

June 28, 2012

The Honourable Dalton McGuinty  
Premier of Ontario Queen's Park  
Rm. 281, Main Legislative Building  
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

Dear Premier McGuinty:

At the May 17<sup>th</sup>, 2012 meeting of the Windsor-Essex County Board of Health, the issues of health inequity and food insecurity in Windsor-Essex County were brought to our attention. In consideration of the undisputable evidence linking health inequity and food insecurity to negative health outcomes, the Board of Directors of the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit recommends the following actions by your government:

1. Implement a monthly \$100 Healthy Food Supplement for social assistance recipients in Ontario as recommended by the Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO), the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (ALPHA), and The Stop Community Food Centre;
2. Partner with Ontario Collaborative Group on Healthy Eating and Physical Activity to support the implementation of the comprehensive, coordinated Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy.

Food insecurity in Windsor-Essex County is threatening the health and well-being of too many families in our community. Immediate action is required to help offset rising food costs for those on social assistance. With the highest unemployment rates in the country, many Windsor-Essex residents continue to rely on social assistance programs. In fact, the number of Ontario Works cases in Windsor has risen twenty one percent over the past five years (City of Windsor, 2012). Increased dependence on this income source is particularly worrisome considering results from the Nutritious Food Basket annual food costing exercise. These food costing exercises have consistently shown that people in Windsor-Essex County who have low incomes don't have adequate funds to afford healthy eating after paying for other essentials, such as housing and utilities. The food security of Windsor-Essex residents has been further threatened by the frozen social assistance rates and the delayed child tax benefit increase highlighted in the proposed 2012 Ontario budget.

We understand that the monthly \$100 Healthy Food Supplement does little to mitigate the underlying problem of food insecurity. However, the supplement is urgently needed to get nutritious food to those who need it most. This, in turn, can help protect them against the negative health consequences associated with food insecurity until more sustainable solutions are in place.

It is our understanding that the Ontario Collaborative Group on Healthy Eating and Physical Activity has taken initiative to create more sustainable solutions by partnering with key stakeholders to develop a comprehensive Food and Nutrition Strategy for the province. The strategy will focus on policy change to

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improve access to healthy food for all Ontarians, including those who are food insecure. We urge you to support the development, implementation, and monitoring of the proposed Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy to effectively address the root causes of food insecurity.

The benefits of these actions extend beyond protecting the health of Ontarians. As you are aware, it costs more to treat and manage the negative health consequences of food insecurity (e.g., compromised growth and development, cognitive impairment, increased risk of infectious and chronic disease) than to prevent them by ensuring people can afford a basic nutritious diet. Further, food security promotes optimism and productivity, both of which are required to stimulate the economic recovery of Windsor-Essex County and for the prosperity of the entire province.

In closing, we look forward to working with the Liberal government as well as the many vested community partners to address the important issues of health inequity and food insecurity in Windsor-Essex County and throughout the province.

Thank you for your immediate attention to this matter.

Sincerely,



Gary McNamara, Chairperson  
Board of Directors

GM:nm

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cc: Dr. Arlene King, Chief Medical Officer of Health  
The Honourable Deb Matthews, Minister's Office, Ministry of Health  
The Honourable Eric Hoskins, Minister of Children and Youth Services  
Ms. Sue Makin, President, The Ontario Public Health Association  
Ms. Amy MacDonald, Co-Chair, Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health  
Ms. Lynn Roblin, Chair, Ontario Collaborative Group on Healthy Eating and Physical Activity  
Mr. Nick Saul, Executive Director, The Stop Community Food Centre  
Mr. Gordon Fleming, Manager of Public Health Issues, alpha  
Ms. Janet Gasparini, Chair of the Board, Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO)  
Ms. Michele Legere, Coordinator, Food Matters Windsor-Essex County  
Mr. Adam Vasey, Director, Pathway to Potential  
M. Brennan, County Council Services (Member Municipalities)  
B. Murray, City of Windsor Council Services  
Ontario Boards of Health

# Windsor-Essex County Health Unit Board of Directors

## Resolution Recommendation

2012 May 17

### **Issue:**

The prevalence of food security in Windsor-Essex County is threatening the health and well-being of our community. Immediate and ongoing action is required to improve access to safe, healthy, personally and culturally acceptable foods, especially among the area's most vulnerable populations.

### **Background:**

#### ***Food Security: A Key Opportunity for Health Protection and Health Promotion***

Food security, which is the ability to secure safe, healthy, personally and culturally-acceptable food, is necessary for good health. The converse state, food insecurity, has been linked to depression, heart disease, diabetes, high blood pressure, as well as self-reported poor general health (Vozoris & Tarasuk, 2003). In addition to the known nutritional inadequacies associated with food insecurity in Canada (Kirkpatrick & Tarasuk, 2008), people from food insecure households also appear more likely to be overweight or obese compared to their food secure peers (Mirza, Fitzpatrick-Lewis, Thomas, 2007). Accordingly, efforts to improve food security can help address the wide range of public health priorities that are associated with malnutrition and obesity, including chronic disease prevention and improved pregnancy outcomes.

