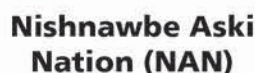


For a Universal Healthy School Food Program



Presented by the Members and Collaborators of
the Coalition for Healthy School Food



The Coalition for Healthy School Food is seeking a \$1 billion investment phased in over 5 years by the federal government in a cost-shared Universal Healthy School Food Program that will enable all students in Canada to have access to healthy meals at school every day. Building on existing programs across the country, all schools will eventually serve a healthy meal or snack at little or no cost to students. These programs will include food education and serve culturally appropriate, local, sus-

Did You Know?

Canada remains one of the few industrialized countries without a national school food program. Canada's current patchwork of school food programming reaches only a small percentage of our over 5 million students. Only federal government policy can ensure universal coverage of the population.



Why?

All children should have access to healthy food at school. We need to lay the foundation for healthy eating habits that will last a lifetime and ensure that learning is not hindered by a lack of access to good food.

Healthy Eating Challenges

Only about 1/3rd of children between the ages of 4 and 13 years eat **five or more servings of vegetables** and fruit daily.¹



The prevalence of diabetes and obesity are at all-time highs, particularly amongst Indigenous peoples, for whom prevalence is higher than in the rest of the population.³

1/3rd of students in elementary schools and 2/3rds of students in secondary schools **do not eat a nutritious breakfast before school**,⁴ leaving them at risk for learning, behavioural and health challenges at school.



About 1/4 of children's **calorie intakes are from food products not recommended in Canada's Food Guide**.²



More than half (58%) of all annual health-care spending in Canada is for the treatment of chronic diseases for which the main risk factors are unhealthy eating, physical inactivity, smoking and the harmful use of alcohol.⁵





School Food Facts

School food programs support student health and wellness as well as school and community connectedness.

- School food programs have been linked with positive impacts on children's mental health, including reductions in behavioural and emotional problems, bullying, aggression, anxiety, and depression^{6,7} as well as fewer visits to the school nurse.⁸
- Children who eat a morning meal are sick less often, have fewer problems associated with hunger, such as dizziness, lethargy, headaches, stomachaches and earaches^{9,10,11,12} and do significantly better than their peers in terms of cooperation, discipline, and interpersonal relations.¹³

School food programs increase the consumption of fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods.

- Studies have shown that school food programs can contribute to reducing the risk of cardiovascular events and chronic disease such as stroke, heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, and certain types of cancer^{14,15} by increasing the intake of vegetables, whole grains, and macro- and micro-nutrients.^{16,17,18,19}
- Research from northern Ontario and British Columbia found that students that who participated in a school food program reported higher intakes of fruits and vegetables and lower intakes of "other" (i.e., non-nutritious) foods.^{20,21}
- Students who participate in school food programs consume more fibre and micronutrients, and consume less saturated and trans fat, sodium and added sugars.^{22,23,24, 25}

School food programs assist with student learning and success at school.

- An evaluation of a morning meal program in the Toronto District School Board found that students who consume a morning meal most days show at least a 10% increase in skills such as independent academic work, initiative, conflict resolution, class participation and problem-solving at school.²⁶
- When children attend school hungry or undernourished their energy levels, memory, problem-solving skills, creativity, concentration, and other cognitive functions are all negatively impacted.^{27,28} They are also more likely to repeat a grade.^{29,30}
- Food insecurity is an urgent public health challenge in Canada, affecting 1.15 million—or one in six—Canadian children under age 18.³¹ Not all populations are affected the same. Over 2 in 3 Inuit children experience food insecurity, where the household food insecurity rate for Inuit is the highest amongst any Aboriginal population living in an industrialized country.³²



School food programs contribute to improved productivity due to the health benefits and increased scholastic success attributed to such programs.

- 78% of students in Grade 10 at a Toronto District School Board school who ate breakfast most days were on track for graduation compared to 61% of those who did not have breakfast.³³
- It is estimated that each 1% increase in graduation rates could result in a \$7.7 billion savings per year in Canada³⁴ since high-school graduates earn higher salaries, pay more taxes, have lower healthcare costs, are less likely to encounter the justice system, and are less dependent on social assistance.
- Supporting a Universal School Food Program reduces the financial burden on our healthcare system by reducing the risk of diet-related chronic disease and mental illness, which are some of the most costly and long-term health problems to treat.³⁵

School food programs have the potential to support national and local economies by increasing jobs and the domestic market for fresh local food.

- A Universal School Food Program in Canada has the potential create thousands of new jobs in communities across Canada.
- When local food is served, the local multiplier of the increased local food purchases will impact regional food production, household and business earnings, long-term gross domestic product, and part-time jobs created or sustained.³⁶

A Healthy Way Forward

School food programs are increasingly seen as vital contributors to students' physical and mental health. Growing research demonstrates the potential of school food programs to improve food choices and support academic success for all students. Our schools can become places that model healthy living. Eating healthy meals together is an important, hands-on experience through which children can learn healthy habits that will last a lifetime.

Many leaders and experts have called for a universal school food program, including the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Food, the Ontario Healthy Kids Panel and Dr. David Butler-Jones, former Chief Public Health Officer for Canada.



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