July 27, 2020

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., MP
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street Ottawa, ON K1A 0A2
Sent via email: justin.trudeau@parl.gc.ca

The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P.
Deputy Prime Minister
Privy Council Office
Room 1000
80 Sparks Street Ottawa, ON K1A 0A3
Sent via email: chrystia.freeland@parl.gc.ca

The Honourable Bill Morneau, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Finance
90 Elgin Street, 17th Floor
Ottawa, ON K1A 0G5
Sent via email: bill.morneau@parl.gc.ca

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau, Deputy Prime Minister Freeland, and Minister Morneau:

RE: Basic Income for Income Security during COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond

At its meeting held on June 17, 2020, the Chatham-Kent Board of Health received correspondence to the federal government from Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, dated May 20, 2020, Timiskaming Health Unit, dated June 9, 2020, Haliburton, Kawartha, Pine Ridge District Health Unit, dated June 19, 2020. These letters request that the federal government transition the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) into a basic income for all Canadians during the COVID-19 response and beyond. The Board also endorses the May 11, 2020 resolution by the City of Kitchener to establish a universal basic income.

Income is one of the strongest predictors of health, and it makes sense that focusing on population health interventions to address socioeconomic factors will impact health outcomes far greater than individual focused interventions.
Previous to COVID-19, Chatham-Kent residents have experienced lower median household incomes, higher rates of poverty (with more than one in four children living in low income), lower rates of post-secondary education, higher proportions of the population working in lower wage manufacturing, retail, and service occupations, as well as higher rates of lone-parent families, seniors, and people living alone. Socio-economic factors vary across the Municipality with some communities and neighbourhoods facing a higher degree of material deprivation than others. An examination of local chronic disease health inequities has shown significantly higher rates of chronic disease-related health care utilization and death in the most materially deprived areas compared to the least deprived areas of Chatham-Kent. Annual analysis of the local cost of a nutritious food basket has continued to illustrate how little money a family of four on a social assistance budget would have left to cover the costs of childcare, rural transportation, and other basic needs, after paying for shelter and healthy food. Furthermore, the most recent calculation of Chatham-Kent’s living wage well exceeded $16 per hour, and local costs of living have increased since that time.

As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, we can anticipate the exacerbation of existing disparities, creating an even wider gap between those with opportunity and those without. Local concerns around homelessness, poverty, food insecurity, transportation, mental health and addictions, child and partner violence, and the needs of Indigenous people have been amplified.

The Board strongly recommends your government take immediate action to evolve CERB into legislation for a basic income as an effective long-term response to the issues of income security, poverty, food insecurity, and overall community health and well-being.

Sincerely,

Joe Faas
Chair, Chatham-Kent Board of Health

C: Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
   Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health
   Pegeen Walsh, Executive Director, Ontario Public Health Association
   Association of Local Public Health Agencies
   Ontario Boards of Health
   Honourable Dave Epp, MP, Chatham-Kent-Leamington
   Honourable Rick Nicholls, MPP, Chatham-Kent-Leamington
   Honourable Monte McNaughton, MPP, Lambton-Kent-Middlesex
   Chatham-Kent Municipal Council