

Sent by email at: basicincome@ontario.ca

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Honourable Helena Jaczek
Minister of Community and Social Services
Hepburn Block 6th Floor
80 Grosvenor St.
Toronto, ON M7A 1E9

Honourable Chris Ballard
Minister of Housing
College Park
777 Bay St.
Toronto, ON M5G 2E5

Dear Minister Jaczek and Minister Ballard,

On behalf of the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHa) and the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA), we are writing to reiterate our strong support for the Ontario basic income pilot and to convey our high-level feedback as part of the current consultations. Both of our organizations passed resolutions in support of basic income in 2015^{1,2}. As such, we were pleased to see that the recommendations made in the Honourable Hugh Segal's discussion paper, *Finding a Better Way: A Basic Income Pilot Project for Ontario*, are consistent with piloting a strong, health-promoting basic income. Our support for basic income is informed by overwhelming evidence of the powerful link between income and health. People living with a lower income are at far greater risk of preventable medical conditions across the lifespan, including cancer, diabetes, heart disease, mental illness, and their associated health care costs, compared with those living with higher incomes. Children are particularly vulnerable to the impacts of growing up in low income, due to its attenuating effect on early childhood development. The experience of childhood poverty leads to vulnerability, both to negative health outcomes and social outcomes, including reduced educational attainment and greater risk of involvement with the justice system. Our members feel strongly that ensuring everyone has an income sufficient to meet basic needs and live with dignity would be one of the most important initiatives the provincial government could pursue to promote health, well-being and equity amongst Ontarians.

The Hon. Hugh Segal's discussion paper provides important considerations for designing the pilot. **We have prepared detailed feedback in collaboration with Public Health Ontario (PHO) on these considerations in a separate technical submission, in accordance with your *Consultation Guide for the Basic Income Pilot Project*.**

To complement that detailed feedback, this letter serves to outline the views of alPHa and OPHA on key, high level aspects of the basic income pilot.

We believe that a set of principles should guide the design of a basic income program, including the type of basic income to be piloted in Ontario. A principle-based approach is consistent with the recommendations of Basic Income Canada Network³, the Basic Income Initiative (a multi-faith, indigenous and multi-sector collaboration)⁴, and the resolutions passed by our respective organizations^{1,2}:

- the pursuit of equity, both health and social;
- income security for all, across the lifespan and regardless of employment status;
- universality, leaving no one behind;
- non-conditionality, other than based on income level and family composition;
- dignity, creating a process for receiving basic income that is comparable to other well-accepted income security programs in Canada, such as child and seniors' benefits; and
- autonomy, ensuring that recipients of basic income have the ability to spend money as they see fit to support the wellbeing of themselves and their family.

Additionally, we feel that key elements should guide the design of the pilot itself, consistent with scientifically rigorous public health research methods:

- designed to produce valid and reliable results, including the ability to detect outcomes of basic income; this will require an adequate benefit level, and sufficient length and sample size of the pilot, amongst other considerations;
- designed to produce generalizable results; this will require pilot sites and participants that reflect Ontario's demographic and geographic diversity, including indigenous communities;
- emphasis on health and social outcomes;
- overseen by those with research expertise, and by an advisory body of diverse stakeholders and those with lived experience of poverty and precarious employment; and
- long-term commitment to implementing, evaluating and sharing the results of the pilot.

These elements are described in more detail in our collaborative technical submission with PHO.

The Hon. Hugh Segal made several key recommendations in his discussion paper, which we support as in keeping with the above principles and elements:

- Much better alignment of income amounts with the cost of living and improved health outcomes, than current Ontario Works (OW) and Ontario Disability Support Program (ODSP) rates
- Replacement of OW and ODSP with basic income
- Use of the negative income tax model
- The testing of two benefit amounts, 100% and 75% of the Low Income Measure, over a period of, minimally, three years
- The testing of a higher and lower tax back rate to earned income
- The stipulation that no one be worse off than before the basic income program

We would emphasize, however, that basic income is an important form of income security not only for those on OW and ODSP - who are the primary targets of the discussion paper proposal - but also for those who are employed yet still living in poverty, including the precariously employed. Accordingly, the pilot methods and results should reflect this range of relevant recipients. This would require that pilot eligibility be based on income level, and not on current receipt of OW or ODSP.

While we clearly see a great deal of promise in a basic income pilot and program, we also believe that basic income can only have a strong impact on the health-damaging conditions of poverty and precarious employment if it is part of, and not a replacement for, a comprehensive approach that includes progress on other key policies and programs. This includes affordable high quality child care, affordable housing, expanded health benefits, and labour law reform, amongst others. In the immediate future, we also strongly urge the Province not to delay increasing social assistance rates to sufficient levels to meet the basic needs of all Ontarians in the short-term, while the basic income pilot is in progress.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment, and for your ongoing and internationally-recognized leadership on this pivotal health and social matter. We would welcome the opportunity to further support the design, implementation and evaluation of the basic income pilot.

Yours Sincerely,



Dr. Valerie Jaeger
aPHa President



Ellen Wodchis
OPHA President

- c. Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health
- Hon. Eric Hoskins, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
- Hon. Michael Coteau, Minister of Children and Youth Services
- Hon. Indira Naidoo-Harris, Associate Minister of Education (Early Years and Child Care)
- Roselle Martino, ADM Population and Public Health Division
- Paul Miller, NDP Critic, Poverty Reduction
- Julie Munro, PC Critic, Poverty Reduction Strategy
- Board of Health Chairs
- Medical Officers of Health

References

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