

Public Survey on Food Insecurity Findings Report 2022



Introduction

More than 1 in 6 households in Nova Scotia were food insecure in 2021. That amounts to 168,000 Nova Scotians. Food insecurity is essentially a matter of inadequate access to food due to financial constraints. While food banks provide critical support, unless the root causes that affect food insecurity are addressed, Nova Scotia will continue to be among the most insecure provinces in Canada. Feed Nova Scotia uses data collection and research to better understand the factors contributing to food insecurity and advocate for change.

Objective

We conducted a public survey to understand Nova Scotians' perspectives on food insecurity, its root causes, and possible solutions to address them. The survey also aimed to raise awareness, provoke thoughts on factors affecting food insecurity, and understand public support for policy solutions.

Methodology

We conducted the public survey through paid ads on Facebook and Instagram between July 17 and August 12, 2022. The survey targeted individuals across Nova Scotia and received 1,088 complete responses.

Demographic Information

Among the 1,088 respondents, they identified as following: 42% had no relationship to Feed Nova Scotia, 27% were food bank visitors, 24% were donors, and 13% identified as other. 85% identified as female, 13% as male, and 2% as non-binary. The 51-65 age group constitutes the majority (47%), followed by the 41-50 age group (25%), and the 26-40 age group (21%). 5% of respondents were over 65, and 2% were between 18-25.

The majority of respondents (56%) were from Central Zone (Halifax area, Eastern Shore and West Hants), 20% were from Western Zone (Annapolis Valley, South Shore, and South West), 14% were from Eastern Zone (Cape Breton, Guysborough, and Antigonish areas), and 20% were from Northern Zone (Colchester-East Hants, Cumberland, and Pictou areas).

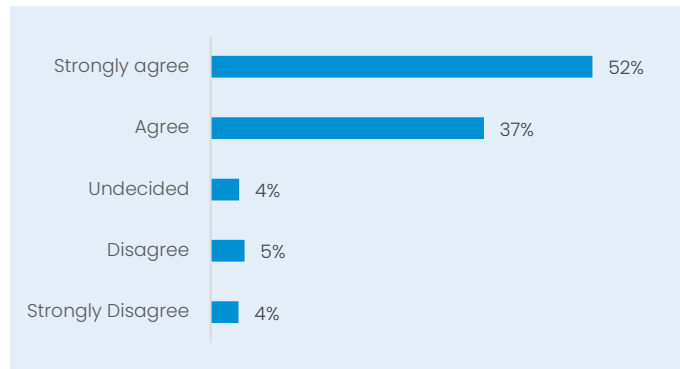
High-level survey findings

- 82% believed provincial income support should be increased and 86% believed income support should be adjusted for inflation.
- 42% believed income supports should be above the poverty line and 23% believed rates should be increased to meet the poverty line.
- 90% said the current minimum wage is inadequate. 38% believed minimum wage should be rapidly increased until it reaches the living wage, while 27% thought it should be immediately increased to \$15 per hour.
- 71% supported guaranteed livable basic income, and 45% were willing to pay more in taxes to help fund it.
- 64% believed more support and investment in non-market, non-profit, co-op, and affordable housing would help solve the housing crisis.
- 49% said adopting a national universal pharmacare would help make prescription drugs more affordable. Another 30% thought waiving or reducing the annual amount that a client pays in deductible and copayment would help solve the problem.

Detailed survey findings

Income and food insecurity

When asked, "Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: People are food insecure because they don't have enough income" here is the response breakdown. →

