



Sent via e-mail:
Minister Todd Smith,
Poverty Reduction Strategy,
prso@ontario.ca

April 27, 2020

The Honourable Minister Todd Smith
Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services
Poverty Reduction Strategy
315 Front Street West, 3rd Floor
Toronto, Ontario M7A 0B8

Re: Response to Consultation: Developing a new Poverty Reduction Strategy for Ontario

Dear Honourable Minister Smith,

On behalf of the Dufferin County Equity Collaborative (DCEC), this letter is being shared with your office to offer comment and provide input into **Developing a new Poverty Reduction Strategy for Ontario**.

The Dufferin County Equity Collaborative (DCEC) represents a strategic partnership of a broad base of stakeholders with a shared mandate to increase social prosperity and decrease inequities for the Dufferin population affected by economic hardship. Working together in collaboration, the membership agreed responsibility is to jointly set strategic direction, identify evidence informed priorities that can be actioned locally, and capitalize and enhance existing systems and programming.

The DCEC, established in December 2018 through combining our Dufferin County Poverty Reduction Task Force and the Central West LHIN poverty sub group, is a 24 agency member collaborative. The DCEC vision is for every resident of Dufferin County to have the opportunity to realize their potential. As a collaborative broad base of stakeholders we are working together to improve the quality of life of Dufferin County residents, with specific focus on *Housing and Homelessness; Employment; and Health Equity*, with engagement and guidance from our emerging Lived Experience Advisory Network (LEAN).

DCEC adopted an equity lens for this collaborative specifically to focus on goals designed to ensure everyone in our community has a range of opportunities so they can be successful, regardless of their starting point. Equity is achieved when each individual can reach their full potential and are not disadvantaged from attaining it because of barriers. Equality doesn't mean equity. Equality means that

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everyone is treated the same regardless of their needs or circumstances. Equity recognizes that some groups in our community may require extra support and resources to provide the same opportunities to reach and maintain their optimal well-being. Understanding additional barriers that individuals face and providing an opportunity to reduce those barriers, is the first step to achieving equity. Barriers may include low income, inability to access to healthy food, or unsafe housing, keeping in mind that equity is subjective and personal.

The DCEC released their first Community Impact Report in November of 2019, reporting to the community on the work and outcomes against the Strategic Plan and the three work group action plans. <http://dcmoves.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/2019-12-12-DCEC-Report-to-the-Community-2018-2019.pdf>

DCEC Strategic Goals:

Housing and Homelessness Members of the community will have equitable opportunities to find and maintain housing. Housing instability and homelessness will be prevented.

Employment Members of the community will have equitable access to employment opportunities with the ability to achieve economic well-being.

Health Equity Members of the community will have equitable opportunities to be healthy, by having access to quality care that is fair, dignified and appropriate to needs.

To inform the new Strategy, the government is asking Ontarians how it can:

1. encourage job creation and connect people to employment;
2. provide people with the right supports and services; and
3. lower the cost of living and make life more affordable.

I. Encourage job creation and connect people to employment

DCEC 2020 work plan includes:

- Making available, local skills training, vocation and apprenticeship opportunities

What the Province could do:



- Invest in wraparound supports and support positive employment outcomes for clients through life stabilization, employment readiness, and skill development to match local labour needs and make connections to good employment
- Ensure sufficient funding, inter-ministerial collaboration and administrative alignment so that OW and ODSP recipients receive wrap-around services, such as childcare, housing, mental health treatment, addictions treatment, and employment supports necessary to achieve employment
- Develop strategies to hire locally for infrastructure projects, consider implementing a percentage of local hires with which an employer must comply
- Create incentives for employers to offer paid on-the-job training or internships
- Provide and cover the costs of transportation to support employees getting to and from work and retaining employment. Public transportation is not available across Dufferin County.
- Invest in affordable housing via construction, repairs and a portable housing benefit to assist low-income individuals with the high cost of housing. People must be able to live in, or close to the communities in which they work
- Develop holistic approaches to employment and wellness goals; designing assured income and strengthen ODSP
- Stronger collaboration with the federal government to ensure the maximization of opportunities for employment specific to youth and seniors, and ensuring ongoing communication with the Ministry of Colleges and Universities, and Ministry of Labour, Training and Skills Development, not just for enhancing youth career opportunities (apprenticeships), but also knowledge and practical skills specific to innovative technological careers
- Improve social assistance rules and redesign benefits to make it easier for people to pursue their employment goals and realize the benefits of working
- Build upon the Canada-Ontario Job Grant model by creating incentives for employers to offer paid on-the-job training or internships

II. Provide people with the right supports and services

DCEC 2020 work plan includes:

- Identify and remove service barriers to reduce health inequities
- Address root causes of health equity issues (food insecurity, housing, transportation, access to primary care, etc.)

