November 20, 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 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 regular meeting held on November 18, 2020, the Thunder Bay District Health Unit (TBDHU) Board of Health resolved to express support for efforts to provide income solutions to reduce Household Food Insecurity (HFI) to Federal leaders.

Prior to COVID-19, many Canadians were already experiencing HFI, which is the inadequate and insecure access to food due to financial constraints. Statistics Canada estimated that in 2017/2018, 10.5% or 1 in 10 households experienced HFI¹. In Thunder Bay, this value is 14.3% or 1 in 7 households². Abundant research has shown that higher HFI rates are associated with increased risk for poor and inadequate diets that are directly linked to higher chronic disease rates, poorer health outcomes and increased health inequities³. 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 7 households⁴. Applying that similar increase locally to the District of Thunder Bay would mean an HFI rate of 18.4% or 1 in 5 household. This increase was anticipated due to many individuals facing precarious employment, reduced hours of work, or loss of job altogether, coupled with the less predictable food supply and fluctuating food prices.

As short-term temporary solutions, many have relied on emergency and charitable food programs and services, such as food banks. The commitment of the Federal government to allocate $200 million for these
programs has undoubtedly bolstered the initial access to food for many experiencing HFI. In addition, the enactment of Canadian Emergency Response Benefit (CERB), amongst others, has demonstrated that income solutions can be effective. The issue however, is that both of these solutions are intended for emergency and temporary coverage, which may not provide longer coverage with the anticipated prolonged existence of COVID-19. It also does not address the root cause of food insecurity, which is inadequate income, and may not fully provide relief for other needs for daily living (such as rent and household expenses) experienced by those in poverty. This has set the precedent for the call to action in this letter of support, which is the consideration for adequate income solutions that provide long-term income support, have a permanence structure, are not only available during emergencies or pandemics, and are equitable in that they provide support to the most at-risk and in need.

An adequate and secure level of household income is strongly linked to lower food insecurity rates, and income solutions have been recommended as the primary strategy to address this issue. The TBDHU will continue to support the government in their priority actions to reduce poverty and improve household food insecurity, and we appreciate your time, commitment and consideration for this crucial endeavor.

Sincerely,

Mr. James McPherson  
Chair, Thunder Bay District Board of Health

cc. Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario  
Dr. David Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health  
Thunder Bay MPs and MPPs  
Ontario Public Health Association  
Ontario Boards of Health

References: