



The Province of Prince Edward Island

Food Insecurity

Poverty Reduction Action Plan Backgrounder

7/20/2018

www.princeedwardisland.ca/poverty-reduction



Food Insecurity

SUMMARY

Access to sufficient quantities of nutritious food is a fundamental human need. When individuals or families have inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints, they are said to be food insecure. Various levels of food insecurity have been [defined](#) to support analysis.

Rates of food insecurity have been [measured](#) in Canada since 2005. This backgrounder relies on data from Statistics Canada's Food Security module of the Canadian Community Health Survey, available for most years, analysis of that data by the PROOF Food Security Research Project at the University of Toronto, and data from Hungercount, the annual count and profile of food bank users carried out by Food Banks Canada.

These data sources indicate that over the decade since 2007, [food insecurity climbed](#) in Prince Edward Island to a peak in 2013 and has improved slightly since then. In 2013, almost one in eight Island households experienced moderate or severe food insecurity, dropping to one in ten in 2014 and 2015-16. In 2015-16, an additional 2 percent of Island households reported a marginal level of food insecurity, such as reporting worrying about running out of food. In 2015-16, Prince Edward Island's rate of moderate and severe food insecurity was the second highest among eight [participating provinces](#). The proportion of Islanders making use of [food banks](#) to help meet their food needs is much smaller, at just over 2 percent, slightly below the national average.

The level and extent of food insecurity varies among [population groups](#). By household type, food insecurity is highest among lone-parent households, followed by single households. Among couple families, those with children are far more likely to be food insecure. By age, food insecurity is highest among younger Islanders, and lowest among seniors.

A high proportion of Island [children](#) live in households that experience some level of food insecurity – 22 percent in 2014 – but detailed survey findings indicate that adults in those households take much of the brunt of food insecurity on themselves. A smaller proportion of children face compromises in the quantity and especially the quality of food.



DEFINITIONS OF FOOD SECURITY AND FOOD INSECURITY

According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, food security exists when “all people, at all times, have physical and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food to meet their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.”

Where these conditions are not met, three levels of food security have been defined:

- Households which worry about running out of food, and/or limit their food selection due to lack of money for food, are **marginally food insecure**.
- Households which compromise the quantity or quality of food due to lack of money are **moderately food insecure**.
- Households whose members miss meals, reduce food intake, and at worst go a day or more without food are **severely food insecure**.

HOW IS FOOD INSECURITY MEASURED?

Data on food insecurity are collected by Statistics Canada’s Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), a routine cross-sectional annual survey of 65,000 Canadians aged 12 and over. To provide reliable estimates at the health region level, a sample of 130,000 respondents is required on a two year basis. The CCHS includes a Household Food Security Module, consisting of 18 questions, ten related to adults and eight to children, on the food situation in the household over the previous year.

The food module operates on two-year cycles, mandatory for one cycle and optional the next. Since inception of the food module in 2005, Prince Edward Island has participated in all years except for 2009 and 2010. The most recent data available are from the 2015-16 Survey.

The questions range from worrying about running out of food, to changing the quality or quantity of foods, to doing without food. Households not experiencing any of these situations, i.e. saying no to all 18 questions, are considered food secure. “Yes” responses are classified into the marginal/moderate/ severe levels as follows:

- Respondents who answer yes to one of the ten adult-related questions or one of the eight child-related questions are considered marginally food insecure.
- Respondents who answer yes to between two and five questions on the adult scale or between two and four questions on the child scale are considered moderately food insecure.
- Respondents who answer yes to six or more questions on the adult scale or five or more questions on the child scale are considered severely food insecure.

