

Madeleine Meilleur  
Minister of Community and Social Services

Laurel Broten  
Minister of Children and Youth Services

Gail Nyberg  
Chair, Social Assistance Review Advisory Council

April 8<sup>th</sup>, 2010

Dear Minister Meilleur, Minister Broten and Ms. Nyberg:

**Re: Review of the Social Assistance Rates and its Impact on Health**

The Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance (OCDPA), consisting of over 30 member organizations, is the province's collective voice on effective chronic disease prevention policy and programming. We acknowledge that **poverty** is one of the root causes of health inequity related to chronic diseases and would like to commend you for your commitment to reduce poverty and to examine the basis of Social Assistance Rates.

The Alliance would like to comment on the review of Social Assistance Rates, part of Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy, *Breaking the Cycle*. As representatives of key non-profit health organizations, we know that increased social assistance rates will allow the more than 1.5 million Ontarians living below the poverty line to eat well, be more active and have a significant positive impact on overall population health. This will in turn reduce pressures on the overextended public health care system and contribute to the current government's stated goal of making Ontarians the healthiest Canadians.

A cornerstone to any estimate of adequate social assistance rates is the Cost of a Nutritious Food Basket which is calculated annually by Ontario's 26 health units through a local survey of food costs based upon a standardized protocol. We advise that it is critical that this annual estimated cost of the nutritious food basket be used to inform the rates given to our most vulnerable citizens.


In addition to annualized food costs which are part of the present Basic Allowance, we believe that the allowance for transportation, clothing and personal care items should be adjusted for inflation annually.

Furthermore, since housing costs demand the largest portion of monthly income, we ask that the shelter component maximum for Ontario Works (OW) clients be set at 85 – 100 percent of the median market rent for each local housing market, based on annual surveys conducted by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

The Poverty Reduction Act 2009 requires that governments develop poverty reduction strategies at least every five years and mandates the government to consult with those living in poverty before developing the strategies. We recommend that the social assistance review, a component of the poverty reduction strategy, be undertaken based on the same principle of inclusiveness and engagement of those affected.

Our Alliance looks forward to the review of Social Assistance Rates and in particular the inclusion of indexed local food and shelter costs as new rates are established.

Sincerely,



Linda Stewart  
Co-Chair  
Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance



Norman Giesbrecht  
Co-Chair  
Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance