

September 8, 2005

Honourable Sandra Pupatello  
Minister of Community and Social Services  
80 Grosvenor St, 6th Floor, Hepburn Block  
Toronto ON  
M7A 1E9  
spupatello.mpp@liberal.ola.org

Dear Minister Pupatello:

We are a group of health care providers and professionals from across Ontario who care, collectively, for thousands of the poorest Ontarians. We are writing to express our concern about the health effects of the poverty in which many of our patients live. As you know, welfare rates in Ontario were cut drastically in 1995, and have fallen steadily relative to their spending power in the ten years since. This has left our patients who live on social assistance without enough money to pay for even their most basic needs, such as food, shelter, and clothing. We believe this constitutes a health crisis.

The link between poverty and ill health is supported by strong evidence. We know that people who live in poverty are at significantly higher risk for developing, and dying from, illnesses such as diabetes, cancer, and heart disease. Given the strength of this evidence, we believe it is our professional obligation and ethical responsibility to address poverty as a risk factor for ill health.

You may have heard of the current initiative by health care providers to approve the special diet supplement for all welfare recipients. As poverty is one of the strongest risk factors for serious illness, it constitutes a legitimate, and preventable, "medical condition", justifying the prescription of the full supplement to every person on social assistance. We now have experience with thousands of our patients who have received this supplement, and who report a powerful impact on their, and their families', ability to meet their nutritional and health needs.

We do not believe this effort should ultimately have to be carried forward by health care providers, however. The issue of poverty can and should be addressed in the legislature, not in our offices. Welfare rates have fallen by a third or more in spending power over the past ten years. These rates now place most recipients' income at less than half the poverty line. According to Toronto Public Health, a single person living on welfare is \$285 per month short of being able to afford the recommendations for a nutritious diet contained in Ontario's Nutritious Food Basket. Welfare rates in Ontario must be raised across the board, to show that our government, and our society, is not willing to allow our poorest neighbours to continue to live at high risk of ill health.

We are writing to enlist your support in improving the health of our province's poorest families, by working to increase welfare rates to a level that meets their basic needs.

We would appreciate the opportunity to meet with you to discuss our concerns, and to discuss how we can work together to address this crisis. Please contact us through Dr. Gary Bloch at [gary.bloch@utoronto.ca](mailto:gary.bloch@utoronto.ca).

Thank you for your attention to this urgent matter,

Gary Bloch MD CCFP, St. Michael's Hospital, Seaton House Homeless Shelter (for)

Linda Alldred-Johnson, Parish Nurse, St Matthew's United Church, Richmond Hill

Peter Barreca BSc MD CCFP FCFP, St Michael's Hospital, Assistant Professor, University of Toronto

Ahmed Bayoumi MD FRCPC, University of Toronto

Marg Benzie PHN, Region of Peel Outreach Team

Philip B. Berger MD CCFP FCFP, Medical Director Inner City Health Program, Chief  
Department of Family & Community Medicine, St. Michael's Hospital

Andrew Bond MD, Resident in Family Medicine, St. Michael's Hospital

Toba Bryant PhD, Centre for Research on Inner City Health, St. Michael's Hospital

Mark D. Caspi, Therapeutic Counselor, Shout Clinic

Viola Coleman RN, Shelter Health, Region of Peel

Barb Craig RN, Street Health

Cathy Crowe RN, Street Nurse, Atkinson Economic Justice Fellow

Gary Deonarain, RN, Salvation Army Harboursight Centre

Mimi Divinsky MD CCFP FCFP, Medical Reform Group

Monika Dutt MD, Resident in Family Medicine, St. Michael's Hospital

Brenda Everett, Administrative Coordinator, Central Toronto CHCs, Shout Clinic

Adeline Falk-Rafael RN PhD, Associate Professor, Nursing, York University

Joyce Fox RN BScN MHS, Director, Healthy Living Service, Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit

Dorothea Fox Jakob, R.N.