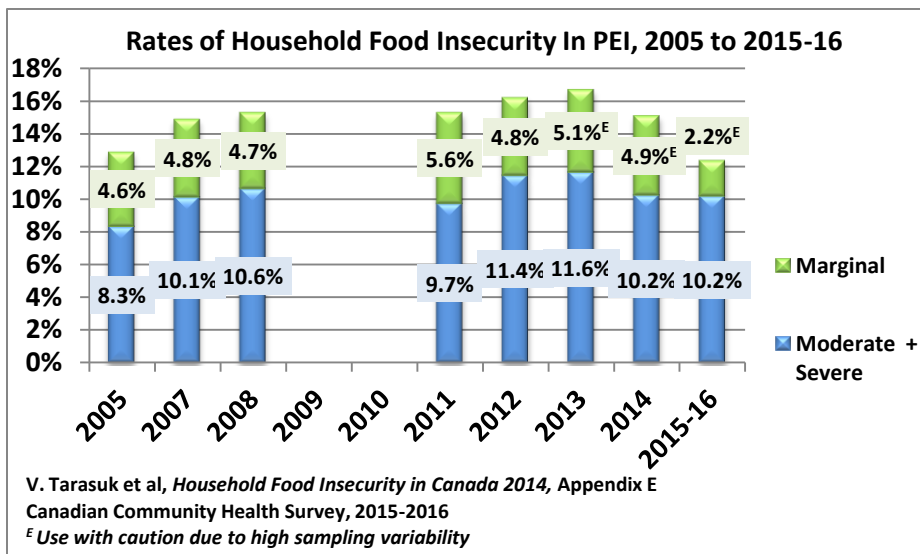
Statistics Canada’s reports on food insecurity focus on the moderate and severe categories, and on the population aged 12 and over. The PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research series at the University of Toronto relies on this data, but also includes the marginally food insecure population in its reports, and includes children under 12 as well. This results in some significant differences in the indicators reported by these organizations.



LEVELS AND TRENDS OF FOOD INSECURITY

From 2005 to 2015-16, levels of food insecurity in PEI rose over time to a peak in 2013 and then dropped in 2014 to 10.2 percent for moderate and severe food insecurity and 4.9 percent for marginal food insecurity. In 2015-16, 10.2 percent of Island households reported experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity, and an additional 2.2 percent of households reported a marginal level of food insecurity.

Detailed CCHS data for PEI are available for the 2015-16 cycle, indicating 1,971 households experiencing severe food insecurity, and a further 3,836 PEI households experiencing moderate food insecurity, for a total of 5,807 households.

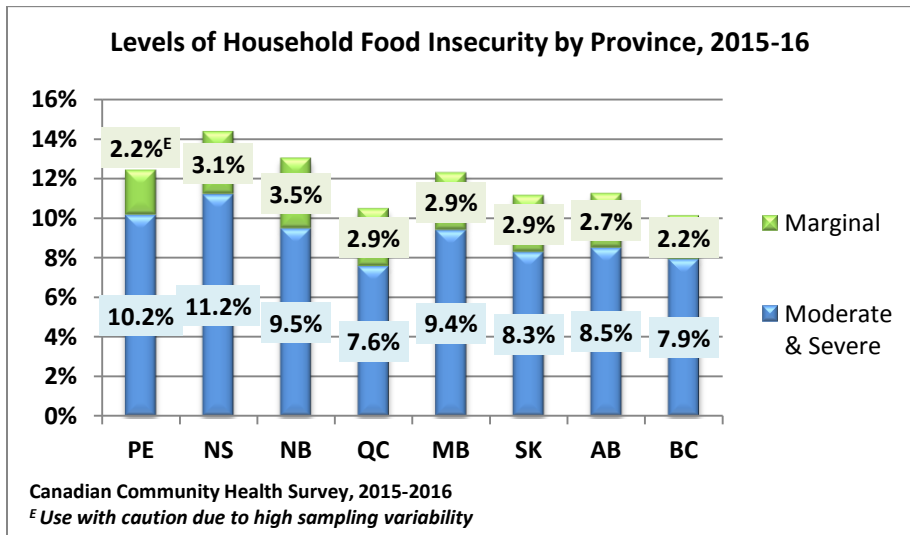




LEVELS OF FOOD INSECURITY ACROSS CANADA

Prince Edward Island’s rates of food insecurity have been higher than in most other provinces throughout the period covered by the CCHS, from 2005 to 2015-16. The province’s rate of moderate and severe food insecurity was the second highest of six participating provinces in 2005 and worsened to the highest rate among the ten provinces in 2007 and 2008. Prince Edward Island did not participate in the optional survey in 2009 and 2010.

