

PARKDALE 2011 REPORT CARD

on

Health, Housing and Food Security

SUBJECT	GRADE	COMMUNITY COMMENTS
Access to quality health care for all	D	Not all residents have equitable access to primary health care to manage and prevent health issues.
Availability of safe and affordable housing	C	A changing Parkdale has less room for residents surviving on the lowest incomes.
Access to healthy food that is affordable	D	Community resources are spread thin. As costs rise, there is not enough being done to ensure that residents have access to healthy food.



Parkdale
Community
Health Centre



09/01/2011

A Needs Assessment: Where are we now?

Parkdale faces complex challenges, among them are Food Security, Access to Affordable Housing, and achieving and maintaining Health:

These issues will be discussed in terms of how they interrelate and how they are particularly felt in the neighbourhood of Parkdale in Toronto. The ability of the main political parties in Ontario to meet these needs will be up to the reader to assess, as the main points of the platforms are summarized in the second section of the text below.

This report card has been developed with the participation of Parkdale Community Health Centre, Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre and West End Food Co-op, specifically the organizing committee for the All Candidates Forum on September 13, 2011. It has also been developed with members of the Parkdale community, through a survey and focus groups.

This report card has been developed in anticipation of the provincial election on October 6, 2011. It is meant to provide information on trends in Parkdale related to the issues of access to health, housing and food security.



Food (In) Security: The Statistics

In 2010, food banks experienced the largest surge in clients since social assistance rates were cut by 21.6% in 1995

34% of people accessing food bank services were children (under 18 years old)

15% of children accessing food bank services go hungry at least once a week

39% of adults accessing food bank services go hungry at least once a week

46% of food bank clients are receiving Ontario Works

23% of food bank clients are on the Ontario Disability Support Program

46% are accessing food bank services due to a reduction in hours at work or loss of employment

Source: Matern, Richard et al., "Fighting Hunger: Who's Hungry 2010 Profile of Hunger in the GTA," a report from the *Daily Bread Food Bank*, p. 4.

Not surprisingly, food insecurity is not common among homeowners, as only 6% of homeowners had experienced food insecurity at least once in the past year. While in comparison, 22% of those living as tenants had reported food insecurity, with 18% suffering from a compromised diet as a result.ⁱ In the context of Parkdale, where the majority of housing is rental housing, the numbers seem particularly reflective of the community. Adding to this is the issue that many Parkdale residents do not have access to cooking and storage facilities for food, particularly those who are homeless or are living in inadequate housing.ⁱⁱ

As a result, there is a continued need for emergency food services to provide food for those who are food insecure for these reasons. The issues of food security, adequate housing, and income security all converge as the ability to store and prepare food is impaired by lack of access to adequate housing and cooking facilities. Yet, “until systemic issues of income security and housing are adequately addressed, food insecurity will likely continue to exist in Parkdale, requiring many people to acquire food outside of the market system.”ⁱⁱⁱ That is, the need for emergency food services, as provided by food banks or meal programs, will persist as long as people are inadequately housed and lacking in income.

In an effort to address these issues, Toronto City Council adopted the [Toronto Food Charter](#) outlining the city’s vision for food security. The Charter recognized that a society that is food secure facilitates the overall health of its people and prevents the need for unnecessary medical care. The Charter also acknowledged that food is integral to the economy of Toronto, and committing to policies that ensure food security contributes to the growth and development of the food sector. This leads to the conclusion in the Charter that, “Every Toronto resident should have access to an adequate supply of nutritious, affordable and culturally-appropriate food.”^{iv} When we compare this definition of food security with the situation existing in Parkdale, it becomes apparent that neither the community of Parkdale, nor the City of Toronto is in any way food secure.

Further, the food insecurity problem is compounded when we consider the relationship that cities and municipalities have with the province and the federal government, in that “all emergency service agencies find themselves stretching their limited resources. Cuts to government funding, inconsistent grants and donations, and limited staff hours make it hard to sustain these...programs.”^v The cuts to social services such as Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program that were the order of the day in the 1990’s in Ontario^{vi} have not yet been restored, but rental costs have continued to rise.

