

August 23, 2010

700 Lawrence Ave. W., Suite 310
Toronto, Ontario M6A 3B4

Tel: (416) 367-3313
1-800-267-6817 (Ont)
Fax: (416) 367-2844
E-mail: info@opha.on.ca
www.opha.on.ca

Honorary Patron

The Hon. David C. Onley
Lieutenant Governor of Ontario

President

Elizabeth Haugh
E-mail: lhaugh@wehealthunit.org

Executive Director

Connie Uetrecht
E-mail: cuetrecht@opha.on.ca

Constituent Societies

ANDSOOHA – Public Health Nursing
Management in Ontario

Association of Ontario
Health Centres

Association of Public Health
Epidemiologists in Ontario

Association of Supervisors of Public Health
Inspectors of Ontario

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Community Health Nurses' Initiatives Group
(RNAO)

Health Promotion Ontario

Ontario Association of Public Health
Dentistry

Ontario Public Health Libraries Association

Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in
Public Health

Public Health Research, Education and
Development (PHRED) Program

Charitable Registration
Number 11924 8771 RR0001

Hon. Dalton McGuinty
Premier of Ontario, Queen's Park, Rm 281,
Main Legislative Building
Toronto, ON M7A 1A4

Dear Premier,

This letter is following up on concern expressed to you in a letter sent on March 22, 2010 regarding the Special Diet Allowance program, which is to be replaced by a new Nutritional Supplement Program. I am writing to you on behalf of the Ontario Public Health Association (OPHA), including its Food Security Workgroup (FSWG). OPHA represents over 3,500 public health practitioners through individual memberships and 11 constituent societies. OPHA's mission is to provide leadership on issues affecting the public's health, and its FSWG advocates for access to affordable, nutritious and personally acceptable foods for all Ontarians.

Annual reports on the cost of a Nutritious Food Basket completed by Public Health Units across Ontario have raised significant concerns about the ability of people living on low incomes, including many on social assistance (Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program), to purchase nutritious foods. Poor nutrition can lead to an increased risk for chronic and infectious diseases, greater risk for low birth weight, and negative impacts on the growth and development of children. It costs more to treat and manage these diseases and conditions than it does to purchase a healthy diet.

For those on assistance who have a medical condition, additional costs of special diets require a fair and adequate allowance, and this should be an essential component of social and health policy in our province. The Special Diet Allowance ensured that people with medical conditions could purchase the nourishing foods recommended for their condition - for example, lactose free milk for someone with lactose intolerance. It is imperative that the new Nutritional Supplement Program allows for recipients to purchase these types of foods in addition to any recommended vitamins, minerals and nutritional supplements.

Your government made a commitment to develop a new Nutritional Supplement Program including consultation with key stakeholders. OPHA is asking you to honour your government's commitment by urging the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care to consult with experts from the health and social sectors, and people with lived experience, before the new program is approved and rolled out.

OPHA strongly supports advice from Dietitians of Canada to the Ministry that experts from the health sector should include Registered Dietitians (RDs), given that RDs in therapeutic practice have the knowledge and skills related to special diets to contribute both to developing and delivering the new program.

OPHA additionally asks that you ensure that the new Nutritional Supplement Program is based on the Five Principles created by the ODSP Action Coalition, the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, and the 25 in 5 Network for Poverty Reduction (<http://25in5.ca/five-principles-for-a-new-nutritional-supplement-program/>) These Five Principles include: a clear policy objective of additional financial support for dietary purposes; accessibility, adequacy and equity; an initial program budget that is at least equal to the current Special Diet Allowance ensuring no one is worse off as a result of transition to the new program; and, adequate consultation with key stakeholders.

We urge your attention to this matter to ensure healthier diets for some of the most vulnerable people in our province.

Please contact Co-Chair of the OPHA Food Security Workgroup to discuss this further: Kim Ouellette, 905-688-8248, ext. 7322, or kim.ouellette@niagararegion.ca.

Sincerely,



Liz Haugh
President

cc: The Honourable Deb Matthews, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
The Honourable Laura Broten, Ministry of Children and Youth Services
Tatum Wilson, Policy Advisor, Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care
Chris Morley, Premier McGuinty's Chief of Staff