

Trends in Household Food Insecurity in Simcoe Muskoka from a Local Survey

JANUARY 2022 – DECEMBER 2024

Key Findings

Report Prepared: June 2025

- **Food insecurity is rising:** In 2024, **one-in-three Simcoe Muskoka households reported they didn't have enough money for food in the past month.** This is significantly higher than the one-in-five that reported struggling with household food insecurity in 2022.
- **Lower-income families are hardest hit:** About **half of all lower-income households reported struggling to afford food.**
- **Middle-income families are also feeling the squeeze:** In 2024, **twice as many middle-income households reported food insecurity** compared with 2022 and 2023.
- **Place matters:** Food insecurity varies across communities in Simcoe Muskoka but is **higher in large and medium size urban areas** when compared with smaller urban and rural areas.

About this Work

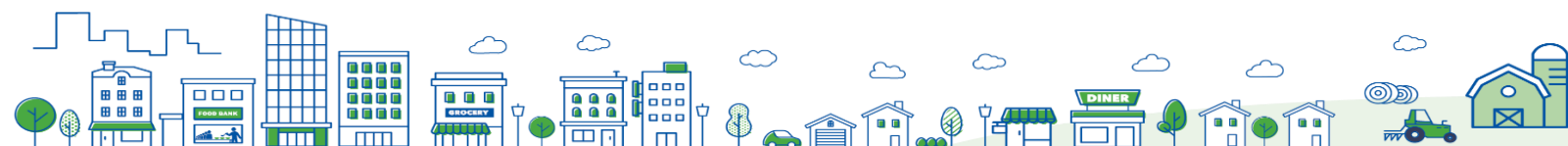
This data brief is intended as a resource for community organizations and partners engaged in work to address household food insecurity and poverty. It provides information about self-reported household food insecurity in the Simcoe Muskoka region from an ongoing local survey, which allows for the monitoring of trends over time.

Sharing health data is one of the roles played by the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) to help prevent and address the health impacts of household food insecurity and poverty. SMDHU also participates at collaborative planning tables, task groups, councils and coalitions that work towards decreasing household food insecurity and poverty rates in our region.

¹ Households were classified as food insecure if they reported any of the following happening in the previous 30 days. 1. Food not lasting and not having any more money to buy more. 2. Not being able to afford to eat balanced meals. 3. Cutting the size of meals or skipping meals because there wasn't enough money. 4. Eating less than they felt they should because there wasn't enough money. 5. Being hungry but not eating because they couldn't afford enough food. 6. Accessing food or meals, at no cost, from a community organization.

Background

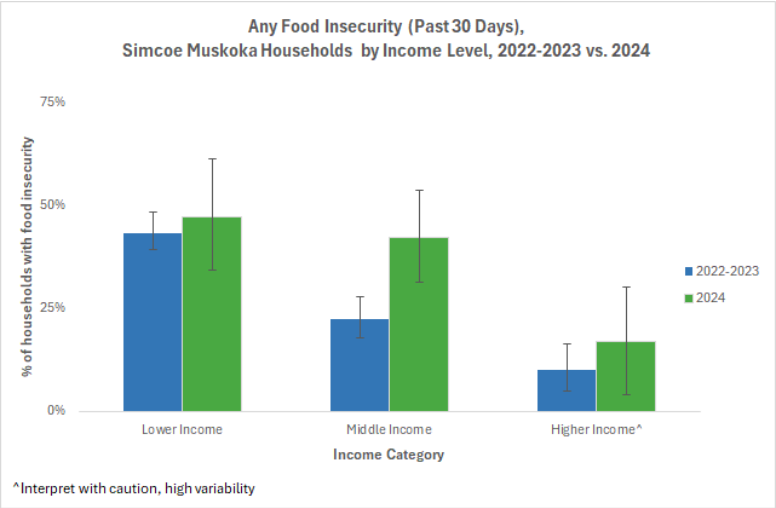
Household food insecurity is a serious public health issue with many associated health impacts. It takes a toll on individual and community health as well as our healthcare system. It is one indicator of poverty and material deprivation requiring healthy public policy at all levels of government. Income solutions are needed to address household food insecurity and poverty.



What we know...

