



**RNAO Speaking Notes:
Rally to Put Food in the Budget**

**Amarpreet Kaur Ahluwalia
(RNAO Region 6 Representative)**

Monday, November 15, 2010

Wychwood Barns, 601 Christie Street



Rally to Put Food in the Budget
Speaking Notes for Amarpreet Kaur Ahluwalia
Monday, November 15, 2010 7:00-9:00 pm
Wychwood Barns, 601 Christie Street, Barn #2

My name is Amarpreet Kaur Ahluwalia and I am delighted to be here this evening on behalf of Ontario's nurses. I am a diabetes nurse educator and like other registered nurses across the province, I see every day why it is urgent from a health perspective to immediately increase social assistance by \$100 per month as a first step toward income adequacy.

In my nursing practice, I have the privilege of working with a woman who has had to go to the emergency room twice a month for the last three months because of chest pain. This pain is linked to cardiovascular disease connected to diabetes caused by lack of access to nutritious, fresh food due to dangerously low social assistance rates. High blood sugar levels and lack of access to healthy food leaves people tired, most susceptible to infections, and often with difficulty concentrating. Single moms are eating once a day so that their children don't go hungry. New immigrants are having to choose between buying food or buying medication. I can't talk about the importance of Canada's Food Guide to many of my patients because it is insulting to ask people to buy fresh fruits and vegetables when they can barely afford their rent. One of our patients came to the community health centre so hungry after not having eaten for two days that he had to stop on the way in to the appointment to eat some raw vegetables from the clinic's community garden. Food is our life source—not having access to nutritious food is part of the reason why those with lower incomes are sicker and die earlier compared with those who have more resources.

One of the great tragedies is that many times people feel that they are not working hard enough or that somehow they have failed in life. Ontario's nurses know that a broken social assistance system that allows people to go hungry means that the fault is with us--we as a society are not working hard enough to avoid failing the most vulnerable members of our community.

As a Board member of the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario, I can promise you that RNAO is going to continue to stand together with you over the long haul to advocate for public policies that will improve health for all Ontarians, especially for those most in need.

The most vulnerable members of our community are often invisible within the corridors of power. Ontario's nurses are committed to joining with you in helping politicians understand that when the provincial election comes along in October 2011, we will be making our voting decisions based on who is demonstrating the courage to build a more inclusive and vibrant province for all. Ontario's nurses call for social assistance rates that reflect the actual local cost of living, an

immediate increase of \$100 per month as a first step to adequacy for social assistance adequacy, and continued access to a nutritional supplement program.

Thank you for being here in this evening—you are a sign of hope and together we can build a stronger Ontario.