

February 11, 2019

The Honorable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
premier@ontario.ca

The Honorable Lisa MacLeod
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
lisa.macleodco@pc.ola.org

Dear Premier Ford and Minister MacLeod:

Ontario's Basic Income Pilot

On behalf of our Board of Health, I am writing to you in support of Thunder Bay District Health Unit's concern and call to action to reconsider the termination of the Ontario's Basic Income Pilot and reduction of scheduled increases to the Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Programs (3% to 1.5%).

The Windsor-Essex County Board of Health has previously written the government expressing its support for the Basic Income Pilot as an evidence-based program to improve quality of life for the most vulnerable Ontarians.

The Windsor-Essex County Health Unit agrees that addressing issues of poverty is a public health priority, and a health equity and human rights issue. Individuals, or households, with lower incomes experience higher levels of food insecurity and suffer from higher mortality from chronic diseases, including mental illness. In Windsor approximately 33% of children under 18, or 1 in 3, live in poverty. Providing a basic income assists in ensuring their basic needs are met, including proper nutrition, and allowing children to grow healthy and reach their full potential.

The Windsor-Essex County Health Unit thanks you for your consideration.

Sincerely,



Gary McNamara
Chair, Board of Health



Theresa Marentette, RN, MCs
Chief Executive Officer, Chief Nursing Officer

<https://www.wechu.org/board-meetings/january-2019-board-meeting>

Encl.

c: Association of Local Public Health Agencies (aLPHA)
Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO)
Ontario Boards of Health
Windsor-Essex MPPs
Windsor-Essex Board of Health



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November 21, 2018

Hon. Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Doug.fordco@pc.ola.org

Hon. Lisa Macleod
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
Lisa.macleodco@pc.ola.org

Dear Premier Ford and Minister Macleod,

As chair of the board of health for the Thunder Bay District Health Unit, I am writing to convey my concern at the termination of Ontario's Basic Income Pilot and reduction of the scheduled increase to Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program from 3% to 1.5%, and urge you to reconsider your decision.

The government's current decision is a retraction of the pre-election indications to continue the project, and will place more than 4000 pilot participants in very challenging socio-economical circumstances. The pilot was provincially and nationally recognized as a pivotal opportunity to study the impact of basic income on societal, economical and health outcomes in Ontario. Significant resources have already been invested in the planning and implementation of the project; to terminate the project at this inopportune time would be wasteful especially without gathering insight from its outcomes.

The Thunder Bay District Health Unit believes that addressing issues of poverty is a public health priority, and a healthy equity and human rights issue. There is considerable research to show that individuals or households with lower income experience higher levels of food insecurity, which is linked to higher levels of adverse health and societal outcomes, compared to those with higher incomes¹. This includes morbidity and/or

mortality from chronic diseases (i.e. obesity, diabetes), mental illness (i.e. depression, anxiety, and reduced learning and productivity), infant mortality, infectious diseases, amongst others¹. In 2014, 11.9% or 594,900 Ontario households experienced food insecurity², which is defined as the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints¹. This statistic is acknowledged as an underestimate as it does not reflect households in First Nations reserves and those that are homeless². Furthermore, 64% of Ontario households reliant on social assistance were food insecure². In some cases, employment does not guarantee that a household's basic needs are met, as almost 60% of food insecure Ontario households were relying on income from wages and salaries². As a result, the estimated burden on healthcare costs from socio-economic health inequalities amounts to a staggering \$6.2 billion annually, with Canadians in the lowest income bracket accounting for approximately 60% of these costs³. The fact is, health is related to food security, which is deeply rooted in poverty. It's not just about having inadequate skills or nutrition knowledge to prepare healthy food, or that the distance to supermarkets is too far – the main reason is the lack of adequate disposable income for food².

The allocation of Thunder Bay as a designated pilot site of the Ontario Basic Income Pilot was an exciting opportunity to explore the impact of basic income in our community and to gather local level data. Poverty and food insecurity pose a risk for certain individuals in our District. Most recent data from Statistics Canada indicates that 13.8% of all households in the District of Thunder Bay are considered low-income, of which 19.8% are children aged 0 – 17⁴. This represents approximately 1 in 7 households being food insecure. As an example of how the basic income pilot positively impacts food security, I will use the most recent information from our local Nutritious Food Basket (2018; Appendix 1). The monthly cost of food for a family of four in the District of Thunder Bay is \$828.68 per month. If the family relies on Ontario Works, the income remaining for other living expenses is limited and increases risk for financial strain, whereas the same family enrolled in the basic income pilot would be in a much better position to meet their basic needs. Furthermore, the on-going effectiveness of the Guaranteed Income Supplement for

seniors provides evidence of how overall health is improved from ensuring financial security^{5,6}. As an advocate for promoting socio-economic and health equity within my community, I am supportive of the Ontario Basic Income Pilot and increased social assistance rates as it is based on evidence informed research indicating the strong relationship between income, food security and health.

