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For Immediate Release

National Living Wage Week is a Time to Reflect on Wages, Work, and Cost of Living

October 31 – November 6, 2016 is National Living Wage Week across Canada. Last spring, the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network released the cost of living and living wage calculations for Niagara region. The 2016 annual cost of household living expenses for a Niagara region family of four have been conservatively pegged at over \$65,000.00 and the hourly wage necessary for families to meet these expenses, otherwise known as a living wage, is \$17.47. Reports and methodologies for each calculation are available at www.wipeoutpoverty.ca

"A living wage reflects what earners in a family need to be paid based on the actual costs of living and being included in a specific community," says Glen Walker, chair of the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network. "It is an evidence-based hourly rate at which a household can meet its basic cost of living needs, once government transfers have been added to the family's income and deductions have been subtracted. Included in the calculation are food, shelter, clothing, transportation, child care, non-OHIP medical insurance, continuing adult education, and items that allow for fuller participation in society, such as communication and local recreation opportunities."

"The continuous rise of employees in precarious employment calls to question what employers can do to create more stable working environments. Providing wages that allow a family to meet its basic household needs is one important tool to address cost of living challenges in Niagara region and should be a consideration for all employers", says Walker. "The provision of employee health benefits for dental, vision, and prescriptions drugs, as well as disability and life insurance benefits, are also ways to support workers and to lower the hourly amount of the living wage calculation."

Employers who choose to pay a living wage find many benefits, including increased employee morale and loyalty, decreased absenteeism and turnover, and a positive reputation in the community. In order to recognize living wage employers across Ontario, the Ontario Living Wage Network, in collaboration with community living wage initiatives such as Niagara's, will soon launch a provincial employer recognition program. "We want to celebrate employers and organizations that are saying yes to living wages and helping to lift workers out of poverty", says Tom Cooper, coordinator of the Ontario Living Wage Network. Learn more about the provincial living wage network and its employer recognition program at www.livingwageontario.ca

"If an employer, whether from the public, not-for-profit, or private sector, is not paying a living wage, but could afford to, then we encourage them to act," says Walker. "However, we recognize that many Niagara businesses are struggling to make ends meet, so other solutions must also be considered to help make life more affordable. If paying a living wage is not immediately possible, then it is imperative that employers strongly support and advocate for ways to ensure workers can meet their basic cost of living needs, such as through increased affordable housing, child care, and public transportation options."

For more information on the Niagara Poverty Reduction Network and its work, please visit www.wipeoutpoverty.ca. You can also follow the Network on Facebook and Twitter.

The Niagara Poverty Reduction Network is a collective of over 30 agencies and individuals working to wipe out poverty in Niagara through education, collaboration, and advocacy to address poverty's root causes.

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