



Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario
L'Association des infirmières et infirmiers
autorisés de l'Ontario

Hon. Helena Jaczek
Minister of Community and Social Services
80 Grosvenor Street, 6th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 1E9

January 9, 2018

Dear Minister Jaczek,

As you know, the Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO) has been fiercely advocating for transformative changes to Ontario's social assistance system for at least a decade.^{1 2} Ontario's registered nurses (RNs), nurse practitioners (NPs), and nursing students see every day the devastating health and social impacts of income insecurity, including those caused by dangerously low social assistance rates and an often punitive, hard-to-navigate system.

Warmest congratulations to the First Nations Income Security Reform Working Group, Income Security Reform Working Group, and the Urban Indigenous Table on Income Security Reform for their groundbreaking report, *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change*.³ RNAO deeply appreciates that the authors situate their roadmap amidst 30 years of reports and thousands of recommendations on poverty that have been ineffective in addressing the needs of the most marginalized Ontarians:

The current system has failed some people more obviously than others--for example, single people who have little more than a social assistance cheque to rely upon; people who are homeless and often struggling to find safe shelter night by night; newcomers to Canada battling prejudice and a system that seems designed to be against them in many ways; African Canadians who continue to face entrenched anti-Black racism; and Indigenous peoples who have faced prolonged racism, inequity and cultural discrimination.⁴

What makes *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change* so welcome and exciting is that it has a vision that puts the needs and rights of people at the centre of a transformed social assistance system. RNAO heartily endorses the report's guiding principles of: income adequacy; realization of rights; reconciliation and respect for Indigenous peoples; access to comprehensive, culturally safe and trauma-informed services; economic and social inclusion; equity and fairness, including addressing historic and current systemic disadvantage and structural racism; sustainability and respectful approach to accountability; and ensuring that all people are treated with respect and dignity.⁵

RNAO urges the government to implement this 10-year roadmap and commit to the specific action areas mentioned in this report. These action areas include: achieving income adequacy; engaging the whole income security system; transforming social assistance; and helping those in deepest poverty.⁶ In particular, RNAO echoes this report's recognition of the "need for urgent action"⁷ to address the deep poverty caused by shamefully low social assistance rates. Moving toward a minimum income standard, this report suggests a 10 per cent increase in Ontario Works and a 5 per cent increase to the Ontario

Disability Support Program yearly over the next three years. Recognizing that this would only be "modest progress," the Income Security Reform Working Group explained that "we chose a number we expect government can implement but we strongly urge moving more quickly to bring people closer to income adequacy."⁸ RNAO urges the government to invest as much as possible in rate increases in the 2018 provincial budget as a down-payment towards income adequacy.

Investing in social assistance reform is expensive but less so than the human and financial toll caused by inaction.⁹ Implementing a human rights-equity lens to transform social assistance will further Ontario's Poverty Reduction Strategy,¹⁰ commitment to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples,¹¹ and Ontario's Anti-Racism Strategic Plan.¹²

Minister Jaczek, thank you for your leadership and hard work to date in transforming Ontario's social assistance system. You can count on RNAO's support in advocating for these much-needed changes that will build a healthier and more inclusive Ontario.

With warm regards and very best wishes for a healthy 2018,



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Chief Executive Officer, RNAO

c: Hon. Kathleen Wynne, Premier
Hon. Peter Milczyn, Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy
Randy Pettapiece, PC Critic, Community and Social Services
Julia Munro, PC Critic, Poverty Reduction Strategy
Lisa Gretzky, NDP Critic, Community and Social Services
Paul Miller, NDP Critic, Poverty Reduction

¹ Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (2007). *Creating a Healthier Society. RNAO's Challenge to Ontario's Political Parties: Building Medicare's next stage, focusing on prevention*. Toronto: Author.
http://rnao.ca/sites/rnao-ca/files/storage/related/2398_RNAO_Election_Platform_2007.pdf

² Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (2010). *Creating Vibrant Communities. RNAO's Challenge to Ontario's Political Parties. 2011 Provincial Election*. Toronto: Author.
http://rnao.ca/sites/rnao-ca/files/CVC_Technical_Backgrounder.pdf

³ Ministry of Community and Social Services (2017). *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change*. Toronto: Author.
https://files.ontario.ca/income_security_-_a_roadmap_for_change-english-accessible_0.pdf

⁴ Ministry of Community and Social Services, *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change*, 51.

⁵ Ministry of Community and Social Services, *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change*, 62-64.

⁶ Ministry of Community and Social Services, *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change*, 66-68.

⁷ Ministry of Community and Social Services, *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change*, 124, 127.

⁸ Ministry of Community and Social Services, *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change*, 127.

⁹ Ministry of Community and Social Services, *Income Security: A Roadmap for Change*, 157-163.

¹⁰ Government of Ontario (2017) Website: *Poverty reduction in Ontario*.

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/realizing-our-potential-ontarios-poverty-reduction-strategy-2014-2019>

¹¹ Government of Ontario (2017). *The Journey Together: Ontario's Commitment to Reconciliation with Indigenous Peoples*. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/journey-together-ontarios-commitment-reconciliation-indigenous-peoples>

¹² Government of Ontario (2017). *A Better Way Forward: Ontario's 3-Year Anti-Racism Strategic Plan*.

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/better-way-forward-ontarios-3-year-anti-racism-strategic-plan>