

Health Providers Against Poverty

Backgrounder for Meeting June 28, 2006

**Expected: Dr. Sheela Basrur, Vincenza Ronaldi
Dr. Gary Bloch, Dr. Melissa Melnitzer, Anne Egger RN(EC)**

What is *Health Providers Against Poverty*?:

- An alliance of health care providers who practice in communities characterized by the serious health risks attributable to poverty.
- On a daily basis we see our clients struggling to feed themselves and their families, to pay their bills, and to maintain their housing.
- We see the profound impact poverty has on our clients' physical and mental health, and we recognize the historical unwillingness of modern health care to address social diseases such as poverty.
- We believe that poverty represents a serious, reversible threat to the health of Ontarians, and that health providers have a duty to focus their professional efforts to alleviate this threat.

Poverty for Social Assistance Recipients in Ontario:

- Welfare rates in Ontario have dropped by 40% (when inflation is taken into account) over the past 10 years.
- This government has not lived up to its promise to increase social assistance in Ontario by a significant amount. In real terms, welfare rates have continued to drop during its tenure.
- According to the Toronto Public Health Nutritious Food Basket assessment, a single person living on welfare of \$573 is \$285/month short of being able to afford even a basic nutritious diet, and is about 33% of the poverty line.
- The special diet supplement was a lifeline to many people living on welfare. With the support of the OMA, the government severely restricted access to this supplement.
- The continued claw-back of the National Child Benefit supplement from social assistance recipients is a direct insult to the health and welfare of children that disproportionately impacts those children living in the worst poverty.
- *The need to raise welfare rates has been publicly declared by health organizations including: alPHA, OPHA, RNAO, OCFP, City of Toronto Board of Health*

Issues for Discussion:

- What is the MOHLTC and Ministry of HP's current plan for addressing poverty?
- Given that poverty is obviously a public health problem, and we know you are concerned about the impact of poverty on health, what can your departments do to address it further?
 - E.g. conduct a health impact assessment, advocate for an intersectoral public health agency concerned with social determinants of health, submit an opinion to cabinet regarding the need to address these issues from a health perspective, work to raise public awareness about the health impacts of poverty
- What role can you take in working to raise awareness among health providers and organizations regarding the need to address these issues?
- What can we do to help you to advance these goals?.