

December 14, 2023

Via Electronic Mail

Senator Percy Mockler, Chair, National Finance Committee Percy.Mockler@sen.parl.gc.ca

Senator Éric Forest, Deputy Chair National Finance Committee Eric.Forest@sen.parl.gc.ca

Senator Clément Gignac, National Finance Committee Member

Clement.Gignac@sen.parl.gc.ca

Senator Larry W. Smith, National Finance Committee Member LarryW.Smith@sen.parl.gc.ca

Senator Jean-Guy Dagenais, National Finance Committee Member

Jean-Guy.Dagenais@sen.parl.gc.ca

Senator Rosa Galvez, National Finance Committee Member Rosa.Galvez@sen.parl.gc.ca

Senator Tony Loffreda, National Finance Committee Member Tony.Loffreda@sen.parl.gc.ca

Senator Jane MacAdam, National Finance Committee Member

Jane.MacAdam@sen.parl.gc.ca

Senator Elizabeth Marshall, National Finance Committee Member

Elizabeth.Marshall@sen.parl.gc.ca

Senator Kim Pate, National Finance Committee Member Kim.Pate@sen.parl.gc.ca

Mireille Aubé, Clerk, National Finance Committee Mireille.Aube@sen.parl.gc.ca

National Finance Committee NFFN@SEN.PARL.GC.CA

Dear Chair, Deputy Chair, Members, and Clerk of the National Finance Committee of the Senate of Canada

[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 urge your support of [Bill S-233](#), An Act to develop a national framework for a guaranteed livable basic income, currently being considered by the National Finance Committee of the Senate. Since 2015, ODPH has strongly supported the concept of a guaranteed livable basic income (GLBI) as an effective policy lever for reducing the pervasive problem of household food insecurity in Canada.¹

Food Insecurity Policy Research (PROOF) defines household food insecurity (HFI) as, "the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints," and further states it is a serious public health problem, a marker of pervasive material deprivation, and a matter of public policy.²

In 2022, the rate of HFI in Canada reached an all-time high since its measurement in Canada began nearly two decades ago. The percentage of households in Canada's ten provinces

experiencing HFI increased significantly to 17.8% in 2022 from 15.9% in 2021.³ This represents 6.9 million people, including 1.8 million, or 1 in 4, children.³ These estimates do not include people living on First Nations or the territories where rates of HFI are typically high, particularly in Nunavut. The provincial rates of HFI in 2022 varied significantly from a low of 13.8% of households in Quebec to a high of 22.9% of households in Newfoundland and Labrador.³

It is important to examine HFI within the context of household income. Seventy per cent of households with social assistance as their main source of income in Canada report experiencing HFI.³ However, having a job is not necessarily protective, as the majority of households experiencing HFI report employment as their main source of income (60.2%), and these households represented the largest increase in HFI from 2021 to 2022.³ A recent survey by Food Banks Canada found that one of the top reasons people cited for going to a food bank was “low wages or not enough hours of work”.⁴ Other research has highlighted the rise of lower quality employment opportunities, precarious employment and lack of benefits as significant challenges within today’s workforce.⁵ This information provides clear evidence that income policy in Canada must be enhanced to protect working age adults from HFI.

Households struggling to put food on the table also struggle to afford other basic needs. HFI, originally perceived as a “food problem,” is now understood to be a potent marker of material deprivation, rooted in inadequate and unstable incomes that have not kept pace with the costs of living. In 2022, Canadians felt a heavy impact of inflation, as prices for basic needs such as transportation (+10.6%), food (+8.9%) and shelter (+6.9%) rose the most.¹ Prices for food purchased from stores rose 9.8%, the fastest pace since 1981 (+12.0%), after increasing 2.2% in 2021.⁶

Extensive Canadian evidence demonstrates HFI is tightly linked to adverse physical and mental health outcomes above and beyond the influence of other social determinants of health. Research linking HFI data from population health surveys with administrative health records, has provided strong evidence that food-insecure people are more likely to be hospitalized for a wide range of conditions, stay in hospital longer, and die prematurely (before the age of 83) from all causes except cancer.⁷ A particularly strong relationship exists between food insecurity and poor mental health. The risk of experiencing depression, anxiety disorders, mood disorders, or suicidal thoughts increases with the severity of food insecurity for both adults and youth.⁷ The health consequences of HFI are extremely costly to Canada’s publicly funded healthcare system.⁸ Policies designed with the aim of reducing HFI have potential to offset considerable public expenditures on healthcare for federal, provincial and territorial governments. Health care cost savings estimates need to be considered in the proposed national framework for a GLBI.

