



## **Social Assistance Advisory Council Report's**

### **Bold Vision for Tomorrow**

#### **Does Not Put Food on the Table Today**

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The Social Assistance Review Advisory Council Report released Monday morning at Queen's Park promotes a bold new vision for income security in the long run but is weak on what it asks the Ontario Government to do to help people on social assistance meet their basic daily living necessities now. The Review panel recommends a consultation and system overhaul process that will take 12 to 18 months.

"A bold vision for tomorrow does not put food on the table today," says Marvyn Novick, retired Professor Emeritus in Social policy at Ryerson University and contributor to the Social Planning Network of Ontario. "The Ontario Government has ignored the needs of the most vulnerable in the province. It sets up a panel on social assistance and shortly thereafter cuts the Special Diet Allowance, reneges on the dental program for adult recipients, and reduces the woefully inadequate real income of recipients by 1% in the latest budget. While the panel claims to promote long-term reform, the real situation with people on the ground is deteriorating rapidly."

"Minister Meilleur needs to listen to people like me," says Nadia, an Ontario Works recipient in Toronto, "who are making the choice every month between paying for my children's needs and buying healthy food and not listen to those who would trade real change today for promises in the future."

"The report lacks a sense of urgency because many are in crisis right now and it ignores the short-term recommendation of \$100 a month Healthy Food Supplement for those on welfare.," says Tom Pearson, Chair of the Poverty Action for Change Coalition in York Region, "The Healthy Food Supplement would put money in people's pockets instantly and it is widely supported in communities across the province."

"The Advisory Council acknowledges the urgency facing single adults with inadequate income support," says Peter Clutterbuck, SPNO Coordinator. "But it is weak on the immediate measures that could be taken to address that issue."

The community would support the panel's proposal for a well-designed and adequate housing benefit in an overhauled income security system in the long run. But, in the meantime, measures like the Healthy Food Supplement could be easily implemented using the existing social assistance benefit system. People who do not know where their next meal is coming from do not have the luxury of time."

The SPNO has been working with community partners across the province in the last year on a campaign called Put Food in the Budget. The campaign calls for the immediate introduction of a \$100 a month Healthy Food Supplement for people on social assistance as a first step toward setting rates at a level that allows them to live with health and dignity. SPNO and its community partners urged the SARAC panel to make this recommendation to the Minister of Community and Social Services along with proposals for long-term income security reform. They are disappointed in the panel's failure to do so.

For further information:  
Peter Clutterbuck, SPNO/PFIB,  
Tel. (416) 653-7947  
Cell (416) 738-3228