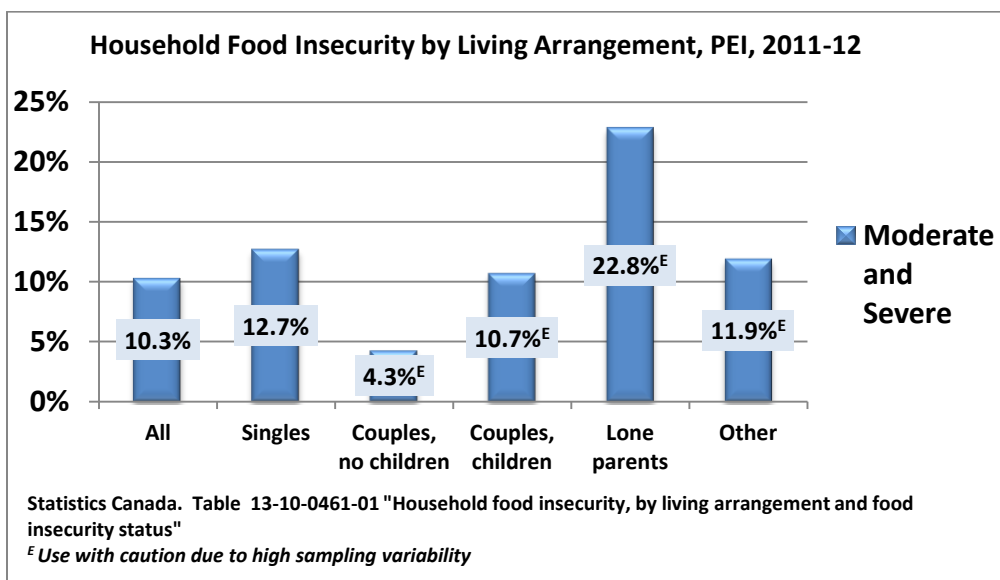
In 2011, the Island’s rate was the third highest among all Canadian provinces, behind rates in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, then rose to second highest in 2012. The rate rose to the highest of seven participating provinces in 2013, a year in which low income rates in PEI also increased sharply, and dropped to second highest within the same group in 2014. (Newfoundland and Labrador, Manitoba, and British Columbia did not participate.) In 2015-16, Prince Edward Island’s rate of moderate and severe food insecurity was the second highest among eight participating provinces, behind the rate reported for Nova Scotia.





DEMOGRAPHIC PATTERNS OF FOOD INSECURITY IN PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

The province’s detailed data from the 2011-12 cycle of the CCHS indicate that the risk of food insecurity is much greater in some types of households than others. Single individuals experience higher levels of severe food insecurity than do families. And, within the family category, couple families with children are more than twice as likely to be food insecure as couples without children. Lone parent households are the most vulnerable of all, with almost one in four being food insecure. While this is concerning, it represents an improvement over the 2007-08 survey findings showing over one-third of lone parent households as moderately or severely food insecure. Over this period, the number of lone parent households that were food insecure dropped from 1,088 to 763.



According to the CCHS, in 2011-12 the number and share of food insecure households by type of household were as follows:

- There were 3,330 lone parent households with children under 18, accounting for 6 percent of all households. Of those, 763 households were food insecure, representing 14 percent of all food insecure households.
- There were 14,925 single individuals, accounting for 26 percent of all households. Of those, 1,898 were food insecure, representing 32 percent of all food insecure households.
- There were 11,884 couple households with children under 18, accounting for 21 percent of all households. Of those, 1,276 households were food insecure, representing 21 percent of all food insecure households.
- There were 16,598 couple households without children under 18, the largest group, accounting for 30 percent of all households. Of those, 720 households were food insecure, representing 12 percent of all food insecure households.



