

# Addressing Food Insecurity in Peterborough

A key ingredient in the recipe for health equity



Peterborough  
Public Health

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We respectfully acknowledge that Peterborough Public Health is located on the Treaty 20 and traditional territory of the Mississauga Anishnaabeg. We offer our gratitude to the First Nations for their care for, and teachings about, our earth and our relations. May we honour those teachings.

## What is Food Insecurity\*?

Household food insecurity is a serious health issue, affecting under-served people the most. Food insecurity is the “inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints.”<sup>1</sup> Someone who is food insecure worries about running out of money for food.

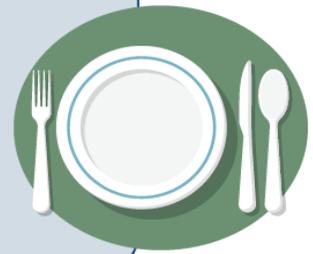
Community members facing food insecurity may:<sup>1</sup>

Worry about running out of food before there is money to buy more

Not be able to afford balanced or nutritious meals

Not be able to buy food that meets individual and cultural needs

Miss meals, eat less food than needed, or even go days without food



### Peterborough Snapshot:

The most recent local data for the Peterborough Census Metropolitan Area in 2017-18 shows that 14.5% of households were food insecure.<sup>2</sup> This is an alarming 1 in 7 local households worrying about having enough money for food. Food insecurity numbers are likely underestimated as unhoused individuals and Indigenous Peoples living on-reserve are not included in this data.



### Ontario and Canada Snapshots:

More recent data from a different survey in 2019-2021 suggests that the prevalence of food insecurity remains high in Ontario and across Canada.<sup>1</sup> Over 2.3 million households in Ontario experienced food insecurity in 2021.<sup>1</sup>

With rising rates of inflation, it is likely that food insecurity will increase as individuals and households face mounting challenges affording basic needs. The price of food purchased from stores in Canada has increased 11.4% between September 2021 and 2022, which is the fastest rise in food prices since the early 1980s.<sup>3</sup>

\* “Food Insecurity” is used as a short-form for “Household Food Insecurity” in this report.

# Realities of Limited Incomes in Peterborough

## Is Food Affordable in the Peterborough County and City?

Not for some. Minimum wage earners and households on fixed incomes have little, if any, money left over to cover basic monthly expenses after paying for shelter and food. The case studies below do not represent real people but are based on research representing the impacts of food insecurity. They include actual benefits, incomes, and costs in the Peterborough County and City from May-June 2022. For more information, data sources, and cost breakdowns for each case study and further income scenarios, see Appendix A.

### Case Study: Single, Pregnant Person

Aisha is in her late 20s, lives on her own in the City of Peterborough, and is expecting a baby. She is unable to work due to a chronic health condition and relies on the Ontario Disability Support Program for income. The cost of rent for her one-bedroom apartment takes up almost 80% of her monthly income. Aisha tries to eat balanced meals to give her baby a good start. However, due to her limited income, this is not always possible, and could put her in a monthly deficit, even before paying for everything else she needs to get by. Facing stress and anxiety about affording rent, food, and necessities for her baby, she notices her mental health declining.

Aisha's monthly income, including benefits: **\$1,349**

Rent: \$1049 (78% of income)

Food: \$ 363 (27% of income)

**-\$ 63** (negative number)

This deficit occurs before considering other expenses: *phone/internet, utilities, transportation, household and personal care items, clothing, laundry, crib, stroller, and the other needs after her baby is born, etc.*



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### Case Study: Single Parent

Sheena is a single parent with two children under 6 years old. She rents a 2-bedroom basement apartment in the County of Peterborough. Sheena currently receives Ontario Works, as she has not been able to find work that also allows her to care for her young children. Sheena is very resourceful with her limited budget, but with the rising cost of living she is having trouble making ends meet. She just found out that she needs to replace her used car, as it is her only form of transportation, but doesn't know how she will pay for this unexpected expense. She finds herself eating less and sometimes skipping meals to make sure that her kids have enough to eat. She notices that she is not feeling her best.

