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## A way to reduce poverty and health costs

March 28, 2010

### **Re:Anti-poverty advocates decry loss of food help, March 26**

The cancellation of the Special Diet Allowance program is a blow to the health and dignity of people living in extreme poverty. The government has managed to hide a cut to welfare benefits behind a moralistic campaign to paint people living on social assistance as no-good fraudsters. This is an astonishing reiteration of the misconceptions about welfare recipients we've heard for decades.

As a physician working largely with people on welfare, I have yet to meet one person who wants to stay on social assistance, or one welfare recipient who doesn't struggle every day to feed themselves. Worse, when people have chronic medical conditions, their need for decent food increases and their capacity to meet that need diminishes.

This government could meet both its goals of reducing poverty and reigning in health-care costs in one go: by increasing the incomes of people living in the most extreme poverty. Poverty is the most powerful determinant of health, and where poverty is reduced, health costs will be reduced as well.

Under this government, money is being "saved" by increasing the depth of poverty experienced by the poorest Ontarians, which will worsen their health. This is not a sound economic choice, it is a sad moral one.

*Gary Bloch MD, St. Michael's Hospital Health Centre*