

Sent via email: lisa.macleodco@pc.ola.org

August 1, 2018

Honourable Minister Lisa MacLeod
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
80 Grosvenor Street, 6th Floor, Hepburn Block
Ministry of Community and Social Services
Toronto, ON M7A 1E9

Dear Minister MacLeod:

On behalf of the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) Board of Health, I am writing to convey our profound disappointment at your recent announcement of your intentions to cancel the Ontario Basic Income Pilot, and to urge you to reconsider this decision. Your government's change in direction from your pre-election indications of continuing the pilot will leave the more than 4000 pilot participants facing extremely challenging circumstances, which is an unethical approach to a scientific endeavor. This pilot is recognized throughout our province and internationally as a pivotal opportunity to study the impact of basic income on a range of economic, social, and health outcomes in modern day Ontario. With the extent of the societal impact of poverty, income inequality, and growing precarious employment, basic income is widely recognized as a key policy avenue for exploration to help address these issues. A great deal of time and resources have already been invested in effectively planning and beginning to implement this pilot; we feel it would be a substantial waste to terminate it so prematurely, without the opportunity to first learn from it.

SMDHU has been a vocal proponent of the basic income concept since 2015. Among other actions, we sponsored a resolution at the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHA) general meeting in May 2015, endorsing the concept of basic income and requesting that the provincial and federal governments jointly consider and investigate a basic income guarantee as a policy option for reducing poverty and income insecurity, available at [this link](#). The full backgrounder informing this resolution, and a related resolution for the Ontario Public Health Association, is available at [this link](#). In June 2016, SMDHU's Board of Health endorsed the [Responses to Food Insecurity Position Statement](#) of the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health. This statement recognizes the strong link between poverty and food insecurity and urges the investigation of a basic income for reducing these phenomena. SMDHU's Board of Health has also written on several occasions to the previous provincial government, including to provide input into the design of the basic income pilot and to acknowledge the scientifically and socially sound approach to the design decisions.

Our support of basic income is informed by evidence of the powerful link between income and health. Twelve per cent of the population of Simcoe Muskoka live in low income. Those living with a lower income in our region are at far greater risk of experiencing a lower life expectancy -- two and a half years less for females and five years less for males, compared to those with the highest income. Moreover, the prevalence of self-reported chronic diseases, such as diabetes and heart disease, are one and a half to two times higher for those living in low income compared to their higher income counterparts in our region.

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In the immediate future, we also strongly urge the Province to maintain the planned increase to social assistance rates. Current rates are highly insufficient to afford basic needs, including rent and nutritious food. The need for increased social assistance rates, as well as continuing the basic income pilot and creating policies that encourage good jobs with regular hours and benefits, is highlighted in SMDHU's campaign on food insecurity: [No Money for Food is Cent\\$less](#).

Ontario has the opportunity to continue its basic income pilot and to learn if, in fact, this policy option will help to provide people in poverty and precarious employment with greater opportunity - to live with dignity, to experience improved physical and mental health, and to fully participate in and contribute to society. We urge your government to maintain this pilot and its planned evaluation, so that future generations may benefit from this learning.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL Signed By:

Scott Warnock
Board of Health Chair
Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

SW:LS:cm

cc: Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
Honourable Christine Elliott, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Roselle Martino, Assistant Deputy Minister, Population and Public Health Division
Loretta Ryan, Executive Director, Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Pegeen Walsh, Executive Director, Ontario Public Health Association
MPPs Simcoe and Muskoka
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