For more than three decades, food banks have been the primary response to HFI in Canada. Despite massive investments in a secondary food system for people who cannot afford to obtain food in a socially dignified manner (i.e., buying from food retailers or growers), food banks are struggling more than ever to meet demands as more and more Canadians are unable to afford the basic costs of living. In March 2023, there were almost 2 million visits to food banks across

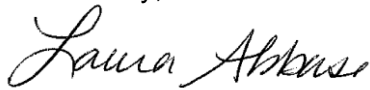
Canada, representing a 32% increase compared to March 2022, and a 78.5% increase compared to March 2019, which is the highest year-over-year increase in usage ever reported.⁴ While food banks can provide temporary food relief, they do not address HFI which is a result of a persistent underlying problem of inadequate income.⁹ Only about one-quarter of households experiencing HFI go to food banks, and for those who do use them, HFI is not resolved.

The only interventions proven to reduce household food insecurity are those that improve the incomes of vulnerable households.⁹ Research on federal and provincial income policies, including public pensions for seniors, social assistance, child benefits, and minimum wage, has documented reductions in food insecurity when these interventions improve the incomes of low-income households.⁹ Research on the impact of Canada's public pension system for seniors provides the strongest parallel to a GLBI. Reaching the age of eligibility for collecting public pensions has been shown to reduce the risk of food insecurity for low-income, unattached adults by almost 50%.¹⁰

Establishing an income floor for working-aged Canadians and their families, similar to that provided to seniors through public pension programs, would help address the vulnerability of households reliant on employment incomes but still unable to make ends meet, and ensure that working-aged adults not in the workforce also have sufficient incomes to meet basic needs. A recently released report¹¹ outlines a proposal for a province-wide Guaranteed Basic Income (GBI) for Prince Edward Island residents aged 18 to 64, recommending a maximum benefit of 85% of the official poverty line, estimated to be \$19,252 for a single adult and \$27,227 for a family of two adults in 2022. PEI's report recommends the GBI be a collaborative federal-provincial program, delivered through the income tax system and jointly financed by both governments, complementing the other income-tested basic income benefits that exist for children (Canada Child Benefit) and seniors (Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement).

Given the magnitude of HFI in Canada and the significant health consequences and costs associated with it, income-based policy solutions specifically targeting the reduction of HFI in Canada are urgently needed. ODPH urges you to support Bill S-233 as an important step toward framing GLBI in Canada. Thank you for reviewing this information.

Sincerely,



Laura Abbasi, RD
Co-Chair ODPH Executive



Erin Reyce, RD
Co-Chair, Food Insecurity Workgroup

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

¹ Ontario Dietitians in Public Health. (2020). Position Statement and Recommendations on Responses to Food Insecurity.

Available (in English and French) at: <https://www.odph.ca/odph-position-statement-on-responses-to-food-insecurity-1>. Accessed 11 December 2023.

² Food Insecurity Policy Research (PROOF). Understanding Household Food Insecurity [webpage online]. <https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/>. Accessed 11 December 2023.

³ Food Insecurity Policy Research (PROOF). (2023). What are the implications of food insecurity for health and health care?

[webpage online]. <https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/what-are-the-implications-of-food-insecurity-for-health-and-health-care/>. Accessed 11 December 2023.

⁴ Food Banks Canada. (2023). HungerCount 2023. Available at: <https://foodbankscanada.ca/hungercount/>. Accessed 11 December 2023.

⁵ Martin JC and Lewchuk W. (2018) The Generation Effect: Millennials, employment precarity and the 21st Century workplace. McMaster University and PEPsO. Available at: <https://pepso.ca/publications>. Accessed 12 December 2023.

⁶ Statistics Canada. (2023). Consumer Price Index: Annual review, 2022. Available at: <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230117/dq230117b-eng.htm>. Accessed 11 December 2023.

⁷ Food Insecurity Policy Research (PROOF). (2023). What are the implications of food insecurity for health and health care? [webpage online]. <https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/what-are-the-implications-of-food-insecurity-for-health-and-health-care/>. Accessed 11 December 2023.

⁸ Tarasuk V. (2017). Implications of a basic income guarantee for household food insecurity. Northern Policy Institute – Research Paper No. 24. Available from: https://www.northernpolicy.ca/upload/documents/publications/reports-new/tarasuk_big-and-foodinsecurity-en.pdf. Accessed 13 December 2023.

⁹ Food Insecurity Policy Research (PROOF). What can be done to reduce food insecurity in Canada? [webpage online] <https://proof.utoronto.ca/food-insecurity/what-can-be-done-to-reduce-food-insecurity-in-canada/>. Accessed 11 December 2023.

¹⁰ McIntyre L, Dutton D, Kwok C, et al. (2016). Reduction of food insecurity in low-income Canadian seniors as a likely impact of a Guaranteed Annual Income. *Canadian Public Policy*. 42(3), 274-86. <https://doi.org/10.3138/cpp.2015-069>. Accessed 11 December 2023.

¹¹ A Proposal for a Guaranteed Basic Income Benefit in Prince Edward Island. Available at: <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6414a3fa59a0c71ae167601e/t/655e0165319bf92e4ef6cbd5/1700659869270/final-report>. Accessed 12 December 2023.