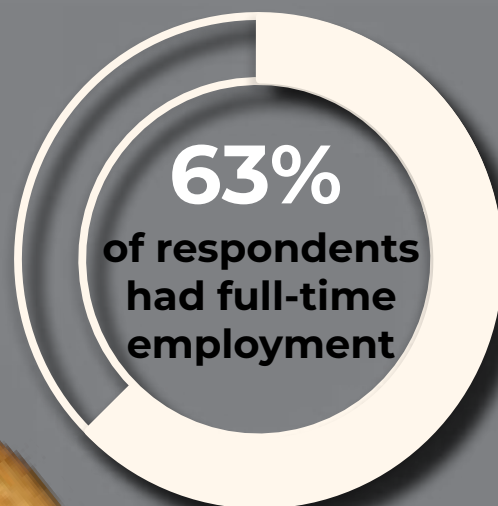


FIGURE 4: ANNUAL HOUSEHOLD INCOME



Other sources included

- Ontario Disability Support Program (9%)
- Part-time employment (9%)
- Canada Child Benefit (4%)
- Seasonal or casual employment (3%).



indicated their annual household income is less than \$35,000

For purposes of comparison, the 2022 Living Wage for Perth-Huron—the income that is necessary to meet basic needs based upon actual local costs—is \$37,632 for an individual, based upon an hourly wage of \$20.70. The results of the survey show that incomes do *not* meet the needs of most participants.

Seventy-three percent of respondents have three or more dependents (including themselves) relying on their household income. About 83% of respondents indicated they have children in their household; 44% were couples with children, 23% were one adult with children and 15% were more than one adult with children.

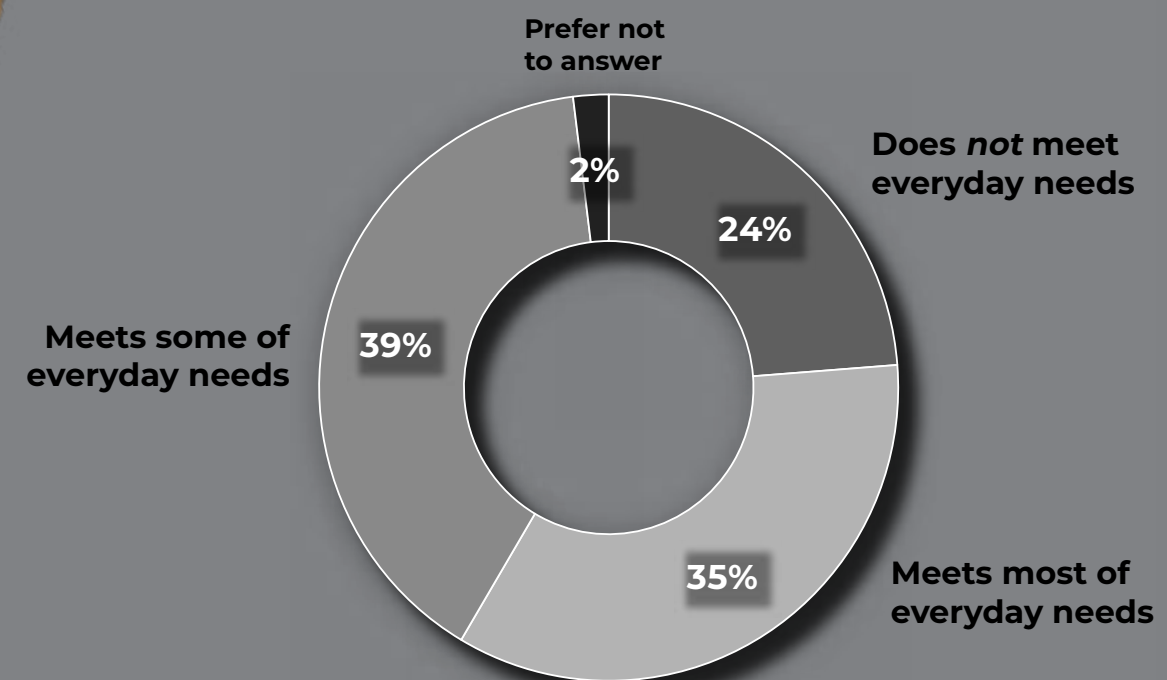


FIGURE 5: DOES INCOME MEET EVERYDAY NEEDS?



