

For Immediate Release

25 March 2010

Special Diet Announcement Increases Insecurity for People on Social Assistance

Toronto – Ontarians on social assistance have every right to be concerned about today's provincial government decision to create a new "nutritional supplementation" program to replace the current Special Diet Program.

"The government has given no hard evidence to justify replacing the entire program," said Mary Marrone, Director of Advocacy and Legal Services at the Income Security Advocacy Centre. "People getting Special Diet are among the sickest and most vulnerable Ontarians, and the stress caused by the uncertainty this announcement creates will only put them at greater health risk."

The new program will be created in the Ministry of Health, but today's budget offers no timeline for its creation and no details on the new program's scope, which medical conditions will be covered, or what supports it will offer.

"'Nutritional supplementation' could be very different from 'medically necessary diets'," said Marrone. "The new program has to offer more than supplements like Ensure, to make sure that Ontarians with conditions like multiple sclerosis, diabetes, and heart disease, which require very different dietary treatment, will continue to have their medically necessary dietary needs met".

A recent Human Rights Tribunal decision recognized that Special Diet has supported substantive equality for people who have additional dietary costs due to disability.

"The creation of a new program indicates government's acknowledgement that people with special dietary needs must have additional support," said Marrone. "We look forward to assisting people who are currently on Special Diet to speak with the Minister of Health about their needs. The new program needs to provide even better supports than the last."

Marrone was also critical of the budget's 1% increase to basic needs and maximum shelter benefits.

"This government has set the bar low on increases to rates, previously providing only cost-of-living increases of 2-3%," said Marrone. "This budget should have gone at least that far."

- 30 -

Media Contact:

Jennefer Laidley

Cell: 416-523-5228

Office: 416-597-5820 x 5150

www.incomesecurity.org