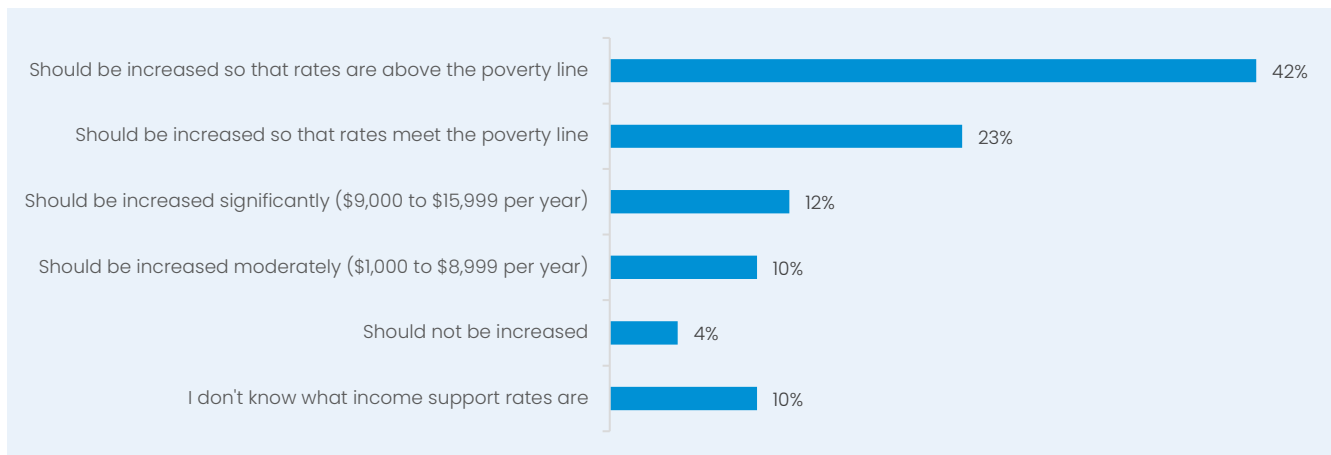


Provincial government income supports

When presented with the information that 91% of food bank recipients who disclosed being on government income support in a separate Feed Nova Scotia survey said the amounts they receive were inadequate, 82% of respondents in the current survey said they believed that income supports should be increased. 6% disagreed, while 12% were undecided.

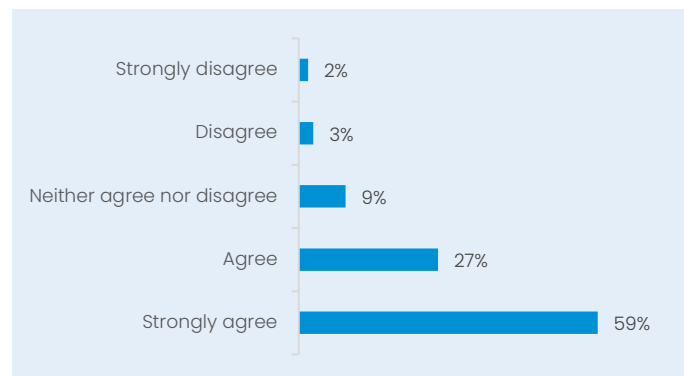
Changes to provincial Income supports

When asked what changes should be made to provincial income supports, this is how people responded:



Income support and Inflation

Nova Scotia experienced a 9.8% inflation in food prices year over year in April. The survey said provincial income supports should be adjusted for inflation and asked respondents to what extent they agreed or disagreed with that statement. These are the results. →

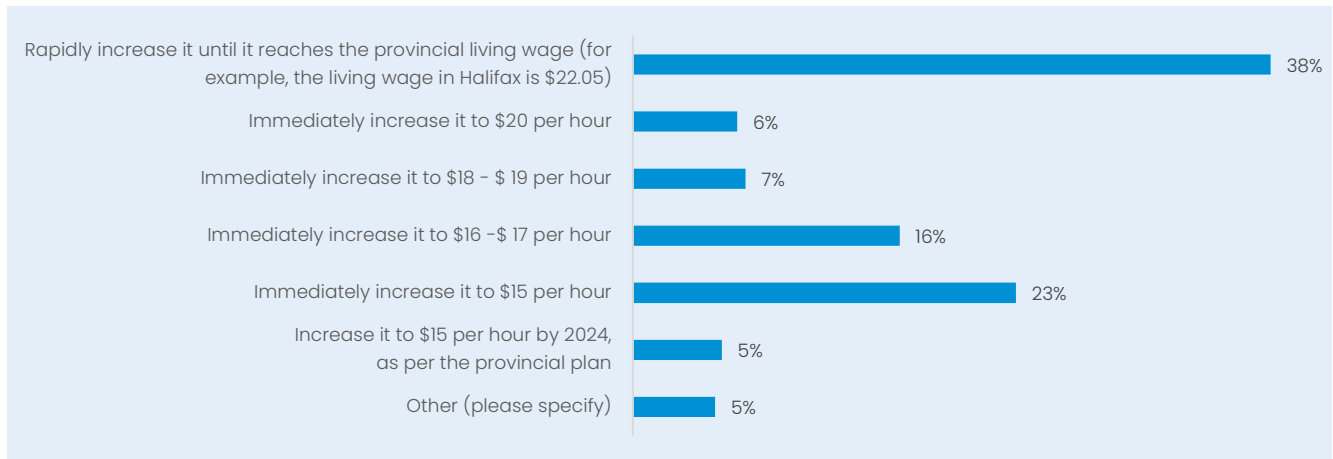


Minimum wage

When asked if Nova Scotia's current minimum wage of \$13.35 is adequate, an overwhelming majority (90%) of respondents said it is inadequate or quite inadequate. Only 4% said it is adequate or quite adequate. The remaining 5% were undecided.

