

October 15, 2008

The Honourable Dalton McGuinty, Premier
Province of Ontario
Main Legislative Building, Room 281
Toronto, ON M7A 1A4

Dear Premier McGuinty:

The results of the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit 2008 Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) survey have raised significant concerns among public health professionals regarding the level of poverty among low-income residents of Simcoe County and Muskoka District. Again this year, our local assessment of the cost of a NFB shows that low-income residents of Simcoe County and Muskoka District do not have enough money to pay the high costs of living **and** feed their families an adequate diet. This level of concern merits your attention because the information jeopardizes the government's record of achievement and the strength of its publicly stated commitment to reducing the level of poverty in the province.

The Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit has supported the initiatives your government has taken with regard to alleviating poverty in Ontario and we would welcome renewed efforts by the government and its ministries to ensure that poverty reduction remains a high priority of the government and that specific steps are taken in response to the challenges posed by the NFB survey results reported in the two publications *The Cost of Healthy Eating in Simcoe County*, Summer 2008 edition and *The Cost of Healthy Eating in Muskoka District*, Summer 2008 edition.

The relationship between poverty and poor health is clear. Poor nutrition can lead to increased risk for chronic and infectious diseases, pregnancy outcomes with greater risk for low birth weight and negative impact on the growth and development of children. It costs more to treat and manage these conditions than to prevent them by ensuring people can afford an adequate diet. Consistent investment in maintaining public health is a pre-requisite for maintaining a population that is prepared for productivity.

Low-income residents of Simcoe County and Muskoka District cannot afford an adequate diet once housing and other fixed costs are paid. We look forward to the release of the Government's anti-poverty strategy in December 2008. We hope the strategy incorporates the measures articulated in the 25 in 5: Network for Poverty Reduction Founding Declaration and its three priorities for a provincial poverty reduction action plan. A comprehensive poverty reduction strategy must include Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program rates that reflect the real cost of living and are indexed annually to reflect inflation, based on the findings of the annual Nutritious Food Basket survey and a shelter component of 85 percent of median market rent. As well, the Province of Ontario needs to implement immediately the full Ontario Child Benefit, and a \$10 per hour minimum wage which is indexed to keep pace with inflation and coupled with a review of the Employment Standards Act to ensure vulnerable workers are protected.

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We look forward to your immediate attention to address the challenges of providing a nutritious diet for low-income families and to your efforts to address the growing wealth gap in this province.

Sincerely,

Original Signed by

Dennis Roughley, Chair
Board of Health

- c. Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
- Minister of Health Promotion
- Minister of Community and Social Services
- Minister of Children and Youth Services
- Local MPP's
- Ontario Public Health Association
- Ontario Public Health Association Food Security Workgroup
- Association of Local Public Health Agencies
- Boards of Health in Ontario

Nutritious Food Basket and Poverty Reduction Strategy

Resolution 08 -09

WHEREAS a nutritious diet is a basic requirement for health and well-being;

AND WHEREAS an inadequate income is the most significant barrier to a healthy diet;

AND WHEREAS Simcoe Muskoka residents receiving social assistance or minimum wage income cannot afford a nutritious diet after paying for housing and other fixed costs;

AND WHEREAS poor nutrition impacts on child growth and development and leads to an increased risk of chronic and infectious diseases which cost more to treat and manage than to prevent;

AND WHEREAS ensuring that people have enough funds to purchase an adequate and nutritious diet is an effective disease prevention strategy;

AND WHEREAS the provincial government has established a Cabinet Committee tasked with developing a provincial poverty reduction strategy for implementation in December 2008;

AND WHEREAS there is now widespread concern that the implementation of this strategy may be delayed indefinitely due to a downturn in the provincial economy;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Simcoe Muskoka District Board of Health use a variety of communication methods to urge the provincial government to implement without delay a coordinated, long-term poverty reduction strategy that includes targets, timelines, a dedicated budget and ongoing evaluation. These communication methods will include a letter from the Board of Health to Premier McGuinty, the issuing of a press release on World Food Day, October 16, 2008 and the publication of a Medical Officer of Health newspaper column.

FURTHERMORE that a copy of the letter to Premier McGuinty and of this Resolution be forwarded to the Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, the Minister of Health Promotion, the Minister of Community and Social Services, the Minister of Children and Youth Services, local MPP's, the Ontario Public Health Association, Ontario Public Health Association Food Security Workgroup, the Association of Local Public Health Agencies and local Boards of Health requesting that they endorse the implementation without delay of a provincial poverty reduction strategy.

AND FURTHERMORE that the Board of Health endorse the 25 in 5: Network for Poverty Reduction Founding Declaration and its three priorities for a provincial Poverty Reduction Strategy (Appendix D) and communicate this endorsement via email to Jennifer Posthumus, designated contact person for the 25 in 5 Network.

Original Signed by Dennis Roughley

October 25, 2008

Chair, Board of Health