

**Report to/Rapport au :**

**Ottawa Board of Health  
Conseil de santé d'Ottawa**

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CITY WIDE / À L'ÉCHELLE DE LA VILLE

Ref N°: ACS2012-OPH-HPDP-0010

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**SUBJECT: ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOODS AND HUNGER PREVENTION**

**OBJET : ACCÈS À DES ALIMENTS SAINS ET PRÉVENTION DE LA FAIM**

### **REPORT RECOMMENDATIONS**

**That the Board of Health for the City of Ottawa Health Unit approve programming to enhance access to healthy foods, including new initiatives to address hunger, as outlined in this report.**

### **RECOMMANDATIONS DU RAPPORT**

**Que le Conseil de santé de la circonscription sanitaire de la ville d'Ottawa approuve des programmes pour assurer un meilleur accès à des aliments sains, dont des nouvelles initiatives de lutte contre la faim, comme il est indiqué dans le présent rapport.**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Through a strategy that involves enhanced programming, policy and research, Ottawa Public Health (OPH) has been working to improve access to healthy foods in Ottawa. Despite progress, there is evidence that many residents continue to face physical and economic barriers to accessing healthy, nutritious food. In 2009-2010, approximately seven per cent of Ottawa residents reported that they 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. Hunger and barriers to healthy food access in Ottawa persist:

- Ottawa residents in 22 of 33 neighbourhoods of lower socioeconomic status must travel more than 1 km or walk longer than 15 minutes to access a large, full-service

grocery store. Evidence demonstrates a link between residential proximity to full-service food retailers and access to nutritious food.

- More than 40 per cent of Ontario Food Bank users are on social assistance programs. The number of Ottawa residents turning to food banks is at an all-time high. An estimated 48,000 Ottawa residents seek the services of the Ottawa Food Bank each month. This represents an almost seven per cent annual increase in the number of people requiring emergency food every month, which is up from the four per cent annual increase that has been noted in past years.
- The average monthly cost of a three bedroom apartment in Ottawa is \$1,412 per month. For a family of four on Ontario Works, this represents almost 70 per cent of their monthly income, leaving little left for basic living expenses and food.
- Results of the 2012 Nutritious Food Basket survey indicate that in Ottawa, it costs a minimum of \$745 per month to feed a family of four with basic food items.
- In Ottawa, 55 per cent of adults and 49 per cent of youth report consuming less than five vegetables and fruit on a daily basis.

Food security in a community exists when all people at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life. Individuals who experience inadequate physical and economic access to healthy foods have significantly worse dietary intakes than those with access. Poor birth outcomes, reduced learning and productivity, chronic diseases and lack of nutrients are examples of how poverty, manifested as lack of access to healthy foods, affects health.

In 2013, OPH will work to overcome these barriers to accessing healthy foods, with a focus on preventing hunger by:

- Increasing access to healthy foods in neighbourhoods where food availability has been identified as a local issue through surveillance and mapping of the physical food environment
- Increasing the distribution and local availability of fresh, healthy food through partnerships with local organizations, including the Good Food Box and Good Food Markets, particularly where the highest needs are identified
- Advocating that access to healthy food be included in municipal plans and policies, including the Official Plan
- Implementing the Municipal Childcare Healthy Eating and Active Living Policy
- Increasing food skills education by 50 per cent to reach 8,800 individuals
- Continuing to work with partners, such as the Ottawa Food Bank and the Poverty and Hunger Working Group, to address economic barriers to healthy food access

## RÉSUMÉ

Au moyen d'une stratégie s'articulant autour de politiques, de recherches et de programmes améliorés, Santé publique Ottawa (SPO) travaille à rendre les aliments sains plus accessibles dans la capitale nationale. Malgré les progrès enregistrés, force est de constater que bon nombre de résidents rencontrent encore des obstacles physiques et économiques qui les empêchent d'avoir accès à des aliments sains et nutritifs. En 2009-2010, environ 7 % des résidents d'Ottawa ont déclaré craindre de ne

pas pouvoir manger à leur faim, ont dû réduire la qualité ou la variété des aliments consommés, ou ont manqué de nourriture pour des raisons financières. Aujourd'hui, la faim et les obstacles à une saine alimentation persistent à Ottawa :

