

**Ministry of Children,  
Community and Social  
Services**

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March 8, 2021

Ms. Erin Reyce, Co-Chair, Food Insecurity Workgroup  
Ms. Amy MacDonald, Communications Coordinator  
Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH)  
c/o executive@odph.ca

Dear Ms. Reyce and Ms. MacDonald:

Thank you for your letter on behalf of Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH) concerning Ontario's new Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS), Building a Strong Foundation for Success: Reducing Poverty in Ontario (2020-2025).

The new PRS was released against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic which has resulted in health, social and economic challenges for our province. Our government has taken these challenges head-on. Protecting the health and well-being of the people of Ontario has been and continues to be our top priority. Through this strategy we will work across government to build a stronger network of services that work together and help people get back on their feet. The PRS drives toward a vision where all Ontarians can fully participate in their communities, access opportunities and build better lives for their families.

I appreciate your sharing with me your position statement and recommendations with respect to food security. Our government acknowledges that there are people in the province who struggle to access healthy and affordable food. This issue has taken on new significance as a result of COVID-19. Our government acted quickly to soften the economic impacts of the pandemic on vulnerable populations. This includes over half a billion dollars to municipalities through the Social Services Relief Fund. Municipalities were able to spend a portion of that funding to address food security issues in their communities.

In addition, the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services provided \$8 million to Feed Ontario to support the launch of the Emergency Food Boxes program to help food banks across Ontario distribute food to those in need. Further, the Ministry of Environment, Conservation and Parks (MECP) made \$5 million available through the Surplus Food Redistribution Infrastructure Program to help food rescue organizations, First Nations communities and Indigenous organizations preserve and distribute surplus food from places like grocery stores and restaurants to those in need during COVID-19 and beyond. Our government will continue to support vulnerable populations in communities across Ontario as we recover from the devastating impacts resulting from COVID-19.

With regards to the Market Basket Measure, Ontario's use is based on Statistics Canada's definition and aligns with the federal government's Official Poverty Line for Canada. By doing so, the province also recognizes the key role of the federal government in addressing poverty in Ontario.

We are taking a phased approach to making changes now while broad system changes proceed. Our social assistance recovery and renewal plan is centred on a [vision](#) to create an efficient, effective and streamlined social assistance system that focuses on people. The aim is to connect them with a range of services and supports to respond to their unique needs and address barriers to success. It is a critical enabler to a whole-of-government approach to accessing human services that will not only help more people succeed in employment, but also support better outcomes in other areas of life, like health and education.

The integration of human services will enable us as a province to better meet the needs of the people who rely on these supports. We know this from years of advice from municipal partners, learnings from previous reform plans and efforts, and research in this sector. My ministry is working closely with municipal service managers to realize this social assistance vision, and will continue to make connections to Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Ontarians know that addressing poverty is a large and complex process. Our government cannot tackle this work in isolation. We will continue to work with all levels of government, Indigenous partners, community groups and all sectors of the economy to bring jobs back, help Ontarians adapt to the changing economy, and ensure our most vulnerable residents get the supports they need to thrive.

Thank you for sharing ODPH's concerns and recommendations with me. I appreciate your feedback on how we can improve the lives of Ontarians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Todd Smith", with a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Todd Smith  
Minister