- There were 10,429 households in various other living arrangements, accounting for 18 percent of all households. Such households were slightly more likely than average to be food insecure, at 1,220 households or 21 percent of all food insecure households.

It should be noted that the Prince Edward Island rates of severe food insecurity are considered too unreliable to be published by Statistics Canada due to the small size of the sample sub-groups.

FOOD INSECURITY AMONG ADULTS AND CHILDREN IN PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND

Over the past several years, the PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research initiative at the University of Toronto has worked with CCHS data to analyze patterns of food insecurity and to propose solutions. As noted above, their approach includes households which are marginally food insecure, and includes children under 12. Based on this approach, PROOF reports on the proportion of children in food insecure households. According to their report released in 2017 (using 2014 data), 15.1 percent of Prince Edward Island households were food insecure at some level, and those households accounted for 22 percent of PEI's children.

CCHS data show that adults in food insecure households take much of the burden of coping upon themselves, and shield children from its impacts. Survey data for PEI for 2015-16 indicate that among households that include children under the age of 18 years:

- 18 percent reported moderate or severe food insecurity among the adult members of the household (2,774 households out of 15,314 households with complete data);
- 11 percent^E reported moderate or severe food insecurity among the child members of the household (1,636^E households out of 15,395 households with complete data).

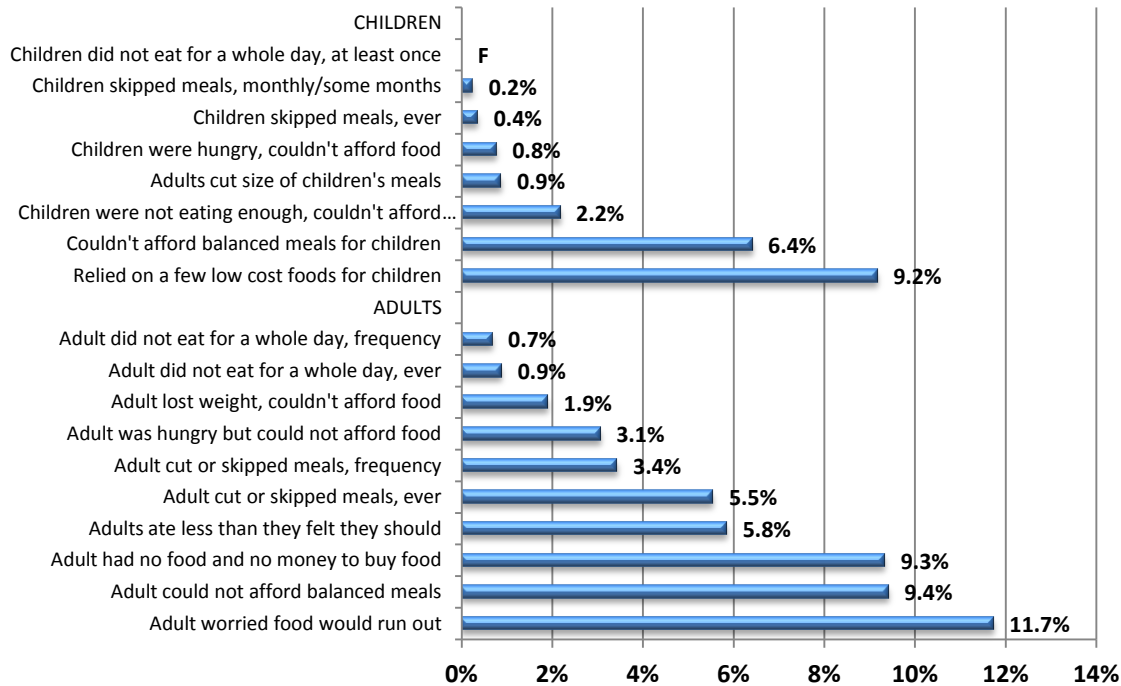
^E Use with caution due to high sampling variability

The detailed responses to the CCHS Food Security survey questions provide insights into the ways in which households experience and cope with food insecurity. The chart below was derived using data from the CCHS 2015-16. As noted above, it indicates that direct impacts of food insecurity tend to be borne by the adults in the household.