- Les résidents demeurant dans 22 des 33 quartiers à faible statut socio-économique doivent parcourir plus de 1 km ou marcher plus de 15 minutes pour se rendre dans un supermarché de grande surface. Or, il a été démontré qu'il existe un lien entre le fait de demeurer près d'un tel commerce et celui d'avoir accès à des aliments nutritifs.
- Plus que 40 % des clients des banques alimentaires de l'Ontario sont prestataires de programmes d'aide sociale. Le nombre de résidents d'Ottawa qui se tournent vers les banques alimentaires n'a jamais été aussi élevé. On estime que 48 000 résidents ont recours aux services de la Banque d'alimentation d'Ottawa tous les mois, ce qui représente une augmentation annuelle de près de 7 %, comparativement à 4 % lors des dernières années.
- Le coût moyen de location d'un logement de trois chambres à Ottawa est de 1 412 \$ par mois, ce qui représente près de 70 % du revenu mensuel d'une famille de quatre bénéficiant du programme Ontario au travail; il reste peu d'argent pour combler les besoins essentiels, dont la nourriture.
- Les résultats du sondage du Panier de provisions nutritif pour 2012 indiquent qu'à Ottawa, une famille de quatre personnes doit déboursier au moins 745 \$ par mois pour se procurer les produits alimentaires de base nécessaires à son alimentation.
- Au total, 55 % des adultes et 49 % des adolescents d'Ottawa disent consommer moins de cinq portions de fruits et légumes par jour.

La sécurité alimentaire existe dans une communauté lorsque toutes les personnes ont un accès physique et économique, à tout moment, à suffisamment d'aliments nutritifs et salubres pour satisfaire leurs besoins et leurs préférences alimentaires de manière à leur assurer une vie active et saine. Les gens qui ne disposent pas d'un accès physique et économique adéquat à des aliments sains ont un apport alimentaire nettement inférieur à ceux qui en bénéficient. La pauvreté, lorsqu'elle se manifeste par un manque d'accès à des aliments sains, est susceptible de nuire à la santé des individus qui en souffrent de plusieurs façons : conséquences néfastes sur l'issue de la grossesse, réduction de la capacité d'apprentissage et de la productivité, maladies chroniques, carences alimentaires.

En 2013, SPO se consacrera à l'élimination des obstacles à une saine alimentation. Pour ce faire, elle mettra notamment en place différentes initiatives de prévention de la faim :

- Améliorer l'accès à des aliments sains dans les quartiers où cette problématique a été ciblée grâce à la surveillance de l'environnement alimentaire physique et au portrait qui en a été dressé.
- Augmenter la distribution et la disponibilité locale d'aliments frais et sains – en particulier dans les secteurs où le besoin est le plus criant – grâce à des partenariats avec des organismes locaux, dont la Boîte verte d'Ottawa et Good Food Markets.
- Promouvoir l'intégration du principe de l'accès à des aliments sains dans les politiques et plans municipaux, dont le Plan officiel.

- Mettre en place la politique pour la promotion de la saine alimentation et de la vie active dans les garderies municipales.
- Augmenter l'enseignement prodigué sur les aptitudes alimentaires de 50 % afin de sensibiliser 8 800 personnes.
- Continuer de travailler avec ses partenaires, comme la Banque d'alimentation d'Ottawa, the Poverty and Hunger Working Group, pour vaincre les obstacles économiques à l'accès à des aliments sains.

## BACKGROUND

Subsequent to the November 2011 report Access to Healthy Foods (ACS2011-OPH-HPDP-0004), the Board of Health approved the Healthy Eating, Active Living (HEAL) Strategy (ACS2012-OPH-HPDP-0003) on May 7, 2012. In particular, hunger prevention and access to healthy food falls under two HEAL objectives: decreasing consumption of energy dense, nutrient poor foods and beverages, and engaging the 'whole-of-community' to change social and physical environments.

This report is the first of a series of updates on the HEAL strategy and describes the activities related to improving access to healthy foods and new initiatives to prevent hunger in Ottawa.

Food security in a community exists when all people at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life (1). Individuals, who experience decreased physical and economic access to healthy foods, have worse dietary intakes than those who have access (2). Poor birth outcomes, reduced learning and productivity, chronic diseases and lack of nutrients are examples of how poverty, manifested as lack of access to healthy foods, affects health (2-5).

### **Physical Access to Food in Ottawa**

Preliminary analysis from the Ottawa Neighbourhood Study shows that residents in 22 of 33 neighbourhoods of lower socioeconomic status\* must travel more than 1 km or walk longer than 15 minutes to access a large, full-service grocery store (6). Evidence demonstrates a link between residents' proximity to full-service food retailers and their access to nutritious food.

As a healthy diet has been shown to decrease the risk of developing cardiovascular disease, diabetes and obesity, enhancing understanding of the local links, barriers and assets related to access to nutritious food will better inform planners, policy makers and programmers working to improve the physical food environment. OPH has partnered with researchers at the University of Ottawa to complete a more in-depth analysis, which will expand on current work to include all Ottawa neighbourhoods and add a

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\* Socioeconomic status is based on the average income of the neighbourhood as well as the percent of residents that are lone parents, have no high school education, live below the Low Income Cut off (LICO), and are unemployed.

range of factors related to health and food access, such as public transportation and car ownership.