Sheena's monthly income, including benefits: **\$2,705**

Rent: \$1316 (49% of income)

Food: \$ 646 (24% of income)

**\$ 743** left to pay for everything else:

*phone/internet, gas, car repairs, utilities, household and personal care items, clothing, laundry, toys, kids activities and school supplies, etc.*



## Case Study: Family with Children

Drew and Taylor have 2 children, ages 8 and 14. They rent a 3-bedroom apartment in the County of Peterborough. Drew works full time at minimum wage. Taylor hopes to re-train and go back to college but is currently a full-time care-giver for their parents, and children. Their kids have asked if they can go on a family vacation like some of their friends, but Drew and Taylor find that can barely afford necessities after paying for monthly bills, and other essentials.

Drew and Taylor's monthly income, including benefits: **\$3,973**

Rent: \$1403 (35% of income)

Food: \$1057 (27% of income)

**\$1513** left to pay for everything else:

*phone/internet, utilities, laundry, transportation, household and personal care items, clothing, school supplies and class trips, kids activities, etc.*



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## Case Study: Single, Unattached Person

Sam is 40 years old and is currently unemployed due to circumstances outside of his control. He receives Ontario Works. After accounting for all benefits received, the rent for his bachelor apartment in the City of Peterborough takes up 93% of his income. Sam worries about losing his housing, and is unable to pay for food. Despite visiting food banks and meal programs, he is severely food insecure, and sometimes goes for a few days without eating.

Sam's monthly income, including benefits: **\$863**

Rent: \$ 805 (93% of income)

Food: \$ 381 (44% of income)

**-\$ 323** (negative number)

This deficit occurs before considering other expenses: *phone/internet, utilities, laundry, transportation, child care, household and personal care items, and clothing, etc.*



# How Food Insecurity Links to our Community and Systems

Food insecurity is a marker of material deprivation. Food insecurity is an income problem that affects our community.

When incomes do not match the cost of food and other basic needs, there are serious negative consequences.

## What is material deprivation?

Material deprivation is the “inability for individuals and communities to access and attain basic material needs.”<sup>4</sup>

It is closely linked to POVERTY, and is a form of marginalization. When basic needs such as housing and enough money to buy food and clothing are not met, this can be a significant barrier for individuals to survive, let alone thrive, or make meaningful contributions to society.

## Well-being of Children and Families:

- Food insecurity can have negative, long-lasting impacts on child health and well-being.<sup>5</sup> It is linked with adverse childhood experiences,<sup>6</sup> and may be a source of toxic stress,<sup>7</sup> which can affect brain development in children. Toxic stress can have long term consequences for learning, behavior, and both physical and mental health.<sup>8</sup> This can perpetuate cycles of health inequity.
- Sadly, many families are affected by food insecurity. In Ontario, 20.6% of households - or 1 in 5 - with children were food insecure in 2021.<sup>1</sup>
- Female-led lone parent households had the highest rate of food insecurity by household type at 38.1% - almost 2 in 5.<sup>1</sup>



Policies, resources, and strategic community action can support under-served single parents and families as they help create healthy, safe, and nurturing environments for child development.

## Physical Health:

- Children and adults experiencing food insecurity have increased risk for poor health outcomes.<sup>5</sup> Food insecurity can make it difficult to eat balanced meals that meet nutrition needs. This may make it difficult to manage chronic health conditions. Adults in food insecure households have a higher risk of infectious diseases and are also more likely to face poor oral health and injuries. This is in addition to having increased risk of chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, arthritis, back problems, and chronic pain.<sup>5</sup>
- Premature death in adults is a serious concern linked with food insecurity.<sup>5</sup>



Food insecurity takes a major toll on the health care system.<sup>5</sup> Addressing food insecurity before it happens could result in significant savings for public health care dollars and can also help us to build a stronger and more equitable health system.

