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Community and public health leaders call on province to Put Food in the Budget

Toronto's Medical Officer of Health, Dr. David McKeown, today joined with community agencies to call on the government of Ontario to introduce a \$100 Healthy Food Supplement for all adults on social assistance in the upcoming provincial budget.

Dr. McKeown reported on the cost of nutritious food in Toronto and said people on social assistance are being forced to choose between paying rent and buying food, are sending their children to school without breakfast or lunch, and are relying on food banks for survival. He described the resulting negative health effects and called for action to support people in distress.

"These health inequities are preventable, but only through a deliberate exercise of enlightened public policy. The absence of effective action leaves the implication that malnutrition and poor health are acceptable consequences of government policy."

Janet Gasparini, a Sudbury City Councillor and chair of the Social Planning Network of Ontario, said this is not a time for half-measures. "The government must do what is right in providing stimulus to the economy and in protecting people during hard times. The Healthy Food Supplement will be spent in local communities and will help people live with dignity."

Nick Saul, coordinator of The Stop Community Food Centre in Toronto and a spokesperson for the 25in5 Network for Poverty Reduction, outlined a province-wide campaign in the coming weeks to urge the government to put food in the budget. "We need a down payment toward poverty reduction and social justice. We will be sending messages from people on social assistance in the form of '100 words on 100 dollars' and we intend to get the government's attention."

A web site has been set up to support the campaign at www.25in5.ca

Toronto is Canada's largest city and sixth largest government, and home to a diverse population of about 2.6 million people. It is the economic engine of Canada and one of the greenest and most creative cities in North America. In the past three years, Toronto has won numerous awards for quality, innovation and efficiency in delivering public services. Toronto's government is dedicated to prosperity, opportunity and liveability for all its residents.

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