

August 16, 2018

SENT ELECTRONICALLY

The Honorable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
doug.ford@pc.ola.org

The Honourable Lisa McLeod
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
lisa.macleodco@pc.ola.org

Dear Premier Ford and Minister McLeod,

The North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit (Health Unit) staff and Board of Health are deeply concerned about the Ontario government's recent decision to cancel the Ontario Basic Income Pilot (OBIP), and to reduce the scheduled increase to Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program rates from 3% to 1.5%.

Annually, the Health Unit monitors food affordability through the Nutritious Food Basket food costing project. In 2017, the monthly cost of healthy eating for a family of four was \$879. When this number is paired with local rent rates and compared to low income scenarios, our data shows that a nutritious diet is out of reach for those living with low incomes, whether they are receiving social assistance, or working for minimum wage.¹

Food insecurity is defined as inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints, which points to low income as the root of the problem. It can range from worrying about running out of food, to diet quality being compromised, to skipping meals altogether, due to not having enough money. While 1 in 8 Ontario households report experiencing food insecurity, social assistance recipients are at increased risk, with 64% of households receiving social assistance reporting food insecurity.² However, food insecurity numbers likely underrepresent the problem given that data is not collected from First Nation reserves, within the homeless population, and other vulnerable population groups that are difficult to reach.

Food insecurity is a significant public health problem because there is a direct link between food insecurity and negative health outcomes.³ Adults experiencing food insecurity are more likely to develop chronic conditions such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart disease, and mental health problems. Children and adolescents who experience food insecurity are more likely to develop asthma and mental

¹ North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit. (2017). The cost of healthy eating report. Retrieved August 9, 2018, from <http://www.myhealthunit.ca/en/resources/The-2017-Cost-of-Healthy-Eating-Report.pdf>

² PROOF: Food Insecurity Policy Research. Household food insecurity is a serious public health problem that affects 1 in 8 Canadian households. Retrieved August 9, 2018, from <http://proof.utoronto.ca/>

³ PROOF: Food Insecurity Policy Research. The Impact of Food Insecurity on Health. Retrieved August 9, 2018, from <http://proof.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/health-impact-factsheet.pdf>

health problems later in life. As a result, food insecurity costs the province in health care spending; individuals experiencing food insecurity have significantly higher health care usage than those who are food secure.⁴

For all of these reasons, our health unit has advocated to the provincial government for the past several years about the importance of adequate incomes to reduce food insecurity and improve health and social outcomes. In particular, our health unit has endorsed the idea of a basic income, which has gained popularity in recent years among many sectors as a viable, universal solution to increasing income security in Ontario.⁵

We urge you to consider the following recommendations in order to benefit the health of many low income Ontarians:

- Reinstating the Ontario Basic Income Pilot and following through with the evaluation plan. This will fulfill the promise made to the 4000 people enrolled in the pilot project who were relying on the extra monthly funds for the next two years. Reports are being made in the media about how lives will be significantly affected by this, including not being able to pursue higher education and being stuck in a housing lease that is now unaffordable.⁶ It is imperative that the results of the pilot project are evaluated to determine whether the basic income model is an effective policy intervention to improve health and social outcomes in low income populations.
- Proceed with the 3% scheduled increase as planned for Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program. Focusing efforts on reducing hydro and gasoline prices will not benefit many of the lowest income citizens of Ontario, many of whom do not own a car, and/or have their utility costs included in their monthly rent. Increasing social assistance rates however, will directly benefit many of Ontario's lowest income households.
- Refer to the report [Income Security: a Roadmap for Change](#) when formulating your plan for social assistance reform over the next 100 days. This report was prepared in collaboration with many experts, including Indigenous representatives, and has already undergone a public consultation process. Our health unit provided a response as part of the consultation and reviewed the report in detail. Please consider the time and associated public dollars that went into the development and subsequent consultation process related to this report.

In the spirit of the new foundational standard of Health Equity outlined in the [2018 Ontario Public Health Standards](#), public health now has an explicit role in reducing health inequities. Part of this requirement includes raising awareness about health inequities, from which income security cannot be excluded. Much of the responsibility related to income security lies on the shoulders of provincial policy makers such as yourselves. We recognize the importance of being fiscally accountable to the taxpayers

⁴ Tarasuk V, Cheng J, de Oliveira C, Dachner N, Gundersen C, & Kurdyak P. (2015). Association between household food insecurity and annual health care costs. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 187(14), E429-E436.

⁵ Tarasuk V. (2017). Implications of a basic income guarantee for household food insecurity. Research Paper 24. Northern Policy Institute. Retrieved August 9, 2018, from <http://proof.utoronto.ca/resources/proof-annual-reports/implications-of-a-basic-income-guarantee-for-household-food-insecurity/>

⁶ CBC News. Hamilton woman can't afford rent, stuck in lease after province scraps basic income. Retrieved August 9, 2018, from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/hamilton-woman-basic-income-1.4777326>

of Ontario, but it is unjust to do so at the expense of our most vulnerable citizens. The repercussions of these actions will ultimately cost the province in health care and social service dollars.⁷

Thank you for taking the time to review this information and we look forward to hearing a response.

Sincerely,



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Medical Officer of Health/Executive Officer



Nancy Jacko
Chairperson, Board of Health

ER/er

Copied to: Hon. Victor Fedeli, MPP Nipissing
Norm Miller MPP Parry Sound-Muskoka
John Vanthrof, MPP Timiskaming-Cochrane
Ontario Boards of Health
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⁷ Dutton D, Forest P.G., Kneebone R, & Zwicker J. (2018). Effect of provincial spending on social services and health care on health outcomes in Canada: An observational longitudinal study. *Canadian Medical Association Journal*, 190(3), E66-71.