## Mental Health:

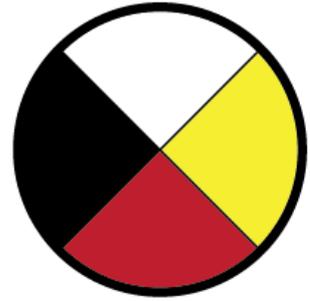
- Food insecurity and poor mental health are strongly linked.<sup>5</sup> For example:
  - Adults in food insecure households have a higher risk of mental health conditions such as depression and anxiety disorders.<sup>5</sup>
  - Food insecurity is a strong predictor of use of public mental health care services. In one study, adults experiencing severe food insecurity were more than twice as likely to use health care services for mental health reasons over the past year, than those who were food secure.<sup>9</sup>
  - Experiencing household food insecurity during pregnancy increases the likelihood of being treated for perinatal mood disorders, and infants have a higher likelihood of visiting an emergency department.<sup>10</sup>
  - Children facing household food insecurity are more likely to experience poor mental health than those in food secure households.<sup>5</sup>
    - Adequate nutrition is important for child health, learning, development and well-being.
    - Severe food insecurity and experiences of child and youth hunger are linked to depression and suicidal ideation in adolescence and early adulthood.<sup>5</sup>
    - Food insecurity has also been connected to hyperactivity and inattention in the early years.<sup>5</sup>



Addressing barriers to services and health inequities related to mental health includes promoting food security, in addition to mental health and wellbeing.

## Indigenous Self-determination and Health Equity:

- Food insecurity is racialized and disproportionately impacts visible minorities.<sup>1</sup> When looking at racial-cultural identity and Indigenous status, off-reserve Indigenous Peoples face the highest rates of food insecurity. In 2021, 30.7% (almost 1 in 3) were food insecure in Canada, not including Indigenous Peoples living on-reserve, or in the Territories.<sup>1</sup> Indigenous Peoples living off-reserve have more than double the likelihood of experiencing food insecurity than non-Indigenous Canadians.<sup>11</sup>
- Restricted access to traditional lands, water, and food resources also impacts Indigenous Peoples' access to traditional foods, which are healthy, nutrient dense, and culturally preferred.<sup>11</sup>



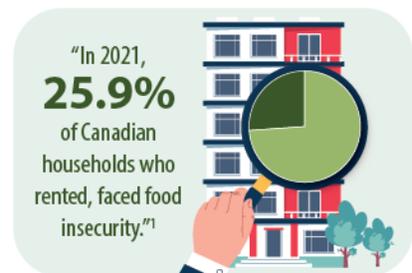
Indigenous health inequities are complex and deeply rooted in historical and ongoing acts of colonization. To move forward together, we can work towards allyship, and support Indigenous Food Sovereignty. This means that we can collaborate with Indigenous Peoples to listen, reflect, amplify Indigenous voices, and help make positive changes.

### What is Food Sovereignty?

“Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through ecologically sound and sustainable methods, and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems.” - *La Via Campesina*

## Housing:

- Housing and food insecurity are deeply interconnected. For example, renters are more likely to be food insecure than home-owners. Owners with mortgages are more vulnerable to food insecurity than those who are mortgage free.<sup>12</sup>
- Unaffordable housing is linked to negative health impacts, food insecurity and inadequate nutrition.<sup>13</sup> Rising housing costs force people with limited incomes to choose between paying rent and other basics like food. In addition, unhoused people are highly vulnerable to food insecurity.<sup>1</sup>
- Both housing and food are basic needs. We need both to be healthy, and to thrive. But when treated as a commodity, housing is out of reach for many people.<sup>14</sup> The same can be said for food.



Our community, local municipalities, provincial and federal governments and First Nations need to work together to address health inequities related to housing and shelter.

## Climate Change:

- When people don't have enough money for food, every day can feel like an emergency. Thinking about climate change or preparing for future emergencies may be a challenge.
- After the derecho storm and power outages that took place in Peterborough in May 2022, community members lost significant amounts of food.<sup>15</sup> Based on informal community feedback, there were people living on low incomes who didn't have resources to prepare or re-stock their food after the emergency.



