



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Dr. Christopher Mackie, Medical Officer of Health and CEO

DATE: 2017 December 14

INCOME SECURITY: A ROADMAP FOR CHANGE

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Board of Health:

- 1. Endorse the recommendations in the report “[Income Security: A Roadmap for Change](#)”; and*
- 2. Call on the Ministry of Community and Social Services to implement the report’s recommendations for reforming Ontario’s income security system, including social assistance reform.*

Key Points

- “[Income Security: A Roadmap for Change](#),” a report released by the Ministry of Community and Social Services, outlines a series of recommendations for reforming Ontario’s income security system, including social assistance.
- The report recommends changes in six key areas: income adequacy; improving the broader income security system; transforming the social assistance system; providing immediate help to those in deepest poverty; respecting First Nations jurisdiction; and ensuring adequate funding.
- The Ministry is requesting feedback on the report, providing the Board of Health with an opportunity to endorse the recommendations with a letter of support.

Income Security: A Roadmap for Change

The social determinants of health, such as food access, income, housing and employment, are strongly influenced by government public policy decisions.

“[Income Security: A Roadmap for Change](#),” a report released by the Ministry of Community and Social Services, was authored by three working groups: the Income Security Reform Working Group, the First Nations Income Security Reform Working Group and the Urban Indigenous Table on Income Security Reform. The Minister of Community and Social Service tasked these working groups with advising the government on how to reform Ontario’s income security system, including social assistance.

The report sets forth a phased ten-year plan for reforming Ontario’s income security and social assistance systems and specifying what investments the government should make in the first three years. The report recommends increasing the amount, quality and kind of benefits and services that low-income people receive. It also calls for a transformation of vision in regard to the income security system, setting out foundational principles for program and service provision. In order to provide a common vision on how to break the cycle of poverty, the report also outlines goals and outcomes that system users should be able to achieve under a reformed system.

The report contains recommendations on:

- What ought to constitute an adequate standard of living for people who receive income supports from Ontario’s benefit programs;

- How to change the social assistance system so it supports people and responds quickly and appropriately to their needs and goals;
- How to make social assistance programs work better for Indigenous people in Ontario;
- How to improve benefits and supports that extend to all low-income people in Ontario, whether they are on social assistance or not;
- How to ensure that the rights of First Nations are respected, and how to support them in creating and administering their own social programs, with appropriate levels of funding; and
- What investments governments should make immediately to help those in deepest poverty.

“Income Security: A Roadmap for Change” is a comprehensive plan that will help break the cycle of poverty in Ontario. The report’s recommendations will significantly improve Ontario’s income security system, as well as improve the relationship with Indigenous peoples.

Opportunity for Action

Each year, the Board of Health uses the Nutritious Food Basket data and income scenarios to advocate for public policies that positively impact these health determinants. The Board of Health has provided input to the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy ([Report No. 099-13](#)), advocating for increases to social assistance rates, the provision of a special diet allowance, and investments in affordable housing. The recommendations in “Income Security: A Roadmap for Change” expand upon these issues and outline wider systematic changes, which, if implemented, will improve the lives of those living in poverty.

The report calls for the government to commit to providing low-income people in Ontario with adequate incomes by adopting a Minimum Income Standard, and to create an Ontario Market Basket Measure that would add up the real costs of regular expenses like food, housing, clothing, transportation and other living costs. As outlined in Board of Health [Report No. 060-17](#), the continued systematic collection of the Nutritious Food Basket survey under the standardized public health protocols set forth in the revised Ontario Public Health Standards could supply the food-expense information pertinent to this measure.

The report “[London for All: A Roadmap to End Poverty](#),” authored by the Mayor’s Advisory Panel on Poverty, outlines many similar recommendations, including linking social assistance rates to inflation, reorganizing individual social assistance funds, subsidies, and vouchers to make it easier for people to access resources, and reducing clawbacks for people moving from social assistance to paid employment. London’s [Child and Youth Network \(CYN\)](#) has also been advocating for many of the same changes to the income security system. The CYN intends to voice its support for the plan outlined in “Income Security: A Roadmap for Change.”

The Ministry of Community and Social Services has requested [feedback](#) on the report. It is recommended that the Board of Health communicate its support by directing Health Unit staff to send the Ministry a letter of endorsement, encouraging the government to implement the report’s recommendations to reform Ontario’s income security system, including social assistance.

This report was prepared by the Chronic Disease Prevention and Tobacco Control Team of the Healthy Living Division.



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This report addresses the following requirements of the Ontario Public Health Standards (revised March 2017): Foundational Standards 4, 9, 10, 13; Chronic Disease and Injury Program Standards (Chronic Disease) 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 12; and Family Health Program Standards (Child Health) 4, 5, 7.