

Put Food in the Budget

Promote health and fight poverty

Nutritious food is essential for good health. As part of our belief that fighting poverty is the best medicine money can buy, the 25in5 Network for Poverty Reduction, in partnership with the Association of Local Public Health Agencies, is launching an Ontario-wide campaign for a **Healthy Food Supplement**.

We are calling for the immediate introduction of a \$100 monthly supplement to the basic needs allowance for all adults receiving social assistance. The existence of widespread food insecurity and chronic illness related to poor nutrition is the result of our society's collective negligence and a failure of public policy.

For the last ten years the Ontario Government has mandated the province's 36 local health units to collect and report the annual cost of a Nutritious Food Basket in their areas. These reports consistently show a vast gap between the level of benefits received by people on social assistance and their ability to meet their basic food requirements along with other necessities of life.

There is no current formula for establishing social assistance benefit levels and the basic needs allowance is set far below actual market costs. We are pleased the government has created its Social Assistance Review to evaluate the true cost of living in communities across Ontario and we look forward to a new benchmark for income adequacy in setting benefit rates. This is a hopeful development. And hope matters.

In the meantime, it is critical to the health and wellbeing of social assistance recipients that the government takes a first step toward income adequacy by introducing a **\$100 per month Healthy Food Supplement**. The Supplement will serve as a down payment in closing the monthly gap of food deficiency while reducing the negative health effects of poverty.

It will also stimulate spending in our local economies. As a recent Globe and Mail editorial says, the idea of putting money in the hands of low-income people who will spend it in their communities "is an idea with remarkably wide consensus... **In these times, putting money in the hands of those who need it is good policy.**"

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