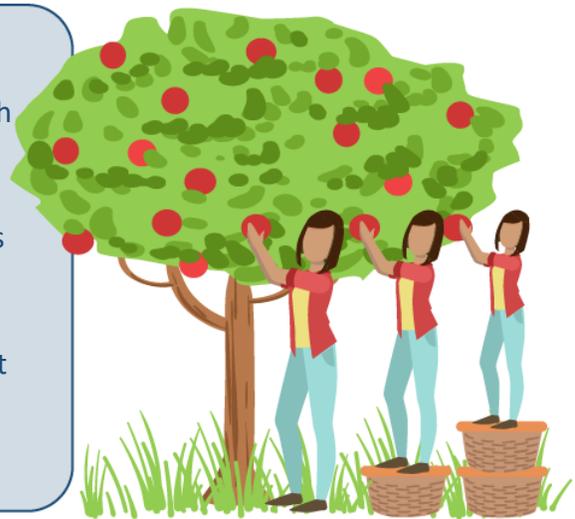
Supporting those who are most vulnerable to the health impacts of climate change and strengthening our food systems are part of helping our community adapt and reduce negative health impacts.

## Food insecurity is a health equity issue.

This means that some groups are more affected than others, and can be held back from reaching their health potential because of factors that are beyond their control. For our community to be healthy, we need to make sure that no one is left behind, that everyone is included, and all have their basic needs met (e.g., food, water, housing, transportation, education, healthcare, etc.).

### What is Health Equity?

Health equity means that all people can reach their full health potential and are not disadvantaged from attaining it because of their race, gender, age, socioeconomic status or other socially determined circumstances. Different people need different heights of steps to reach the apple tree, just as different people need different supports to reach health equity.



# How Can We Fix the Problem of Food Insecurity?

Food insecurity is an income problem that requires income solutions.<sup>16</sup>

Research supports that policies that improve incomes to meet basic needs can move the needle on food insecurity. For example, between 2007-2013, low income seniors receiving public pensions (a form of guaranteed income) had **half the rate of food insecurity**, compared with low income Canadians under the age of 65, who did not have this income floor.<sup>17</sup> Income solutions address the root of the problem, help to preserve dignity, give choices to buy foods that meet needs, and promote the right to food.



## Examples of income solutions:

- living wage,
- social assistance, benefit rates, and minimum wage rates that match the cost of living,
- a basic income guarantee or guaranteed liveable income,
- child benefits designed to adequately support lowest income families and,
- lowering income tax rates for lowest-income households

### What about Food Banks?

Although food banks and meal programs may support some people with immediate needs, **they have not been shown to reduce food insecurity.**<sup>18</sup>

Advocating for systemic changes such as income solutions and the right to affordable housing, childcare and drug plans, can improve equity in access to basic needs.

Working together strategically to change our systems can support underserved groups, including single-parent families, people impacted by the drug poisoning crisis, and those vulnerable to health impacts of climate change. There are benefits for our whole community **WHEN NO ONE IS LEFT BEHIND.**

## How Can We Learn More and Be Part of the Change?

### Get Connected and Explore Issues and Solutions:

- **Food Insecurity** - [www.odph.ca/cent\\$less](http://www.odph.ca/cent$less), or [www.proof.utoronto.ca](http://www.proof.utoronto.ca)
- **Indigenous Food Sovereignty** - Food Secure Canada Discussion Paper #1: <https://foodsecurecanada.org/resources-news/newsletters/discussion-papers-peoples-food-policy>
- **Food Systems, Food Action and the Peterborough Food Charter** - [www.foodinpeterborough.ca](http://www.foodinpeterborough.ca)
- **Housing**
  - Housing and Homelessness Plan: [www.peterborough.ca/housing](http://www.peterborough.ca/housing)
  - United Way, Housing is Fundamental 2022: [www.uwpeterborough.ca/media-releases/](http://www.uwpeterborough.ca/media-releases/)
- **Basic Income**
  - Coalition Canada: [basicincomecoalition.ca/en/](http://basicincomecoalition.ca/en/) or
  - Basic Income Peterborough: [www.nourishproject.ca/basic-income-peterborough-network](http://www.nourishproject.ca/basic-income-peterborough-network)
- **Living Wage** - United Way Peterborough and [www.ontariolivingwage.ca/](http://www.ontariolivingwage.ca/)



### Speak up for change. Your voice can make a difference.

- Start conversations about food insecurity, incomes, and solutions with your friends, family, and communities.
- Write to or chat with your local MP, MPP or Council members about the need to improve incomes and housing to help address food insecurity and health inequities. You can find templates here: [www.odph.ca/centsless](http://www.odph.ca/centsless)



Together, we can work towards health equity and communities where everyone can thrive with health and dignity.

