June 25, 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
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
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
bill.morneau@parl.gc.ca

Dear Prime Minister, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister Morneau:

Subject: Endorsement of the letter from Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit, Basic Income for Income Security during COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond

I am writing on behalf of the Board of Health for Peterborough Public Health to express support for recommendations from the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) Board of Health, for the “evolution of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) into a basic income for all Canadians, during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.”

As mentioned in the letter endorsed by SMDHU, from the Ontario Dietitians in Public Health, there is a lack of evidence that charitable food distribution systems can lower household food insecurity rates. Basic income is an evidence-based strategy to address poverty and household food insecurity in Canada.

Poverty and household food insecurity are severe problems in Peterborough. For example, half of single mothers in Peterborough are food insecure, worrying about running out of money for food.¹ Also, many residents have little income left over after paying rent: Peterborough has the highest percentage of renting households with unaffordable shelter costs in Canada, and over half of local renters are housing insecure.² There are also significant income challenges faced by rural communities, including those in the Peterborough County. Of note, net farm incomes in Ontario were almost 50% lower in 2019 when compared to 2017, highlighting risk of poverty for farmers.³
During the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond, local residents and all Canadians require adequate incomes to meet basic needs and live with dignity. Basic income is a strategy that has been shown to facilitate critical outcomes including housing stability, household food security, and improved physical and mental health. Basic income would also allow for flexibility of Canadians to meet needs in ways that are reflective of their cultures and traditions. A basic income is what our country needs to address impacts of COVID-19 and other adversity we will face, to allow for an equitable, healthy, and resilient future.

Sincerely,

Original signed by

Mayor Andy Mitchell
Chair, Board of Health

/ag
Encl.

cc: Local MPs
Opposition Critics
The Association of Local Public Health Agencies
The Ontario Public Health Association
Ontario Boards of Health

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May 20, 2020

The Right Honourable Justin Trudeau, P.C., MP
Prime Minister of Canada
Office of the Prime Minister
80 Wellington Street
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The Honourable Chrystia Freeland, P.C., M.P.
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The Honourable Bill Morneau, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Finance
90 Elgin Street, 17th Floor
Ottawa, ON K1A 0G5

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

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

On behalf of the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) Board of Health, I am writing to convey our strong support for the evolution of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) into a basic income for all Canadians, during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond.

While we commend the federal government for the economic measures that have been put into place to support Canadians during this unprecedented time of the COVID-19 pandemic, we also know that many are falling through the cracks. Measures such as the CERB, the Canada Emergency Student Benefit (CESB) and the Canada Emergency Wage Subsidy (CEWS), though necessary and very important, have left many Canadians, who do not qualify for or not able to access these programs, vulnerable to household food insecurity and the negative consequences of income insecurity and poverty such as inadequate or unstable housing, and poorer mental and physical health, including chronic diseases. A basic income would address these gaps, offering support to the most vulnerable Canadians.

Before the COVID-19 pandemic, many Canadians were already experiencing household food insecurity. In 2017-18 approximately 4.4-million (1 in 8) Canadians reported being food insecure, including 1.2 million children under the age of 18. As a result of COVID-19, this number is predicted to increase as many individuals are facing precarious employment, have had their hours reduced or have lost their jobs altogether. Many are relying on food banks and other charitable programs, however, this only meets the need on a temporary basis and is not a long term solution.
Examples of key Canadian initiatives that demonstrate the positive impact of basic income-like programs on health and well-being include the Old Age Security and Guaranteed Income Supplement through Canada’s public pension system, the Canada Child Benefit, and the Newfoundland Poverty Reduction Strategy.

Basic income pilots for working-age adults in Canada have also led to promising findings, including the Mincome pilot in Manitoba and the recent Ontario Basic Income Pilot. The research study, Southern Ontario’s Basic Income Experience released in March 2020, is based on Ontario’s pilot. This pilot was implemented in three Ontario cities in 2018 by the provincial government, and the project was terminated in 2019 following a change in government. While the formal pilot evaluation was cancelled, this research study made use of surveys of individuals from Hamilton, Brantford and Brant County who had been enrolled in the pilot (217 individuals participated out of 1000 enrolled households), and interviews with 40 participants. Some of the key findings cited by participants in this report include improvements in physical and mental health; increased labour market participation; moving to higher paying and more secure jobs; reduced household food insecurity; housing stability; improved financial status and social relationships; less frequent visits to health practitioners and hospital emergency rooms; improved living standards; and an improved sense of self-worth and hope for a better future.

Additional evidence supporting the potential of a basic income for reducing the prevalence and severity of household food insecurity is presented in: Implications of a Basic Income Guarantee for Household Food Insecurity, a research paper prepared for the Northern Policy Institute based on the Ontario Basic Income Pilot.

Moving forward during and following the COVID-19 pandemic is an opportune time for the federal government to take action to evolve the CERB into a basic income. This would provide income security to all Canadians during the economic challenges of the pandemic itself, the post-pandemic recovery, and into the future. This is particularly pertinent given the dramatic shifts in the labour market in recent decades, such that full-time permanent employment is no longer the norm. The current CERB has helped demonstrate the logistical feasibility of delivering a basic income, and it could be readily evolved into an ongoing basic income for anyone who falls below a certain income floor. There is evidence of growing support for this concept, as outlined in Appendix A. The Basic Income Canada Network has outlined key features of basic income design for Canada, which we support.

The SMDHU has been a strong proponent of basic income repeatedly since 2015. This includes having sponsored a resolution at the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHA) general meeting endorsing the concept of basic income and requesting the federal and provincial governments jointly consider and investigate a basic income policy option for reducing poverty and income insecurity (2015), and expressing support and input into the Ontario Basic Income Pilot (2017). SMDHU has also been encouraging advocacy for income solutions to household food insecurity through our No Money for Food is Cent$less initiative since 2017.

In keeping with this, we strongly recommend your government take swift and immediate action on the evolution of the CERB Benefit into legislation for a basic income as an effective long-term
response to the problems of income insecurity, persistent poverty and household food insecurity, as well as a response to the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Sincerely,

ORIGINAL Signed By:

Anita Dubeau
Chair, Board of Health

AD:CS:cm

Encl. (1)

cc. Hon. Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
    Simcoe and Muskoka MPs and MPPs
    Simcoe Muskoka Municipal Councils
    Association of Local Public Health Agencies
    Ontario Public Health Association
    Ontario Boards of Health
Appendix A: Examples of Support for Basic Income in Response to COVID-19 and Beyond

On April 21, 2020, 50 members of Canada’s Senate wrote a letter to the federal government calling for a restructuring of the CERB into a minimum basic income to “ensure greater social and economic equity”, especially for those who are most vulnerable. In support of this letter, Senator McPhedran’s Youth Advisory Council, the Canadian Council of Young Feminists, in collaboration with the Basic Income Canada Youth Network, sent their own letter to the federal government.

In our region, Simcoe North MP Bruce Stanton has expressed agreement that it’s time to consider basic income. He is quoted as saying “Based on my reading of this, like Senator Boniface, I am persuaded that it could be very good public policy” (News Story).

The Ontario Dietitians’ of Public Health (ODPH) have also written a letter to the federal government stating “We ask that you take immediate action to enact legislation for a basic income guarantee as an effective long-term response to the problem of persistent poverty and household food insecurity as well as shorter-term consequences of the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic”.

The Board of Health of the Kingston, Frontenac, Lennox and Addington Health Unit in Ontario also passed a motion requesting the federal government to provide a basic income support to all Canadians (News Story).