

Settling for Band-Aids

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Not all Band-Aid solutions are bad. By their nature, they are partial answers, but sometimes they're the best tool available. That's the case with Hamilton's emergency and community service committee decision last week to give Hamilton Food Share \$100,000 for this year's Christmas hamper campaign. Under the circumstances, it's the best the city can do at this point.

Against a backdrop of a skyrocketing welfare caseload, the highest since 2000, and in the absence of a systemic solution that must come from Queen's Park, Hamilton is doing what it can. By the end of this year, the city will have spent \$500,000 on food security.

It doesn't have to be this way. Late last year, the province committed to a review of social assistance rates. The results have never been announced.

In 1995, the Harris government cut social assistance rates by 22 per cent. In the ensuing years, the McGuinty government has given increases totalling 9 per cent, while inflation has gone up 30 per cent over the same period.

The simple fact is Ontario Works recipients and most who receive Ontario Disability Support Benefits (ODSP) don't have enough money coming in to pay rent, expenses and provide a decent nutritious diet for their families. Ontario Works pays \$572 monthly, while ODSP recipients get \$1,020. Most conservative calculations say a single person needs \$1,400 just to get by. Hence, the huge growth in food bank use. Hence, the need for more Band-Aids. When will we get this right?