Charles Gardner MD, Medical Officer of Health and CEO, Leeds, Grenville and Lanark District Health Unit

Miriam Garfinkle MD CCFP, Regent Park CHC

Michael Garreau, President Canadian Nursing Students' Association, Co-Chair New Health Professionals Network

Abbas Ghavam-Rassoul MD MHSc CCFP, St. Michael's Hospital and The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health

Rick Glazier MD MPH CCFP FCFP, St. Michael's Hospital

Kevin Gough MD FRCPC M.Ed, Assistant Professor, University of Toronto, Head Division of Infectious Diseases, Medical Director HIV Service St. Michael's Hospital

Nancy Graham RN BScN, Public Health Nurse, City of Toronto

Doris Grinspun RN MSN Ph.D. (cand) O.Ont., Executive Director Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario

Gordon Guyatt MD FRCPC, McMaster University

Ted Haines MD, McMaster University

Abby Hershler MEd MD, Psychiatry Resident

Stephen Hwang MD MPH FRCPC, Associate Professor Dept. of Medicine, University of Toronto, Research Scientist, Centre for Research on Inner City Health, St. Michael's Hospital

Sarah Innis RN, Street Health

Tara Kiran MD CCFP

Wendy Lai MD CCFP

Peggy Lathwell MD, Regent Park CHC

Joan Lesmond RN, Casey House

Rhonda Love PhD, Professor, Dept. of Public Health Sciences, University of Toronto

Janice Meilach, Counselor, Queen West CHC

Peggy Millson MD MHSc FRCPC, Associate Professor, Dept. of Public Health Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, University of Toronto

Nabil B. Missiha MB BCh CCFP FCFP, St. Michael's Hospital

Alicia Odette RN, Street Health

Rosana Pellizzari MD, Medical Officer of Health, Perth District Health Unit

Judith Peranson MD, Resident in Family Medicine, St Michael's Hospital

Deb Phelps RN, Health Promoter, Queen West CHC

Neena Prasad MSc MD CCFP, St. Michael's Hospital, Queen West CHC

Kapri Rabin, Health Services Director, Central Toronto CHC

Dennis Raphael PhD, Associate Professor, School of Health Policy and Management, York University

Meb Rashid MD CCFP, Access Alliance Multicultural CHC

Lynn Rempel RN PhD, Assistant Professor Department of Nursing, Brock University

Pete Sarsfield MD FRCPC, Medical Officer of Health and CEO, Northwestern Health Unit

Dyanne Semogas RN, Assistant Professor, McMaster University, Project Director Wesley Managed Alcohol Program

Leah Steele MD PhD CCFP, St. Michael's Hospital, Centre for Addiction and Mental Health, Methadone Works, Toronto Public Health

Jim Sugiyama MD CCFP, Taddle Creek Family Health Network

Penny Sutcliffe MD MHSc FRCPC, Medical Officer of Health and CEO, Sudbury & District Health Unit

Tomislav Svoboda MD CCFP FRCPC, Medical Director Seaton House, St. Michael's Hospital, Centre for Research on Inner City Health

Judy Tsao MSW, Outreach Counsellor, Queen West CHC

Jolanda Turley MDCM CCFP, St. Michael's Hospital, Assistant Professor University of Toronto

Karen Weyman MD CCFP FCFP, St. Michael's Hospital

Roland Wong MSc MD FRCPC, Community Medicine Specialist, Toronto

Susan Woolhouse MD CCFP, South Riverdale CHC

Anita Young RN, Street Health

cc: Hon. George Smitherman, Minister of Health and Long Term Care  
 Hon. Jim Watson, Minister of Health Promotion  
 Dr. Sheela Basrur, Chief Medical Officer of Health  
 Michael Prue, NDP Critic Community and Social Services  
 Gerry Martiniuk, PC Critic, Community and Social Services  
 Shelley Martel, NDP Critic, Health and Long Term Care  
 Elizabeth Witmer, PC Critic, Health and Long Term Care