Cost of the Nutritious Food Basket – Toronto 2007

Date: September 5, 2007
To: Board of Health
From: Medical Officer of Health
Wards: All
Reference Number:

SUMMARY

This report provides information on the cost of the Nutritious Food Basket in Toronto for 2007 and recommends measures to improve health through increased access to nutritious food for individuals and families on low incomes. The Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) is a food costing tool used to measure the cost of healthy eating in each Board of Health jurisdiction within Ontario.

The average weekly cost for a family of four in Toronto in 2007 is $133.04 per week ($576.06 month). This is an increase of 7% in food costs from the 2006 pricing survey. Overall, food costs have increased by 24.5% since 1999, when the current version of the costing tool was first implemented.

Since the 2006 NFB results were presented to the Board of Health in January 2007, the provincial government has introduced an Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) for low income families of up to $250 per dependent child under 18 years in 2007 rising to up to $1,100 per child per year by 2011. A 2% increase in social assistance rates is scheduled to take effect in November 2007; however, a family of four receiving Ontario Works benefits would see an average increase of just over $67/month as a result of implementation of OCB and the increase to social assistance. The cost of rent and basic groceries still exceeds available monthly income, leaving no funds for all other basic needs such as personal care items, clothing and transportation. The minimum wage rate has increased slightly in 2007 to $8.00 per hour, but this is still far short of an adequate living wage.

Access to adequate amounts of safe and nutritious food is a basic human right as well as a fundamental requirement for health and well-being. The difficulty experienced by many Toronto residents in meeting daily nutritional needs is a result of the high cost of housing.
inadequate income, low social assistance rates, as well as the rising cost of food. This forces many people to choose between paying the rent and buying food and other necessities and increases the likelihood of relying on food banks and other emergency food programs.

The NFB survey results were analyzed according to the energy and nutrient needs of 23 age/gender groups, as defined in the 1990 Recommended Nutrient Intakes for Canadians. The 2007 results are summarized in Attachment 1.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Medical Officer of Health recommends that:

1. the Board of Health direct the Medical Officer of Health to request the Premier of Ontario to increase Ontario Works benefit rates so that the Basic Allowance includes a nutrition component which is sufficient to meet daily nutritional needs as determined annually by the cost of the Nutritious Food Basket and that the remainder of the Basic Allowance be set to enable recipients to afford other basic needs including transportation, clothing and personal care items.

2. the Board of Health direct the Medical Officer of Health to request the Premier of Ontario to publish annually the details of current social assistance rate components and how they are determined, including the nutrition component of the Basic Allowance.

3. the Board of Health request that the Ministry of Health Promotion collate the results of the Nutritious Food Basket surveys conducted by local Boards of Health and report the findings publicly on an annual basis.

4. the Board of Health continue to champion community efforts to reduce health disparities by endorsing the 25 in 5 Network’s call to provincial political candidates and parties to develop a comprehensive plan to reduce poverty rates in Ontario by 25% in five years.

5. the Board of Health request that all levels of government make significant investments in affordable housing, universal child care and other strategies that impact on income security.

6. the Board of Health reaffirm its request to the Premier of Ontario to increase minimum wage rates to ensure a standard of living to promote optimal health.

7. The Board of Health request the Premier of Ontario to implement the Ontario Child Benefit fully by 2008; and

8. The Board of Health forward this report to key stakeholders: the City of Toronto’s Community Development and Recreation Committee, the General Managers of
Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, Children’s Services, Homes for the Aged and Parks, Forestry and Recreation, the Ontario Ministers of Health Promotion, Community and Social Services, Children and Youth Services and Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the Office of Nutrition Policy and Promotion at Health Canada, the Association of Local Public Health Agencies, the Ontario Public Health Association’s Community Food Security Workgroup, all Ontario Boards of Health, the Association of Ontario Health Centres, the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health and Dietitians of Canada.

Financial Impact
There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

DECISION HISTORY
Since 1999, Boards of Health in the Province of Ontario have been required to complete an annual Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) survey each May/June, using a supplied protocol and software program. The survey must be submitted to the Chief Medical Officer of Health by August 1st of each year. Information about the cost of the NFB can be used to promote and support policy development to increase access to nutritious food. The results of the Nutritious Food Basket survey in Toronto are reported annually to the Board of Health and City Council and shared with a wide range of stakeholders.

ISSUE BACKGROUND
As a requirement specified in the Chronic Disease Prevention program standard, Mandatory Health Programs and Services Guidelines (1997), Toronto Public Health staff conduct an annual food costing survey using the 1998 Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care document, Monitoring the Cost of a Nutritious Food Basket Protocol (1). This protocol requires that 66 specified foods be priced in at least six different grocery stores, including major supermarket chains and independent stores. The foods included in the NFB survey are based on nutrition recommendations and food expenditure surveys, and are not intended to be a prescriptive list of what to eat. Instead, the NFB provides a sample of foods that can be used to determine benchmark costs of healthy eating. The NFB includes basic food items from all food groups in Canada’s Food Guide.

The difficulty experienced by many Toronto residents in meeting daily nutritional needs is a result of the high cost of housing, inadequate income, low social assistance rates, as well as the rising cost of food. In November 2005, the Board of Health requested the Premier of Ontario to increase social assistance rates such that the shelter component is 100% of median market rent and the basic needs component is increased by 40%. In June 2006, City Council approved a report by Toronto Social Services entitled Systems of Survival, Systems of Support: An Action Plan for Social Assistance in the City of Toronto, which calls for improvements to the social assistance system to ensure adequate benefits for Toronto residents. In addition to increases in OW rates, this action plan also identifies the need to consider local differences in cost of living when setting OW rates (2).
COMMENTS

Nutritious Food Basket Costing Tool
The NFB costing tool is designed to measure the cost of healthy eating in each Board of Health jurisdiction in Ontario. The NFB tool does not include processed and prepared foods, snack foods or restaurant/take-out foods. It also excludes essential non-food items such as laundry detergent, soap, paper products, toiletries etc. that are often purchased with groceries, and it does not take into account the potential additional cost of transporting the goods home.

The cost of the NFB is generally lower than the actual grocery expenditures of the average Toronto resident. It is also assumed that the consumer has access to an adequate number of good quality food stores, as well as sufficient time and means of transportation to allow for comparison shopping for the lowest prices. In addition, it is assumed that the consumer has the time, skills and equipment to consistently plan, purchase and prepare meals and snacks from relatively low-cost food staples and ingredients.

