

November 21, 2019

Honourable Todd Smith
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
7th Floor, 438 University Ave.
Toronto, ON
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todd.smithco@pc.ola.org

Re: Social Assistance Review and Disability Definition for the Ontario Disability Support Program

Dear Minister Smith:

The Middlesex-London Board of Health commends the Government of Ontario for deciding not to proceed with the planned cancellation of the Transition Child Benefit starting November 1st, 2019. This important benefit helps support many low-income families, who would otherwise be unable to afford basic needs for their children.

The Middlesex-London Board of Health requests that the Government of Ontario also reconsider the proposed change to align the disability definition for the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) with federal guidelines. We request the Government continue to include episodic and short-term disabilities within the disability definition for the ODSP.

We are concerned that aligning the definition with federal guidelines would make qualifying for ODSP more challenging, particularly for people with episodic or shorter-term disabilities and health conditions, including some mental health conditions. Using a more restrictive definition of disability would limit access for people who may be unable to periodically support themselves due to the episodic nature of their health condition, disproportionately affecting individuals living with addictions or mental illness. This proposed change would result in many low-income people living with disabilities in Ontario instead relying on the lower benefit rates of the Ontario Works program, despite having additional disability-related costs and challenges. Those most in need of support will be put in increasingly vulnerable positions.

Social determinants of health, such as income, food, housing and employment, help explain the wide health inequalities in Ontario, and are strongly determined by government public policy decisions. As incomes increase, health risks decrease and health outcomes improve. Food insecurity negatively impacts physical and mental health, and greatly increases healthcare costs. As demonstrated by the Nutritious Food Basket survey results, conducted annually by most Ontario public health units, Ontario individuals and families receiving social assistance do not currently have adequate income to meet a basic standard of living. In 2013-2014, 64% of Ontario households reliant on social assistance were food insecure ([PROOF, 2016](#)).

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

Sincerely,

Trish Fulton, 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. 070-19, “Monitoring Food Affordability and Implications for Government Public Policy and Action”