## APPENDIX A: Income Scenarios

### Twelve Scenarios Based on Income and Benefits in Ontario and Canada, and Peterborough Food and Housing Costs (May-June 2022)

Case studies on pages 3-4 and scenarios below use food cost data from the Peterborough County and City collected by public health staff in May and June of 2022. Due to inflation rates described on page 2, it is expected that food costs will have increased between data collection and release of this report in November 2022. This data was collected as part of pilot testing of an updated process to monitor food affordability in Ontario. The 61 food items costed are based on the 2019 National Nutritious Food Basket<sup>19</sup> and reflect Canada's Food Guide.<sup>20</sup> Data does not include: non-food items, foods that may be needed to meet cultural or religious needs, or foods to manage disease conditions, allergies, or intolerances. Data should not be compared to previous years, due to changes in food costing methodology. The below income scenarios integrate provincial and federal benefits from May-June 2022, including child benefits, GST/HST credits, the Ontario Trillium Benefit, the Canada Worker Benefit, and the Climate Action Incentive Payment. Scenarios use the Peterborough Census Metropolitan Area Housing Cost Data from the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

**Table 1:  
Income Scenarios 1-4**

	Scenario 1	Scenario 2	Scenario 3	Scenario 4
	Family of Four, Ontario Works	Family of Four, Full-Time Minimum Wage Earner (n)	Family of Four, Median Income (after tax) (o)	Single Parent Household with 2 Children, Ontario Works
<b>Monthly Calculations</b>				
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	\$ 2,760.00	\$ 3,973.00	\$ 9,323.00	\$ 2,528.00
<b>Selected Expenses</b>				
	(3 Bdr.)	(3 Bdr.)	(3 Bdr.)	(2 Bdr.)
Average Monthly Rent (may or may not include heat/hydro) (l)	\$ 1,403.00	\$ 1,403.00	\$ 1,403.00	\$ 1,316.00
Food (m)	\$ 1,056.80	\$ 1,056.80	\$ 1,056.80	\$ 775.91
<b>TOTAL SELECTED EXPENSES</b>	\$ 2,459.80	\$ 2,459.80	\$ 2,459.80	\$ 2,091.91
<b>Funds Remaining</b> (for other basic needs e.g. telephone, transportation, child care, household and personal care items, clothing, school supplies etc.)	\$ 300.20	\$ 1,513.20	\$ 6,863.20	\$ 436.09
Percentage of income required for rent	51%	35%	15%	52%
Percentage of income required to purchase healthy food	38%	27%	11%	31%

**Table 2:  
Income Scenarios 5-8**

	Scenario 5	Scenario 6	Scenario 7	Scenario 8
	One Person Household, Ontario Works	One Person Household, Ontario Disability Support Program (p)	One Person Household, Old Age Security/ Guaranteed Income Supplement	Married Couple, Ontario Disability Support Program
<b>Monthly Calculations</b>				
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>	\$ 863.00	\$ 1,309.00	\$ 1,885.00	\$ 2,322.00
<b>Selected Expenses</b>				
	(Bachelor)	(1 Bdr.)	(1 Bdr.)	(1 Bdr.)
Average Monthly Rent (may or may not include heat/hydro) (l)	\$ 805.00	\$ 1,049.00	\$ 1,049.00	\$ 1,049.00
Food (m)	\$ 381.41	\$ 381.41	\$ 272.02	\$ 632.68
<b>TOTAL SELECTED EXPENSES</b>	\$ 1,186.41	\$ 1,430.41	\$ 1,321.02	\$ 1,681.68
<b>Funds Remaining</b> (for other basic needs e.g. telephone, transportation, child care, household and personal care items, clothing, school supplies etc.)	\$ (323.41)	\$ (121.41)	\$ 563.98	\$ 640.32
Percentage of income required for rent	93%	80%	56%	45%
Percentage of income required to purchase healthy food	44%	29%	14%	27%

