August 24, 2018

Honourable Minister Lisa MacLeod
Minister of Children, Community and Social Services
80 Grosvenor Street, 6th Floor, Hepburn Block
Ministry of Community and Social Services
Toronto, ON M7A 1E9

Dear Minister MacLeod:

On behalf of the Board of Health for the Grey Bruce Health Unit, I am writing to convey our deep disappointment in the recent announcement of your government’s intention to cancel Ontario’s Basic Income Pilot and reverse planned updates to social assistance programs. I urge you to reconsider these decisions.

Social assistance support is already dangerously inadequate. Moreover, the proposed 1.5% rate increase, while similar to those of the recent past, is so wanting that it fails even to keep pace with inflation. The health of more than 900,000 people who currently rely on Ontario Works and the Ontario Disability Support Program will undoubtedly be affected by this unfair decision, which was made without consultation. The Grey Bruce Health Unit strongly encourages the Government of Ontario, at the very least, to maintain a 3% increase in social assistance rates.

The direct link between poverty and illness cannot be understated. The Basic Income Pilot was grounded on a detailed and well-researched proposal authored by Senator Hugh Segal, which was in turn subject to a broad consultation that received input from over 35,000 Ontarians as well as support from each of the provinces’ major political parties. We urge your government to continue this pilot and its planned evaluation, so the results can inform future decisions.

As you embark on your review of social assistance policies in Ontario, please consider the evidence-based and experience-informed recommendations of the Income Security: A Roadmap for Change report to support people in their efforts to participate in the labour market and in their communities. Of note from that report, ”Past decisions to create savings through reductions in social assistance have led to worse outcomes for people and exacerbated issues associated with poverty.” The best social assistance is that which is evidence-informed and reflects the diverse needs of individuals. Many Grey Bruce children and adults rely on this valuable income to pay rent, buy nutritious food and contribute to our rural economy. Everyone deserves to live with dignity, experience improved physical and mental health and to participate fully in society. You have the power to transform lives for the better.

Respectfully,

Alan Barfoot
Chair, Board of Health
Grey Bruce Health Unit

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Cc:

Working together for a healthier future for all.

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