



Ontario Dietitians in Public Health
Diététistes en santé publique de l'Ontario

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March 26, 2019

Hon. Lisa MacLeod
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
lisa.macleodco@pc.ola.org

Dear Minister MacLeod,

Re: Support for Bill 60, establishing a Social Assistance Research Commission

[Ontario Dietitians in Public Health](http://www.odph.ca) (ODPH), the independent and official voice of Registered Dietitians working in Ontario's public health system, is writing to you to express concerns about the more than 1.6 million Ontarians who experience food insecurity: insecure or inadequate access to food due to financial constraints.

Household food insecurity is a serious public health and social problem on which ODPH has taken a strong stance with our [Position Statement on Responses to Food Insecurity](#). For the past five years, ODPH has been steadfast in promoting awareness and advocating for effective measures to address the primary root cause: poverty. Food banks and other forms of food charity do not address this prevalent and pervasive problem. Most people who experience food insecurity do not use food banks and even if they do, they remain food insecure.

Ontarians receiving social assistance have an extremely high risk for food insecurity. In 2013-14, 64% of Ontario households reliant on social assistance were food insecure.ⁱ Benefits are inadequate to meet recipients' basic needs. **When people are not able to meet their basic needs, they cannot achieve the physical, mental and social well-being needed for long-term employment.** If Ontario's Government for the People reforms Ontario Works to make it a "welfare to work" program, then it must ensure that peoples' basic needs are being met. The best way to ensure this is to obtain data on the cost of living in defined regions across Ontario. Establishment of a Social Assistance Research Commission, as proposed in [Bill 60, Ministry of Community and Social Services Amendment Act](#), could help to achieve this.

ODPH eagerly awaits the announcement of further details about reforms to Ontario's social assistance system. We urge the Ontario government to prioritize the establishment of a Social Assistance Research Commission as part of the emergent changes.

Sincerely,

Carolyn Doris
Co-Chair ODPH

Mary Ellen Prange
Co-Chair, ODPH Food Insecurity Workgroup

Copies to:

Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario

Hon. Christine Elliott, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health and Long-Term Care

Paul Miller, MPP Hamilton East-Stoney Creek

Robert Bailey, MPP Sarnia-Lambton

Jennifer Buccino, Ontario Region Executive Director, Dietitians of Canada

Pegeen Walsh, Executive Director, Ontario Public Health Association

Loretta Ryan, Executive Director, Association of Local Public Health Agencies

ⁱ Tarasuk V, Mitchell A, Dachner N. 2016. Household food insecurity in Canada, 2014. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). <https://proof.utoronto.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/Household-Food-Insecurity-in-Canada-2014.pdf>