

# *Building Capacity among Women for Food Security Related Policy Change*

## **Nova Scotia Participatory Food Costing Project**



A project of the Nova Scotia Food Security Network in partnership with community partners, the Department of Health Promotion and Protection, and Mount Saint Vincent University

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# What is Food Security?

**Food security** means that all people, at all times, have access to nutritious, safe, personally acceptable and culturally appropriate foods that are produced, procured and distributed in ways that are sustainable, environmentally sound and socially just.

(adapted from Fairholm, 1999)



# Food Insecurity ...

The inability to obtain sufficient, nutritious, personally acceptable food through normal food channels or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so results in food insecurity.

(Davis & Tarasuk, 1994)



# Why is income-related food insecurity an concern in Nova Scotia?

- 14.6% of Nova Scotian households report experiencing income-related food insecurity vs 9.2% Canadians
- 33.4% Female led lone parent families
- 21% of families with 3 or more children



# Consequences of Food Insecurity

- Nutritional quality and adequacy of diet compromised (Badun, Evers & Hooper, 1995; Kendall, Olson & Frongillo, 1996; MacIntyre et al., 2001)
- Profound lack of food choice & monotony of diet; strong feelings of powerlessness, inequity, frustration → alienation (Hamelin et al., 2002)
- Lone mother households → mothers' dietary intakes consistently poorer than children's (McIntyre et al., 2003)



# Food Insecurity contributes to health disparities...

- Compromised physical, mental and social well being; risk of chronic illness, behaviour problems, anxiety, and depression.
- Loss of constructive participation in society, social and economic disparities, impaired potential for social and economic development.

(Power, 2006; Hamelin, Habicht, & Beaudry, 1999; Weinreb Wehler, Perloff, Scott, Hosmer, Sagor, & Gundersen, 2002; McIntyre et al., 2002; 2003; Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003)





# VOICES...

*“So for some of us who end up in a situation where we don’t have enough to eat, we already know shame. Shame is so comfortable. It just fits like a jacket. So, you go somewhere and someone gives you a bit more, you take it. It fits. It feels normal.”*



# Our journey ...

- Participatory Food costing in 2002 and 2004/05
- Model for ongoing food costing developed and submitted to DHPP
- Nova Scotia Food Security Network, Annual Participatory Food Costing funded by the Department of Health Promotion and Protection as a Component of the Healthy Eating Strategy





# Working together for food security in NS and beyond...

- Collaborating CAPC/CPNP-funded NS Family Resource Centres/Projects and other community-based organizations
- Nova Scotia Nutrition Council
- Atlantic Health Promotion Research Centre
- NS Public Health Services
- Departments of Health Promotion and Protection; Health; Community Services; and Agriculture
- MSVU, Dalhousie, St. FX, Acadia & Univ. Ont. Inst. Tech. Universities
- Health Canada; Public Health Agency of Canada
- Atlantic Canadian Regional Organic Network
- Ecology Action Centre's Food Action Committee
- Food Security networks across Canada
- National & Provincial Advisory Committees

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# Our guiding principles



- Food security  
for all -- through policy  
and system change
- Capacity building &  
inclusion
- Collaboration



**>> Participatory Action Research**



# The 2007 Participatory Food Costing Project

- Determine the cost of a basic nutritious diet in Nova Scotia in June 2007
- Assess the affordability of a basic nutritious diet for selected household types in June 2007
- Identify implications of these findings concerning income related food security for Nova Scotians



# Participatory Process

- Participatory research involves community partners in decision making, data collection and analysis and the use of the research results
- It involves the participation of those most involved, affected, or potentially affected by food insecurity as well as government and other partners who can work influence policy



# Methods

- Trained food costers from Family and Women's Resource Centres/Projects
- Stratified, random selection of Grocery Stores
- June 2007 data collection
- Analysis of food costing data
- Constructing affordability scenarios



# The Survey Tool: The National Nutritious Food Basket (NNFB)

- Standardized reference tool developed by Health Canada
- Reflects current food buying patterns and nutrition guidelines
- Uses 66 foods, to determine cost of a basic nutritious diet for 23 age and gender groups
- Considers lowest price available for a specific size of product regardless of brand
- Includes food items that are minimally processed and widely available in grocery stores
- Does not include non-food items



# Analysis

- Affordability scenarios examined hypothetical household types in relation to various income sources
- Monthly Costs for basic essential expenses were subtracted from total after tax income to determine if adequate money was left for the cost of the NNFB for different household scenarios
- Household scenarios examined included:
  - Reference household of four
  - Female Led Lone Parent Household with 2 children
  - Lone Adult Male
  - Elderly Widowed Female (Green et al. 2008)
  - Lone Pregnant Female (Amero, 2008)





