

Hon. Dalton McGuinty
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Bldg
Rm 281
Queen's Park
Toronto, ON M7A 1A1

March 4, 2009

Dear Premier McGuinty,

Re. alPHa Resolutions on Poverty Reduction

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 to congratulate you on the recent introduction of Bill 152, the Poverty Reduction Act and to inform you of resolutions related to poverty reduction that were passed by the membership of alPHa at its October 2008 meeting.

We believe that these interventions will be essential components of the broader government strategy to act decisively to alleviate the effects of poverty, most notably its significant detriments to health.

The resolutions are attached and summarized as follows:

A08-9 Back-to-School and Winter Clothing Allowances for Children in Families on Social Assistance

We are urging the provincial government to continue to issue both the back-to-school and the winter clothing allowances; and that these allowances be paid 100% by the Province of Ontario. Spreading these amounts across the annual total virtually guarantees that these dollars will be used for things other than seasonal clothing, as social assistance rates are presently insufficient to cover the basics.

A08-10 Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy

This resolution calls for a government commitment to implement a coordinated, long-term poverty strategy with targets, timelines, a dedicated budget and ongoing evaluation in order to achieve sustained results, including meeting a target of reducing 2005 poverty rates by 25% by 2012 and 50% by 2017. alPHa endorses the content and recommendations of the Campaign 2000 discussion paper, *A Poverty Reduction Strategy for Ontario*. We congratulate your government for producing the plan, and now urge you to implement the strategy in order to start achieving real reductions in poverty levels that have remained unacceptably constant since the pledge to eliminate child poverty in Canada was made in the House of Commons 20 years ago.

A08-11 Poverty Reduction Strategy Linked to Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program Base Funding

The Association of Local Public Health Agencies urges the Government of Ontario to ensure that the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction identifies the HBHC Program as a critical intervention in the poverty reduction strategy. This program is slowly eroding due to ongoing funding inadequacy, and this is a direct threat to the long-term health of our youngest and most vulnerable citizens.

A08-12 Provincial Dental Program

The Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) urges the provincial government to immediately implement the dental program for low income families as promised in the 2008 provincial budget.

Once again, we congratulate you for the commitment that you have made and the steps that you have already taken to begin to address the intolerable level of poverty that exists in Ontario. I look forward to working with you to achieve the aims of these resolutions as part of an effective and measurable reduction of poverty and concrete improvement in quality of life for all Ontarians.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL SIGNED

Linda Stewart,
Executive Director

Copy The Honourable Deb Matthews, Chair, Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction,
Minister of Children and Youth Services
The Honourable George Smitherman, Minister of Energy and Infrastructure
The Honourable Margaret Best, Minister of Health Promotion
The Honourable Chris Bentley, Attorney General
The Honourable David Caplan, Minister of Health and Long Term Care
The Honourable Kathleen Wynn, Minister of Education
The Honourable Dwight Duncan, Minister of Finance
The Honourable Madeliene Meilleur, Minister of Community and Social Services
The Honourable John Milloy, Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities
The Honourable Michael Chan, Minister of Citizenship and Immigration
The Honourable Jim Watson, Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
MPP Bas Balkissoon, Parliamentary Assistant, Minister of Health and Long Term Care
MPP Bruce Crozier, Chair of the Committee of the Whole House
MPP Carol Mitchell, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
MPP David Oraziotti, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Education
MPP Lou Rinaldi, Parliamentary Assistant to the Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural
Affairs

Enclosures

ALPHA RESOLUTION A08-9

TITLE: **Back-to-School and Winter Clothing Allowances for Children in Families on Social Assistance**

SPONSOR: **Hastings and Prince Edward Counties Board of Health**

WHEREAS the province has implemented the Ontario Child Benefit with monthly payments scheduled to begin in July 2008; and

WHEREAS the implementation of the Ontario Child Benefit will restructure social assistance and the back-to-school and winter clothing allowances will be eliminated from Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) benefits; and

WHEREAS the back-to-school and winter clothing allowances serve a specific need for families receiving social assistance; and

WHEREAS families receiving social assistance do not have adequate finances and will not have sufficient monthly income to allow them to save money to address these particular needs; and

WHEREAS families receiving social assistance and purchasing school supplies and winter clothing for their children will have even less ability to purchase healthy foods;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Association of Local Public Health Agencies call upon the provincial government to continue to issue both the back-to-school and the winter clothing allowances;

AND FURTHER THAT these allowances be paid 100% by the Province of Ontario.

