

October 5, 2018

The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos
Minister of Families, Children and Social Development
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6
Via email: jean-yves.duclos@parl.gc.ca

Dear Minister Duclos:

[Ontario Dietitians in Public Health](http://www.odph.ca) (ODPH), the independent and official voice of Registered Dietitians (RDs) working in Ontario's public health system, is writing to congratulate you and your Ministry on *Opportunity For All – Canada's First Poverty Reduction Strategy*. ODPH commends the Government of Canada for setting an official measure of poverty and specific poverty reduction targets as well as the establishment of a National Advisory Council on Poverty.

As RDs, we are deeply concerned about the problem of household food insecurity (HFI) – inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints. HFI is rooted in poverty and is a highly sensitive measure of material deprivation. As such, ODPH is pleased that food insecurity will be tracked as an indicator of progress towards poverty reduction targets and that options are being explored with Statistics Canada to annually collect food insecurity data for all provinces and territories.

ODPH strongly recommends that the Government of Canada recognize a single positive response to any of the 18 questions included in the Canadian Community Health Survey Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM) as 'marginally food insecure' and not 'food secure' as is currently the case. Research demonstrates that even a single affirmative response on the HFSSM denotes some degree of vulnerability and negative impact. Utilizing Ontario data from 2005 to 2010, health care costs were 23% higher in households with marginal food insecurity compared to food secure households.ⁱ When marginal food insecurity is included, approximately 12% of Canada's population was food insecureⁱⁱ, as opposed to 8.3% which includes only those who experienced moderate and severe food insecurity.

As you know, the newly elected Ontario government has announced that the Ontario Basic Income Pilot (OBIP) will be terminated as of March 31, 2019. This decision continues to be highly distressingⁱⁱⁱ for the 4,000 vulnerable Ontarians who enrolled in the study group for this experiment and is a major disappointment to health and social service professionals who were anticipating crucial data and information from this investigation. OBIP participants have reported feeling better physically and mentally, as well as increased self-esteem and dignity. Being able to afford food choices for good health^{iv} appears as a common theme. Emerging evidence^v suggests a basic income guarantee could be the most effective policy intervention to reduce HFI.

ODPH joins the Mayors of the Cities of Brantford, Hamilton, Kawartha Lakes and Thunder Bay who wrote to you on September 4, 2018 requesting the federal government assume oversight of OBIP for years two and three of the pilot. We reiterate their appeal that federal oversight would be the best option to revive the critical information that will be generated, protect participants from crisis and ensure the funds that have been

invested are not wasted. The federal government could benefit from the results of OBIP – the largest controlled trial of basic income currently underway in the world.

Sincerely,



Ellen Lakusiak, RD
Co-Chair ODPH



Kim Loupos, RD
Co-Chair ODPH Food
Insecurity Workgroup



Mary Ellen Prange, RD
Co-Chair ODPH Food
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Copies to: Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor, Minister of Health
Loretta Ryan, Executive Director, Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Pegeen Walsh, Executive Director, Ontario Public Health Association

ⁱ PROOF – Food Insecurity Policy Research. The Impact of food insecurity on health. <http://proof.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/health-impact-factsheet.pdf>. Accessed October 1, 2018.

ⁱⁱ Tarasuk, V, Mitchell, A, Dachner, N. (2014). Household food insecurity in Canada, 2012. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). http://proof.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Household_Food_Insecurity_in_Canada-2012_ENG.pdf. Accessed October 1, 2018.

ⁱⁱⁱ CBC News August 28, 2018. 'Shocked and devastated' — photo series to reveal faces of cancelled basic income project. <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/hamilton/humans-of-basic-income-hamilton-1.4801847>. Accessed October 1, 2018.

^{iv} PBS News Hour May 28, 2018. 'Does a basic guaranteed income decrease the need for social services?' <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/does-a-basic-guaranteed-income-decrease-poverty>. Accessed October 1, 2018.

^v Tarasuk V. Implications of a Basic Income Guarantee for Household Food Insecurity. Research Paper 24. Thunder Bay: Northern Policy Institute, June 15, 2017. <http://proof.utoronto.ca/resources/proof-annual-reports/implications-of-a-basic-income-guarantee-for-household-food-insecurity/>. Accessed October 1, 2018.