I strongly urge the province to maintain the continuation of the Ontario Basic Income Pilot and the scheduled increases of Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program. The need for adequate income from basic income and social assistance rates provides socio-economic stability and equity, and is highlighted in the report: "Income Security – A Roadmap for Change"⁷.

Ontario has the opportunity to champion an initiative that could have a profound impact on informing future policies that could expand to the international level. But more importantly, it could provide the residents of Thunder Bay and Ontario with improved livelihood, healthy equity, and the opportunity to live with dignity.

Yours Sincerely,

Original Signed by

Joe Virdiramo, Chair,
Board of Health for Thunder Bay District Health Unit

cc. Michael Gravelle, MPP (Thunder Bay-Superior North)
Judith Monteith-Farrell, MPP (Thunder Bay-Atikokan)
All Ontario Boards of Health

References:

1. PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research. (2017). Household Food Insecurity in Canada: Factsheets. Accessed at: <http://proof.utoronto.ca/resources/fact-sheets/>
2. PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research. (2016). Household Food Insecurity in Canada – Research to identify policy options to reduce food insecurity. Accessed at: <http://proof.utoronto.ca/resources/proof-annual-reports/annual-report-2014/>

3. Public Health Agency of Canada. (2016) The direct economic burden of socioeconomic health inequalities in Canada: an analysis of health care costs by income level. Accessed at: http://vibrantcanada.ca/files/the_direct_economic_burden_-_feb_2016_16_0.pdf.
4. Statistics Canada. (2016). Census Profile, 2016 Census (Income). Accessed at: <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/details/page.cfm?Lang=E&Geo1=CD&Code1=3558&Geo2=PR&Code2=35&Data=Count&SearchText=thunder%20bay&SearchType=Begin&SearchPR=01&B1=Income&TABID=1>
5. Government of Canada. (2016). Canada's most vulnerable single seniors will see an increase of up to \$947 annually to the Guaranteed Income Supplement. Accessed at: <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/news/2016/06/canada-s-most-vulnerable-single-seniors-will-see-an-increase-of-up-to-947-annually-to-the-guaranteed-income-supplement.html>
6. McIntyre, L, Kwok, C, Herbert-Emery, J.C, Dutton, D.J. (2016). Impact of a guaranteed annual income program on Canadian senior's physical mental and functional health. *Can J Public Health*;107(2):e176-e182
7. Income Security Reform Working Group, First Nations Income Security Reform Working Group, Urban Indigenous Table on Income Security Reform. (2017). Income Security – A Roadmap for Change. Accessed at: https://files.ontario.ca/income_security_-_a_roadmap_for_change-english-accessible_0.pdf

Appendix 1 - Comparison of Household Income and Expenses for Families (2018)

Low-income households often live in rental housing. Using the average costs of renting in the District of Thunder Bay for 2018, and the results from the NFBS, here are five family scenarios outlining their respective monthly costs of living.

Scenarios	Family of 4 Ontario Works (2 parents; 2 children)	Family of 4 Ontario Basic Income Pilot (2 parents; 2 children)	Family of 4 Full-Time Minimum Wage (2 parents; 2 children)	Family of 4 Median Income (After Tax) (2 parents; 2 children)	Family of 3 Ontario Works (1 parent; 2 children)
Monthly Incomeⁱ	\$2601.00	\$3353.00	\$3622.00	\$7871.00	\$2382.00
Rent ⁱⁱ	\$1194.00 (3 Bdr. Apartment)	\$1194.00 (3 Bdr. Apartment)	\$1194.00 (3 Bdr. Apartment)	\$1194.00 (3 Bdr. Apartment)	\$959.00 (2 Bdr. Apartment)
Cost of Food ⁱⁱⁱ	\$828.68	\$828.68	\$828.68	\$828.68	\$595.84
Income Remaining for Other Living Expenses	\$578.32	\$1330.32	\$1599.32	\$5848.32	\$827.16

- i. Incomes (except those including the Ontario Basic Income Pilot) derived from NFBS Income Scenario Spreadsheet (May 2018), developed by the Ontario Dietitians in Public Health - Locally Driven Collaborative Project Food Insecurity Working Group
- ii. Rental cost calculations are from the Rental Market Report – Canada Mortgage and Housing Cooperation (June 2017)
- iii. Based on the NFBS for the District of Thunder Bay (May 2018)