(Un) Affordable Housing: Rent and the cost of living continue to rise while wages and social assistance rates do not

On average, Food bank clients in the GTA who were surveyed spent 68% of their income on rent and utilities...people are at a high risk of homelessness when they are spending 50% or more of their income on housing.

Many people living on social assistance can only afford to live in inadequate housing with shared facilities, sometimes putting their safety and health at risk.

Single people on Ontario Works received only \$585/month in 2010; this is a third of what they would receive with full-time employment.

The average “market-rent” price in Toronto is \$750, however in reality, most rents are much higher.

Source: Matern, Richard et al., Fighting Hunger: Who’s Hungry 2010 Profile of Hunger in the GTA, a report from the Daily Bread Food Bank, p. 22.

With the introduction of the Tenant Protection Act in 1998, rent regulations were eased, allowing landlords to raise the rents more easily.^{vii} When rent increases are combined with low social assistance rates and wages, people are forced to go hungry more often. This means “shelter costs are one of the biggest contributors to food bank use. While people can eat less food when money is tight, they cannot pay less rent.”^{viii} The high cost of living in Toronto forces low-income people to choose between paying the rent and putting food on the table, leading to the necessity of emergency food services to bridge the gap where the government retreats.

In addition, Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program are not indexed to inflation. That means that food and housing continues to become more expensive while income stays at the same level. In the context of Parkdale, where “a large population in Parkdale lives either on social assistance or below the low-income cut-off point,”^{ix} this is of particular concern. Indeed the issue of the de-regulation of rents and the history of cuts to social services in Ontario in the 1990s is still affecting the most vulnerable in the province today. It seems easy to cut services and sell off assets when the converse appears to be almost unthinkable within the current context.

Another factor affecting the increased cost of living that is specific, but not limited to Parkdale is the process of gentrification. “In parts of Parkdale, particularly the area north of Queen Street, neighbourhood change has progressed rapidly in recent years. The influx of more affluent households and individuals is not only placing upward pressure on property values in the area but it is also transforming the types of commercial establishments and available community space for residents.”^x The spread of trendy restaurants, bars, and retail, the public relations campaigns of advocacy groups and associations in Parkdale, and the discovery of the Parkdale neighbourhood to be a place of Victorian homes, with lower property values, in close proximity to downtown, has meant the spread of gentrification in Parkdale.^{xi}

It is clear from the brief discussion above that these issues cannot be seen in isolation. Food security is interrelated with housing, access to housing, the cost of housing, and the cooking and storage facilities in the housing unit. The consequences of spending the majority of income on rent leads to a situation of compromised food security, which in turn leads to poor health.

Access to Healthcare: How does access to affordable housing, secure income and a secure food supply impact health and access to healthcare?

Food and housing insecurity puts increased stressed on physical and mental health:

Low income Canadians are almost four times more likely than Canadians in the highest income group to report fair or poor health (31% vs. 8% for women; 31% vs. 7% for men).¹

There is a strong link between poverty and chronic illness.¹

In the Toronto Central area there are 217,690 people living in poverty, yet only 93,480 of those people have access to a Community Health Centre...a 57.1% gap in service.¹

Community health centres have a specific mandate to address the social determinants of health.¹

The issue of food security connects with the ability to be healthy, especially when we consider that food is becoming less affordable, particularly healthy food. “Even the most basic inexpensive food has increased in price above inflation. Healthy nutritious food that includes more fruit and vegetables would be even more costly.”¹ Yet the consequences of poor nutrition and food insecurity are even costlier for society, as “poorly nourished people are usually less resistant to infections, and they tend to heal more slowly, have more diseases, longer hospital stays, and incur higher health care costs.”^{xii} Food insecurity is shown to be associated with both physical and emotional health problems, which suggests that reductions in food insecurity may lead to reductions in the cost of treating health problems.^{xiii}

The needs of the residents of Parkdale include and go beyond the issues discussed above, but these issues demonstrate the impact of poverty in general and how poverty relates to health. When looking to how we can improve health care in the future and even reduce the economic costs to society, the social determinants of health needs to be given due consideration.