## **Economic Access to Food in Ottawa**

In 2009-2010, approximately seven per cent of Ottawa residents reported that they 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 (7). This is consistent with the rest of Ontario, where almost eight per cent of the population reported some barrier to accessing healthy food (7). These statistics, unchanged over the last year, highlight that hunger and access to healthy foods persist in Ottawa.

The Nutritious Food Basket is a survey tool that is used to monitor the cost of basic, healthy eating. The tool examines the cost of 67 basic food items representing current nutrition recommendations and average purchasing patterns of Canadians. According to the 2012 Nutritious Food Basket survey, it costs \$745 per month to feed a family of four in Ottawa, a decline of two per cent or approximately \$3 per week since 2011 (8).

In addition, more than 40 per cent of Ontario Food Bank users are on social assistance programs (9). A single person on Ontario Works receives \$7,704 per year (\$642 per month) (10). While Ontario Works recipients often receive access to benefits, such as dental and prescription drug coverage, many cannot afford to purchase healthy food after having paid for basic living expenses (Document 1). Over 16,000 individuals in Ottawa receive Ontario Works and nearly 24,000 rely on Ontario Disability Support Program (11). These statistics do not reflect family members and dependants of Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program recipients.

For individuals on low and fixed incomes, the rental housing market also presents a challenge. The average monthly cost of a three bedroom apartment in Ottawa is \$1,412 per month (12). For a family of four on Ontario Works, this represents almost 70 per cent of their monthly income. For a family of four with one full-time, minimum wage earner, this represents over 50 per cent of their monthly income. Further, 9,977 families were on the waiting list for rent-geared-to-income housing in Ottawa at the end of 2011 (13). The time on the waiting list varies but in some cases can be 5 years or more (14).

These scenarios illustrate that households with fixed incomes and minimum wage earners have little if any money left over to cover basic living expenses (Document 1). In reality, people choose to pay rent and other fixed expenses, before buying food. Food becomes a “discretionary” expense resulting in a diet of poor nutritional quality.

*“Hunger is toxic for those living through it, and it is harmful to Canada as a whole.”*

-Hunger Count 2012, Food Banks Canada

The number of Ottawa residents turning to food banks is at an all-time high. An estimated 48,000 Ottawa residents seek the services of the Ottawa Food Bank each month (15). This represents an almost seven per cent annual increase in the

number of people requiring emergency food every month, which is up from the four per cent annual increase that has been noted in past years. The increasing number of food

bank users indicates that hunger and barriers to healthy food access in Ottawa not only exist, but persist.

## DISCUSSION

### **OPH Programming to Address Access to Healthy Foods and Hunger Prevention**

Over the past year, OPH has worked at improving access to healthy foods through a multipronged approach: food skills education, community programs, community partners and policy development. Partnership, in the form of collaborative initiatives and community empowerment, has advanced awareness of and resource commitments to healthy food access and hunger prevention.

#### Food Skills Education

Food skills necessary to help people access nutritious food include the ability to budget, shop and prepare food. OPH has been working to enhance food skills of priority populations through collaboration with English as Second Language schools and providing food skills training in rural and low-income neighbourhoods.

OPH community food advisors are trained volunteers who provide practical advice and food demonstrations to new immigrants, seniors and low-income residents at neighbourhood locations, food banks and farmers' markets. Since January 2012, approximately 2,300 individuals have been reached through food skills presentations by community food advisors.

#### Community programs

##### *Good Food Box*

OPH has been an active partner to promote and expand the Good Food Box. The Good Food Box, led by Centretown Community Health Centre, is a volunteer-driven, not-for-profit food distribution initiative. The program increases access to low-cost fresh fruits and vegetables and is currently delivered in more than 30 locations across the city. Over the last year, OPH has actively worked to increase distribution sites at City facilities.

##### *Good Food Market*

The Good Food Market pilot initiative was implemented this summer in four under-served neighbourhoods. Community partners such as OPH, local Community Health and Resource Centers, the Ottawa Good Food Box, the Social Planning Council of Ottawa, Anti-Poverty Initiative of the Coalition of Community Health and Resource Centres, and the City of Ottawa Community and Social Services Department, collaborated to host two

#### **Good Food Market customers reported...**

**68%** came to the market because it was close to their home.

**43%** attended the market because it offered affordable food.

**57%** would eat more fruits and vegetables as a result of attending the market.

market days in each of the four neighbourhoods. The offerings were tailored to the neighbourhood residents' preferences with a focus on healthy produce. Approximately 1,000 residents attended the markets throughout the summer. OPH provided support with planning, incentives, promotion, evaluation and on-site food demonstrations, recipes and taste tests. This initiative will continue in 2013.