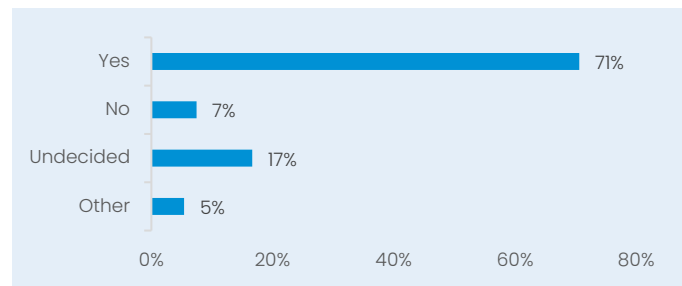
Addressing minimum wage

When asked how much minimum wage should be increased, here's how Nova Scotians responded:



Guaranteed livable basic income

We asked, "Would you support a guaranteed livable basic income, i.e., government-guaranteed non-conditional payment to ensure everyone has sufficient income to meet their needs?" Here's the response.



Additional taxes to fund guaranteed livable basic income

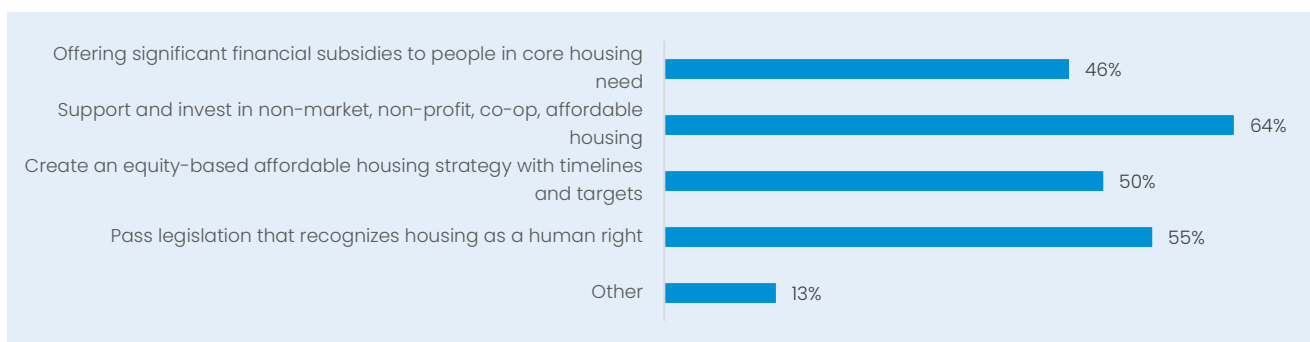
In a further question, 45% of respondents said they will be willing to pay more in taxes to fund guaranteed livable basic income, while 27% were not willing to pay more. 28% of respondents were undecided.

Housing

When asked about their views on the unaffordable housing crisis facing those who are food insecure, 73% said affordable housing is an essential human right for everyone. 22% said more support is necessary than currently available, and a combined 6% thought that either the current provisions are enough, or housing is not a major factor behind food insecurity.

Strategies to address the housing crisis

When asked what strategies would be most effective in addressing the housing crisis, here's how people responded:



Key recommendations

Index income supports to inflation and increase at least at that rate. With unprecedented inflation, incorporating indexation into income support such as Income Assistance, child benefit, and disability benefit would mean that the most vulnerable Nova Scotians aren't pushed further into poverty and food insecurity.

Rapidly increase the Nova Scotia standard household rate for Income Assistance to match the official poverty line (i.e., Market Basket Measure). The increase in Income Assistance should equate to a monthly livable income that every Nova Scotian deserves.

Alternatively, commit to a guaranteed minimum income floor, and supplement wages when someone's employment income falls below that floor. To determine the most suitable amount for the minimum income for Nova Scotians, the government should invest and design a basic income pilot project, at or above the Market Basket Measure or official poverty line.

Support low-income workers by setting a higher minimum wage closer to the living wage to enable low-income Nova Scotians to cope with the increasing cost of living. With the living wage in Halifax as high as \$23.50, a rapid incremental increase in the minimum wage to \$20 by 2024 is necessary to ensure that Nova Scotians can afford the increasing cost of living.

Support and invest in more non-market, non-profit, co-op, affordable housing for low-income Nova Scotians, to prevent pushing an enormous number of food insecure to spend well beyond 30% of their income on housing.

Reduce out-of-pocket expenses for prescription medication by waiving or reducing the annual deductible amount after which the 20% copayment is applied to the Family Pharmacare program.