

2005 aPHa Resolution A05-018

TITLE Adequate Nutrition for Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program Participants and Low Wage Earners

SPONSOR: Council of Ontario Medical Officers of Health

WHEREAS the 2001 aPHa RESOLUTION NO. A01-19 - Ontario Works Allowances and Adequate Nutrition endorses that “the Government of Ontario be urged to review and ensure that the Basic Allowance portion of Ontario Works Financial Assistance allows for adequate nutrition”;

WHEREAS The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care recommends that information about the cost of a Nutritious Food Basket be used on an ongoing basis to promote and support policy development to increase access to nutritious food;

WHEREAS in 1995, Ontario Works (OW) allowances were reduced by 21.6%, Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) allowances were frozen, and both have since been increased by only 3%;

WHEREAS these reductions to social assistance rates, combined with a 20% increase in inflation since 1995, have resulted in a decrease of 35% in the purchasing power of OW participants;

WHEREAS a family of four receiving OW benefits is eligible to receive a maximum allowance of \$1,215.00 per month to cover all expenses including food, rent, utilities, clothing and other necessities;

WHEREAS the maximum minimum wage paid to an experienced adult worker in Ontario is \$7.45 per hour and this rate is only expected to increase to \$8.00 per hour in 2007. A full-time worker (40 hrs/week) can be expected to earn \$1,222.00 per month to cover all expenses including health care costs in the absence of employer-provided health benefits;

WHEREAS in 2004, the average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Ontario represents a substantial portion of these monthly earnings (e.g. \$655.00 per month in the City of Greater Sudbury and \$1,052.00 in the City of Toronto);

WHEREAS Nutritious Food Basket measures continue to indicate that the Basic Allowance portion of OW and ODSP payments is unlikely to provide for adequate nutrition for individuals and families after shelter costs are taken into account. For the province of Ontario, it cost an average of \$122.83 per week in 2004 to feed a reference family of four, an increase of over 10.5% since 2000;

WHEREAS 322,911 individuals visited Ontario food banks in 2004, representing a 5% increase in food bank use since 2003, and it is known that 54% of Canadians who visited food banks reported social assistance as their primary source of income;

WHEREAS recent grassroots efforts supported by many health care providers to exploit the Special Diet Supplement for OW and ODSP participants represents a desperate measure that illustrates the depth of concern over the adequacy of social assistance levels for basic nutritional requirements;

WHEREAS adequate nutrition is essential for proper growth and development as well as a significant factor in preventing many chronic diseases including cancer;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Government of Ontario be further urged to review the adequacy of Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program rates from a health perspective and that allowances for basic needs and shelter be based on actual current representative costs;

AND FURTHER THAT the Government of Ontario be urged to review the current minimum wage from a health perspective and establish a living wage for all Ontario workers;

AND FURTHER THAT the Premier of Ontario, the Ministers of Community and Social Services, Health and Long-Term Care, and Health Promotion and the Chief Medical Officer of Health are so advised.

Action from Conference:

MOVED: R. Pellizzari (MOH- PERTH)

CARRIED

SECONDED: F. Scott (AMOH – TORONTO)