

March 14, 2024

The Honourable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto ON, M7A 1A1

Email to: premier@ontario.ca

Dear Premier:

Re: Income-based policy interventions to effectively reduce household food insecurity (HFI)

On behalf of the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) Board of Health, I am writing to share that the SMDHU endorses the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHA) [resolution #A23-05](#) Monitoring Food Affordability in Ontario and Inadequacy of Social Assistance Rates.

The SMDHU 2023 Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) survey results indicate that many Simcoe Muskoka residents living on a limited income do not have sufficient income to purchase basic nutritious food. NFB survey results continue to demonstrate that for households with income from Ontario Disability, Ontario Works, minimum wage, Old Age Security, Canada Pension Plan and / or Guaranteed Income Supplement, the cost of food and rent alone can consume most of an individual's or family's income, and in some cases exceed it, without factoring in the cost of other basic needs. These households are food insecure, and they experience inadequate and insecure access to food due to financial constraints. To reduce household food insecurity, income solutions at all levels of government are needed to put more money in people's pockets for food and to help meet other basic needs.

HFI, inadequate or insecure access to food due to household financial constraints, is an urgent public health issue that imposes serious consequences to the health and well-being of Ontarians and the residents of Simcoe Muskoka. Individuals who are food insecure are at higher risk of diet-related diseases and are at higher risk for a wide range of chronic conditions. HFI leaves a significant mark on children's health and well-being now and into adulthood.¹⁻⁵ In Ontario, the healthcare costs of individuals who are the most food insecure can be more than double that of individuals who are food secure.^{1,5}

In 2022, HFI affected more than 2.8 million Ontarians.^{1,6} In Simcoe Muskoka, between 2021-2022, 1 in 5 households experienced food insecurity.⁶ This is the highest prevalence estimate we have ever seen. Simcoe Muskoka's 2023 food affordability monitoring results show that many residents struggle to afford food and housing. As in previous years, there is less money left after residents paid for food and rent than the year before, and in many cases, people are facing deficits.⁷

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Research indicates that income-based responses are needed to address household food insecurity. Sufficient income to meet basic needs supports individuals to be physically and mentally healthy, to make meaningful contributions to society, and lead productive lives.^{1,4} Effective income-based policy interventions to reduce food insecurity could offset considerable public expenditures on healthcare and improve overall health by reducing demands on healthcare services, decreasing healthcare costs, creating more equitable communities, reducing social isolation and stigma, supporting economic development, improving community connectedness and enhancing student learning and success.¹⁻⁵

The SMDHU has been engaging with community partners for many years to raise awareness and encourage action on income-based policy solutions. In May 2023, the SMDHU Board of Health passed a resolution endorsing a set of income-based policy interventions to effectively reduce HFI that can be actioned at the municipal, provincial and/or federal level (e.g., raise social assistance rates to match real living costs indexed to inflation, implement a basic income initiative, lower taxes for those living with low income, implement employment standards that support jobs with livable wages, regular hours and benefits).

In addition to the actions recommended in the aPHa resolution, SMDHU also urges the provincial government to meet commitments outlined in [Ontario's poverty reduction strategy](#) (2020-2025) and continue to report regularly on achievements; enhance workplace legislation that supports jobs with livable wages, regular hours and benefits, increase investment in public initiatives that make life more affordable for lower income populations (e.g., attainable housing), and work with the federal government to implement a Basic Income initiative.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. Income-based policy interventions are effective, preserve dignity, give choice of which foods to buy, and ensure the basic right to food. We urge you to take action on income-based policy solutions that will reduce food insecurity.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL Signed By:

Ann-Marie Kungl
Chair, Board of Health
Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

AK:CG:CS:VH:sh

cc: The Honorable Sylvia Jones, Deputy Premier and Minister of Health
The Honorable Michael Parsa, Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health
Members of Provincial Parliament in Simcoe Muskoka
Members of Parliament in Simcoe Muskoka
Municipal Councils in Simcoe Muskoka
aPHa

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