What the Province could do:

- Increase funding for people who enroll in education programs (provide wrap around support and financial incentive)



- Design Social Assistance programs with flexibility to account for the unique circumstances and challenges of rural communities, rather than employing a one-size-fits-all approach
- Commit to the annual measurement of the prevalence and severity of food insecurity in Ontario by making the Household Food Security Survey Module a core module in the Canadian Community Health Survey
- Ensure that the data collected by the Canadian Income Survey includes local level food insecurity prevalence and severity data
- Commit to the annual Nutritious Food Basket local measurement which is used in rural communities
- Engage The Whole Income Security System by co-designing a portable housing benefit, saving programs for youth in care, creating a new Ontario child benefit supplement, working with the federal government to enhance the WITB, providing core health benefits for all low income people and reviewing the current social assistance appeal process are steps that must be taken to create an inclusive society
- Focus not just on those who are in receipt of social assistance but those who choose to remain independent of such programs and are suffering the ills of being low income. Individuals and families who are trying to do their best must be helped and deterred from entering the grasps of poverty (via social assistance programs) by creating opportunities that allow for support outside of Social Assistance programs
- Establish a new rate and benefit structure (including immediate increases to current rates
- Provide mandatory and discretionary benefits
- Redesign the Social assistance rate structure so that all adults have access to a consistent level of support regardless of living situation
- Introduce a housing benefit to assist all low income people with the high costs of housing, whether or not they receive social assistance, so they are not forced to choose between a home and other necessities
- Work with the federal government to enhance the WITB

III. Lower the cost of living and make life more affordable

DCEC 2020 work plan includes:

- Investigating solutions to increase supply of affordable housing options
- Increasing access to affordable rental housing options
- Greater housing support service(s) and prevention initiatives for individuals to help maintain existing housing

What the Province could do:



- Implement a Living Wage and benefits: by committing to a minimum income standard, designing a made-in-Ontario Market Basket Measure, achieving income adequacy and allowing for a review of social assistance benefits and allowances are critical elements needed to address deep poverty
- Increase the amount people can earn while accessing social assistance benefits needs so they have a safety net to leave OW/ODSP
- Increase the income cut-offs for government dental programs and offer dental across all ages
- Invest in universal childcare for all
- Creation of new exemptions that allow those on social assistance to keep more of their income and earnings
- Implement Guaranteed Income for all working age Ontarians
- Adopt a minimum Income Standard in Ontario through a combination of supports across the income security system
- Make essential health benefits available to all low income people beginning with ensuring those in deepest poverty have access to the services they need
- Modernize income and assets rules so people can maximize the income source available to them and save for the future
- Co-design an “assured income” approach for people with disabilities
- Ensure ongoing access to targeted allowance and benefits until such time as the adequacy is achieved
- Introduce legislation prohibiting all Pay Day lenders who prey on lower income populations

DCEC supports a focus on Truth and Reconciliation as paramount for a successful and inclusive Ontario. Although the number of Indigenous people living in Dufferin County is low; as a community we have no desire to wait for local challenges to arise but instead turn to the provincial government to safe guard against systemic and institutional racism and recognize the profound impacts of colonization. DCEC also strongly believes that racialized persons disproportionately experience levels of poverty and social exclusion and efforts must be made by the government to address the root cause of these issues.

DCEC members strongly advocate for a “person (s) in need” centric approach, encompassing a holistic focus on funding, programs and education and allows for flexible execution at the local level based on relationships of managed trust.

DCEC strongly feels that investment in people makes sense and recommendations that address inequity and poverty should be prioritized. First and foremost to raise citizens out of poverty, and as a demonstrated consequence, mitigate enormous costs and tax burden associated with increased health care related expenses due to poor living conditions.

DCEC sees opportunity to impact citizens’ lives if we can fundamentally change the legislative framework for social assistance programs to set the foundation for a culture of trust, collaboration and problem solving. Introduce an approach to serving people receiving Ontario Works and ODSP that



promotes a culture of trust, collaboration and problem solving as a priority and supports the good quality of life outcomes for people in all communities including Indigenous people.

DCEC is well aware there are many other initiatives and individual recommendations that can address poverty. DCEC recognizes that addressing inequity and poverty is a joint effort and all local agencies and levels of government have a responsibility. DCEC stresses to all government that local approaches to end inequity and poverty must be considered where funding is available. DCEC work is currently carried out by collaborative members who have taken on the responsibility working from the corners of their desk while carrying out their agency specific mandates. Making funding available at the local level, to support the coordination of local poverty reduction focused initiatives will assist in moving local initiatives forward.

DCEC appreciates the dedication of those responsible for Developing a new Poverty Reduction Strategy for Ontario. DCEC recognises the complexity of change required and reiterate our view that forward movement needs to be specifically defined and time sensitive to have the most immediate beneficial impact to all people who deserve to have equitable opportunity to realize their potential and live in a prosperous and healthy community, free of poverty.

In closing, the DECE further recommend there be inclusive consultation with all Human Service providers following the recovery from the COVID-19 crisis to re-visit, re-evaluate, and re-think the Poverty Strategy and how we create equity for all Ontarians based on the collective learning from the experience of working in the Crisis response system.

On behalf of the DCEC

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elaines".

Elaine Capes,
Coordinator
Dufferin County Equity Collaborative



cc:

The Honourable Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario
Warden for The County of Dufferin, Darren White

DCEC Voting Member Agencies

Alzheimer Society of Dufferin County
Bethell Hospice Foundation
Canadian Mental Health Association Peel-Dufferin
Catholic Family Services Peel-Dufferin
Choices Youth Shelter
Community Torchlight
Dufferin Area Family Health Team Dufferin Child & Family Services
Dufferin County Community Services
Family Transition Place
Friends & Advocates Peel
Georgian College
Habitat for Humanity
Headwaters Health Care Centre
Hospice Dufferin
Humber College
Central West Local Health Integration Network
Ontario Telemedicine Network
Orangeville Food Bank
Orangeville Police Services
Services and Housing In the Province
United Way Guelph Wellington Dufferin
Upper Grand District School Board
Wellington-Dufferin-Guelph Public Health
Workforce Planning Board of Waterloo Wellington Dufferin

The DCEC is grateful to Haliburton County / City of Kawartha Lakes Poverty Reduction Roundtable and Bruce Grey Poverty Task Force, we support their recommendations and re-iterate many of them in our submission.