

Submission to the Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy

to the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services

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HEALTH PROVIDERS AGAINST POVERTY

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[Health Providers Against Poverty](#) is a multidisciplinary alliance of health care providers across Ontario that works to eliminate poverty and reduce health inequities through advocacy, education and patient care.

As a group of professionals with expertise in the health impacts of poverty, we are deeply concerned by the approach that this provincial government has taken towards the income security system in this province and the nearly one million people it supports. As healthcare providers, we know that income is the most important social factor contributing to health. People experiencing poverty have a shorter life expectancy and are more likely to suffer from mental illness, addiction, cancer, heart disease, and diabetes [1]. In addition to affecting the health of individuals, poverty has major impacts on our health system as a whole. Poverty costs an estimated \$32-38 billion yearly in Ontario [2] due to increased use of health services, justice services, and lost productivity.

We believe the approach being taken will entrench people who rely on social assistance programs into deeper poverty rather than lift them out of it. And we are worried about the downstream health effects we will see in our hospitals, clinics, and emergency rooms.

As a part of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy, we recommend the following:

1. Respect the rights of people living in poverty and living with disability to participate in decisions affecting them by creating a meaningful process of consultation and co-designing of social assistance programs.
2. Reverse the over \$500 Million in cuts announced in the 2019 budget to OW and ODSP programs.
3. Maintain the current definition of disability for the Ontario Disability Support Program.
4. Reverse the cuts to the planned rate increases for Ontario Works and ODSP, and increase the rates to reflect the real costs of living, including housing, basic needs, nutritious food, transportation, and utilities including telephone and internet. At a bare minimum, retroactively implement the previously planned 3% yearly rate increases for OW and ODSP, which were slated for 2018-2020. However, a stronger step forward on the path towards fixing Ontario's broken social assistance system would be to increase the monthly rates for OW and ODSP to \$893 and \$1334 respectively, by the fall of 2020, as outlined in the Ontario Government's own *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change* 2017 report [3].
5. Implement other recommendations in the *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change* report including, but not limited to, adopting a minimum income standard, introducing a housing benefit for low income individuals, and expanding the core health benefits provided as part of OW and ODSP [3].

Sincerely,



Dr. Alissa Tedesco, MD CCFP



Dr. Jonathon Herriot, MD CCFP

Co-Chairs of Health Providers Against Poverty

References:

- [1] Tjepkema, M., Wilkins, R., Long, A. 2013. Cause-specific mortality by income adequacy in Canada: A 16-year follow-up study. *Health Reports* 24(7): 14-22.
- [2] Ontario Association of Foodbanks. 2008. The Cost of Poverty: An Analysis of the Economic Cost of Poverty in Ontario. <http://www.oafb.ca/assets/pdfs/CostofPoverty.pdf>
- [3] Income Security: A Roadmap for Change. 2007. https://files.ontario.ca/income_security_-_a_roadmap_for_change-english-accessible_0.pdf