HOUSEHOLD FOOD SITUATION

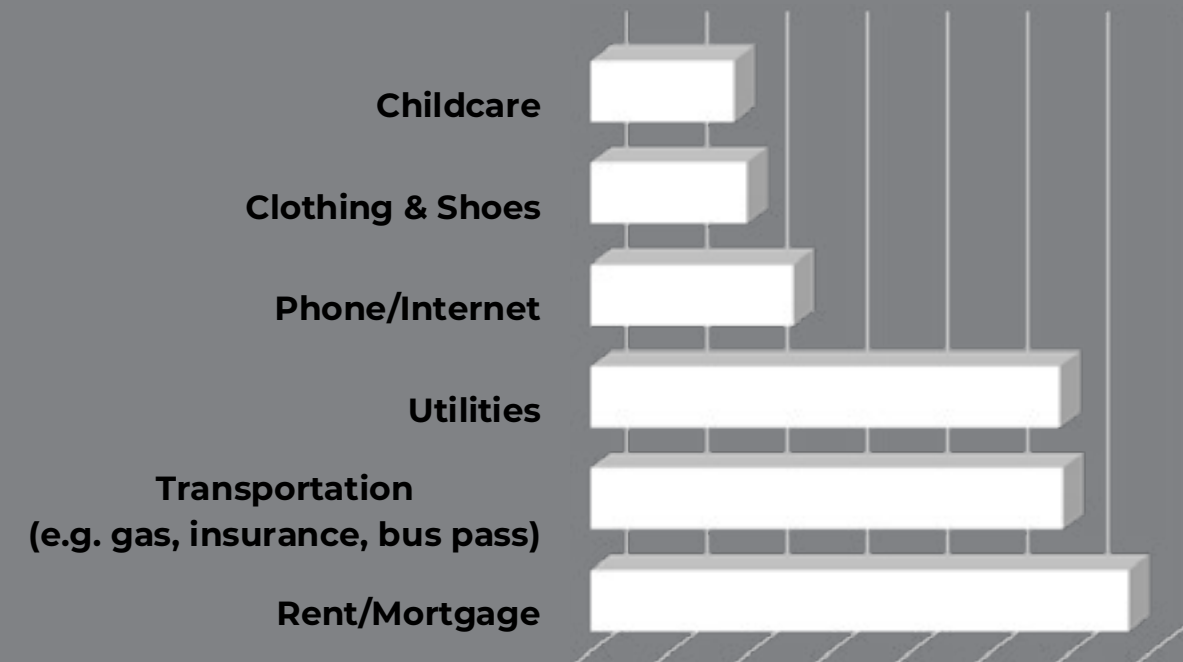


FIGURE 6: LIVING EXPENSES FOR WHICH PEOPLE SACRIFICED THEIR FOOD BUDGET



MENTAL HEALTH & SOCIAL IMPLICATIONS

A large majority of food insecure respondents feel anxious and stressed, and many suffer from depression, frustration, a sense of powerlessness and shame.

Figure 7 displays the mental health implications of an inadequate food budget or food supply.

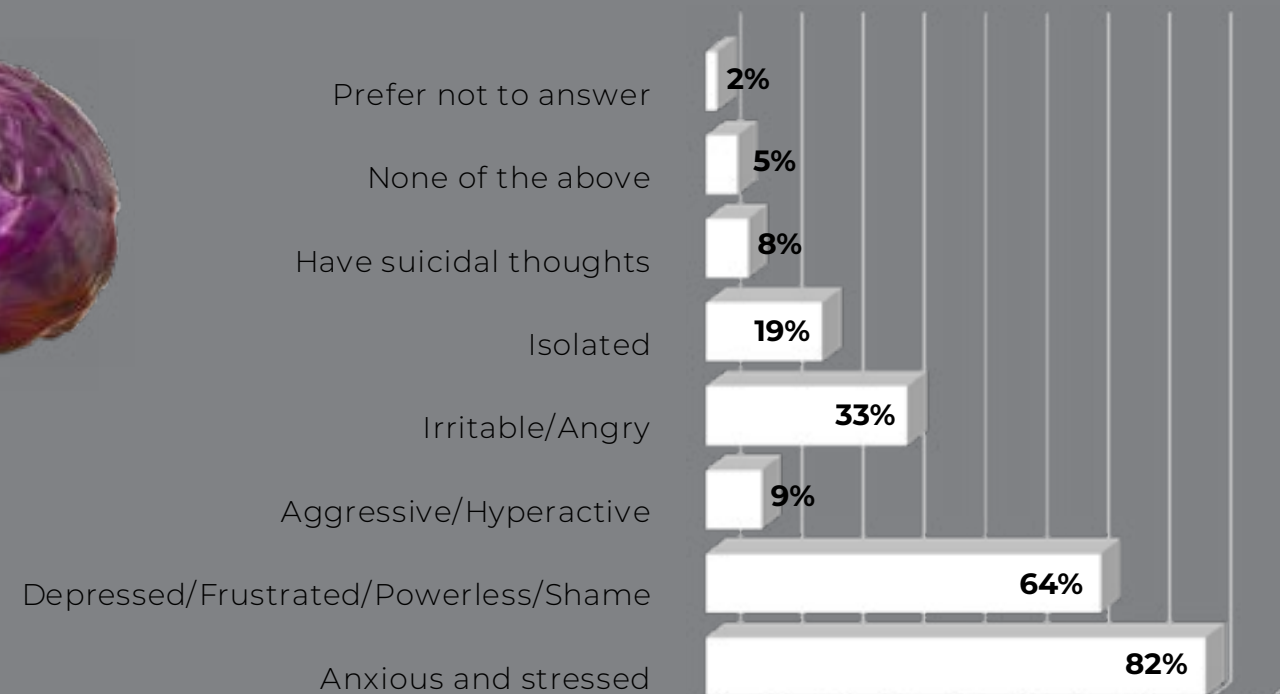
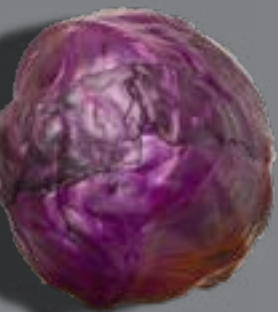


