

Food Costing in BC 2015

Executive Summary

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Executive summary

Sufficient, safe, and nutritious food is critical to the health and well-being of the British Columbian population. A food security indicator in BC is the average monthly cost of a nutritionally adequate, balanced diet. Obtaining food costs (food costing) can provide valuable information for population and public health planning. Every two years, the Provincial Health Services Authority (PHSA) works with the Ministry of Health and the five regional health authorities to monitor the cost of a nutritionally adequate diet in British Columbia (BC).

The purpose of this document is to present the 2015 data on the average monthly cost of a nutritionally adequate, balanced diet in BC based on the National Nutritious Food Basket (NNFB).

Methods

In BC, data is collected every two years using Health Canada's NNFB tool, which includes 67 food items that are minimally processed, require preparation, and are considered to be commonly eaten by most Canadians in amounts that provide a nutritionally adequate, balanced diet. Data collection is implemented by the regional health authorities (RHAs) and occurs in the last week of May and the first week of June. A sample of approximately 220 full-service grocery stores were randomly selected and stratified by the health service delivery areas (HSDAs) of the RHAs. Complete data for 196 stores was obtained and used to determine the average cost of the NNFB.

The surveillance team at PHSA analyzed the data submitted by the RHAs using algorithms and information received from Health Canada. The average cost in each food category is weighted by purchase popularity and the amount of food that each person needs, adjusted by sex and age.

Findings

Monthly cost of a nutritious food basket

The average monthly cost of a nutritious food basket for a reference family of four in British Columbia in 2015 is **\$974**. The average monthly cost of a nutritious food basket across the health authorities is \$1,032 in Northern Health (NH); \$997 in Vancouver Coastal Health (VCH); \$973 in Interior Health (IH); \$965 in Island Health (VIHA); and \$958 in Fraser Health (FH). The monthly costs for each of BC's HSDAs were also calculated and range from \$927 in the Fraser East HSDA (FH) to \$1,121 in the North West HSDA (NH).

Changes in food costs

The average monthly cost of the 2015 nutritious food basket for a reference family of four, \$974, shows an increase of \$60/month between 2013 and 2015. Food costs increased in all of the health authorities.

Conclusion

The costing results show that the monthly cost of the NNFB in BC is steadily increasing over time. The cost of a healthy diet can affect individuals and families of all incomes but can have the highest impact among households with the lowest incomes.