A report released by Toronto Public Health looks at how inequalities in income determine access to health, and suggests that if everyone were as healthy as those with the most income, the results would be:

About 1,100 (18%) fewer premature deaths;
Nearly 1,300 (20%) less low birth weight babies;
About 1,600 (30%) more children ready to learn at school; and
Nearly 1,000 (46%) less teen pregnancies^{xiv}

The report comes to the logical conclusion that these types of health inequalities should be unacceptable in a country that places a great deal of value on equal access to healthcare.^{xv}

Yet it would seem that it has become increasingly acceptable to place social services on the chopping block, leaving those who are vulnerable to be the worst affected. There is a disproportionately high number of Parkdale residents without the adequate means to live a healthy life. As one service provider explains, “57% of our clients report income under \$20,000 and more than 30% of our clients live with mental health issues.”^{xvi} Many people in the community of Parkdale lack access to affordable housing, secure and adequate incomes, and access to healthy and affordable food. Other barriers to health care include racism, social isolation and language barriers, to name only a few. Despite all this, there is hope in terms of the community agencies working to ensure access to healthcare to all those who need it, regardless of status or circumstance.

Community health centres aim to eliminate systemic barriers to accessing health care services. Parkdale Community Health Centre and other community health centres in Ontario, have as their mandate to address the social determinants of health. However they are constrained in their efforts by systemic inequities such as poverty and racism. It is clear that increasing access to health care must coincide with efforts to address the social determinants of health. This can be achieved through social and economic policies that help the poorest members of society. In contrast, cuts to social services lead to increased poverty and force people into situations of food insecurity and ultimately lead to poor health.

How is Parkdale Doing?

Issue	How is Parkdale doing?	Comments
Access to Health Care	Progress has been made, but needs improvement.	Barriers include long wait times, shortage of doctors and nurses and other healthcare practitioners, lack of funding, and reactive rather than proactive health care strategies. Many people in the community of Parkdale lack access to the social determinants of health, such as affordable housing, secure and adequate incomes, and access to healthy and affordable food. . ^{xvii} Yet there are community agencies working to ensure access to healthcare to all those who need it, regardless of status or circumstance.
Housing	Shows promise, but needs improvement.	As Parkdale undergoes neighbourhood change through the spread of trendy establishments and the influx of more affluent populations, rent prices go up. The process of gentrification means that finding affordable housing becomes more and more difficult. In addition, problems persist with homelessness or substandard housing. Adding to the problem is low incomes for the working poor or those receiving social assistance and their inability to cover the costs of rent <i>and</i> food.
Food Security	Needs improvement.	The process of gentrification in Parkdale has included the spread of trendy restaurants and bars, endangering the supply of affordable food options. Many Parkdale residents rely on Food Banks and emergency food services due to the gap between income and the cost of living. These emergency food services have stretched resources, and are not able to provide much in the way of adequately nutritious food. . However, efforts are under way to establish a community food hub in Parkdale to provide affordable fresh food ^{xviii} to the local residents.

Getting to an “A” for Better Health, Housing and Food Security in Parkdale

We asked community leaders in each of the areas of health, housing and food security, what an “A” in each of these areas would look like. Here is what they had to say:

Access to Health Care (Parkdale Community Health Centre)

We must begin by broadening our definition of health, to include not just the absence of disease or injury, but also a state of complete physical, mental, emotional and social well-being. Using this definition, a healthcare system gets a “Good” grade when it responds to the needs of the population across all of these dimensions. More specifically, a “Good” healthcare system would provide: Easy access to a wide range of services for all people, in community hubs or under one roof.

Carla Ribeiro, Executive Director

Housing (Parkdale Activity Recreation Centre)

Let’s envision what an “A” for housing in Parkdale looks like: it would be safe, affordable, accessible; there would be enough choice so that people who wanted to live together could do so; there would be a wide variety of housing type so that people of all income and ability levels could choose the type and style of housing that adequately fit their needs; all housing would be free of poor maintenance, pests and discrimination; there would be housing options that allowed people to easily transition from single to couple to family and back as required; there would be enough choice so that if tenants wanted to own, opportunities to own would be available; no one would be denied housing on the basis of ethnicity, religion, language, gender, class, sexual orientation, or ability. That’s what an A looks like.