### Policy Development

The Municipal Childcare Healthy Eating and Active Living policy, completed in partnership with the City's Community and Social Services Department, outlines nutrition standards, healthy meal routines and physical activity guidelines. Four municipal childcare centres will pilot the policy in spring of 2013. Upon full implementation, an estimated 1,000 children from 15 municipal childcare centres and 80 municipal home-based centres will benefit from this policy.

OPH is also collaborating with By-law and Regulatory Services on the [New Street Food Vending Program and Update on Business Licensing Transformation](#) (ACS2012-COS-EPS-004). OPH is participating in the selection committee to provide technical advice on food safety and progressive, innovative, healthy menus.

In addition, breastfeeding is recognized as a key component of a comprehensive access to healthy eating strategy, one supporting the most vulnerable population. From an economic perspective, breastfeeding provides families with immediate and long-term cost savings. As discussed in the report to the Board of Health tabled August 2012, on the [Baby-Friendly Initiative: Protecting, Promoting and Supporting Breastfeeding](#) (ACS2012-OPH-HPDP-0007), OPH is working towards achieving a Baby-Friendly Initiative™ designation by the end of 2012. Following certification, OPH will be working with other City departments and community partners to protect, promote and support breastfeeding across the city.

### Community Partners: Supporting Community Action Related to Food Security

OPH continues to support community action to improve access to healthy foods through work with organizations, such as Food For All, Just Food, the Poverty and Hunger Working Group, and other City departments. In 2012, OPH:

- Supported Just Food by:
  - Participating in the development of the "Food Action Plan for Ottawa: A Community Vision"
  - Providing consultation in establishing a Food Policy Council for Ottawa
  - Facilitating a grant application through the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
- Partnered with the Poverty and Hunger Working Group on the Good Food Market project
- Provided a submission to the Healthy Kids Panel that advocated for affordable and accessible healthy foods
- Monitored potential impacts of changes to income protection programs, such as the Ontario Child Benefit, Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program and the progress of the provincial Social Assistance Review

- Promoted volunteerism and donation to the Ottawa Food Bank at every opportunity

A key effort over the past year has been to involve the whole community, an overarching objective of the HEAL strategy. Several champions and strong partners in the community recognize access to healthy food as a fundamental and critical local issue. OPH is deeply appreciative and supportive of the work the partners are undertaking and acknowledge that there would be little progress without this collaboration. These relationships pave the way to continued progress in 2013.

## **Next Steps**

### *Physical Access to Food*

- Increase access to healthy foods in neighbourhoods where food availability has been identified as a local issue through surveillance and mapping of the physical food environment
- Increase the distribution and local availability of fresh, healthy food through partnerships with local organizations, including the Good Food Box and Good Food Markets, particularly where the highest needs are identified. An additional three Good Food Box sites are planned for 2013 as well as continuation of Good Food Markets.
- Advocate that access to healthy food be included in municipal plans and policies, including the Official Plan
- Implement the Municipal Childcare Healthy Eating and Active Living Policy
- Increase food skills education activities by 50 per cent to reach 8,800 individuals

### *Economic Access to Food*

Continue to explore opportunities to work with partners, such as the Ottawa Food Bank and the Poverty and Hunger Working Group, to address economic barriers to healthy food access.

## CONSULTATION

There are many partners that work collaboratively with OPH to improve access to healthy foods for Ottawa residents. As part of this work, OPH has shared the Nutritious Food Basket data with Community Health and Resource Centres, Just Food, Ottawa Food Bank, Ottawa Network for Education, Good Food Box, and City of Ottawa departments such as the Community and Social Services Department.

## LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no legal impediments to the implementation of the recommendation in this report.

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications associated with this report.

## TECHNOLOGY IMPLICATIONS

There are no technology implications associated with this report.

## BOARD OF HEALTH STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The recommendations in this report support the Board of Health Strategic Priorities: B2 Increase access to healthy foods through municipal policies; B3 Increase nutrition skills in priority populations

## TERM OF COUNCIL PRIORITIES

The recommendations in this report support the 2010-2014 Term of Council Priorities under “Healthy and Caring Communities”.

## SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

[Document 1 – The Price of Eating Well in Ottawa](#), 2012

## DOCUMENTS À L’APPUI

[Document 1 – Ce qu’il en coûte pour manger sainement à Ottawa, 2012](#)

## DISPOSITION

Ottawa Public Health will continue implementation of the HEAL strategy with focused efforts to improve access to healthy foods in Ottawa.

## REFERENCES

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