April 26, 2021

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 and Minister of Finance  
Privy Council Office, Room 1000  
80 Sparks Street Ottawa, ON K1A 0A3  
Sent via email: chrystia.freeland@parl.gc.ca

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau and Deputy Prime Minister Freeland:

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

At its meeting held on February 3rd, 2021, Lambton County Council received correspondence to the federal government from the Thunder Bay District Health Unit dated November 20, 2020 with respect to using a basic income to address food security. This letter is intended to express our support for these efforts to provide income solutions to reduce food insecurity.

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.

Prior to COVID-19, 8% of Lambton County residents reported moderate or severe food insecurity: experiencing actual issues with procuring an adequate quality or quantity of food, or worrying about the source of their food. Since COVID-19, this pre-existing issue has become more apparent and worrisome with Statistics Canada reporting an increase to 14.6% or 1 in 5 households. This increase was anticipated due to many individuals facing precarious employment, reduced hours of work, or loss of job altogether, coupled with increasing food prices.

Food insecurity is associated with significantly higher annual provincial health care costs; one study showed total health care costs were 49% and 121% higher among households experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity, respectively. People without consistent access to enough healthy food struggle to eat a nutritious diet,
putting them at increased risk of health problems such as chronic and infectious diseases, low birth weight pregnancies, and poor child growth and development. Undernourished children also do not perform as well at school academically, have difficulty concentrating in class, and have poorer psychosocial outcomes than those who are fortunate enough to eat a balanced diet.

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, transportation, and other basic needs, after paying for shelter and healthy food.

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.

Lambton County Council agrees that income solutions are an effective long-term response to the issues of income security, poverty, food insecurity, to improve overall community health and well-being.

Sincerely,

Kevin Marriott
Chair, County of Lambton Board of Health
Warden, County of Lambton

cc: The Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
    The Hon. Monte McNaughton, Minister of Labour, MPP, Lambton-Kent-Middlesex
    The Hon. Bob Bailey, MPP, Sarnia-Lambton
    Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health
    The Hon. Lianne Rood, MP, Lambton-Kent-Middlesex
    The Hon. Marilyn Gladu, MP, Sarnia-Lambton
    Pegeen Walsh, Executive Director, Ontario Public Health Association
    Association of Local Public Health Agencies
    Ontario Boards of Health