

Letter to the Editor of the Sarnia Observer  
Re: Political 'Hot' Potato, August 13, 2007

The deaths of Suzanne Young and Stan Scott highlight the need for the provincial government to take responsibility for making housing and energy affordable for low-income Ontarians. According to your article, neither could afford the \$50/month charged by the landlord to operate an air conditioner, and heat stress may have been a factor in their deaths.

Your article quoted John Letherby of the Ministry of Community and Social Services as stating that utility costs are included in the Ontario Works monthly shelter allowance. In fact, utilities are covered only if the actual rent paid by the tenant falls below the maximum allowance provided by Ontario Works. For a single person, that maximum is \$342. The average rent for a bachelor apartment in Sarnia, according to the CMHC, is \$483 a month. The average rent for a one-bedroom is \$581. The gap between shelter allowance received and actual cost of rent makes it extremely unlikely that funding would ever be available for energy costs above the monthly rent.

The entire social assistance rate structure bears no relation to the real cost of goods and services in communities across Ontario. The provincial government must move quickly to address the situation by instituting a rational rate structure that allows social assistance recipients to live in dignity without forcing them to make choices that jeopardize their health or even their lives.

Mary E. Marrone  
Director of Advocacy & Legal Services  
Income Security Advocacy Centre  
425 Adelaide Street West  
5<sup>th</sup> Floor  
M5V 3C1  
[www.incomesecurity.org](http://www.incomesecurity.org)