

For immediate release March 16, 2009

Medical officer of health launches Put Food in the Budget campaign

(PETERBOROUGH, March 15, 2009) - Peterborough Medical Officer of Health Rosana Pellizzari is launching a public appeal, along with a group of poverty-reduction advocates, to urge the Ontario Government to add a Healthy Food Supplement to the Basic Needs Allowance for all adult recipients of social assistance, as part of its Spring 2009 budget.

“By putting “Food” in the budget, the Province will give all recipients of social assistance the opportunity to put healthy food on their tables,” Dr. Pellizzari says.

Every public health unit in Ontario conducts an annual standardized Cost of a Nutritious Food Basket (NFB) study that measures the basic cost of healthy eating in the areas that they serve. When these costs are added to average rents for the same area, it becomes clear that people on social assistance throughout the province are being forced to choose between paying rent and buying food. In Peterborough, that shortfall is \$209 for a single man; \$82 per month for a family of four.

Unless strategies are put in place to ensure that low-income Ontarians can afford to make healthy food choices, dietary interventions for the prevention and management of diseases and promotion of overall health will remain out of reach for those who are most at risk. Putting food in the budget will be a welcome first step in changing that.

Since 2001, the Association of Local Public Health Agencies has urged the Ontario Government to set social assistance rates according to the true costs of basic needs. The Put Food in the Budget campaign calls for the addition of a \$100 Healthy Food Supplement to the Basic Needs Allowance as a down payment on closing the gap between social assistance incomes and the cost of healthy eating. The campaign was launched on Feb. 19 in Toronto.

“The Ontario Government has held public meetings in Peterborough to find out ways to alleviate poverty so today we offer a solution that will help the most vulnerable while investing wisely to prevent poor health in those who are most at risk,” Dr. Pellizzari said.

She has the support of the Peterborough Poverty Reduction Network, the Peterborough Social Planning Council, the board of Our Space and the youth of several church communities.

Anyone who wishes to join the campaign can find letters and contact information on the Peterborough Social Planning Council website at www.pspc.on.ca

For further details, please contact:

Dr. Rosana Pellizzari
Medical Officer of Health
Peterborough County-City Health Unit
743-1000

Dawn Berry Merriam
Research policy analyst
Peterborough Social Planning Council
743-5915