

The Honourable Jean-Yves Duclos
Minister of Families, Children and Social Development
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

September 20, 2018

Re: Opportunity for All – Canada’s First Poverty Reduction Strategy

Dear Minister Duclos:

The Middlesex-London Board of Health commends the Government of Canada for releasing *Opportunity for All – Canada’s First Poverty Reduction Strategy* and setting strong poverty reduction targets so that all Canadians can reach their full potential for health and well-being. We request the Government of Canada to commit additional funding for poverty reduction in Budget 2019, and report the marginal food insecurity category separately from the food secure category within the Canadian Community Health Survey Household Food Security Survey Module.

Poverty and its negative impacts, must be addressed through systemic, targeted and sustainable approaches. Poverty is the root cause of food insecurity, which is inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints. Food insecurity is a strong predictor of poorer physical and mental health, independent of other well-established social determinants of health such as income and education. The basic income guaranteed to seniors in Canada has been shown to reduce food insecurity risk by 50%. However, single working-age people with low incomes, post-secondary students, and low income families headed by working age parents with children over 18 years, among others, remain vulnerable to poverty.

The Canada Child Benefit is a financial support to families, but still leaves many families vulnerable to financial instability and poverty. Annually, the Health Unit monitors food affordability through the Nutritious Food Basket survey. Local food and rent costs are compared to low income scenarios. Our data shows that households receiving social assistance, and all eligible tax credits and entitlements, cannot afford basic needs including healthy food and safe, adequate housing. Most Ontario residents receiving social assistance and all eligible tax credits and entitlements live below the poverty line.

The Middlesex-London Board of Health commends the Government of Canada for committing to public tracking of a variety of indicators related to poverty, including food security. We strongly support your discussions with Statistics Canada about options for collecting the food security data annually for all provinces and territories. The Middlesex-London Board of Health, at its November 2017 meeting, recommended that the Household Food Security Survey Module (HFSSM) be made a core module of the Canadian Community Health Survey and sent a letter to Dr. Hassan Hutchison, Director General of the Office of Nutrition Policy and Promotion, dated February 1, 2018, expressing its support for regular and consistent monitoring of household food insecurity because it is fundamental to population health research and evidence-based policy decision-making at all levels of government.

When reporting the HFSSM results, Statistics Canada currently combines the categories of food secure and

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marginal food insecurity (i.e., worrying about running out of food and/or limited food selection). However, research shows that all individuals who experience some level of food insecurity are at greater risk of physical and mental health concerns. Therefore, to accurately report food insecurity rates, we recommend the marginal food insecurity category be reported separate from the food secure category.

Thank you for consideration of our recommendations and your commitment to the health and well-being of all Canadians.

Sincerely,

Joanne Vanderheyden, Chair
Middlesex-London Board of Health

cc: The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada
Hon. D. Ford, Premier of Ontario
The Honourable Patricia A. Hajdu, Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Labour
Dr. Hassan Hutchison, Director General, Office of Nutrition Policy and Promotion, Health Canada
Dr. William Yan, Director of Nutritional Sciences, Food Directorate, Health Canada
Hon. L. MacLeod, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
Hon. C. Elliot, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Ms. Lorelle Taylor, Associate Deputy Minister, Health System Information Management and CIO, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
Dr. Michael Hillmer, Executive Director, Information Management, Data and Analytics Office, Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
Ms. Karen Vecchio, MP Elgin-Middlesex-London
Mr. Bev Shipley, MP Lambton-Kent-Middlesex
Mr. Peter Fragiskatos, MP London North Centre
Ms. Kate Young, MP London West
Ms. Irene Mathyssen, MP London-Fanshawe

Attachment – Report No. XXX-18, “2018 Nutritious Food Basket Survey Results and Implications for Government Public Policy and Action”