**Table 3:  
Income Scenarios 9-12**

	Scenario 9	Scenario 10	Scenario 11	Scenario 12
	One Person Ontario Works (Pregnant Person)	One Person Household, Ontario Disability Support Program (Pregnant Person)	Single Parent with 2 Children (3y, 5y), Ontario Works	Single Parent with 2 children (3y, 5y), Ontario Disability Support Program
<b>Monthly Calculations</b>				
<b>Total Income</b>	\$ 903.00	\$ 1,349.00	\$ 2,705.00	\$ 3,309.00
<b>Selected Expenses</b>				
	(Bachelor)	(1 Bdr.) <sup>o</sup>	(2 Bdr.)	(2 Bdr.) <sup>o</sup>
Average Monthly Rent (may or may not include heat/hydro) (l)	\$ 805.00	\$ 1,049.00	\$ 1,316.00	\$ 1,316.00
Food (m)	\$ 362.78	\$ 362.78	\$ 646.25	\$ 646.25
<b>Total Selected Expenses</b>	\$ 1,167.78	\$ 1,411.78	\$ 1,962.25	\$ 1,962.25
<b>Funds Remaining</b> (for other basic needs e.g. telephone, transportation, child care, household and personal care items, clothing, school supplies etc.)	\$ (264.78)	\$ (62.78)	\$ 742.75	\$ 1,346.75
Percentage of income required for rent	89%	78%	49%	40%
Percentage of income required to purchase healthy food	40%	27%	24%	20%

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- <sup>8</sup> Harvard University Centre on the Developing Child (2022). A Guide to Toxic Stress. Retrieved from: [developingchild.harvard.edu/guide/a-guide-to-toxic-stress/](http://developingchild.harvard.edu/guide/a-guide-to-toxic-stress/)
- <sup>9</sup> Tarasuk, V., Cheng, J., Gundersen, C., de Oliveira, C., & Kurdyak, P. (2018). The Relation between Food Insecurity and Mental Health Care Service Utilization in Ontario. *The Canadian Journal of Psychiatry*. 63(8), 557-569. doi: [10.1177/0706743717752879](https://doi.org/10.1177/0706743717752879)
- <sup>10</sup> Tarasuk, V., Gundersen, C., Wang, X., Roth, D.E., & Urquia, M.L. (2020). Maternal Food Insecurity is Positively Associated with Postpartum Mental Disorders in Ontario, Canada. *Journal of Nutrition*. 150(11), 3033-3040. doi: [doi.org/10.1093/jn/nxaa240](https://doi.org/10.1093/jn/nxaa240)
- <sup>11</sup> Richmond, C., Steckley, M., Neufeld, H., Bezner Kerr, R., Wilson, K., & Dokis, B. (2020). First Nations Food Environments: Exploring the Role of Place, Income, and Social Connection, *Current Developments in Nutrition*, 4 (8). doi: [doi.org/10.1093/cdn/nzaa108](https://doi.org/10.1093/cdn/nzaa108)
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<sup>14</sup> United Way. (2022) *Housing is Fundamental: A report to the community of Peterborough*. Retrieved from: <https://www.uwpeterborough.ca/2022/10/12/7504/>

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<sup>17</sup> Ontario Dietitians in Public Health. (2020). *Position Statement and Recommendations on Responses to Food Insecurity*. Retrieved from: [www.odph.ca](http://www.odph.ca)

<sup>18</sup> McIntyre, L., Dutton, D. J., Kwok, C., & Emery, J. C. H. (2016). Reduction of food insecurity among low-income Canadian seniors as a likely impact of a guaranteed annual income. *Canadian Public Policy*, 42(3), 274–286.

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<sup>20</sup> Health Canada (2022). *Canada's Food Guide*. Retrieved from: [food-guide.canada.ca/en/](http://food-guide.canada.ca/en/)

For further details on food cost and income scenarios, please call the Family and Community Health Team, Peterborough Public Health, at 705-743-1000 or visit [www.peterboroughpublichealth.ca](http://www.peterboroughpublichealth.ca).

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