Victor Willis, Executive Director

Food Security (West End Food Co-op)

The Toronto Food Charter* describes what real food security looks like best:

- The availability of a variety of foods at a reasonable cost.
- Ready access to quality grocery stores, food service operations, or alternative food sources.
- Sufficient personal income to buy adequate food for each household member each day.
- The freedom to choose personally and culturally acceptable foods.
- Legitimate confidence in the quality of the foods available.
- Easy access to understandable, accurate information about food and nutrition.
- The assurance of a viable and sustainable food production system.

Sally Miller, Coordinator

How the provincial political parties compare

	Access to Health Care	Housing (and Income Security)	Food Security
New Democratic Party ^{xix}	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • End ambulance fees • Cap healthcare CEO salaries • Cut emergency room wait times in half through the creation of 24 hour clinics • Enhance supports to seniors so they can stay in their homes longer • More investments in long-term care, eliminate wait list for long-term care for those with complex medical needs <p>From their platform: “If we give people a hand when they want to stay healthy, we can avoid the costs that come from poor health.”^{xx}</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Freeze transit fares at current levels for 4 years • Take HST off of electricity and home heating • Lower small business taxes, end corporate tax give-aways • Ontario Retirement Plan for people who are without a pension plan through their employment • Tax credit for companies that provide skills upgrading to employees • The Commission for the Review of Social Assistance in Ontario report is expected in 2012 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • They would increase the ability to buy food through: Increase the minimum wage to \$11 and index it to the cost of living • Index Ontario Works rates to inflation • Reduce claw back of social assistance rates of people on Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP). <p>The NDP has said that “the government also needs to put in place win-win local procurement policies that will spark demand for local farm products, reduce pollution from food transport, and encourage healthier eating and reduced health costs.”^{xxi}</p>
Green Party	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage the development of healthier communities • Prevent illness before it starts • More support for home care • Reduce pollution, improve water quality and sewage treatment • Funding to health care professionals and community health care clinics • Put communities in charge of local health decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support transit and multi-occupant vehicles • Freeze tuition for one year, then index it to inflation in subsequent years • Lower income taxes for families and local businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote financially sustainable local food • Reward farmers for implementing more environmentally friendly methods • ‘Healthy food in schools’ program • Create green jobs through investments in renewable energy and modernizing the economy • Make industry healthier, more environmentally sustainable • Support organic farming

<p>Liberal Party^{xxii}</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide more breast cancer screening exams • Increase government funding to the community services sector to improve community-based support and long term care homes • Invest in a Mental Health and Addictions Strategy, starting with children and youth • Enhance pharmacy and support services available to Ontarians who receive drug coverage through the Ontario Drug Benefit Program, primarily seniors and social assistance recipients 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with the federal government on an affordable housing initiative that would extend federal and provincial funding to build and renovate affordable housing • Transform social assistance and child welfare systems to improve accountability and financial sustainability • Increase the basic adult allowance and maximum shelter allowance by 1% for people receiving Ontario Works or Ontario Disability Support Program in the fall of 2011 • Help children with complex special needs and their families by improving services 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve prices for many agricultural commodities to help Ontario farmers • Farm income stabilization programs to help farmers with volatile prices and rising costs • Improve the labeling and marketing of Ontario-grown food. • Invest in the Friends of the Greenbelt Foundation to promote agriculture, tourism and environmental integrity in Ontario's Greenbelt.
<p>Progressive Conservative</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Double tax credit for those who take care of elderly or critically ill members of their family in their own home • Reduce ER wait times • More long term senior care • Contract out laundry and food preparation in public facilities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require welfare recipients to be residents of Ontario for 1 year before receiving benefits • Lifetime ban for repeat offenders of welfare fraud • Lower income taxes by 5% on the first 75,000 of taxable income • Appoint a minister for reducing the regulation of business by 30% • Reduce the basic corporate tax rate from 11.5% to 10% • Sell government assets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support 'Buy Ontario Food Policy' in provincial institutions, hospitals and schools