The following table shows the pattern of replies to survey questions, for Canadian households with children under 18. Due to low numbers of affirmative responses recorded when limiting the sample to Prince Edward Island only, the province's responses are not publishable for many of the questions in the Food Security Module. For this reason, Canadian data is presented.



Affirmative Responses, 2015-16 CCHS Food Security Module, Canadian Households with Children Under 18 years



Canadian Community Health Survey, 2015-2016. Household weights were used
 F: Estimate is too unreliable to be published

FOOD BANK UTILIZATION

A range of community supports have come into being to assist individuals and families who are food insecure. These include food banks, soup kitchens, community kitchens and gardens, and food sharing networks. As well, breakfast and lunch programs have been established in many schools. To promote inclusion, school-based programs are open to all, but are of especial value for children who are experiencing food insecurity at home.

Since 2005, Food Banks Canada has done an annual survey of food banks across the country, through a count in March of each year, releasing its findings in its *Hungercount* reports. The most recent available report is for 2016. The reports provide valuable information on the profile of Islanders who use food banks, over time and compared to other provinces. Key points include the following:

- The number of Islanders using food banks climbed during and after the recession to a high of just over 3,502 or 2.4 percent of the population in 2013. It then declined in 2014 and 2015, hitting a post-recession low of 3,153 or 2.15 percent in 2015. In 2016, it increased again to 3,370 or 2.3 percent.



- The Island's 2016 rate of 2.3 percent was slightly below the national average of 2.4 percent, and the fourth lowest among provinces. The other three Atlantic Provinces were higher, at 2.6 percent in New Brunswick, 3 percent in Nova Scotia, and 5 percent in Newfoundland.
- By sex, women accounted for 45 percent of food bank users overall. In rural Prince Edward Island, this proportion dropped to 36 percent.
- By age, food bank users were much younger than the general population:
 - Those aged 45 and over accounted for almost half the population, but just over one-quarter of food bank users. In particular, seniors accounted for 19 percent of the population but less than 6 percent of food bank users. Province-wide, the 45-64 age group accounted for 30 percent of the population and almost 22 percent of users. In rural areas, this share climbed to 25 percent.
 - Children aged 0 to 17, on the other hand, accounted for one-fifth of the population but over one-third of food bank users. Usage was particularly high among children aged 0-5, who accounted for 6 percent of the population but 14 percent of food bank users.
 - Youth aged 18-30 made up 15 percent of the population and 18 percent of food bank users. Proportions were similar for younger adults aged 31 to 44, who made up 16 percent of the population and 19 percent of food bank users.
- Looking at other groups known to be at risk of low income:
 - 13 percent of food bank users were Aboriginal. In rural areas, this proportion rose to 16 percent.
 - 7 percent of food bank users were newcomers; none of these were in rural areas.
- By family structure, single individuals accounted for one in three food bank users. Couple families with children and lone-parent families each accounted for one in four food bank users, while couples without children formed a relatively small share at one in eight. Lone parent families were most over-represented, followed by single individuals, while couple families, especially without children, were underrepresented.
- By source of income, well over one-third of food bank users in Prince Edward Island were working or receiving Employment Insurance, more than double the national average. About 38 percent were receiving Social Assistance benefits, a much lower proportion than in other provinces. The remaining one-quarter of food bank users were fairly evenly split between pensions, disability benefits, and other sources of income. Rural users were less likely to have earnings or Social Assistance income and more likely to rely on all other sources of income.
- By housing type, over half of food bank users lived in private rental dwellings, and another one in five lived in social housing. Homeowners accounted for 17 percent of food bank users – double the national average – and residents of band housing another 7 percent.