ACTION FROM CONFERENCE:

Moved: M. Leduc (Eastern Ontario)

Seconded: J. Albanese (Northwestern)

Resolution CARRIED

ALPHA RESOLUTION A08-10

TITLE: Ontario Poverty Reduction Strategy

SPONSOR: Board of Directors of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies

WHEREAS strong associations between poverty and risks to health, including low birth weight, infant mortality, respiratory conditions, obesity, oral health, developmental outcomes, and a range of chronic diseases have been repeatedly demonstrated; and

WHEREAS almost one in every six Ontario children is growing up in poverty and 132,000 rely on food banks every month¹, despite Ontario's status as one of the most prosperous jurisdictions in the world; and

WHEREAS there is clear evidence that a strong economy alone is not enough to significantly reduce overall poverty rates; and

WHEREAS there has been no change in child poverty rates in Canada since a 1989 all-party House of Commons resolution to end child poverty in Canada by the year 2000 was passed; and

WHEREAS the November 2007 Liberal Throne Speech contained a pledge to establish government targets for reducing poverty within the next 12 months; and

WHEREAS the Ontario Government has responded by establishing the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction, tasked with developing "poverty indicators and targets, and a focused strategy on reducing child poverty and lifting more families out of poverty; and

WHEREAS successful poverty reduction strategies have been implemented in the United Kingdom and Ireland that have reduced child poverty by 25% between 1999 and 2004 in the former and the overall poverty rate to less than 5% in the latter;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) call for a government commitment to implement a coordinated, long-term poverty strategy with targets, timelines, a dedicated budget and ongoing evaluation in order to achieve sustained results, including meeting a target of reducing 2005 poverty rates by 25% by 2012 and 50% by 2017.

AND FURTHER THAT alPHa endorse the content and recommendations of the Campaign 2000 discussion paper, *A Poverty Reduction Strategy for Ontario*.

ACTION FROM CONFERENCE:

Moved: V. Sterling (Toronto)
Seconded: R. Pellizzari (Peterborough)

Resolution CARRIED

¹ Campaign 2000, A Poverty Reduction Strategy for Ontario

ALPHA RESOLUTION A08-11

TITLE: Poverty Reduction Strategy Linked to Healthy Babies Healthy Children Program Base Funding

SPONSOR: Simcoe Muskoka Board of Health

WHEREAS in the winter of 2008, the Government of Ontario announced the establishment of The Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction, led by the Honourable Deb Matthews to develop a focused poverty reduction strategy by the end of 2008 to ensure all have increased opportunities for success; and

WHEREAS “Ontario’s Poverty Reduction Plan” (Government of Ontario, 2008) identified that The Best Start Plan is designed to make sure that children are ready to learn by the time they start Grade One, and that “the Plan includes: The Healthy Babies Healthy Children program that gives families with new babies information on parenting and child development from before birth up to age six”; and

WHEREAS the Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) Program’s vision is consistent with the government’s vision and commitment to poverty reduction; and

WHEREAS HBHC Program public health nurses identify risks that prevent healthy child development and achievement of optimal potential including parental high risk situations (e.g. substance misuse, mental illness, poverty, housing and food instability); and

WHEREAS through the HBHC ongoing intensive home visiting program public health nurses provide counselling, health teaching, case management, referrals and coordination of services; and

WHEREAS public health nurses and lay home visitors promote healthy birth outcomes, teach healthy child growth and development, enhance parents’ self-esteem and provide them with referrals to community programs that enhance the child’s optimal potential and facilitate opportunities for success; and

WHEREAS HBHC program benefits are likely to have the most positive and far-reaching impacts on low-income families due to a strong association with developmental risk factors; and

WHEREAS HBHC base funding and minimal annual increases over the past several years have been insufficient to maintain service levels under this program; and

WHEREAS the HBHC Program has been identified as a 100% funded program through the Ministry of Children and Youth Services;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Association of Local Public Health Agencies urge the Government of Ontario to ensure that the Cabinet Committee on Poverty Reduction identifies the HBHC Program as a critical intervention in a poverty reduction strategy;

AND FURTHER THAT the Government of Ontario recognize that the HBHC Program provides services that Ontario's families require, particularly low income families, that assist families to overcome the impact of poverty, provide children with a healthy start in life, and enhance opportunities for life-long success contributing to a strong Ontario economy;

Resolution A08-11 continued

AND FURTHER THAT the Government of Ontario provide a significant increase to base funding to cover the full costs of delivery for all eligible clients for HBHC Programs along with annual increases to maintain service delivery to complement the poverty reduction strategy;

AND FURTHER THAT the Association of Local Public Health Agencies utilize the results of the HBHC alpha survey conducted with its member boards of health to inform the development of an advocacy strategy focused on funding for the Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) Program;

AND FURTHER THAT the Association of Local Public Health Agencies work in partnership with other agencies or organizations regarding further advocacy strategies in support of the HBHC program.

ACTION FROM CONFERENCE:

Moved: D. McKeown (Toronto)
Seconded: V. Blackmore (Middlesex-London)

Resolution CARRIED AS AMENDED



ALPHA RESOLUTION A08-12

TITLE: Provincial Dental Program

SPONSOR: Toronto Board of Health

WHEREAS low income Ontarians in need of dental care to relieve pain and suffering require assistance now;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) urge the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the Provincial Poverty Reduction Committee and the Premier of Ontario to immediately implement the dental program for low income families as promised in the 2008 provincial budget.

ACTION FROM CONFERENCE:

Moved: R. Pellizzari (Peterborough)

Seconded: B. Hughes (Timiskaming)

Resolution CARRIED