

# Board of health calls for increase in social assistance

By Expositor Staff - Oct 28, 2016

SUDBURY DISTRICT—The Sudbury and District Board of Health (SDBH) is calling on the government to increase social assistance rates to reflect the actual cost of nutritious food and adequate housing as provided in the current results of the Ministry of Health's (MOH) nutritious food basket and the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation Rental Income reports.

“With the Nutritious Food Basket we do a costing every year, with several scenarios being provided,” said Bridget King, registered dietitian, public health nutritionist with the Sudbury and District Health Unit (SDHU) after a board of health meeting last week. “In our 2016 Nutritious Food Basket report we look at several examples of for instance a family of four on Ontario Works (OW)—what their total monthly income is, the cost of rent food expenses, funds remaining for other basic needs, as well as the percentage of their income is required to pay rent and the percent of their income required to purchase healthy food.

“The one example that is the most shocking is the single person household on Ontario Works,” stated Ms. King. “After taking in their total monthly income, and their rent and food expenses, the funds remaining for other basic needs is \$141 in the red,” stated Ms. King. “Their percentage for income required to purchase healthy food is 39 percent. Obviously what this person would need is more money to provide to make ends meet and purchase healthy food as well.”

“It demonstrates clearly in this case and others that the current social assistance and minimum wage being provided is not adequate,” said Ms. King. “And because of this there are huge implications on health. It has a real impact, not just following the Canada Food Guide, but the effects not having enough to make ends meet has on the health of the person on assistance, not just the physical health but mental health of the person in this circumstance.”

The motion passed by the Sudbury and District Board of Health reads in part, “Nutritious Food Basket 2016. Whereas the Sudbury District Board of Health has monitored the cost of healthy eating on an annual basis in accordance with the nutritious food basket protocol and the population health assessment and surveillance proposal per the 2008 Ontario public health standards; whereas the 2016 costing results outline to demonstrate that individuals and families being on low incomes cannot afford food after paying for housing and other necessities and may be at risk for food insecurity; within the 2016 budget, the provincial government announced a Basic Income Pilot and has appointed the honourable Hugh Segal to provide advice on the design and implementation of a Basic Income Pilot through a discussion paper to be delivered to the province by the fall; therefore be it resolved that the Sudbury and District Board of Health commend the provincial government on taking steps to investigate basic income guarantee as a policy option for reducing poverty and that social assistance rates be increased to reflect the actual cost of nutritious foods and adequate housing.”