The NFB tool will also require revisions to reflect new nutrition recommendations from Eating Well with Canada’s Food Guide, which was released in February 2007.

Income and Food Access
The right to adequate food has been recognized in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and has been further defined by the Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in General Comment 12 (1999) which states. “The right to adequate food is realized when every man, woman and child, alone or in community with others, has the physical and economic access at all times to adequate food or means for its procurement” (3). Canada signed the United Nations Covenant on Social, Economic and Cultural Rights in 1976. The Toronto Food Charter, adopted by Toronto City Council in 2001, states that “every Toronto resident should have access to an adequate supply of nutritious, affordable and culturally-acceptable food”. Inadequate incomes and the high cost of housing, together with rising food costs, have made it increasingly difficult, if not impossible, for Toronto residents living on limited incomes to realize this right.

The 2007 findings from the Nutritious Food Basket indicate that the cost of food for a reference family of four has increased 7% from 2006, in the City of Toronto. The 2006 NFB findings for Toronto showed a slight decrease of 0.2% in the cost of the foods as compared to 2005. The provincial average cost of the NFB for a family of four increased by 2.6% in 2006 from the previous year, while information on the 2007 provincial average cost is not yet available. Increases in food costs may be associated with many issues affecting various stages of the food system continuum, including the costs of production and processing, transport and distribution, marketing, purchasing and preparation. Within each stage of the food system, the cost of energy/fuel, utilities, wages and other components ultimately affect the price of food at the retail level. The NFB tool is a measure of the retail cost of food.
The Consumer Price Index also confirms an increase in food costs: up 3.5% over the last year, although the CPI is based on a smaller number of foods than in the NFB (4). The CPI is calculated on a monthly basis for Canada and provincially. In Ontario, foods which have shown an increase in price include fresh vegetables and fruit, dairy, meat and eggs (4); this is consistent with the NFB survey results in Toronto this year. In a recent analysis conducted by the Daily Bread Food Bank, individuals using food banks in Toronto were asked “Are there foods which you think you should eat for a healthy diet, but cannot afford? If so, which?” A total of 74.8% of respondents indicated vegetables and fruit, 76.4% indicated meat and alternatives and 56.3% indicated milk (5).

According to the Canadian Community Health Survey 2.2 (2004), the prevalence of household food insecurity was 8.4% (n = 379,100 households) in Ontario, with 5.6% reporting moderate food insecurity and the remaining 2.7% severe food insecurity. Food security in this report referred to a household’s financial ability to purchase adequate food. In Ontario, the prevalence of food insecurity was 24% for female one-parent households and 14.1% for recent immigrant households who have been living in Canada 5 years or less (6). Furthermore, in Ontario, food insecurity was most prevalent (61%) in households where the main source of income was social assistance (6). Individuals and families on low or fixed incomes may be faced with the reality of choosing between paying the rent and buying food and other necessities, which increases the likelihood of turning to food banks and other emergency food programs to meet nutritional needs. Currently, one in ten Toronto residents rely on the inadequate income available through social assistance in any given year (2).

Vulnerability of the working poor to food insecurity is also highlighted in the most recent findings from the Canadian Community Health Survey 2.2 (2004). Results indicate that the prevalence of food insecurity among Ontario households who report their main source of income as salary/wages was 6.6% (6). The groups most affected by chronically low incomes include older single adults, lone parents and recent immigrants to Canada (7). Although the minimum wage rate has recently been increased from $7.75 to $8.00 per hour, it still falls short of an adequate living wage.

In 2007, the provincial government introduced the Ontario Child Benefit (OCB) to assist families living on low income. It will be phased in over five years, with an initial one-time payment in July 2007 of up to $250 per dependent child under the age of 18. Payments will begin to flow monthly in July 2008 with the benefit level rising to up to $600 per child per year, then to $805 in 2009, $900 in 2010 and by 2011, the benefit will be up to $1,100 per child per year. Beginning in July 2008, OCB payments will be reduced by 3.4 cents for every dollar of adjusted family net income over $20,000.

The 2007 provincial budget also provided for a 2% increase in social assistance rates to take effect this November. Although the government has taken some positive steps to strengthen income security, residents living on low incomes still cannot afford healthy food. For example, even with the recent changes announced, a family of four would see an increase of only just over $67/month (an additional $25.56 as a result of a 2% increase in OW rates and an additional $41.66 as a result of the OCB benefit) by November 2007.
The combined cost of shelter and nutritious food still exceeds their monthly income, leaving no funds for all other basic needs. See Attachment 2 for more details on the monthly budgets for three households supported by Ontario Works benefits.

There are ongoing community efforts to support the importance of income security and the need to implement a provincial poverty reduction strategy. The 25 in 5 Network is a multi-sector network of agencies and organizations with a common goal: to encourage all provincial political candidates and parties to develop a plan to reduce poverty rates in Ontario by 25% in five years. The 25 in 5 Network is calling for a comprehensive, integrated and coordinated plan of action that would address the central components of community supports, housing, child care and income support/living wages.

In April 2007, the Community Development and Recreation Committee launched “Toronto for All”; an initiative to build an inclusive City that provides opportunities for optimal well-being and healthy development for all children, youth and adults. A key priority of the “Toronto for All” initiative is income security.

**Food and Health**
There is strong evidence of a direct link between poverty and poor health and the importance of good nutrition for healthy growth and development. Research has shown that young children living in low income households have poorer health status, more frequent hospitalizations, stomach aches and headaches, poorer social skills and impaired academic performance (8) than children living in higher income households. Individuals from low income households are more likely to report poor health and multiple chronic conditions such as heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, major depression and distress, and food allergies (9).

Poverty is associated with lower food expenditures, as well as diets comprised of foods that are more energy-dense, higher in fat and sugars and more refined (10). According to Drewnowski (2004), there is an inverse relationship between energy density of foods (energy per unit weight) and energy cost ($/kcal), such that “diets based on refined grains, added sugars and added fats are more affordable than the recommended diets based on lean meats, fish, fresh vegetables and fruit” (11). In Canada, families on low income tend to consume fewer vegetables, fruit and milk products than higher income families (12). As well, many people living on low incomes are unable to eat foods that are personally and culturally acceptable, which in turn contributes “to an overall sense of impoverishment” (13).

