

1/9/2006

Hon. Sandra Pupatello  
Minister of Community and Social Services  
Hepburn Block 6th Flr  
80 Grosvenor St  
Toronto, ON M7A 1E9

Hon. Steve Peters  
Minister of Labour  
14th Flr  
400 University Ave  
Toronto, ON M7A 1T7

Honourable Ministers,

**Re. alPHa Resolution A05-18 - Adequate Nutrition for Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program Participants and Low Wage Earners**

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On behalf of member Medical Officers of Health, Boards of Health and Affiliate organizations of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa), I am writing today to introduce alPHa's Resolution on Adequate Nutrition for Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program Participants and Low Wage Earners (A05-18, attached).

Since 1995, the purchasing power of Ontarians relying on some form of social assistance has decreased significantly as rates have been dramatically cut as costs have risen. The recent 3% increase to assistance rates is a small step considering the original cut was over 21%. The recent grassroots effort to make as many social assistance recipients as possible eligible for the Special Dietary Allowance clearly illustrated the inadequacy of the basic rate.

More alarmingly, even a full-time job at minimum wage yields annual earnings for a single worker that fall below even the lowest accepted Low Income Cut Off (also known as the "poverty line") in Ontario.

Your government has set a goal to make Ontarians the healthiest Canadians. This goal is unreachable unless more is done to address the basic needs of Ontario's poor, working or otherwise. Living below the poverty line is by definition being unable to meet these needs, and this inability is one of the most significant causes of poor health.

We are therefore urging your Ministries to begin work on raising social assistance rates and minimum wages to levels that provide for adequate nutrition, shelter and other basics for all Ontarians. We look forward to a response at your earliest convenience.

Yours truly,

Linda Stewart,  
Executive Director

**Copy:** Hon. Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario  
Hon. George Smitherman, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care  
Dr. Sheela Basrur, Chief Medical Officer of Health

**Encl.**

## 2005 aPHa Resolution A05-18

### **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