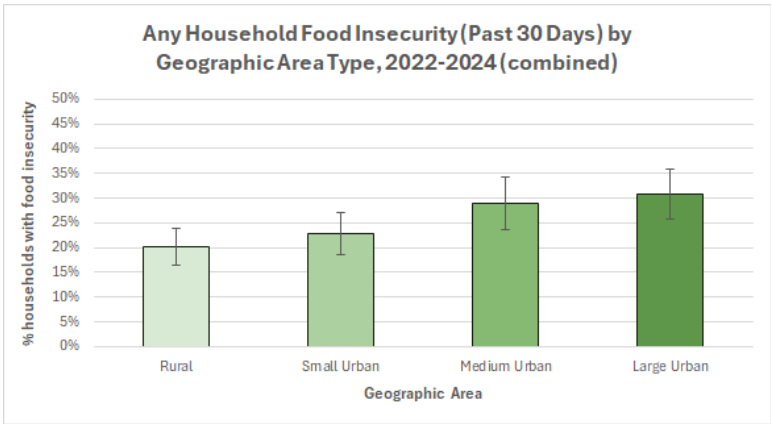
Trends in Household Food Insecurity in Simcoe Muskoka from the Local RRFSS Survey

- Between 2022 and 2024, as part of the Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System (RRFSS) [1], over 1,800 randomly sampled households in Simcoe Muskoka were asked questions about the food situation for their household over the previous 30 days.
- In 2024, 30% (26%, 34%) of Simcoe Muskoka households reported household food insecurity in the previous 30 days, which was significantly higher than the 21% (17%, 25%) of households reporting food insecurity in 2022
- In 2024, approximately half (47% (35%, 60%)) of lower-income² households in Simcoe Muskoka reported household food insecurity in the previous 30 days, which was similar to levels reported in 2022 and 2023.
- There was, however, a **significant increase** in household food insecurity among **middle-income² households** over this period. In 2024, 42% (33%, 53%) of middle-income households reported household food insecurity in the past 30 days, which was nearly double the 22% (17%, 29%) compared with 2022 and 2023.
- From 2022 to 2024 (combined), 30% (26%, 34%) of Simcoe Muskoka households located in large or medium sized urban areas³ reported household food insecurity in the previous 30 days, which was significantly higher than the 21% (18%, 25%) of households located in small urban or rural areas reporting household food insecurity.



² **Lower income households** were defined as a (i) 1 or 2 people with an income of less than \$40,000; (ii) 3 or 4 people with an income of less than \$50,000; (iii) 5 or more people with an income of less than \$60,000. **Middle income households** were defined as a (i) 1 or 2 people with an income between \$40,000 and \$80,000; (ii) 3 or 4 people with an income between \$50,000 and \$90,000; (iii) 5 or more people with an income between \$60,000 and \$100,000. **Higher income households** were defined as a (i) 1 or 2 people with an income of \$80,000 or more; (ii) 3 or 4 people with an income of \$90,000 or more; (iii) 5 or more people with an income of \$100,000 or more.

While food insecurity impacts all communities in Simcoe Muskoka, some areas are affected more than others.



³ Rural and urban areas were defined as follows:
(i) Rural: The District of Muskoka, Tiny, Tay, Clearview, Adjala-Tosorontio, Oro-Medonte, Severn, and Ramara.
(ii) Small urban: Midland, Penetanguishene, Collingwood, Wasaga Beach, Essa, and Springwater.
(iii) Medium urban: Orillia, Innisfil, New Tecumseth, and Bradford West Gwillimbury.
(iv) Large urban: Barrie.



What's Next

We acknowledge that a telephone survey like RRFSS underestimates the true level of household food insecurity in Simcoe Muskoka as those most vulnerable and most impacted by the issue are less likely to participate in the survey. We also acknowledge that RRFSS asks different questions when compared to other provincial and national surveys that are used to estimate the prevalence of household food insecurity in the population (e.g., the Canadian Income Survey). The results in this data brief are not meant to replace information provided by these other sources. Rather, these results allow for closer examination of how household food insecurity is evolving locally in ways that other sources of data cannot. The SMDHU will provide updates to this report as additional years of RRFSS data become available. **For further information about the economic characteristics of the Simcoe Muskoka population, including household food insecurity and food affordability, see [SMDHU's HealthSTATS website](#).**

The health unit will also continue to monitor other sources of evidence that can inform our work and the work of our community partners to bring awareness to this important public health issue, the associated health impacts and the need for income solutions at all levels of government.

References

[1] York University. Rapid Risk Factor Surveillance System ([RRFSS](#)) January 2022 – December 2024 [data file]. Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit. Received: April 4, 2025.

