



Head Office:

247 Whitewood Avenue, Unit 43
PO Box 1090
New Liskeard, ON P0J 1P0
Tel.: 705-647-4305 Fax: 705-647-5779

Branch Offices:

Englehart Tel.: 705-544-2221 Fax: 705-544-8698
Kirkland Lake Tel.: 705-567-9355 Fax: 705-567-5476

www.timiskaminghu.com

August 8, 2018

VIA EMAIL

Honourable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Premier@ontario.ca

Honourable Lisa MacLeod
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
lisa.macleodco@pc.ola.org

Honourable Christine Elliott
Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
christine.elliott@pc.ola.org

Dear Premier Ford and Ministers MacLeod and Elliott:

Re: Basic Income Research Project and Social Assistance Rate Reduction and Reform

On behalf of the Timiskaming Health Unit (THU), I am writing to express our concerns with the recent announcements to reduce income supports to Ontario's most vulnerable citizens. These announcements include stopping the Basic Income Research Project and the reduction in the scheduled social assistance rate increase.

There is substantial evidence that demonstrates the powerful relationship between income and health and social outcomes. Those with lower incomes experience higher burden of adverse outcomes compared to those with higher income. The effects of low income and of income inequality perpetuated by the current system may be felt more severely in northern areas of the province such as Timiskaming, where the median income is lower than the provincial average, a greater proportion of the population lives in low income, and access to health and social services may be more limited.¹

Reducing the negative impact of income and income inequalities is fundamental to the work of public health. The Board of Health for the Timiskaming Health Unit has previously called for and expressed support for a basic income guarantee policy and social assistance rates that reflect the actual cost of basic needs.

As such, we request that you:

- **Reconsider the decision to cancel the basic income pilot.** The basic income pilot was based on sound research, considerable public consultation, and expressed support from all provincial political parties. The basic income pilot should be maintained and evaluated at the end of its three-year duration as planned before decisions are made as to its effectiveness and viability.

- **Maintain the planned increase to social assistance rates and consider social assistance reform as an investment in society rather than a cost to society.** Current social assistance rates are insufficient as highlighted by a public health campaign on food insecurity – No Money for Food is Cent\$less.² Studies have shown that investing to eliminate poverty costs less than allowing it to persist.³ Investing to eliminate poverty saves money spent on treating the consequences of poverty in all sectors of government.
- **Act on the recommendations from the “Income Security: A Roadmap for Change” report.** The Roadmap promotes taking a fundamentally different approach to income security—putting people’s dignity, their needs, and their rights at the centre of the system.⁴ The changes proposed in this report would have a significant impact on income and health.

It is with grave concern that we learned of your governments recent announcements and we urge you to reconsider these important supports. Furthermore, as your government undertakes an accelerated plan to reform Social Assistance we ask you to consider the points above to make the most of the opportunity for the people of Ontario.

Sincerely,



Carman Kidd, Chair
Board of Health for Timiskaming Health Unit

cc: John Vanthof, Member of Provincial Parliament, Timiskaming-Cochrane
Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Helen Angus, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
All Ontario Boards of Health

References

1. Statistics Canada. 2017. Timiskaming Health Unit, [Health region, December 2017], Ontario and Ontario [Province] (table). Census Profile. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Ottawa. Released November 29, 2017. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2016/dp-pd/prof/index.cfm?Lang=E> (accessed July 24, 2018).
2. Ontario Dietitians in Public Health. *No Money fo Food is Cent\$less*. Accessed August 8 2018: <https://www.odph.ca/centsless>
3. National Council of Welfare. *The Dollars and Sense of Solving Poverty*. Ottawa, Ontario: Her Majesty the Queen in Right of Canada; 2011.
4. Income Security Reform Working Group, First Nations Income Security Reform Working Group, Urban Indigenous Table on Income Security Reform. *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change*. Toronto, Ontario; 2017.