**Implications for City of Toronto Programs**
Student Nutrition Programs, which provide over 80,000 meals and snacks per day to children and youth in approximately 500 programs across the city, will face additional budget pressures as a result of higher food costs. Of the $2,799,340 in municipal funding for student nutrition programs in 2007, at least 70% is spent directly on food. A 7% increase in food costs translates into an additional $137,168 needed by these community-based programs to purchase nutritious foods and maintain the current nutritional standards for these programs. All student nutrition programs (SNPs) are required to
include a serving of vegetables or fruit in every meal/snack and a serving of Milk and Alternatives in every meal. These food categories, already identified as unaffordable by a majority of food bank users, may become unaffordable to SNPs. Student Nutrition Programs will be forced to make difficult choices such as reducing the quantity and quality of the foods they provide or restricting the number of children and youth who access the program or reducing or ceasing program operation.

The Healthiest Babies Possible (HBP) and Peer Nutrition programs target “at-risk”, culturally diverse Toronto families. These programs provide food certificates to participants (i.e., pregnant women and parents with children up to 6 years old). Food certificates are used as an effective strategy for reducing barriers, increasing access to nutritional foods, decreasing food insecurity, incentives, and skill development or to purchase food for group facilitation for client populations. In 2006, HBP distributed $235,660.00 in food certificates to approximately 1,100 clients, while Peer Nutrition distributed approximately $175,000.00 in food certificates to 3,500 participants. The food certificates are intended to help clients purchase healthy foods, such as fruits and vegetables and milk and alternatives as recommended in Canada’s Food Guide, to meet key nutrients needed for healthy pregnancies and for adequate growth and development in the early years. Increased food costs means that the certificates will now have reduced purchasing power for these much needed nutritious foods.

Increased food costs will of course also have implications for all City programs and services that provide food, including child care centres, homes for the aged and shelters for homeless people. In June 2007, the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care announced a $0.11 per diem increase (i.e. from $5.46 to $5.57 per resident per day) in raw food costs for long-term care settings. However, due to advocacy efforts by Dietitians of Canada (DC), the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO) and others, the provincial government announced a month later that it would increase the daily raw food allowance to $7.00 per resident per day, effective September 1, 2007, which was the amount recommended by DC back in November 2006.

Conclusion
The high cost of housing and inadequate incomes (i.e. low minimum wage rates, inadequate social assistance rates) prevent Toronto’s most vulnerable and marginalized residents from accessing nutritious foods. There is a clear link between poverty and health. This year's 7% increase in the cost of Nutritious Food Basket in Toronto makes the situation worse and will further impact overall health and quality of life.

CONTACT
Carol Timmings, Healthy Living Director
Chronic Disease Prevention
Toronto Public Health
Telephone: 416-392-1355
Email: ctimmings@toronto.ca
Judi Wilkie. Healthy Living Manager  
Chronic Disease Prevention  
Toronto Public Health  
Telephone: 416-338-1671  
Email: jwilkie@toronto.ca

SIGNATURE

Dr. David McKeown  
Medical Officer of Health

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment 1: Weekly Cost of Nutritious Food Basket in Toronto (May. 2007)  
Attachment 2: Monthly household budget for three household types supported by Ontario Works benefits and living in market rental accommodations
References:


## How to Calculate the Food Costs of a Nutritious Food Basket

Follow the steps below to find out the cost of a weekly nutritious food basket.

### STEP 1:
Write down the age and sex of all the people you are feeding. For example:
- Man, 37 years old and Woman, 37 years old
- Boy, 13 years old and Girl, 8 years old

### STEP 2:
Write down the cost of feeding each person.

### STEP 3:
This is your subtotal.

### STEP 4:
It costs a little more to feed a small group of people and less to feed a large group. Use the following adjustments for household size:
- 1 person – multiply by 1.15
- 2 people – multiply by 1.10
- 3 people – multiply by 1.05
- 4 people – make no change
- 5 people – multiply by 0.95
- 6+ people – multiply by 0.90

### STEP 5:
To determine the cost per month, multiply by 4.33

### Example: Reference Family of 4, Toronto (May, 2007)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age (years)</th>
<th>Cost Per Week ($)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>40.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>29.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>37.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>25.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtotal</td>
<td></td>
<td>133.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td></td>
<td>$133.04 x no adjustment = $133.04 x 4.33 = $576.06/month</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Cost Per Week

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age/Sex/Group</th>
<th>Cost Per Week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>15.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2-3</td>
<td>16.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-6</td>
<td>21.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>25.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>32.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-15</td>
<td>37.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-18</td>
<td>43.99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girl</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7-9</td>
<td>25.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12</td>
<td>29.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13-15</td>
<td>31.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16-18</td>
<td>30.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-24</td>
<td>41.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-49</td>
<td>40.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-74</td>
<td>36.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75+</td>
<td>33.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19-24</td>
<td>31.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-49</td>
<td>29.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-74</td>
<td>29.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75+</td>
<td>28.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnancy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 13-15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trimester 1</td>
<td>35.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trimesters 2,3</td>
<td>37.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lactation</td>
<td>38.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 16-18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trimester 1</td>
<td>35.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trimesters 2,3</td>
<td>37.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lactation</td>
<td>38.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 19-24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trimester 1</td>
<td>34.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trimesters 2,3</td>
<td>36.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lactation</td>
<td>37.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age 25-49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trimester 1</td>
<td>33.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trimesters 2,3</td>
<td>35.11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lactation</td>
<td>35.80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The cost of the Nutritious Food Basket is based on the 66 food items collected from 12 stores across the City. The software program automatically adds 5% to the basket cost to cover the cost of miscellaneous foods used in meal preparation.*

