

February 15, 2007

City Council, Toronto

To The City Community Development and Recreation Committee:

I am a nurse practitioner working in downtown Toronto. I work primarily with low-income individuals and families on social assistance, people living in poverty. I write to you today as a member of Health Providers Against Poverty (HPAP), a group of health providers who recognize that poverty is the most powerful determinant of health. Poverty represents the biggest health challenge facing Ontarians today.

Along with my colleagues at HPAP I wish to specifically address the inconsistent approach social assistance workers have in their task with regards to the allocation of the Special Diet. Social assistance recipients are entitled to different benefits depending upon their eligibility. With regards to the Special Diet forms, it is the responsibility of the welfare worker to provide the social assistance recipient with the form when requested. It is then the responsibility of a designated health provider be it a physician, a nurse practitioner, a dietitian, or a midwife to fill the form as per their client's health conditions. The decision as to what constitutes a health condition for a particular individual lies solely with the designated health provider, in consultation with the client. What happens inconsistently, but all too frequently, is that individuals and/or families are denied the special diet form by their worker when requested or denied certain funds allocated by their health provider on their Special Diet form. These seemingly arbitrary and inconsistent practices cannot continue.

In November 2005, City Council passed a resolution calling for all entitlements under the Special Diet to be provided and for welfare staff to be trained to ensure this happens. Sadly, we witness and hear of far too many gaps and inconsistencies by welfare offices throughout the city.

As members of Health Providers Against Poverty we are asking that this matter be addressed by this council and that the 2005 resolution be reviewed and re-implemented as needed.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Anne Egger RNEC, on behalf of Health Providers Against Poverty