

Household Food Insecurity – Letter to take action on income solutions

Dear

writing to you as an deeply concerned about a serious public health problem – household food insecurity (HFI). In 2023, this problem affected more than 8.7 million Canadians including 2.1 million children. Food insecurity remains a large and persistent problem. The estimates are the highest in almost twenty years of monitoring. urge you to stand behind income policies that have been proven to effectively reduce household food insecurity.

HFI is the inadequate or insecure access to food due to household financial constraints. Individuals and families struggling to put food on the table also struggle to afford other basic needs. HFI is a sign of poverty and is caused by the lack of adequate and stable incomes required for Canadians to make ends meet. Poverty should not exist in a country as wealthy as Canada, where all citizens should be able to meet their most basic human needs.

In Simcoe Muskoka, the situation is getting worse, with one in three households (30.7%) experiencing food insecurity. This is a **significant** increase from 2022 (18%, one in five), and higher than the provincial estimates (24.2%, one in four households). Thousands of children in our region go to bed or school hungry every day; the problem is at its worst level ever.

Not being able to afford adequate food has profound adverse effects on people's physical and mental health and their ability to lead productive lives. The health consequences of household food insecurity place a large burden on our healthcare system. Using Ontario healthcare cost data, it has been estimated that severely food insecure households in Ontario incur an additional \$150M per year in healthcare costs compared to those in food secure households. Effective income policies to reduce household food insecurity could keep people healthy and offset considerable public expenditures on health care in Canada. They could also improve overall health by ensuring everyone has enough food to meet their dietary needs, reducing demands on healthcare services, creating more equitable communities, reducing social isolation and stigma, supporting economic development, improving community connectedness and enhancing student learning and success.

Evidence shows that food charity is NOT a solution to household food insecurity. Food banks and other food access programs may provide temporary food relief but do not address the underlying issue of inadequate income. Only about one-quarter of households experiencing food insecurity go to food banks and for those who do use them, food insecurity does not go away.

Income policy solutions to reduce poverty and end household food insecurity are urgently needed. Proven policy solutions include:

- Implementing a basic income guarantee.
- Increasing social assistance rates to match real living costs, indexed to inflation.
- Reducing income tax rates for the lowest income households.
- Increasing investment in the Canada Child Benefit.
- Enhancing legislation that supports good jobs with livable wages, regular hours and benefits.
- Increasing investment in public initiatives that make life more affordable for lower income populations (e.g., attainable housing)

Such income policies address the underlying causes of poverty and household food insecurity, preserve dignity, improve equity, give choice of which foods to buy and ensure the basic right to food.

As an elected representative, I call on you to make poverty reduction and ending household food insecurity a priority. These are urgent public health problems that, if not addressed, will continue to have serious consequences for the health and well-being of citizens, economic progress, and our reputation as a province and country. I urge you to stand behind and take action on effective income policy solutions that will successfully reduce poverty and household food insecurity. You have the power to make our province and country a better place for everyone to lead healthier and happier lives.

Sincerely,

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