**S.O. spices, seasonings, condiments, etc.**
Monthly Household Budget for Three Household Types Supported by Ontario Works Benefits and Living in Market Rental Accommodations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>September 2007</th>
<th>One Person Household (male, aged 25-49) (a)</th>
<th>Single-Parent Household (female, aged 25-49, boy age 10 and girl age 3) (b)</th>
<th>Reference Family of four (male and female age 37, boy age 13, girl age 8) (c)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monthly Income</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Data for social assistance rates provided by Toronto Social Services)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Basic Allowance (d)</td>
<td>$206.00</td>
<td>$559.00</td>
<td>$644.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelter Allowance (d)</td>
<td>$342.00</td>
<td>$583.00</td>
<td>$634.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Winter Clothing Allowance (e)</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
<td>$18.00</td>
<td>$18.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Back-to-School Allowance (f)</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
<td>$5.92</td>
<td>$16.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ontario Child Benefit (g)</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
<td>$41.66</td>
<td>$41.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada Child Tax Benefit (h)</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
<td>$292.81</td>
<td>$292.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Universal Child Care Benefit (i)</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
<td>$100.00</td>
<td>$0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federal GST Benefit (j)</td>
<td>$19.75</td>
<td>$60.33</td>
<td>$60.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$567.75</td>
<td>$1,660.72</td>
<td>$1,707.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Selected Monthly Expenses</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food (k)</td>
<td>$201.32</td>
<td>$356.67</td>
<td>$576.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Monthly Rent (l) (assuming rent includes heat, electricity) (Bachelor)</td>
<td>$738.00</td>
<td>$1,073.00</td>
<td>$1,280.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Telephone (m)</td>
<td>$25.39</td>
<td>$25.39</td>
<td>$25.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation (n)</td>
<td>$99.75</td>
<td>$99.75</td>
<td>$283.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>$1,064.46</td>
<td>$1,554.81</td>
<td>$2,164.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Monthly Funds Remaining</strong> (for other basic needs, e.g., household and personal care items, clothing, child care)</td>
<td>- $496.71/month</td>
<td>+ $105.91/month</td>
<td>- $457.06/month</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a) Only basic and shelter allowances factored into estimated OWA net income for calculation of GST credit. Net annual income = 12 months x $548.00 Basic & Shelter Allowances = $6,576.00
b) Net annual income calculation = 12 months x ($1,142.00 Basic & Shelter Allowances + $18 Winter Clothing + $5.92 Back-to-School + $41.66 Ontario Child Benefit + $292.81 CCTB + $100.00 UCBC) = $19,204.68
c) Net annual income calculation = 12 months x ($1,278.00 Basic & Shelter Allowances + $18 Winter Clothing + $16.84 Back-to-School + $41.66 Ontario Child Benefit + $292.81 CCTB) = $18,767.72
d) Basic and Shelter Allowance does not take into consideration the 2% increase announced in the March 2007 Provincial budget. Scheduled to take effect in November 2007
e) Based on a one time payment of $108.00 for every eligible dependent divided over 12 months
f) Back-to-School Allowance is $71 for dependents aged 4-12 and $131 for dependents aged 13-17.
g) The Ontario Child Benefit in July 2007 will provide all social assistance families with children below the age of 18 with a lump of $250 per child. Starting in July 2008, monthly benefits will be issued.
h) CCTB includes Basic Benefit and NCBS (this figure is based on income remaining after the maximum chargeable amount (clawback) per number of dependants is deducted).
i) UCBC paid to children below six and is based on net annual incomes as described in notes 2 & 3.
j) Based on net annual income. GST credit issued on a quarterly basis. Figures derived from GST Guideline Table effective July 2007-June 2008.
k) Based on Nutritious Food Basket 2007.
l) Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, Average Rental in Toronto, April 2007.
m) Based on Bell Canada rates August 2007, does not include long distance.
n) Transportation takes into consideration TTC transit fares as of April 1, 2006. Monthly adult Metropass is $99.75 and student Metropass is $83.75 (aged 13 to 19 years old). Child fares are not calculated.

The monthly shelter allowance in the Ontario Works Benefits does not reflect the high cost of market rental accommodations in Toronto. For this reason, many low and/or fixed income residents have to choose between paying the rent or buying food.
July 24, 2007

BOARD OF HEALTH:

Subject: Community Development and Recreation Committee Item 7.8
"Toronto for All" - Income Security

City Council on July 16, 17, 18 and 19, 2007, adopted this Item without amendment, and in so doing, directed that the report from the Chair of the Community Development and Recreation Committee and the attached backgrounder be forwarded to the Board of Health; Affordable Housing Office; Children’s Services; City Manager’s Office; Parks, Forestry and Recreation; Shelter, Support and Housing Administration; Social Development, Finance and Administration and Toronto Social Services to provide valuable backround information on the income security issues identified by City residents, and to inform Divisional work related to income security, access and social inclusion.

for City Clerk

M. Toft/csb

Attachment

Sent to: Chair, Community Development and Recreation Committee
Board of Health
Medical Officer of Health, City of Toronto
City Manager
General Manager, Children's Services
General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation
General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration
Executive Director, Social Development, Finance and Administration
General Manager, Social Services
Director, Affordable Housing Office
Cindy Wilkey, Staff Lawyer, Income Security Advocacy Centre
Community Development and Recreation Committee - Item 7.8  
Considered by City Council on July 16, 17, 18 and 19, 2007

CD7.8 NO AMENDMENT

"Toronto for All" - Income Security

City Council Decision
City Council on July 16, 17, 18 and 19, 2007, adopted the following motions:

1. Consistent with Toronto Social Services’ implementation of Systems of Survival, Systems of Support: An Action Plan for Social Assistance in the City of Toronto, Toronto Social Services, in conjunction with Toronto Public Health and Social Development, Finance and Administration, work with community agencies and organizations to hold community education forums to advance public awareness regarding social inclusion and income security issues in Toronto.

2. The Chair of the Community Development and Recreation Committee and appropriate City Divisions and Agencies actively support community efforts to draw attention to the growing need for a Provincial poverty reduction strategy.

3. The report from the Chair of the Community Development and Recreation Committee and the attached backgrounder be forwarded to the Board of Health; Affordable Housing Office; Children’s Services; City Manager’s Office; Parks, Forestry and Recreation; Shelter, Support and Housing Administration; Social Development, Finance and Administration and Toronto Social Services to provide valuable background information on the income security issues identified by city residents, and to inform Divisional work related to income security, access and social inclusion.

(June 18, 2007) Report from Councillor Joe Mihevc, Chair, Community Development and Recreation Committee

Committee Recommendations
The Community Development and Recreation Committee recommends that:

1. consistent with Toronto Social Services’ implementation of Systems of Survival, Systems of Support: An Action Plan for Social Assistance in the City of Toronto,
Toronto Social Services, in conjunction with Toronto Public Health and Social Development, Finance and Administration, work with community agencies and organizations to hold community education forums to advance public awareness regarding social inclusion and income security issues in Toronto;

2. the Chair of the Community Development and Recreation Committee and appropriate City Divisions and Agencies actively support community efforts to draw attention to the growing need for a Provincial poverty reduction strategy; and

3. the report from the Chair of the Community Development and Recreation Committee and the attached backgrounder be forwarded to the Board of Health: Affordable Housing Office; Children’s Services; City Manager’s Office; Parks, Forestry and Recreation; Shelter, Support and Housing Administration; Social Development, Finance and Administration and Toronto Social Services to provide valuable background information on the income security issues identified by city residents, and to inform Divisional work related to income security, access and social inclusion.