Get to know your candidates in Parkdale-High Park

The Green Party: <http://itstimeforgreen.ca/>
Justin Trottier: <http://votejustintrottier.com/>

Ontario Liberal Party : <http://www.ontarioliberal.ca/Home.aspx>
Cortney Pasternak: <http://votepasternak.ca/>

Ontario New Democratic Party: <http://ontariondp.com/en/>
Cheri DiNovo: <http://www.cheridinovo.ca/>

Ontario Progressive Conservative Party^{xxiv}: <http://www.ontariopc.com/>
Joseph Ganetakos: <http://votejoe2011.ca/home/>

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ⁱ Che and Chen, “Food Insecurity in Canadian Households,” *Statistics Canada Health Reports*, Vol. 12, No. 4, p. 17.

ⁱⁱ Richer, Chloe, et al. “Beyond Bread and Butter: Toward Food Security in a Changing Parkdale,” p. 10. Web. Dec. 17, 2010. Accessed Aug. 12, 2011 (<http://parc.on.ca/toward-food-security-in-a-changing-parkdale>), p. 10.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid. p. 16.

^{iv} “Toronto’s Food Charter,” Web. May 2000. Accessed Aug. 12, 2011 (http://www.toronto.ca/food_hunger/food_hunger_report.htm).

^v “Beyond Bread and Butter,” p. 16.

^{vi} McMullin, Julie Ann, Davies, Lorraine, and Cassidy, Gale. “Welfare Reform in Ontario: Tough times in Mother’s Lives,” *Canadian Public Policy/Analyse de Politiques*. Vol. 28, No. 2 (June 2002), pp. 397-314.

^{vii} Matern, Richard, “Fighting Hunger: Who’s Hungry 2010,” *Daily Bread*, p. 11.

^{viii} Ibid., p. 22.

^{ix} “Beyond Bread and Butter,” p. 9.

^x “Beyond Bread and Butter,” p. 4.

^{xi} Slater, Tom. “Toronto’s South Parkdale Neighbourhood: A brief History of Development, Disinvestment, and Gentrification,” *Centre for Urban and Community Studies Research Bulletin #28*, May 2005.

^{xii} “Food Insecurity in Canadian Households,” p. 11.

^{xiii} Ibid., p. 20.

^{xiv} McKeown, David et al., “Toronto Public Health: The Unequal City: Income and Health Inequalities in Toronto,” (2008), p. 1.

^{xv} Ibid., p. 1.

^{xvi} Parkdale Community Health Centre, “Annual Report 2009-2010,” p. 3.

^{xvii} “Population Health Team,” Parkdale Community Health Centre. Accessed Aug. 11, 2011 (<http://www.pchc.on.ca>).

^{xviii} West End Food Co-op, “Food Close to Home Campaign.” Web. Posted on May 31, 2011. Accessed Aug. 10, 2011 (<http://westendfood.coop/content/press-release-food-close-home-campaign>).

^{xix} “Change that Puts People First: Ontario’s New Democrats Plan for Affordable Change,” *Ontario New Democratic Party* (2011: NDP Platform), p. 32.

^{xx} Hampton, Howard, “Stop Stalling on Local Food Procurement, Hampton Tells McGuinty.” Ontario NDP Blog Archive. Posted on Feb. 9, 2011. Accessed Aug. 10, 2011 (<http://ontariondp.com/en/stop-stalling-on-local-food-procurement-hampton-tells-mcguinty>).

^{xxi} Ibid., p. 32.

^{xxii} Hampton, Howard, “Stop Stalling on Local Food Procurement, Hampton Tells McGuinty.” Ontario NDP Blog Archive. Posted on Feb. 9, 2011. Accessed Aug. 10, 2011 (<http://ontariondp.com/en/stop-stalling-on-local-food-procurement-hampton-tells-mcguinty>).

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^{xxiii} “Changebook,” *Ontario Progressive Conservative Party* (2011: PC Platform).

^{xxiv} “Changebook,” *Ontario Progressive Conservative Party* (2011: PC Platform).