



Put Food in the Budget

Promote health and fight poverty

Cross-Community Campaign February-March, 2009

February 19 – TORONTO – Dr. David McKeown, Toronto Medical Officer of Health, Nick Saul, the Stop Community Food Centre, and Janet Gasparini, Social Planning Network of Ontario launch the Put Food in the Budget campaign at The Stop before more than 25 participants in The Stop’s breakfast program and covered by reporters of the major broadcast and print media in Toronto. Multiple follow-up media interviews are conducted and several radio and TV programs follow up on the campaign. The first entries in the campaign’s “100 Words on a \$100” are made to the PFIB web page in both postings and video clip form (www.povertywatchontario.ca/put-food-in-the-budget/ ; <http://wx.toronto.ca/inter/it/newsrel.nsf/9a3dd5e2596d27af85256de400452b9b/596a74b35b7299d9852575610064e0b6?OpenDocument>).

February 26 – TORONTO -- The Association of Local Public Health Agencies (aLPHa) announces its partnership with the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction “in an Ontario-wide campaign to urge the Ontario government to add a Healthy Food Supplement to the Basic Needs Allowance for all adult recipients of social assistance, as part of its Spring 2009 budget.” Releasing data on the cost of the Nutritious Food Basket compared to social assistance incomes in 36 public health units across the province, Dr. Charles Gardner, aLPHa President, says that the \$100 Healthy Food Supplement “would demonstrate commitment by the Ontario Government to help the most vulnerable even in tough economic times.” (www.alphaweb.org)

March 3 – TORONTO – The Ontario Public Health Association representing more than 3,000 public health professionals and the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health issue a joint letter urging Premier McGuinty to include the Healthy Food Supplement in the provincial budget, saying, “We know that \$100 per month falls short of what is needed to purchase a healthy diet. However, it does begin to close the gap between current social assistance rates and the cost of basic needs.” (www.opha.on.ca/media/news.shtml#foodbudget ; www.osnpnh.on.ca/communications/index.php)

March 5 – CORNWALL – Dr. Paul Roumeliotis, Medical Officer of Health for the Eastern Ontario Health Unit, in conjunction with Dr. Mehroon Kassam of the Social Development Council of Cornwall and Area and Roni Summers-Wickens of the Social Planning Network of Ontario launched the local campaign for Put Food in the Budget in support of a \$100 monthly Healthy Food Supplement. Dr. Roumeliotis reported on the cost of a Nutritious Food basket in Cornwall and the inadequate incomes of social assistance recipients to eat healthy diets. “We need to tell the McGuinty government collectively, as a voice, that we need help,” Dr. Roumeliotis said, “We’re not asking to subsidize big-screen TVs, we’re asking to subsidize food.” A number of social assistance recipients talked about the struggle to stay healthy on poor diets for lack of adequate incomes.

(www.eohu.ca/media/view_release_e.php?pressID=87)

March 10 – THUNDER BAY – The Thunder Bay District Health Unit joined the alpha campaign for a Healthy Food Supplement in a joint announcement with the Thunder Bay Economic Justice Committee and the Lakehead Social Planning Council. On the \$100 monthly Healthy Food Supplement, Catherine Schwartz Mendez, public health nutritionist, commented, “It’s certainly not enough, but it is a good start until they start reviewing (social assistance) rates.” Gwen O’Reilly of the Economic Justice Committee, said, “The issue these days is that the Ontario Disability Support Program and the Ontario Works rates are so low that people do not have enough disposable income to afford healthy food.”

(www.tbdhu.com/ ; www.chroniclejournal.com/stories.php?id=170486)

March 11 – SIMCOE – The Board of Health of the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit passed a resolution supporting the \$100 month Healthy Food Supplement and expressed its support for the Put Food in the Budget campaign by signing a letter to Finance Minister Dwight Duncan.

(www.simcoemuskokahealth.org/)

March 11 – DURHAM REGION – Durham Regional Council passes a resolution brought forward by the Health and Social Services Committee in support of the \$100 month healthy Food Supplement and the Put Food in the Budget campaign.

(www.durham.ca/departments/clerk/minutesPDF.asp?id=9876)

March 12 – SARNIA -- The Community Health Services Department of Lambton County issued a media release supporting the healthy Food Supplement campaign launched by alpha and the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction. Dr. Chris Greensmith, MOH for Lambton County, said, “When people are forced to choose between paying rent and buying food, the increase makes food unaffordable and inaccessible. Ultimately, the lack of food and poor nutrition leads to a higher risk of chronic disease, depression, diabetes and other health conditions that put people at a greater disadvantage.” The media release was followed up with a Letter to the Editor in the *Sarnia Observer* on the HFS and visits to local MPPs Bob Bailey and Maria Van Bommel who were presented with a petition with 695 local signatures supporting the Healthy Food Supplement.

MPP Bob Bailey invites the local poverty reduction group to meet the following week with members of the business community to discuss how to reduce poverty in Lambton County. (www.lambtonhealth.on.ca/media.asp?art=605)

March 13 – TORONTO – Linda Stewart, Executive Director of aPHa sends a letter to premier McGuinty on behalf of the Medical Officers of Health, Boards of Health and affiliated organizations of aPHa urging his Government to adopt the \$100 monthly Healthy Food Supplement. Ms. Stewart wrote, “Unless strategies are implemented to ensure that low-income Ontarians can afford to make healthy food choices, dietary interventions for the prevention and management of diseases and promotion of overall health will remain unavailable to those who are at most risk. Putting food in the budget will be a welcome and critical first step in changing that.”