Summary
Report from Councillor Joe Mihevc, Chair, providing a summary of the special meeting of the Community Development and Recreation Committee held May 3, 2007, to hear speakers from residents and community stakeholders on issues related to income security in Toronto.

Background Information

cd7.8  
cd7.8-Backgrounder  
cd7.8-Attachment  

Communications
(July 3, 2007) Submission from Cindy Wilkey, Staff Lawyer, Income Security Advocacy Centre (CD.New.CD7.8.1)

Speakers
Cindy Wilkey, Staff Lawyer, Income Security Advocacy Centre, and filed a written submission
MEMORANDUM

To: Community Development and Recreation Committee

From: Councillor Joe Mihevc
Chair, Community Development and Recreation Committee

Date: June 18, 2007

Re: “Toronto for All” – Income Security

The Community Development and Recreation Committee, at the April 2, 2007 meeting, focused the agenda on Social Inclusion and launched an initiative referred to as “Toronto for All” – building a Toronto that provides opportunities for the optimal well-being and healthy development of all children, youth and adults.

As a first focus under “Toronto for All”, a special meeting of the Community Development and Recreation Committee was held on May 3, 2007 in order to hear directly from City of Toronto residents and community stakeholders on issues related to income security.

We heard from a panel of three speakers with different perspectives – Jehad Aliweiwi, Executive Director of Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office; Hugh Mackenzie, Research Associate at the University of Toronto Centre for Urban Studies and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and Finn Poschmann, Director of Research, C.D. Howe Institute. Following these speakers, we heard 16 deputations from the public, including 7 written submissions.

The following key issues were clearly expressed at the May 3 meeting:

There is a need to focus on:

- real employment opportunities for City residents – jobs that pay living wages and offer a way out of poverty;
• immediate increases to social assistance rates and benefits and the elimination of overly punitive eligibility criteria, processes and procedures;

• dental services and drug benefits for the poor, access to vitamins and health supplements and low cost nutritious food;

• other support services such as child care, affordable housing, recreation services, public transit and education;

• greater access to other income security programs such as Employment Insurance and the Ontario Disability Support Program; and

• particular issues facing newcomers, visible minorities and those residing within specific high needs communities.

There has been recent momentum on some income security measures, introduced in the 2007 federal and provincial budgets - a gradual increase to a $10 minimum wage, the introduction of an Ontario Child Benefit and the federal Working Income Tax Benefit. These measures represent important first steps in the area of income security; however, what appears to be missing from the current political discourse is a clearly articulated framework from which to proceed.

Ultimately, what we heard on May 3rd was the strongly expressed belief that the City of Toronto should support the growing call for the articulation of a poverty reduction strategy at the Provincial order of government. This Strategy would be characterized by clear goals, targets, timelines and measures of success; with inter-related components including affordable child care, income security, affordable housing and effective and fair employment standards.

I am pleased to attach a summary backgrounder that reflects what was heard and provides an analysis of recent income security measures announced in the 2007 federal and provincial budgets. I make the following recommendations:

(1) Consistent with Toronto Social Services' implementation of Systems of Survival, Systems of Support: An Action Plan for Social Assistance in the City of Toronto, TSS, in conjunction with Toronto Public Health and Social Development, Finance and Administration, work with community agencies and organizations to host community education forums to advance public awareness regarding social inclusion and income security issues in Toronto;

(2) The Chair of the CDRC and appropriate City Divisions and Agencies actively support community efforts to draw attention to the growing need for a Provincial poverty reduction strategy; and
This backgrounder and covering memo be forwarded to the Board of Health; Affordable Housing Office; Children’s Services; City Manager’s Office; Parks, Forestry and Recreation; Shelter Support and Housing Administration; Social Development, Finance and Administration and Toronto Social Services to provide valuable background information on the income security issues identified by city residents, and to inform Divisional work related to income security, access and social inclusion.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Councillor Joe Mihevc
Chair, Community Development and Recreation Committee
June 18, 2007

"Toronto for All" – Income Security

Social Inclusion and Income Security

At the first meeting of the Community Development and Recreation Committee in January 2007, there were presentations from City Divisions on key strategic issues and upcoming areas of work. Social inclusion emerged as an overarching theme that ties together the work of these Divisions and services at the City of Toronto.

Inclusive cities contribute to the quality of life of individuals and improve the health of the population by reducing social and economic distances between people. Inclusive cities also value diversity and ensure that all members have the ability to participate in their communities as equally valued and respected citizens. The City is the order of government with the biggest stake in promoting social inclusion because it is closest to people at a local level and is most responsive to their needs. Social inclusion provides a useful lens or framework for the work of the Community Development and Recreation Committee in addressing the social challenges facing a large, diverse city like Toronto.

The Community Development and Recreation Committee, at its April 2, 2007 meeting, focused the agenda on social inclusion and launched an initiative referred to as "Toronto for All" - building a Toronto that provides opportunities for the optimal well-being and healthy development of all children, youth and adults. "Toronto for All" is consistent with the Mayor’s mandate for making a safe city safer, investing in priority neighbourhoods and building a city with opportunity for all.

Within the context of the social inclusion framework, income security has emerged as a key area. Income security is a key determinant of one’s ability to enjoy a high quality of life and an important concern for a significant number of Torontonians. Although Toronto is a prosperous city, that prosperity is not shared equally among all its residents. Substantial—and growing—inequalities exist between our richest and poorest citizens. Between 1991 and 2001, the number of families living in poverty increased by 36 per cent. The proportion of families living in poverty rose from 16 per cent to almost 20 per cent, while the proportion of higher income families rose from 18 per cent to over 23 per cent. Since 2001, evidence suggests that low income rates have remained relatively unchanged despite growing employment.
These disparities in income have serious consequences for social inclusion. Low incomes have been tied to poorer outcomes in a wide range of areas, including physical and mental health, longevity, educational attainment, and school readiness in children. The lack of adequate income has a particularly significant impact on children, where its affect on school readiness can initiate a life of poorer outcomes.