#### ***Many Windsor-Essex Residents are at Risk of Food Insecurity***

With unemployment rates in Windsor continuing to top the country at 10.7% (Statistics Canada, 2012), many Windsor-Essex residents continue to rely on social assistance programs. In 2011, the number of Ontario Works cases in Windsor rose to 24,457, resulting in a 21% increase over the past five years (City of Windsor, 2012). Increased dependence on this income source is particularly worrisome considering the results from the Nutritious Food Basket survey in Windsor-Essex County. This annual survey has repeatedly shown that people with low incomes, including those who rely on social assistance, don't have adequate funds to afford healthy eating after paying for other essentials, such as housing and utilities. This disparity is illustrated in appendix A, which highlights real life situations for people in Windsor-Essex County utilizing the Nutritious Food Basket survey data from 2011.

#### ***Addressing Immediate Need and Building for the Future***

Food prices will continue to rise despite a slow economic recovery. The community should be prepared to meet the immediate needs of an increasing number of people unable to secure food as a result of this situation. Provincial implementation of a monthly Healthy Food Supplement (e.g. \$100) for social assistance recipients is required to help offset rising food costs for our community's most vulnerable populations and, in turn, protect them against the negative health consequences associated with food insecurity. Further, coordinated local and provincial efforts are required to create sustainable solutions to food insecurity that go beyond preventing hunger.

In summary, as a leader in community health protection and promotion, it is imperative that the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit continue to support food security initiatives through resource allocation, community collaboration and advocacy efforts. This is especially true in light of our current economic reality. Addressing food security can also help tackle some of the community's most pressing public health issues, including our low vegetable and fruit consumption and higher than provincial average rates of high blood pressure, diabetes, and obesity, which were highlighted in the most recent *Statistics Canada Health Profile (2011)*. While community collaboration and policy development efforts are well underway in the area of food insecurity, action is urgently needed to work with priority populations to develop evidence-based programming that address their unique needs.

## **Proposed Motion:**

**WHEREAS** addressing food security is essential to protecting and improving the health of Windsor-Essex County residents, and

**WHEREAS** immediate action is required to ensure that our community's most vulnerable populations continue to have access to basic healthy food during this time of economic instability, and

**WHEREAS** effective and sustainable food security solutions require coordinated, evidence-based policies and programs that are supported by all levels of government

**NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED** that the Board of Directors at the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit petition the Premier of Ontario, the Right Honourable Dalton McGuinty to:

1. Implement the \$100 Healthy Food Supplement for social assistance recipients in Ontario as recommended by the Social Planning Network of Ontario (SPNO) in partnership with the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (ALPHA) and The Stop Community Food Centre;
2. Partner with Sustain Ontario and other stakeholders to develop and implement a comprehensive Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy through multi-sector partnerships.

**AND FURTHER** that the Board of the Windsor-Essex County Health Unit continue to support local food security by:

1. Facilitating the creation of a comprehensive strategic plan for food security that is based on the evaluated needs of priority populations;
2. Committing to reviewing food affordability data (i.e., Nutritious Food Basket data) annually as per the Ontario Public Health Standards 2008, and coordinating related advocacy efforts as deemed necessary;
3. Continuing to partner with key food sustainability and anti-poverty organizations and initiatives. These partnerships will include, but are not limited to, *Pathway to Potential*, Windsor-Essex County's Poverty Reduction Strategy and *Food Matters*, the Ontario Trillium funded local food sustainability initiative;
4. Pursuing policies that support health equity, including the proposed Food Charter for Windsor-Essex County.

## References:

City of Windsor (2012). Ontario Works Statistics. Retrieved on 12, Apr. 2012 from: <http://www.citywindsor.ca/residents/socialservices-/Ontario-Works/Pages/Ontario-Works-Statistics.aspx>

Kirkpatrick, S., & Tarasuk, V. (2008). Food Insecurity is Associated with Nutrient Inadequacies among Canadian Adults and Adolescents. *Journal of Nutrition*.138, 604-612.

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Statistics Canada (2012). Labour Force Information. Catalogue no. 71-001-X. Retrieved on 12, Apr. 2012 from: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/71-001-x/71-001-x2012003-eng.pdf>

Vozoris, N.T. & Tarasuk V.S. (2003). Household food insufficiency is associated with poorer health. *Journal of Nutrition*. 133, 120-126.

## Appendix A: Monthly Income and Cost of Living Scenarios for Windsor-Essex County Residents

	Single Man on Ontario Works (OW)	Single Women over 70 (Old Age Security/ Guaranteed Income Security)	Single Mother Family of 3 on OW	Family of 4 Minimum Wage Earner	Family of 4 Median Income After tax
Monthly Income Including Benefits and Credits	\$ 635	\$ 1245	\$ 1836	\$ 2619	\$ 5767
Estimated Shelter Cost	\$ 482	\$ 627	\$ 752	\$ 891	\$ 891
Cost of a Nutritious Diet	\$ 199	\$ 147	\$ 480	\$ 666	\$ 666
<b>What's Left?</b>	- \$ 46	\$ 471	\$ 604	\$ 1062	\$ 4210
% Income Required for Shelter	76 %	50 %	41 %	34 %	15 %
% Income Required for Nutritious Diet	31 %	18 %	26 %	25 %	12 %
<b>Remember: People still need to pay for utilities, phone, transportation, cleaning supplies, personal care items, clothing, gifts, entertainment, internet, school essentials, medical and dental costs and other purchases</b>					

Table adapted from Middlesex-London Health Unit Report No. 104-11 using local housing data and results from the 2011 Nutritious Food Basket costing survey conducted in Windsor-Essex County