

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**Health providers and anti-poverty advocates urge government to maintain Special Diet**

Today, 18 organizations issued an open letter to Minister Meilleur, calling for her commitment to maintain the Special Diet Allowance. This supplement is available to people on social assistance with health problems, and can make a big difference in their ability to afford food and other necessities.

“Despite its shortcomings, the Allowance is essential to the health of welfare recipients”, said Dr. Andrew Pinto, a physician with Health Providers Against Poverty. “Countless studies demonstrate that poor people have worse health. Part of this is due to food insecurity, which is linked to diabetes, obesity and cardiovascular disease. In our context, food insecurity is all about economic insecurity.”

Toronto Public Health has calculated that, for a single person on Ontario Works, the gap between what is received from social assistance and the cost of nutritious food is over \$400 per month.

“Eliminating the Special Diet Allowance would be a major cut to social assistance, disproportionately impacting those with existing health conditions”, says Dr. Michaela Beder, also with Health Providers Against Poverty. “We call on the government to maintain the Allowance and implement the recommendations of the Special Diet Expert Review, the Human Rights Tribunal, and the Social Assistance Review Advisory Council. Ultimately, the government must raise social assistance rates to meet the basic needs of healthy living”.

The letter was endorsed by the Registered Nurses’ Association of Ontario, the Ontario Physician Working Group on Poverty, The Stop Community Food Centre, and Voices from the Street, among others.

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