

Food Costs in Newfoundland and Labrador in Comparison to Other Provinces in 2021

Objective

To use a novel, nationally representative, highly disaggregated food costing measure (digital National Nutritious Food Basket: dNNFB) to compare the cost of food across regions and provinces in 2021.

Practice Points

1. Food baskets for a reference family of two adults and two children were more expensive in Atlantic Canadian provinces than other provinces/territories sampled.
2. Comparing the dNNFB with national estimates of market basket measure (MBM) food costs suggests we are underestimating the cost of food across the country with standard surveillance statistics.
3. Empirical observations of food prices and their distribution across retailers and regions within Canada (CA) can facilitate conversations between retailers, communities, and policymakers regarding effective policy options to address ongoing affordability issues.

Data (PIs: N. Taylor, Dr. C. Mah)

Online food price data over 23 Nov and 24 Nov 2021 was collected from 751 stores in 11 retail banners across Canada. 184 discrete products were matched to 61 indicator foods to cost the dNNFB.

<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2211335523000530>

Results

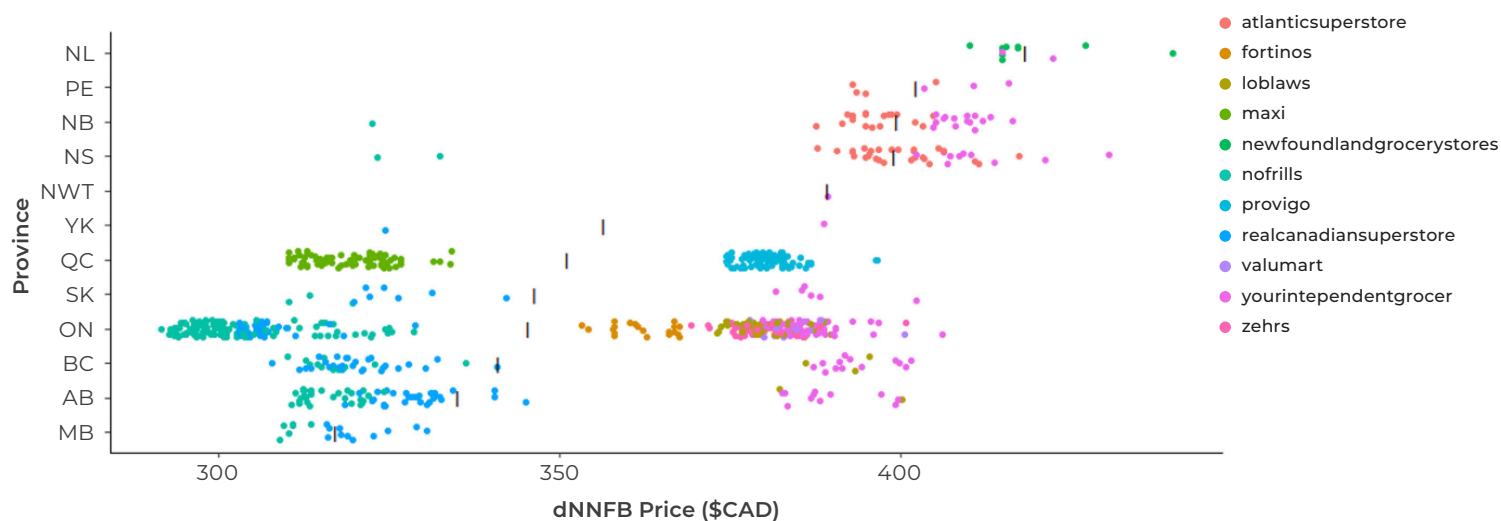
Table 1. Average Weekly dNNFB Reference Family Costs Stratified by Statistics Canada Region. Percentage Reflects the Increase in Cost Associated with Baskets in Atlantic Canada Relative to Other Regions

Province	Mean (CI)	Comparative Cost (Manitoba Reference)
Manitoba (MB)**	317.29 (314.17–320.4)	1
Alberta (AB)	335.13 (328.7–341.57)	1.06
British Columbia (BC)	341.12 (332.05–350.19)	1.08
Ontario (ON)	345.46 (341.32–349.59)	1.09
Saskatchewan** (SK)	346.36 (330.69–362.03)	1.09
Quebec (QC)	351.09 (346.1–356.09)	1.11
Yukon* (YK)	356.57 (NA)	1.12
Northwest Territories* (NWT)	389.38 (NA)	1.23
New Brunswick (NB)	399.52 (394.42–404.62)	1.26
Nova Scotia (NS)	399.03 (393.24–404.81)	1.26
Prince Edward Island** (PE)	402.35 (395.7–409.01)	1.27
Newfoundland** (NL)	418.38 (414.2–422.56)	1.32

* Note only 2 stores were sampled respectively for the YK and NWT. Although the data is included, caution should be taken when comparing these values to the provincially sampled stores.

** NL, PE, MB, and SK had store counts >6 but <30, confidence intervals should be interpreted cautiously.

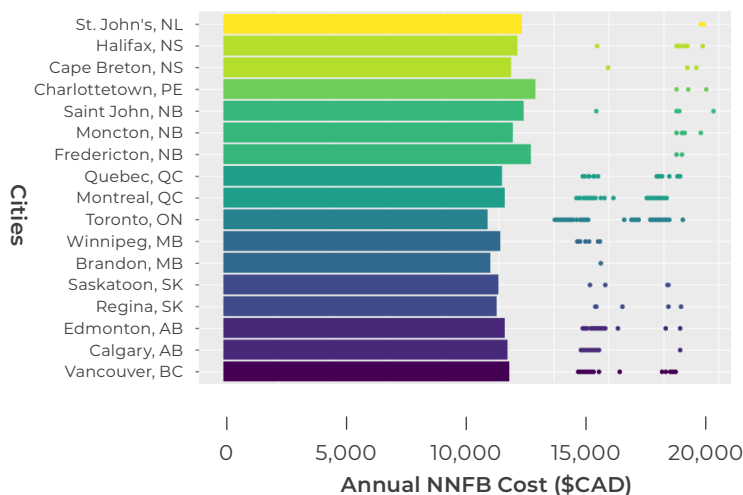
- A reference family in Newfoundland would pay ~32% more than a reference family in MB for a weekly national nutritious food basket



Average basket costs per province are captured by black horizontal lines. Point colors reflect the store banner each basket cost was calculated from.

Figure 1. Weekly dNNFB Reference Family Costs Stratified by Province and Banner

- Among the Four Atlantic provinces NL has the greatest average and maximum food costs for a reference family (Two adults, Two children).



Bar graphs indicate MBM estimates from Statistics CA for cities from each province across CA. Points indicate dNNFB costs from stores within the cities listed.

Figure 2. Comparison of Annual dNNFB Estimates and Statistics CA MBM Estimates Adjusted for Inflation

- dNNFB annual estimates were greater than Statistics CA MBM estimates after adjusting for inflation in cities across the ten provinces of CA.

Conclusions

Inequity exists in the cost of food between Atlantic CA, more specifically NL, and the rest of CA. Food affordability is associated with food insecurity, dietary compromise, and adverse health outcomes. Underestimating food costs may lead to inadequate responses to the ongoing cost of living crisis. Web scraped food prices provide accurate, near real-time data to engage with stakeholders in communities across the country to address food affordability.