

Remarks for OPHA's Award of Excellence

It is my pleasure to present this award to Mary Ellen in recognition of her outstanding leadership and significant contributions to public health, especially related to public health dietetics and addressing household food insecurity.

Mary Ellen is a Registered Dietitian and Health Promotion Specialist at Hamilton Public Health where she supports and works with many local community organizations such as Basic Income Hamilton, Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction and the Social Planning and Research Council of Hamilton to raise awareness about the impact of household food insecurity and the need for income based strategies to effect change. She also serves as a mentor to dietetic and Masters' students.

Along with leading change at the local level, Mary Ellen has been making her mark at the provincial and national level too. Mary Ellen works tirelessly to support her colleagues across Ontario's 34 public health units to coordinate action on this issue. As co-chair of the Ontario Dietitians in Public Health Food Insecurity Workgroup, she has led the development of numerous initiatives including:

- The Association's Position Statement on Responses to Food Insecurity
- No Money for Food is ... Cent\$less, a campaign to put food insecurity on the government's policy agenda; and
- resources to support monitoring food affordability.

Mary Ellen has used every avenue possible to make her message heard and influence action. From media interviews, letters, publications,

policy submissions, presenting at national and provincial forums to attending government consultations on topics such as the federal Poverty Reduction Strategy, increasing social assistance rates, household food insecurity measurement, and the Ontario Basic Income Pilot. Organizations such as alPHA, Dietitians of Canada, the Association of Public Health Epidemiologists in Ontario have sought out her advice to guide their work.

Last year, Mary Ellen was instrumental in influencing the Ministry of Health to include the household food security survey module in Statistics Canada's 2019-2020 Canadian Community Health Survey, something that was missing for Ontario in the previous survey. This 18 question module will reveal critical information about the state of food security in Ontario households.

Mary Ellen's colleague describes her as having an astute mind, admirable work ethic, and a strong dedication to public health dietetics, all while being a kind and supportive colleague. To quote one of Mary Ellen's local community partners, "Mary Ellen is a gem!" I am delighted to be able to bring a spotlight to this exceptional work and honour Mary Ellen by conferring her with OPHA's Award of Excellence.