

December 24, 2024

The Honourable Jenna Sudds
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The Honourable Mark Holland
Minister of Health
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Dear Honourable Ministers:

Re: Federal Strategy to Address Severity and Prevalence of Household Food Insecurity

At its December 11, 2024 meeting, the Board of Health for Peterborough Public Health received a presentation and [report](#) on the concerning impacts of household food insecurity on mental and physical health of community members, including families with children.

Household food insecurity refers to inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints.¹ In Peterborough County and City, nearly 1 in 5 households faced food insecurity between 2021-2023.² Across the ten provinces between 2021-2023, there has been an increase in both prevalence and severity of food insecurity.³ The rate of severe food insecurity has almost doubled, meaning that a growing number of Canadians are reducing their food intake, skipping meals, and even going for days without eating, because they don't have enough money for food.^{3,4} For every four children facing food insecurity in 2023, three of them lived in moderate or severely food insecure households, forced to make compromises in quality/quantity of food, or miss meals due to not enough money for food.^{3,4} This trend of increasing severity is alarming, due to the association between higher severity of food insecurity and more serious health consequences, such as early mortality.⁵ Food insecurity can also have negative, long-lasting impacts on child health and well-being.⁵

Household food insecurity is an income problem that requires income solutions.⁶ While there are several policies that support incomes of Canadians, there is evidence that these policies could be more effectively designed to reduce household food insecurity. For example, evidence demonstrates that when the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) was introduced in 2016, it lowered the severity of food insecurity especially for households with the lowest incomes.⁷ However, research also indicates that the Canada Child Benefit could be designed to address household food insecurity more effectively.⁸ Below are examples of specific recommendations from networks and researchers across Canada:

- **Increase CCB for lowest income families:**

Increasing the child benefit for the lowest income families could help to address food insecurity prevalence and severity. Organizations and networks such as [Campaign 2000](#), [Children First Canada](#), [PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research](#), and [Ontario Dietitians in Public Health](#) have recommended supplements to the CCB, and/or increasing CCB, to protect children from poverty and improve child health:

- Campaign 2000 and PROOF recommended introduction of a CCB end of poverty supplement to significantly decrease child poverty and improve children’s health, in a Submission to the Standing Committee on Health (HESA) on Children’s Health.⁹
- The Ontario Dietitians in Public Health recommended the following in the 2023 federal pre-budget consultation: “That the government increase the Canada Child Benefit (CCB) amount for low-income families.”¹⁰
- Campaign 2000 and the 2024 Raising Canada report recommend development of a non-taxable Canada Child Benefit End of Poverty Supplement (CCB-EndPov) for families experiencing deep poverty, which would provide an additional \$8,500 per year to a family with an earned income of less than \$19,000 for the first child, and scaled reductions for additional children.”^{11, 12}

- **Remove the reduction in CCB for children ages 6-18:**

Research conducted by PROOF Food Insecurity Policy Research at the University of Toronto indicated that matching CCB amounts provided for children under 6, with those for children 6 and over for families with the greatest risk of food insecurity, would create a reduction in the probability of food insecurity for these families.⁸

- The Ontario Dietitians in Public Health recommended the following in their 2023 federal pre-budget consultation submission: “That the government equal CCB amounts for families with children over 6 years old so that they are not receiving less when their children turn 6.”¹³

The example of the Canada Child Benefit demonstrates the importance of designing income policies to address household food insecurity, for maximum impact. A federal food insecurity strategy could allow for income policies to be intentionally designed for this purpose. It is important to note that costs for goods and services have had large increases in 2022 and 2023,¹⁴ when some of the above recommendations were developed. An effective food insecurity strategy should ensure that sufficient income is provided to cover basic needs, in the midst of inflation.

Food insecurity and income strategies should also address Indigenous Food Sovereignty. Indigenous health inequities are connected with complex historical and ongoing acts of colonization, and restricted access to traditional lands, water, and food sources. Indigenous Peoples strengths, resilience, and wisdom should be supported through allyship towards Indigenous self-determination, Food Sovereignty, and positive community-led changes.

Thank you for your attention and for exploring how income policies may be intentionally designed to address household food insecurity, and support the health and well-being of children, families, and communities.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Councillor Joy Lachica
Chair, Board of Health

cc: Local MPs
Chief Keith Knott, Curve Lake First Nation
Chief Laurie Carr, Hiawatha First Nation
Association of Local Public Health Agencies
Ontario Boards of Health

References

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