

August 7, 2018

Hon. Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
doug.ford@pc.ola.org

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

Dear Premier Ford and Minister MacLeod:

[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 you regarding the announcement on social assistance reform and the wind down of the Ontario Basic Income Pilot (OBIP).

As RDs, we are deeply concerned about the impact this announcement will have on Ontarians who experience household food insecurity – defined as inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints. Food insecure individuals, both children and adults, are likely to have poorer health. This costs our already overburdened health care system considerably. In one year, adults who are severely food insecure cost Ontario's health care system 2.5 times more than food secure adults do.¹

In 2014, 11.9% or 594,900 Ontario households experienced food insecurity.² This is an underestimate of the problem because these numbers do not reflect households on First Nations reserves and people who are homeless. Food insecurity is deeply rooted in poverty. It is not about living too far away from the nearest grocery store, having poor food skills or a lack of nutrition knowledge — it is simply about not having enough money for food. Annual monitoring of food affordability by Ontario public health units clearly shows individuals and families living on social assistance can barely afford to pay rent, let alone pay all the bills and buy nutritious food (see attached table).

Social assistance recipients are particularly vulnerable to food insecurity. In 2013 and 2014, 64% of Ontario households reliant on social assistance were food insecure.² Having a job, however, is no guarantee that a household's basic food needs can be met. In 2013 and 2014 almost 60% of food insecure Ontario households were relying on income from wages and salaries.²

A 3% increase to social assistance programs in 2018 was far from adequate, but at least it would have been the first increase in a very long time to exceed the rate of inflation. The recently announced 1.5% increase will mean that social assistance rates continue to fall further behind, leaving recipients poorer, hungrier and sicker than they are already.

¹ Tarasuk V, Cheng J, de Oliveira C, Dachner N, Gundersen C, Kurdyak P. Association between household food insecurity and annual health care costs. Canadian Medical Association Journal, 2015;187(14):E429-E36. Available at: http://www.cmaj.ca/content/187/14/E429?utm_source=TrendMD&utm_medium=cpc&utm_campaign=CMAJ_TrendMD_0

² Tarasuk V, Mitchell A, Dachner N. (2016). Household food insecurity in Canada, 2014. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). Retrieved from: <http://proof.utoronto.ca/resources/proof-annual-reports/annual-report-2014/>.

ODPH strongly encourages the Government of Ontario to at the very least maintain a 3% increase to social assistance rates. Current rates are highly inadequate to cover the cost of basic needs, including rent and nutritious food.

Emerging evidence³ suggests that a basic income guarantee could be the most effective policy intervention to reduce household food insecurity. ODPH's [Position Statement on Responses to Food Insecurity](#) calls for federal and provincial governments to consider and investigate a basic income guarantee as a policy option for reducing poverty and income insecurity and for providing opportunities for people with low incomes.

ODPH strongly urges the Ontario government to continue, possibly in collaboration with the federal government, the implementation of OBIP and its comprehensive evaluation. A common theme in anecdotal reports from Pilot participants is their new found ability to purchase healthy food – an important outcome for improving the health of vulnerable Ontarians. OBIP is a world-leading study of how basic income could transform lives for the better. The eyes of the world have been on this study and [remain on Ontario now](#) in the wake of your government's decision.

Sincerely,



Ellen Lakusiak, RD
Co-Chair ODPH



Mary Ellen Prange, RD
Co-Chair ODPH Food Insecurity Workgroup

Copies to: Hon. Christine Elliott, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Hon. Laurie Scott, Minister of Labour
Andrea Horwath, Leader, Official Opposition
Mike Schreiner, Leader, Green Party of Ontario
Rt. Hon. Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development
Pegeen Walsh, Executive Director, Ontario Public Health Association
Loretta Ryan, Executive Director, Association of Local Public Health Agencies

Attachment: 2018 Income Scenarios

³ Tarasuk V. Implications of a Basic Income Guarantee for Household Food Insecurity. Research Paper 24. Thunder Bay: Northern Policy Institute, June 15, 2017. Available at: <http://proof.utoronto.ca/resources/proof-annual-reports/implications-of-a-basic-income-guarantee-for-household-food-insecurity/>

2018 Income Scenarios

Scenarios [†]	Households with Children				Single Person Households	
	Family of 4 Median Income	Family of 4 Ontario Works	Family of 4 OBIP (no disability)	Family of 4 Minimum Wage (\$14/hr)	Single Male Ontario Works	Single Male OBIP (no disability)
Monthly Income ⁱ	\$7871	\$2582	\$3334	\$3603	\$810	\$1518
Estimated Rental Housing Cost ⁱⁱ	\$1345	\$1345	\$1345	\$1345	\$650	\$650
Cost of Nutritious Food ⁱⁱⁱ	\$883	\$883	\$883	\$883	\$297	\$297
Income remaining for other expenses	\$5643	\$354	\$1106	\$1375	-\$137	\$571
% Income for Shelter	17	52	40	37	80	43
% Income for nutritious food	11	34	26	25	37	20

[†] Scenarios Composition:

Family of four = 2 adults (male and female ages 31-50) and 2 children (boy age 14 and girl age 8)

Single male (age 31-50)

Single Male (age 31-50)

ⁱ Incomes derived from 2018 Nutritious Food Basket Income Scenario Spreadsheet, developed by Ontario Dietitians in Public Health, August 2018.

ⁱⁱ Rental Market Report. Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Fall 2017.
<http://skyviewrealty.com/CMHCb/2017/Ontario2017.pdf> (accessed August 3, 2018).

ⁱⁱⁱ Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. 2017 Provincial Nutritious Food Basket Data, January 2018.