

**May 3, 2023**

The Honourable Sylvia Jones, M.P.P.  
Minister of Health  
5th Floor  
777 Bay St.  
Toronto, ON  
M7A 1Z8

The Honourable Michael Parsa, M.P.P.  
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services  
17th Floor  
777 Bay St.  
Toronto, ON  
M7A 2J3

**Re: Increased Social Assistance Rates in Regard to the Affordability of Food**

Dear Ministers,

At the April 20, 2023 meeting of the Middlesex-London Board of Health, [Report No. 25-23 Monitoring Food Affordability and Implications for Public Policy and Action](#) was received. The following motion was carried:

It was moved by **Skylar Franke**, seconded by **Michelle Smibert**, *that the Board of Health direct the Board Chair to write a letter on behalf of the Board of Health to the Minister of Health, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services and local Members of Provincial Parliament to advocate for increased social assistance payments in regard to the affordability of food.*

Report No. 25-23 makes it evident that, for the low-income residents of Middlesex County and London, income and social assistance rates have not kept pace with the increased cost of living, resulting in high levels of food insecurity. Food insecurity negatively impacts families and communities and is associated with challenges to physical and mental health, including chronic conditions, non-communicable diseases, infections, depression, anxiety, and stress.

In 2020, approximately one in five households in Middlesex-London were food insecure.<sup>1</sup> Through food affordability monitoring conducted by the Middlesex-London Health Unit in May 2022, the estimated local monthly cost to feed a family of four was \$1,084. This amount will have increased in 2023 since, according to the Consumer Price Index, food prices in stores in Ontario were 10.1% higher than in January 2022.<sup>2</sup> When food affordability is compared to a variety of household and income scenarios, it is demonstrated that households with low incomes spend up to 45% of their after-tax income on food, whereas households with adequate incomes spend approximately 12% of their after-tax income. This means that Middlesex-London residents with low incomes cannot afford to eat after meeting other essential needs for basic living.

Upstream-level policies which address the root causes of food insecurity, including income inadequacy and poverty, are needed to reduce the harm to our families and communities resulting from not having enough quality food to eat. We welcome the Provincial Government's attention to this urgent matter and advocate for an approach which increases social assistance rates.

Thank you,



Matt Newton-Reid  
Board Chair  
Middlesex-London Health Unit

[health@mlhu.on.ca](mailto:health@mlhu.on.ca)

[www.healthunit.com](http://www.healthunit.com)

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London Office  
110-355 Wellington St. | London, ON | N6A 3N7  
tel: (519) 663-5317 fax: (519) 663-9581

Strathroy Office  
51 Front St. E | Strathroy, ON | N7G 1Y5  
tel: (519) 245-3230

CC: Honourable Monte McNaughton, M.P.P., Minister of Labour, Immigration, Training and Skills Development  
Peggy Sattler, M.P.P., London West  
Rob Flack, M.P.P., Elgin-Middlesex-London  
Terence Kernaghan, M.P.P., London North Centre  
Teresa Armstrong, M.P.P., London-Fanshawe  
Skylar Franke, Board of Health Member

References:

1. Public Health Ontario. (2023). Response to scientific/technical request: Household food insecurity estimates from the Canadian Income Survey: Ontario 2018-2020.
2. Statistics Canada. Table 18-10-0004-03. Consumer Price Index, monthly, percentage change, not seasonally adjusted, Canada, provinces, Whitehorse and Yellowknife — Food. Retrieved from <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1810000403&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.14&cubeTimeFrame.startMonth=01&cubeTimeFrame.startYear=2023&referencePeriods=20230101%2C20230101>.
3. Tarasuk V, Li T, Fafard St-Germain AA. (2022). Household food insecurity in Canada, 2021. Toronto: Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity (PROOF). Retrieved 20Sept2022 from <https://proof.utoronto.ca/>.