March 13 – BELLEVILLE – A feature article in the Belleville Intelligencer recounts an extended interview that reporter Barry Ellsworth conducted with four people on social assistance, a public health unit nutritionist, a community worker with the Community Development Council of Quinte and a member of the Social Planning Network of Ontario. The report highlighted the inadequacy of social assistance incomes to meet basic healthy eating requirements. In the report, Denika Andrews of the local public health unit says, “Without proper and sufficient amounts of food, children can’t concentrate in class and fall behind in school. Poor eating habits also contribute to obesity and chronic diseases later in life.” The social assistance recipients present each do a short video clip on “100 words on a \$100’ for posting to the Put Food in the Budget web page. (www.intelligencer.ca/PrintArticle.aspx?e=1476025 ; www.ckwstv.com/index.cfm?page=news&id=409)

March 13 – KINGSTON – Peter Clutterbuck of the Social Planning Network of Ontario meets with the Kingston Food Security Providers Networking Group in Kingston for a discussion of the \$100 a month Healthy Food Supplement and the Put Food in the Budget Campaign. Beth Pater, Chair of the Kingston-Frontenac Public Health Board, is also present. The group expresses its support for the campaign and is making plans for a public launch in late March.

March 16 – PETERBOROUGH – Dr. Rosana Pellizzari, Medical Officer of Health for the Peterborough County-City Health Unit, launched the local campaign to Put Food in the Budget in conjunction with the Peterborough Social Planning Council, the Peterborough Poverty Reduction Network, the board of Our Space, and youth of several faith communities. Urging the provincial government to give all social assistance recipients “the opportunity to put healthy food on their tables,” Dr. Pellizzari said, “The Ontario Government has held public meetings in Peterborough to find out ways to alleviate poverty so today we offer a solution that will help the most vulnerable while investing wisely to prevent poor health in those who are most at risk.” A. J. McNaught talked from personal experience about how inadequate food takes away hope, energy and ‘a lot of self-esteem. It

makes you feel less than human when you have to struggle and beg for your right to live.”

(<http://www.pspc.on.ca/www.thepeterboroughexaminer.com/PrintArticle.aspx?e=1481463> ;
http://pcchu.peterborough.on.ca/NP/NP-images/PDF/Put-Food-In-Budget/Press_release.pdf)

March 18 – TORONTO – The Put Food in the Budget campaign came to Queen’s Park, joining the Interfaith Social Assistance Reform Coalition with a large community event “Setting the Table” for the \$100 month Healthy Food Supplement. Rev. Susan Eagle of ISARC blessed soup and bread provided by FoodShare and The Stop Community Food Centre to several hundred attending. Community leaders and people living on low income from FoodShare and The Stop addressed the gathering with concrete examples and stories of the health impacts of income barriers to access to healthy food. Dr. David McKeown, Toronto MOH, pointed to the clear evidence from 10 years of public health data on the costs of the Nutritious Food Basket compared to incomes on social assistance that the \$100 monthly Healthy Food Supplement is desperately needed as a first step to helping low income people meet the basic necessities of life. (<http://www.toronto.ca/health/foodsupplement/index.htm>)

March 20 – SUDBURY – The Social Planning Council of Sudbury and the Sudbury & District Health Unit (SDHU) invite people receiving social assistance to come to the Health Unit’s Rainbow Health Centre where they will have an opportunity to tell their stories and send messages to their elected representatives in support of the \$100 month Healthy Food Supplement. On Thursday, March 19 the SDHU Board passed a motion supporting the introduction of a \$100 monthly Healthy Food Supplement for inclusion in the province’s spring budget. “We all know that nutritious food is essential to good health, but the gap between what it costs to eat a healthy diet and the income people receive on social assistance is getting wider,” said Ron Dupuis, Board chair. “We hope that the provincial government takes a serious look at narrowing that gap by introducing a monthly \$100 Healthy Food Supplement,” he added.

(www.sdhu.com/content/news/details.asp?n=759&lang=0 ;
www.thesudburystar.com/ArticleDisplay.aspx?e=1487651)

March 24 – KINGSTON – The Food Provider’s Networking Group will hold a media conference at Martha’s Table to discuss an action plan to address the shocking statistic that a Kingston family of four on social assistance are \$159 a month in deficit after paying rent and food needed to stay healthy. Beth Pater, Chair of the KFL&A Public Health Board, says, “Nutritious food should be available to everyone. Without adequate income, people receiving social assistance may be forced to choose between paying the rent and buying food.” Gord Hunter, Executive Director of Martha’s Table, adds, “Kingston needs to recognize that we’re at the bottom of the pack in a crucial area of community service. Nutritious food is the key to preventing serious medical conditions like

cancer, heart disease and diabetes. If we don't step up to the plate – literally and figuratively – and provide resources for a nutritious diet, we are abandoning the most vulnerable members of our society.” (www.marthastable.ca/)

March 24 – MUSKOKA – The Poverty Reduction of Muskoka Planning Team (PROMPT), a network of local individuals and groups mobilized around the issue of poverty reduction within the District of Muskoka, will issue a One Month Food Challenge in support of a Healthy Food Supplement in the provincial budget. It will encourage people of all income groups to keep their food receipts for one month and to fill out a survey to help build awareness about food costs and food security in Muskoka District. Participation will create a better understanding of the costs of living in Muskoka but also provide information to help PROMPT press for change to reduce poverty in the District.

March 25 – SARNIA – A Prayer Vigil from 12:00 noon to 2:00 PM organized by the Anglican deanery outside the offices of MPP Bob Bailey will highlight the need for a \$100 monthly Health Food Supplement.

March 23, 2009