First Focus – Income Security

As a first focus under "Toronto for All", a special meeting of the Community Development and Recreation Committee was convened May 3, 2007 in order to hear from residents of the City of Toronto and community stakeholders on issues related to income security. This special committee meeting was a first for the City of Toronto under its new governance structure. It is an effort to advance the role of the City as a convenor of public dialogue - to take a strategic approach to critical issues facing the City, enter into dialogue with key experts and stakeholders and to facilitate community input and debate. This is also consistent with the emphasis of the Mayor’s platform on engaging residents and community stakeholders in decision-making and policy development at the City of Toronto.

Special Committee - What We Heard

The May 3rd meeting featured a panel of three speakers, bringing a variety of perspectives to the table on key income security issues, and putting forward options regarding appropriate City responses. They included Jehad Aliweizi, Executive Director, Thorncliffe Neighbourhood Office; Hugh Mackenzie, Research Associate at the University of Toronto Centre for Urban Studies and the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives and Finn Poschmann, Director of Research, at the C.D. Howe Institute.

Following these speakers, a total of 16 deputations from the public were made, including seven written submissions.

At this meeting, residents and social policy advocates identified the need for real employment opportunities for City residents – jobs that pay a living wage and offer a way out of poverty.

Deputants reiterated the need for immediate increases to Social Assistance rates and benefits, and an elimination of overly punitive eligibility criteria, processes and procedures. Several speakers made reference to Toronto Medical Officer of Health, Dr. David McKeown’s recent report on the inadequacy of social assistance rates - indefensibly low rates which, according to one speaker, force individuals to, “choose between paying the rent and buying enough food to see them through the last 10 days of each month.”

1 Janet Maher, written submission CD5.1.6

“Toronto for All” – Income Security June 2007
The strong link between poverty and health was reinforced and many deputants focussed on the need for dental services and drug benefits for the poor, access to vitamins and health supplements, and low cost, nutritious food. Deborah Phelps, representing the Queen West Community Health Centre, spoke of higher infant mortality, diabetes and other chronic disease rates among the poor. She summarized the connection between poverty and health in the following terms:

Poverty has been identified as the most important factor contributing to health disparities and inadequate government funding of programs and services used to close these gaps are directly linked to an increased demand for health services.  

Many speakers focused on the importance of other support services such as affordable housing, childcare, recreation, transit and education, and referenced the need for better links and integration between these services. Some highlighted the need for greater access to the other income security programs such as Employment Insurance and the Ontario Disability Support Program. The particular issues facing newcomers, visible minorities and those residing within specific communities were also highlighted.

There was a clear message that it is very difficult to speak of income security in the absence of a meaningful dialogue on systemic issues of poverty, marginalization, access and social inclusion. According to John Campey, Executive Director of the Community Social Planning Council of Toronto,

The adverse effects of poverty are clear – illness, discrimination, stigma, family dysfunction, social isolation, exclusion and premature death. These effects stretch beyond the individual, the family and the community to impact the City of Toronto itself – in increased service needs and emergency shelter costs.

Ultimately, there was a strongly expressed belief that the City should support the growing call for the articulation of a poverty reduction strategy at the Provincial order of government.

Building Momentum

Many of the May 3rd deputants echoed the recommendations and conclusions of two recent documents developed and reported through City Council in the spring of 2006: Time for a Fair Deal by the Task Force for Modernizing Income Security for Working Age Adults (MISWAA), and Systems of Survival, Systems of Support, an Action Plan for Social Assistance in the City of Toronto, produced by Toronto Social Services.

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2 Deborah Phelps, Health Promoter, Queen West Community Health Centre, written submission CD5.1.3
3 John Campey, Executive Director, Community Social Planning Council of Toronto, written submission CD5.1.4)

"Toronto for All" – Income Security June 2007
Systems of Survival, Systems of Support is a wide-ranging policy document comprised of some 65 recommendations and actions for improving social assistance in Toronto. The report was prepared by Toronto Social Services, and approved by City Council in May 2006.

While the immediate focus of the report was on changes that should be made to the Ontario Works system in Toronto, the report also commented on the full range of income security issues facing unemployed adults in the city.

The overriding objective of the Action Plan is to ensure that benefits, services and employment supports for low income people are available, adequate and appropriate. It proposes immediate changes to the Ontario Works rate structure so that benefits reflect the true cost of living in Toronto, increased asset levels, as well as improved dental benefits for all social assistance recipients. In addition, the report calls for increased access to other income support programs such as Employment Insurance, and the Ontario Disability Support Program.

Chief among the recommendations in the report is the call for the creation of a provincial child benefit for low income families which would, in effect, remove the financial support of children from the social assistance system. By creating increased access to ODSP and creating a separate benefit for children, the Ontario Works program would be able to focus on assisting adults in making the transition from social assistance to sustainable employment.

Systems of Survival, Systems of Support also pays particular attention to the need for greater employment supports and job skill training for unemployed residents. It calls on the City to take a lead role in planning, managing and delivering employment services and supports in light of the federal and provincial governments wholesale downloading of these responsibilities. The report commits Toronto Social Services to lead in the development of an employment services plan on behalf of the City of Toronto.

Like many of the deputations heard on the evening of May 3rd, the Action Plan for Social Assistance in the City of Toronto concludes that addressing the full breadth of challenges faced by unemployed City residents will require a concerted effort by all levels of government and community service providers.4

MISWAA, a multi-stakeholder group reporting on Canada’s income security system for adults living with low incomes, released Time for a Fair Deal in May, 2006. The report reviewed current policies and programs designed to support adults in gaining economic independence and stable employment.5

The MISWAA report made a number of recommendations for both the Federal and Provincial governments in order to restore the income security system in

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4 Memo to Community Services Committee. April 11, 2007
5 MISWAA FAQ document

“Toronto for All” – Income Security June 2007
Canada. It called on the Federal government to reform Employment Insurance, create a new refundable tax benefit for working age adults, and provide a national disability income support program for persons with substantial disabilities. The Task Force also supported the recommendation made by others to increase the National Child Benefit.

The Task Force called on the Provincial government to establish an independent body to recommend periodic increases to the minimum wage. The report also included a recommendation to create a child benefit for all low income families outside of the social assistance system, to provide basic health and dental coverage to low income earners, and to significantly raise social assistance asset levels.

Both the MISWAA report and Systems of Survival, Systems of Support make concrete recommendations for reforms and re-investment in income security programs and policies. Several of the most important recommendations made came to fruition in the recent Federal and Provincial announcements. Earlier this spring, both the Federal and Provincial governments released budgets with an emphasis on families, poverty and issues of income security.