FIGURE 7: MENTAL HEALTH IMPLICATIONS OF INADEQUATE FOOD BUDGET OR SUPPLY

Due to their food situation, participants reported facing physical and mental challenges (36%), relationship issues at home (30%), barriers to moving forward with their lives (28%) and low productivity at work or school (22%). Thirty-nine per cent of respondents indicated they sometimes worried because their food would run out before they had money to buy more, 31% said this was often true and 18% said it was rarely true.

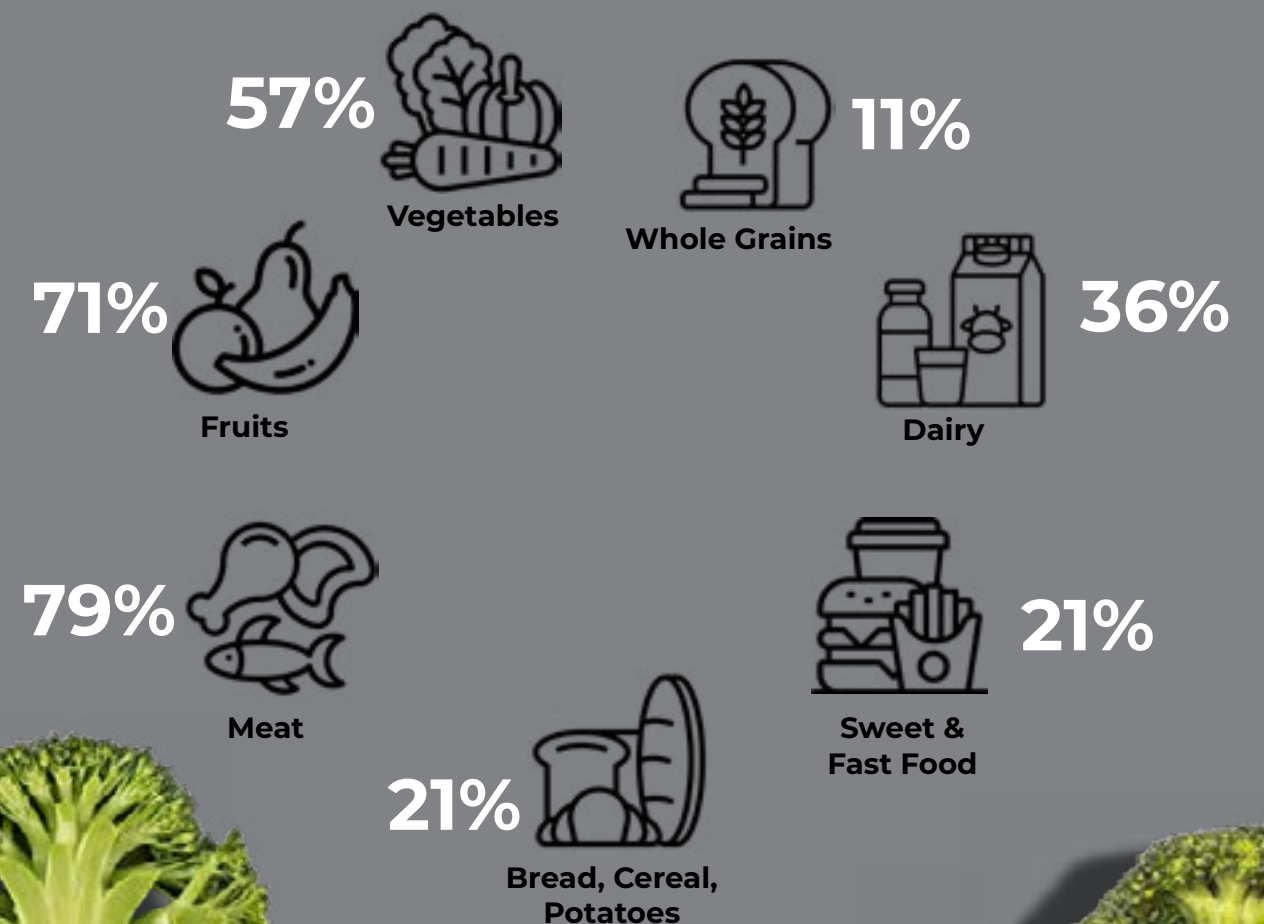


EATING BEHAVIOUR CHANGES DUE TO LACK OF MONEY

When asked if they faced situations where they could not afford balanced meals for themselves and their household members in the last 12 months, 37% of respondents said this was often the case and 43% said it was sometimes the case.

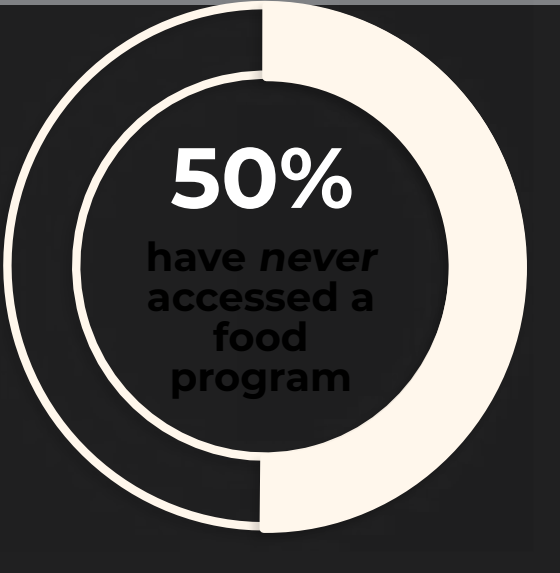
Those facing food insecurity have to go without meat, fruits & vegetables and dairy products. Instead, the most commonly eaten foods are pasta, breads, cereals, potatoes and canned food.

FIGURE 5: FOODS PEOPLE ARE UNABLE TO AFFORD



COMMUNITY FOOD PROGRAM USAGE Previous 12 months

Almost **50% of participants said they never used any community food programs** (such as food boxes, community meals, food banks, food pantries). Thirty-three per cent indicated they accessed a food bank, 17% used food boxes and 14% accessed community meals. Other programs used included student nutrition programs, meal delivery services and food pantries.





RECOMMENDATIONS



Strategies that address poverty and increase incomes of low-income households will also address food insecurity. Recognizing that food banks and community meals were intended as emergency measures and not permanent solutions to food insecurity, our recommendations focus on improving economic outcomes for food insecure households. However, we recognize that charitable food sources are important in the meantime. For this reason, we also offer a recommendation focused on increasing charitable emergency food availability.



3

Advocate for an increase in Social Assistance Rates

Advocate for an increase in social assistance rates, increased earnings allowance and rates that adjust for inflation. This allows individuals who are unable to work, including seniors, people of differing abilities and those with young children or barriers, to have enough income to cover basic living expenses including food.

1

Promote Living Wage

When wages reflect the cost of living in a community, people can afford basic needs and will not have to sacrifice their food budget. Paying a living wage, and supporting employers to pay a living wage, helps ensure people can meet their household needs, including food.



4

Increase accessibility to Food Programs

Explore options with community food programs to expand areas of service and/or service delivery times to increase accessibility to a larger segment of the population.

2

Advocate for Basic Income

A basic income is a guaranteed amount regularly given by the government to every household that needs it, without conditions, to meet basic needs. A basic income allows people to have the purchasing power to buy adequate, nutritious food.



5

Collaborate Food Programs

Consider further collaboration between Perth and Huron food security networks to formally join and represent both counties. An expanded region and membership could lead to greater diversity of ideas, resources and action.



REFERENCES

Household food insecurity in Canada. Proof. (2022, September 9). Retrieved from <https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/>

Statistics Canada. 2023. (table). *Census Profile*. 2021 Census of Population. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2021001. Ottawa. Released March 29, 2023.





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