

April 18, 2010

Honourable Dr. Eric Hoskins
Minister of Citizenship and Immigration
St. Paul's, 8035 St. Clair Ave. West
Toronto, ON
M6C 1B9

To Honourable Dr. Hoskins:

I am writing to you with regards to the Liberal Government's decision on March 25th to cut the Special Diet Allowance for people living on social assistance. This is the single most punitive and inhumane decision of this government and has to be reversed immediately.

As a nurse practitioner working in downtown Toronto with homeless, under housed and food insecure individuals and communities, I see directly the multifaceted ravages that poverty leads to. At the same time, I have countless accounts of individuals and families whose physical and mental health has benefited from the Special Diet Supplement.

I am appealing to you as a physician with a history of strong humanitarian work and as my MPP to confront this inhumane decision with your colleagues in Parliament and with Premier Dalton McGuinty. As you are aware, the Special Diet, albeit grossly inadequate helps to provide financial assistance towards the purchase of nutritious foods for people with certain medical conditions. Individuals and families who have to rely on social assistance experience a level of poverty that is totally unacceptable in this rich province of ours. When rent consumes more than 75% of your income and there are more than 70,000 people waiting for subsidized housing, people face homelessness and food insecurity on a daily basis.

As you are aware, poverty is the single most important predictor of ill health. People living in poverty face increased rates of cardiovascular disease, diabetes, obesity, arthritis, stress and depression and increased rates of cancer and low infant birth weight. In 2008, the Liberal Party committed to a poverty reduction strategy, 25in5. The recent decision to cut the Special Diet program and replace it with a more restrictive, not yet defined, nutritional supplement, is a far cry from poverty reduction and goes a long way towards a poverty augmentation strategy.

Honourable Dr. Hoskins, now more than ever is the time to remember your Hippocratic oath: "Do no harm". I strongly urge you and your colleagues in Parliament, along with the Premier to start acknowledging the true perils of poverty and work towards reversing this "unconscionable" decision and increasing social assistance rates to reflect the actual cost of living.

Due to the importance of this matter, would appreciate meeting with you to discuss this at a time that may be convenient to you.

Sincerely,

Anne Egger, Nurse Practitioner
Member of Health Providers Against Poverty

cc. Wendy Fucile, President of RNAO,
Paula Carere, President of NPAO
Hon. Deborah Matthews, Minister of Health and Long Term-Care
Hon. Dalton McGuinty, Premier of Ontario