

DRAFT LETTER

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

The Honourable Sylvia Jones
Deputy Premier and Minister of Health
Ministry of Health
777 Bay Street, College Park, 5th floor
Toronto ON M7A 2J3

The Honourable Michael Parsa
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services – Central Region
6733 Mississauga Road #200
Mississauga, ON L5N 6L5

Dear Premier Ford, Deputy Premier and Minister Jones and Minister Parsa:

Re: Increasing Social Assistance Rates to Address Food Insecurity

On behalf of the City of Stratford Councillors, we are writing to convey our strong support for the call to index social assistance rates to the cost of living for all Ontarians.

Ontarians receiving social assistance have an extremely high risk for food insecurity. In 2021, 67.2% of Ontario households reliant on social assistance were food insecure.¹ Household food insecurity (HFI) is inadequate or insecure access to food due to household financial constraints. HFI is an urgent public health, human rights, and social justice problem that, if not addressed, will continue to have serious consequences for Ontario's economic progress as well as the health and well-being of residents.

Social assistance benefits are inadequate to meet recipients' basic needs. When people are not able to meet their basic needs, they cannot achieve the physical, mental and social well-being needed to sustain long-term employment. In a province as wealthy as Ontario, it is unacceptable and unjust that we've been on a nearly 30-year trajectory of worsening quality of life for individuals living on the Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) and Ontario Works (OW).

OW rates have not been increased since 2018, are not based on the actual costs of living, are not indexed to inflation, and do not protect vulnerable citizens from living in dire situations without the money they need to buy food. While ODSP rates increased

¹ <https://proof.utoronto.ca/>

by 5% in 2022, an increase from \$200 per month to \$1,000 per month on employment earning cap, and an adjustment for inflation beginning July 2023, ODSP falls well below the actual cost of living.²³⁴ We strongly urge the Government of Ontario to index social assistance rates to the cost of living, as outlined in *Provincial Policy Levers to Reduce Household Food Insecurity*⁵, proven to effectively reduce HFI.

Health units monitor food affordability according to the Ontario Public Health Standards. Huron Perth Public Health recently presented the results of their 2022 [report](#), which draws attention to the inadequacy of current social assistance rates. Households with social assistance as their main income do not have enough money for the costs of living, including food. **Appendix A** illustrates that monthly OW and ODSP rates in addition to all potential tax credits (assuming individuals file income tax returns). **Rates fall short of covering only the cost of rent and food.** Other basic costs of living (e.g., clothing, personal care, transportation, phone, etc.) are not included. **This data clearly indicates the extreme inadequacy of social assistance rates.**

2.34 million Ontarians who experienced HFI in 2021.⁶ Additionally, 14.6% of Huron Perth households experienced food insecurity in 2021.⁷ The situation has undoubtedly worsened in 2022 with the extraordinary rate of food inflation. In Ontario, the price of food purchased from stores in September 2022 was 11.5% higher than in September 2021⁸, rising at a rate not seen since the early 1980s.

Municipalities feel the impact of poverty at the local level, as we struggle to adequately support residents who are unable to make ends meet. Funding and administering public and social services, including targeted supports for low-income households is challenging at the best of times, but even more-so now in the current state of COVID-19 recovery and sky-rocking inflation rates. Ensuring low-income households have enough money to meet their basic needs is essential for their health and the well-being of our communities.

Ensuring people have enough money for food improves health, reduces demands on health care services, decreases health care costs, creates more equitable communities, reduces social isolation and stigma, supports economic development, and improves community connectedness. There is strong evidence showing food insecurity can be addressed through policy changes that improve the incomes of low-income households.

The Government of Ontario holds the power to reduce food insecurity and extreme poverty, especially among households receiving social assistance across the province.

² <https://incomesecurity.org/owand-odsp-rates-and-the-ocb-as-of-september-2022/>

³ <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1002233/ontarios-plan-to-build-supporting-strongerprovince-and-economy>

⁴ <https://communitylivingontario.ca/key-changes-announced-in-the-2022-ontario-falleconomic-update/>

⁵ <https://proof.utoronto.ca/resource/provincial-policy-levers-to-reduce-household-food-insecurity/>.

⁶ <https://proof.utoronto.ca/>

⁷ <https://www.odph.ca/upload/membership/groups/10/on-food-insecurity-estimates-2023-02-01.pdf>

⁸ <https://doi.org/10.25318/1810000401-eng>

Our council recommends implementing social assistance rates based on local costs of basic needs, which could improve incomes for people on social assistance, and would substantially improve health and reduce health care costs. From a municipal perspective, we urge you to take action for the health of our residents and to ease the burden of poverty on our municipality.

Sincerely,

cc.

Rhonda Ehgoetz, Warden Perth East
Jim Aitcheson, Councillor Perth South
Matt Duncan, Councillor North Perth
Todd Kasenberg, Councillor North Perth
Doug Kellum, Deputy Mayor North Perth
Hugh McDermid, Councillor Perth East
Walter McKenzie, Councillor West Perth
Sue Orr, Councillor
Jerry Smith, Councillor
Dean Trentowsky, Councillor

Appendix A

Income Scenario	Monthly Income	Cost of Rent	Cost of Food	Funds Remaining
Single person on Ontario Works	\$863	\$742	\$386	-\$265
Single person on Ontario Disability Support Program	\$1,309	\$1,258	\$386	-\$335