

January 4, 2018

Honourable Helena Jaczek  
Minister of Community and Social Services  
Communications and Marketing Branch  
Via email: [incomesecurity@ontario.ca](mailto:incomesecurity@ontario.ca)

Dear Minister Jaczek,

The North Bay Parry Sound District Health Unit (Health Unit) would like to commend the Ministry of Community and Social Services on the release of the recent report *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change*. Thank you for commissioning this report, and for recognizing that the current social safety net in Ontario is not adequate to protect our most vulnerable populations from poverty.

For many years the Health Unit has advocated for increased incomes as a means of decreasing food insecurity and poverty rates. Through the annual Nutritious Food Basket food costing project, we monitor food affordability across the Nipissing and Parry Sound Districts. Year after year our data shows that those relying on social assistance or working for minimum wage do not have enough money for the costs of living, including healthy food. We have attached our Cost of Healthy Eating 2017 infographic for your reference.

Evidence shows that social assistance recipients are at great risk for being food insecure. As stated in the report, [Household Food Insecurity in Canada, 2014](#), 64% of households receiving social assistance experience food insecurity. Food insecurity is defined as inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints, which highlights income as the root cause of the problem. Food insecurity is directly linked with higher rates of many chronic conditions and increased health care costs, which makes it a serious public health concern requiring immediate action. The *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change* report provides a refreshing framework that has the potential to greatly improve the social safety net in Ontario, and thus, profoundly reduce poverty and food insecurity rates.

While the report states that 'over half a million people face challenges accessing healthy and affordable food' (page 157), please note the statistic from the [Household Food Insecurity in Canada, 2014](#) report is actually 590,000 households, which translates into approximately 1.6 million Ontarians. In addition, please use caution when linking food insecurity with rates of food bank use (page 157). Evidence has shown that only approximately one in four food insecure households access food banks, which means food bank statistics significantly under-represent food insecurity rates and do not capture the magnitude of the problem. Please continue to refer to [PROOF: Food Insecurity Policy Research](#) for the most up to date research related to food insecurity in Ontario.

In addition, the Health Unit would like to make the following comments related to the recommendations within the report:

- **The proposed 10 year implementation period is too long.** Please consider adopting an accelerated timeline to implement the recommendations within the report. It is an unfair burden to ask people living in poverty to wait another 10 years for an adequate and just income security system in Ontario.
- **We strongly support the recommendation of defining a made-in-Ontario Market Basket Measure** to contribute to the definition of income adequacy. This will ensure social assistance rates are indexed to inflation and accurately reflect the costs of living in Ontario. Although the Nutritious Food Basket has been removed from the new Ontario Public Health Standards as a protocol, many health units across the province will continue to monitor food affordability. Please include public health representatives in the process of developing the made-in-Ontario Market Basket Measure to contribute data related to the cost of healthy eating.
- **We urge you to listen to the Indigenous voices represented within this report**, as they present the unique challenges and barriers Indigenous peoples in Ontario face related to income security. Given that Indigenous social assistance recipients are one of the most marginalized groups in Ontario, please continue to include Indigenous representation in this work and decision making moving forward to ensure that the changes made related to income security in Ontario will be truly impactful for Indigenous peoples.
- **We strongly support the proposed vision for Ontario's income security system** of '*All individuals are treated with respect and dignity, and are inspired and equipped to reach their full potential. People have equitable access to a comprehensive and accountable system of income and in-kind support that provides an adequate level of financial assistance and promotes economic and social inclusion, with particular attention to the needs and experience of Indigenous peoples.*' Changing the spirit of the social assistance system from being punitive and inadequate to be one that is supportive with a human rights based equity approach is needed to provide a positive, sustainable impact on the lives of low income people in Ontario. Please consider adopting this vision to guide your decision making moving forward.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input on the *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change* report. We recognize the cost of implementing the recommendations in the report will be great, but the return on investment will be well worth it. In the long run, raising our most vulnerable populations out of poverty will be more economical than the social and health care costs of inaction. A change to our provincial social safety net is long overdue. We look forward to hearing the next steps on improving income security in Ontario.

Sincerely,

*Original Signed by Dr. Jim Chirico*

James Chirico, H.BSc., M.D., F.R.C.P. (C), MPH  
Medical Officer of Health/Executive Officer

/bk

Enclosure

# The Cost of Healthy Eating

North Bay Parry Sound District 2017

**\$879**

Local monthly cost to feed a family of 4



## Food Insecurity =

• Not enough money to buy healthy food

• Higher rates of: Diabetes  
Heart disease  
High blood pressure  
Depression



1 in 8 Ontario households are food insecure.

## Social assistance rates are inadequate.

What is left after paying for rent and food in our district?



## Working does not always pay the bills.

**59%** of food insecure households are in the workforce.



People on social assistance or earning minimum wage may not have enough money for heat, hydro, telephone, child care, transportation, clothing and the other costs of living.

## What can you do?

Poverty is the root of the problem. Food insecurity must be addressed with policy change.

Learn more about food insecurity and poverty.

- Visit [proof.utoronto.ca](http://proof.utoronto.ca)

Share these messages. Talk to your local MP and MPP about policy solutions:

- A basic income for all.
- Higher social assistance rates.
- More secure job opportunities with benefits.

Sign your local food charter at [www.nipissingareafood.ca](http://www.nipissingareafood.ca) or [www.parrysoundareafood.com](http://www.parrysoundareafood.com)



What about food banks and soup kitchens?

They're not enough.

They only provide short-term relief.

Learn more

[www.myhealthunit.ca](http://www.myhealthunit.ca)

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