

March 19, 2007

Dalton McGuinty, Premier  
Legislative Building  
Queen's Park  
Toronto, Ontario  
M7A 1A1

Dear Premier McGuinty:

The undersigned Ontario Medical Officers of Health are deeply concerned about the impact of poverty on the health of the citizens of Ontario. The relationship between poverty and poor health is clear. Individuals from low income households are more likely to report chronic illness such as heart disease, diabetes, and hypertension. Children living in low income households have poorer health and developmental outcomes on average than other children. Children's early experience with poverty affects their health not only when they are young, but also later in their lives as adults.

Adequate nutritious food is a basic pre-requisite for health and well-being. Ontario Boards of Health are required to assess the cost of nutritious food annually in local health units. These assessments of the cost of a Nutritious Food Basket clearly indicate that low income individuals and families cannot meet their daily nutritional needs as a result of the combined effects of rising food costs, inadequate income due to a low minimum wage and inadequate social assistance rates and the high cost of other essential needs such as housing and child care.

We strongly urge your government to take immediate steps to address the health impacts of poverty by ensuring that low income individuals and families have sufficient income to purchase adequate nutritious food. This could be accomplished by a combination of the following public policies:

- Increase the Ontario Works Basic Allowance benefit to include a nutrition allowance based on the cost of the annual Nutritious Food Basket, to ensure that recipients have sufficient funds to purchase nutritious food.
- Increase the Ontario Works Shelter Allowance to equal 85% of the median market rent for each local housing market as determined by annual surveys conducted by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, to ensure that recipients are not forced to spend their nutritious food benefit on housing in high cost markets
- Increase the minimum wage to \$10.00 per hour to provide increased means to purchase nutritious food for low-income workers;
- Publish annually the details of social assistance rate components and how they are determined, including the nutrition allowance portion of the Basic Allowance.

In order to further support the health of children in low income families, we also urge your government to eliminate the provincial claw-back of the National Child Benefit Supplement as promised in your election platform.

These measures should be implemented as part of a Poverty Reduction Strategy for Ontario with specific targets and timetables. Such a strategy would be one of the most important and effective health measures undertaken by your government. We would be pleased to work with you on this strategy to improve the health of Ontarians.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. McKeown', written in a cursive style.

Dr. David McKeown  
Medical Officer of Health  
Toronto Public Health

Dr. Hazel Lynn  
Medical Officer of Health  
Grey Bruce Health Unit

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Lynn Noseworthy', written in a cursive style.

Dr. A. Lynn Noseworthy  
Medical Officer of Health  
Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bob Nosal', written in a cursive style.

Dr. Bob Nosal  
Medical Officer of Health  
Halton Region Health Department

Dr. Graham Pollett  
Medical Officer of Health  
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Dr. Robin C. Williams  
Medical Officer of Health  
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Dr. Catherine Whiting  
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Dr. Pete Sarsfield  
Medical Officer of Health and Chief Executive Officer  
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Dr. David Salisbury  
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Dr. Rosana Pellizzari  
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Dr. Garry Humphreys  
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Dr. G. Allen Heimann, M.D., MHSc.  
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