# Female Led Lone Parent Household with 2 children: Affordability of a Basic Nutritious Diet, June 2007

- **Minimum wage**
- **Income Assistance**

***NOTE:** The food basket is made up of only basic food items and doesn't include prepared foods, paper products or toiletries*

**NNFB: \$414.19**





	Single Female, 24 yrs	Single Female, 24 yrs
<b>Family Composition</b>	Boy, 7 yrs -Girl, 4 yrs	Boy, 7 yrs - Girl, 4 yrs
<b>Source of Income</b>	Minimum Wage (FT)	Income Assistance
Monthly Net Income		
Wages	\$1,316.32	\$0.00
Payroll Deductions	(\$192.26)	n/a
Personal Allowance	n/a	\$200.00
Shelter Allowance	n/a	\$620.00
Childcare Allowance	n/a	\$290.33
Transportation Allowance	n/a	\$150.00
Federal Child Tax Benefit	\$626.15	\$626.15
Universal Child Tax Benefit	\$100.00	\$100.00
GST benefit	\$59.00	\$59.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$1,909.21</b>	<b>\$2,045.48</b>
Basic Monthly Expenses		
Shelter	\$559.56	\$559.56
Power	\$80.00	\$80.00
Telephone	\$29.21	\$29.21
Transportation	\$326.48	\$326.48
Childcare	\$290.33	\$290.33
Clothing, footwear, etc.	\$155.50	\$155.50
Other (Personal Care, Household)	\$62.25	\$62.25
Funds remaining before food costs	<b>\$405.88</b>	<b>\$542.15</b>
Cost of the NNFB	<b>\$414.19</b>	<b>\$414.19</b>
Funds remaining for other expenses	<b>(\$-8.31)</b>	<b>\$127.96</b>



# Other Scenarios...

Household Type	Funds remaining for other expenses
Reference household of four relying on minimum wages	\$59.24
Reference household of four relying on Income Assistance	(\$79.89)
Elderly widowed female (Green et al., 2008)	(\$224.18)
Lone pregnant female relying on Income Assistance (Amero, 2008)	(\$187.04)



# Conclusions

- From 2002 to 2007 there has been a 13% increase in the cost of a basis nutritious diet
- Many households, specifically female-led households, in Nova Scotia simply cannot afford to eat a basic nutritious diet
- Current Income Assistance rates do not fully cover the costs of a nutritious diet, and therefore may pose a significant risk to health.
- Those working for minimum wage, particularly female led lone parent families, are also at risk of food insecurity.



# Policy Implications

- Need for continued review of policies surrounding minimum wage and Income Assistance rates in Nova Scotia
- Levels of income (through Income Assistance, wages and Federal transfers) need to equate to an adequate living wage.
- Programs and policies to support families and individuals can make a difference
- Government social policy initiatives need to contribute to food security and will ultimately improve the health and well being for all citizens.



# *Building Capacity for Policy Change*

Participatory action research... Food costing; Story sharing; National scan of strategies for influencing policy; National, Regional and Community Level Dialogues; Advocacy workshops and media releases of research findings, etc..

2000

Ongoing



Working together across sectors and jurisdictions to develop policy tools

- Workbook “Food Security & Influencing Policy”
- DVD “Food Security: It’s Everyone’s Business”
- Understanding the Relationship Between Public Policy and Food Security in Nova Scotia: A Background Paper and Policy Lens

[www.foodthoughtful.ca](http://www.foodthoughtful.ca)





# What Have We Learned?

Participatory approaches are powerful springboards to action on food insecurity

- Involvement of those affected by the issue
- Based on needs and strengths of communities
- **Individual Capacity Building** - Increased confidence & skills; gained a voice; sense of belonging; increased awareness and critical analysis of root causes and solutions
- **Collaborative Capacity** – tools, resources and processes used to support policy development and action, enhanced participation and collaboration, knowledge and ability to support others and work with others
- **System capacity** – local, provincial and national



# For More Information

Williams *et al.* Can Journal of Public Health

2006. 97(6): 430-34

Green *et al.* Can Journal of Aging. 2008. 27(1):69-79

NSNC Website:

[www.nsync.ca](http://www.nsync.ca)



AHPRC Website:

[www.ahprc.dal.ca](http://www.ahprc.dal.ca)

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Workbook: Thought About Food?

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