

Honourable Lisa MacLeod  
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services  
80 Grosvenor Street  
6<sup>th</sup> Floor, Hepburn Block  
Toronto, ON  
M7A 1E9

September 20, 2018

**Re: Ontario Basic Income Pilot Cancellation and Social Assistance Rates**

Dear Minister MacLeod:

On behalf of the Board of Health of the Middlesex-London Health Unit, congratulations on your appointment as the Minister of Children, Community and Social Services. We have shared interests and we look forward to our continued partnership with the Ontario Government as we work together to tackle the economic and social conditions that influence individual and group differences in health status within our community.

The Middlesex-London Board of Health supports the Association of Local Public Health Agencies' (alPHA) position as outlined in its letter dated August 2, 2018 and asks that you consider reinstating the Ontario Basic Income Pilot (OBIP) study. The success of existing guaranteed income supplement programs (e.g., Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplements for seniors) provides evidence of improved health status and quality of life for recipients. Continuation of the OBIP would allow researchers to fully assess the program's impact on labour participation, health, social engagement, food security, housing stability and educational activities to inform any future reforms to the social assistance program in Ontario.

We are concerned about the well-being of the over 4 000 Ontarians who were relying on these additional monthly funds for the full 3-year pilot length, who had made positive life changes they can't continue without the continuation of OBIP payments, like safer housing and pursuing higher education. OBIP participants report many positive outcomes including the ability to purchase nutritious food, improved housing, paying bills, improved mental health, finding paid employment, planning and building for the future (e.g., further education, saving money) and contributing to their local community. About 7 out of 10 OBIP participants are working, but struggling with precarious, low paid work. Many participants reported the additional monthly funds from OBIP were used for educational and training upgrades to support the attainment of more stable work.

The current income support system in Ontario is not adequate for households to cover basic needs. 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 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, with the exception of single older adults receiving the Guaranteed Income Supplement and Old Age Security pension. A sustainable social assistance program should support recipients to transition off of social assistance, as they are able to, but also provide adequate funding to afford basic needs when receiving social assistance. The report [Income Security: A Roadmap for Change](#) includes valuable information to inform your social assistance review.

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We respectfully request you to consider the following recommendations in order to benefit the physical and mental health of many low income Ontarians:

- Reinststate the Ontario Basic Income Pilot study to support completion of the evaluation. The evidence obtained from the pilot would help determine whether the basic income model is an effective policy intervention to improve health and social outcomes in low income populations and help guide further refinements to the social assistance program to reduce poverty.
- Increase social assistance rates to reflect the cost of nutritious food and safe housing. The planned 1.5% increase to rates is a first step, but will still keep the rates below the poverty line.

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

Sincerely,

Joanne Vanderheyden, Chair  
Middlesex-London Board of Health

cc: Hon. Jeff Yurek, MPP Elgin-Middlesex-London  
Hon. Monte McNaughton, MPP Lambton-Kent-Middlesex  
Mr. Terence Kernaghan, MPP London North Centre  
Ms. Peggy Sattler, MPP London West  
Ms. Teresa Armstrong, MPP London-Fanshawe

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