While contemplating how and where to concentrate our efforts as a City, it is both useful and critical to take stock of recent Federal and Provincial measures in the area of income security.

Taking Stock – Recent Income Security Measures

The Federal Budget:

The Federal budget of March 19, 2007 allocated more than $550 million per year to establish a Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB), along the lines of that proposed by the MISWAA task force.

The WITB is intended to provide an incentive to people receiving social assistance to rejoin the labour force by "helping them over the welfare wall". It is a refundable tax credit for low income earners, designed to off-set the additional costs an individual and family incur when moving from social assistance to paid employment. According to the budget plan, the Federal government estimates that the WITB will:

Help make work more rewarding for an estimated 1.2 million Canadians already in the workforce, thereby strengthening their incentives to stay employed. In addition, it is estimated that a WITB will encourage close to 60,000 people to enter the workforce.

However, given the relatively modest amounts available, it is unclear whether the WITB can make enough of a difference to enable many people receiving social assistance to seek increased employment.

"Toronto for All" – Income Security June 2007
The WITB includes an additional supplement for adults who are unable to work due to a substantial disability. This supplement, along with the new Registered Disability Savings Plan (RDSP), represents an important first step towards creating a national disability support system. The RDSP will allow parents and others to save for the long term financial stability of a child with a severe disability, with matching contributions from the Federal government.

Keeping the focus on families and children, the federal budget also included a new, non-refundable child tax credit that will save families up to $310.00 per year in taxes per child under the age of 18. It is expected that approximately 3 million taxpayers will benefit from this new credit. Unfortunately, the new child tax credit will not benefit the poorest Canadians, including social assistance recipients, who have no taxable income.

In addition to the WITB, RDSP, and new child tax credit, the Federal budget included:

- a plan to equalize the Canadian Social Transfer payments to support post-secondary education, social assistance and social services equally in all provinces;
- $250 million per year for new childcare spaces; and
- $500 million for labour market training.

The investment of $500 million annually beginning in 2008/2009 under a new labour market strategy targeted to those who do not qualify for EI programs and services was another welcome announcement in the Federal budget. According to budget documents, the funds will be allocated on a per capita basis. The federal government will work with the provinces and territories to determine how those funds can be best spent.

The Provincial Budget:

A few days after the Federal budget was announced, the Ontario government's budget was released. The following overview from the budget document *Investing in People, Expanding Opportunity* reflects the Provincial government's emphasis on income security and commitment to low income individuals and their families:

If each Ontarian is to be able to participate in the province's prosperity, the appropriate support and opportunities must be available. That means giving children who are growing up in low-income families in Ontario a better start in life. It means helping low-income families and those receiving social assistance.

While advocates and anti-poverty groups have suggested the budget is only a beginning with respect to addressing poverty in Ontario, it did include perhaps
the most significant change to the province’s income security system in several decades with the introduction of the much anticipated Ontario Child Benefit (OCB). Systems of Survival, Systems of Support advocated this type of a benefit:

(It is recommended that) The Province commit to developing a child benefit, funded 100 percent by the provincial and federal governments, that builds on the current National Child Benefit Supplement and that provides adequate benefits to all children in low income families, outside of the social assistance system...6

According to Provincial budget documents, the OCB program will be income tested (rather than means tested), and will therefore reach beyond OW recipients to include all low-income families. The benefit is targeted to families with children under age 18, including those on social assistance. The OCB will be phased in over five years, beginning with a one-time payment of up to $250.00 per child in July 2007. This marks an initial investment with the amount of the benefit growing to a maximum of $1,100.00 per child annually by 2011. Social assistance benefits will not be reduced by the amount of the OCB,7 However, a single parent with one child on social assistance will see an increase of only fifty dollars per month once the OCB is fully implemented.

While the implementation schedule and amounts of the OCB are slower and less than many advocates had hoped for, it nevertheless represents a significant step towards creating a protected benefit for children of low income families in Ontario. It will also ease the financial burden of families leaving social assistance for lower paying jobs, as they will retain their OCB.

The budget also included provisions to increase the minimum wage in Ontario to $10.25 by 2010 – a more cautious approach than poverty advocates and other groups were looking for. However, once fully implemented, these incremental increases will bring Ontario’s minimum wage to the highest levels in real terms since the development of a minimum wage policy.

Toronto City Council endorsed the call for an immediate increase to the minimum wage and increase to Social Assistance rates based on the Nutritious Food Basket Measure. The position of Council was communicated to the Premier in a May 8, 2007 letter, that has been attached.

In addition to the OCB, and increases to the minimum wage, the Provincial budget provided for:

- a 2 percent social assistance rate increase;

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7 TSS staff memo on budgets

“Toronto for All” – Income Security June 2007
• the exemption of July 2007 increase to the National Child Benefit Supplement (NCBS); and
• the full flow-through of the federal Working Income Tax Benefit (WITB) for social assistance recipients.

Conclusion

All of these budget items will have an overall positive impact on the income security system in Ontario, but there is still much work to be done. The provincial and federal measures represent important first steps in the area of income security. However, what appears to be missing from the current political discourse is a clearly articulated framework from which to proceed. Ultimately, the public and social policy advocates present on May 3rd called for the City to strongly support the growing call for a Provincial poverty reduction strategy similar to those in place in other jurisdictions—characterized by clear goals, targets, timelines and concrete measures of success; with inter-related components including affordable child care, income security, affordable housing and effective and fair employment standards.

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"Toronto for All" – Income Security June 2007
May 8, 2007

The Honourable Dalton McGuinty
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building, Room 281
Queen’s Park
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A1

Dear Premier:

The City of Toronto, through the leadership of the Community Development and Recreation Committee, is moving forward on its Social Inclusion agenda – to build a Toronto that provides opportunities for the optimal well-being and healthy development of all children, youth and adults. There has been increasing concern about the effectiveness of one important component of social inclusion – income security measures, and a growing sense that wages and social programs are not providing income security for low income people in Toronto.

We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate your government on introducing a number of measures that will strengthen income security in the 2007 budget. The Ontario Child Benefit is a welcome step, and will provide additional benefits for all low-income families, whether on social assistance or working poor. An increase to the minimum wage is also an important support to working families and individuals, particularly in Toronto where the cost of living, specifically for housing and transportation, is the highest in the province. While both initiatives are noteworthy, the realities facing many low income people in our city dictate greater urgency with respect to how rapidly implementation proceeds.

