

Board of Health Briefing Report

To: Chair and Members of the Board of Health
Date: June 3, 2020
Topic: **Basic Income for Income Security during Covid-19 Pandemic and Beyond**
Submitted by: Dr. Glenn Corneil, Acting Medical Officer of Health/CEO
Prepared by: Kerry Schubert-Mackey, Director of Community Health
Reviewed by: Walter Humeniuk, RPPA and Amanda Mongeon, Program Manager

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended THAT the Timiskaming Board of Health endorse the Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit (SMDHU) call for the federal government to ‘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’; AND FURTHER that Prime Minister Trudeau, Deputy Prime Minister Freeland and Minister Morneau, Timiskaming’s MPs, MPPs and Chief Medical Officer of Health and all Ontario boards of health are so advised.

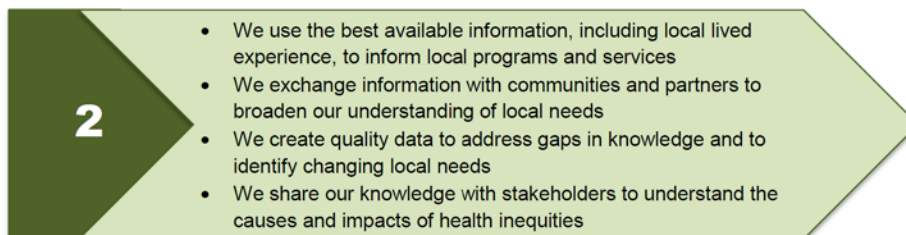
Overview

The Timiskaming Health Unit received correspondence from SMDHU May 20, 2020 ([Appendix A](#)), highlighting basic income as an effective long-term response to income insecurity, persistent poverty, household food insecurity and the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. As one of the most compelling social determinants of health, poverty reduction is a key area for public health action.

Ontario Public Health Standards (2018) and Timiskaming Health Unit Strategic Plan 2019-2023 Links

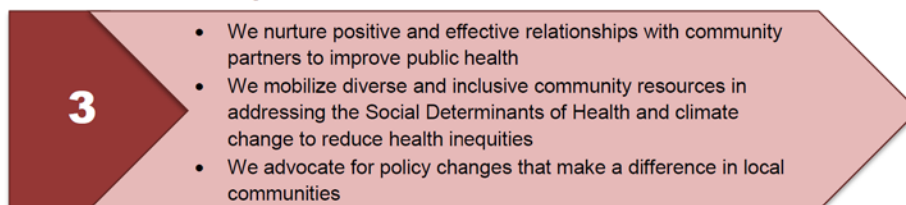
This work directly contributes to meeting requirements and expected outcomes in the Ontario Public Health Standards (2018) and supports THU 2019-2023 strategic directions 2 and 3.

We create, share and exchange knowledge



- We use the best available information, including local lived experience, to inform local programs and services
- We exchange information with communities and partners to broaden our understanding of local needs
- We create quality data to address gaps in knowledge and to identify changing local needs
- We share our knowledge with stakeholders to understand the causes and impacts of health inequities

We collaborate with partners to make a difference in our communities



- We nurture positive and effective relationships with community partners to improve public health
- We mobilize diverse and inclusive community resources in addressing the Social Determinants of Health and climate change to reduce health inequities
- We advocate for policy changes that make a difference in local communities

Background

Income is a significant determinant of health as it influences overall living conditions, including psychological functioning, health-related behaviours, food security, housing, and other prerequisites of health.¹ THU recognizes that the prolonged stress of continually struggling to satisfy basic needs negatively impacts the physical and mental health of entire families.

Household Food Insecurity (HFI) is a highly sensitive indicator of an extreme level of material deprivation that negatively impacts people's physical, mental, and social well-being and life expectancy.² In 2017-18 approximately 4.4-million (1 in 8) Canadians reported being food insecure (higher than any previous national estimate), including 1.2 million children under the age of 18.²

Using Canada's low-income measureⁱ, there are currently 1.57 million Ontarians, including 382,000 children living in poverty.³ Poverty costs the Ontario economy over \$27 billion annually, with the cost of maintaining poverty far outweighing the cost of addressing it.³ Currently, in the district of Timiskaming, 18% of people continue to live in low-income households, including 20% of children under the age of 18 years.⁴

The 2019 Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) results show that the cost of living in Timiskaming is increasing. The higher cost of food (e.g., \$219.27 a week for a family of four, a \$2.74 increase since 2017) and housing, among other living expenses unfairly burdens those who live on a limited income.⁵ Responses to HFI often focus on charity & food-based initiatives, but these do not address the root cause of this issue, poverty.⁶ Government action on income-based effective measures to address poverty and food insecurity are needed.⁷

Preceding the COVID-19 pandemic, many Canadians were already experiencing HFI. This number is predicted to increase as a result of COVID-19, as many individuals are facing precarious employment, have had their hours reduced, or have lost their jobs altogether.

A basic income ensures that everyone can meet basic needs and live with dignity, regardless of their work status. A basic income protects households against volatility in income until stability returns.⁸ It has the potential to ease or even end poverty.⁹ As noted by SMDHU, there are Canadian examples that demonstrate the positive impact of basic income-like programs on health and well-being.

Timiskaming BOH History Related to HFI and/or Income Solutions to Address Poverty:

April 2020: Motion #18R-2020 response to the Ontario Government as part of their consultation on Poverty Reduction Strategy.

March 2020: Receive 2019 Nutritious Food Basket Costing Results and Household Food Insecurity Action and Motion #8R-2020 to support KFLA January 28, 2020 motion *Monitoring of food insecurity and food affordability*.

April 2019: Motion #23R-2019. Northern Fruit & Vegetable Program Funding Letter.

September 2019: Motion #44R-2019 Federal Election Campaign which included information on addressing poverty and a basic income for all Canadians.

Q3 Report 2018: Letter to Government of Ontario advocating for reconsideration of basic income pilot cancellation, maintaining the planned social assistance rate increases, and act on the recommendations from the Income Security Roadmap.

April 2018: Information re. 2017 Nutritious Food Basket Results and Addressing Household Food Insecurity, and THU's participation in the Cent\$less campaign.

September 2018: Presentation re. Public Health Policy Priorities for Consideration: 2018 Municipal Election.

September 2015: Resolution #01-2015: Support for a Basic Income Guarantee.

January 2012: Resolution #01-2012. Social assistance funding freeze.

December 2008: Resolution #09-2008. Nutritious Food Basket and Poverty Reduction Strategy.

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
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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 18.¹ 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.

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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](#)).

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ⁱ low-income measure, which refers to those living in a household with less than 50% of the median after-tax household income, adjusted for household size.