We would also like to take this opportunity to communicate the importance of another income security measure discussed at the March 2007 meeting of Toronto City Council – the cost of nutritious food for people living on social assistance.

Adequate nutritious food is a basic requirement for health and well-being. Toronto’s Medical Officer of Health has reported that many Toronto residents, notably those on social assistance, have great difficulty in meeting their daily nutritional needs due to inadequate incomes and high housing costs. Toronto City Council therefore, requests the Province of Ontario to increase social assistance benefit rates so that the Basic Allowance includes a nutrition allowance which meets daily nutritional needs as determined annually by the Nutritious Food Basket. We also request that the Province of Ontario publish annually the details of current social assistance rate components and how they are determined, including the nutrition allowance portion of the Basic Allowance. For your information a brief report on the cost of the Nutritious Food Basket, from the Toronto Medical Officer of Health, has been attached.
Income security is an acute issue in a large, diverse city like Toronto, where there are large numbers of vulnerable and low income people, a high cost of living and growing evidence that poverty is concentrating in specific communities and neighbourhoods. Having taken what are laudable first steps, we urge your government to move quickly to fully implement the efforts outlined in the 2007 budget – by accelerating plans to increase the minimum wage, by ensuring low income families receive the maximum benefits through the OCB as soon as possible and by introducing increases to social assistance rates to reflect the nutrition allowance based on the Food Basket Measure.

Strengthening income security is an essential part of achieving our vision of a great city with prosperity, liveability and opportunity for all. Thank you for consideration of this important matter.

Yours truly,

Mayor David Miller
City of Toronto

Councillor Joe Mihevc
Chair, Community Development & Recreation Committee

c. Hon. Madeleine Meilleur, Minister of Community and Social Services
Hon. George Smitherman, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care
Hon. Jim Watson, Minister of Health Promotion
Dr. David McKeown, Medical Officer of Health, City of Toronto
September 19, 2007

To: All Interested Persons

From: Board of Health

Subject: Cost of the Nutritious Food Basket – Toronto 2007

The Toronto Board of Health on September 19, 2007, considered:

i. a report (September 5, 2007) from the Medical Officer of Health, providing information on the cost of the Nutritious Food Basket in Toronto for 2007 and recommending measures to improve health through increased access to nutritious food for individuals and families on low incomes; and

ii. a letter (July 24, 2007) from the City Clerk, advising that City Council on July 16, 17, 18 and 19, 2007, adopted Community Development and Recreation Committee Item 7.8 entitled "Toronto for All" - Income Security' and, in so doing, directed that the report from the Chair of the Community Development and Recreation Committee and the attached backgrounder be forwarded to the Board of Health, and other City Divisions, to provide valuable background information on the income security issues identified by City residents, and to inform Divisional work related to income security, access and social inclusion.

The Board of Health:

1. directed the Medical Officer of Health to request the Premier of Ontario to increase Ontario Works benefit rates so that the Basic Allowance includes a nutrition component which is sufficient to meet daily nutritional needs as determined annually by the cost of the Nutritious Food Basket and that the remainder of the Basic Allowance be set to enable recipients to afford other basic needs including transportation, clothing and personal care items;

2. directed the Medical Officer of Health to request the Premier of Ontario to publish annually the details of current social assistance rate components and how they are determined, including the nutrition component of the Basic Allowance;

3. requested that the Ministry of Health Promotion collate the results of the Nutritious Food Basket surveys conducted by local Boards of Health and report the findings publicly on an annual basis;
4. will continue to champion community efforts to reduce health disparities by endorsing the 25 in 5 Network’s call to provincial political candidates and parties to develop a comprehensive plan to reduce poverty rates in Ontario by 25% in five years;

5. requested that all levels of government make significant investments in affordable housing, universal child care and other strategies that impact on income security;

6. reaffirmed its request to the Premier of Ontario to increase minimum wage rates to ensure a standard of living to promote optimal health;

7. requested the Premier of Ontario to implement the Ontario Child Benefit fully by 2008;

8. requested the Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHA) to submit its province-wide findings on the nutritious food basket survey and its resolution A05-18 entitled “Adequate Nutrition for Ontario Works and Ontario Disability Support Program Participants and Low Wage Earners” to the leaders of all provincial parties to request a commitment from the parties to implement the recommended measures by September 25, 2007, to enable a public release of the responses prior to the provincial election on October 10, 2007;

9. requested the Chair of the Board of Health to submit the Toronto Nutritious Food Basket results and the Board of Health’s positions and strategies to address poverty, to the Toronto Caucus Chair of each provincial party and request a response prior to the end of September so that the results can be made public; and

10. forwarded this report to key stakeholders: the City of Toronto’s Community Development and Recreation Committee, the General Managers of Shelter, Support and Housing Administration, Children’s Services, Homes for the Aged and Parks, Forestry and Recreation, the Ontario Ministers of Health Promotion, Community and Social Services, Children and Youth Services and Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, the Office of Nutrition Policy and Promotion at Health Canada, the Association of Local Public Health Agencies, the Ontario Public Health Association’s Community Food Security Workgroup, all Ontario Boards of Health, the Association of Ontario Health Centres, the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health and Dietitians of Canada asking for support in drawing attention to the need for a Provincial poverty reduction strategy including support and resources to Public Health Units to address food security and social determinants of health.

The following persons addressed the Board of Health:

Nick Saul, Executive Director, The STOP Community Food Centre, and filed a written submission; and

Gordon Fleming, Manager, Public Health Issues, Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHA), and filed a written submission.
In accordance with Recommendation 10, this item is forwarded to you for support.

Yours truly,

[Signature]

Secretary,
Board of Health

C. Davidovits/jd
Item HL7.1
Attachment

Sent to:  Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHA)  
Community Development and Recreation Committee  
General Manager, Shelter, Support and Housing Administration  
General Manager, Children’s Services  
General Manager, Homes for the Aged  
General Manager, Parks, Forestry and Recreation  
Ontario Minister of Health Promotion  
Ontario Minister of Community and Social Services  
Ontario Minister of Children and Youth Services  
Ontario Minister of Agriculture, Food and Rural Affairs  
Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada  
Office of Nutrition Policy and Promotion, Health Canada  
Ontario Public Health Association’s Community Food Security Workgroup  
Ontario Boards of Health  
Association of Ontario Health Centres  
Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health  
Dietitians of Canada

c. Medical Officer of Health  
Nick Saul, Executive Director, The STOP Community Food Centre