



**Written Submission for the Pre-Budget  
Consultations in Advance of the 2020 Budget**

**Submitted by the  
Coalition for Healthy School Food**

**The Coalition for Healthy School Food recommends the Government of Canada invest \$360 million a year in a cost shared universal, healthy school food program, with the eventual goal of universal coverage, to improve the health of our children, the health of our planet, and significantly reduce the \$13.8 billion in costs of the treatment of and productivity losses due to nutrition-related chronic disease in Canada.**

Hon. Wayne Easter, PC, MP, Chair  
Standing Committee on Finance

July 26, 2019

By email to: wayne.easter@parl.gc.ca, [FINA@parl.gc.ca](mailto:FINA@parl.gc.ca) and [finapbc-cpb@parl.gc.ca](mailto:finapbc-cpb@parl.gc.ca)

**Re: Invest in the health of our children and the state of our climate through a Healthy School Food Program for Canada**

**“Food is the single strongest lever to optimize human health and environmental sustainability on Earth.”** -- EAT-Lancet Commission

Dear Mr. Easter and Members of the Standing Committee on Finance:

We are writing to ask that the 2020 federal Budget commit \$360 million per year to a universal healthy school food program that is, cost-shared with provinces, territories, cities, parents and community groups. This investment would advance multiple federal priorities including promoting the health and well-being of Canada’s children, strengthening local agriculture and food sectors and building a low carbon economy.

The Coalition for Healthy School Food, a growing network of, now 72, health, education, and environmental organizations from every province and the North, is seeking federal investment in a school food program that would see all children having daily access to healthy food at school. The primary goal of this initiative would be to improve the physical and mental health of our next generation.<sup>1</sup> The Coalition is coordinated by Food Secure Canada.

Only one-third of children aged four to 13 eat five or more servings of fruit and vegetables (of the 7-10 recommended servings), and a quarter of children’s caloric intake is from foods not recommended by even the the 2007 edition of *Canada’s Food Guide*. One recent survey found that only 10% of youth in grades 6-12 met fruit and vegetable recommendations.<sup>2</sup> These trends are seen across all demographics. *Our kids are not ok*. There is a real concern that our children will live *shorter and sicker lives than their parents* because of an increase in the rate of illnesses such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease, cancer and other preventable diseases, most of which are closely linked to dietary choices. The annual economic burden of chronic disease *attributed to unhealthy eating* has been estimated at a staggering \$13.8 billion.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Unlike many industrialized and even low income countries, Canada has no national school food program: only one million of our five million students have access to school food programs, putting the rest at risk for long-term health problems, discipline problems at school, mental health issues and lowered success at school.

<sup>2</sup> Minaker L, Hammond D. [Low Frequency of fruit and vegetable consumption among Canadian youth: findings from the 2012/2013 Youth Smoking Survey](#). J Sch Health. 2016; 86: 135-142.

<sup>3</sup> Lieffers JRL, Ekwaru JP, Ohinmaa A, Veugelers PJ (2018) [The economic burden of not meeting food recommendations in Canada: The cost of doing nothing](#). PLoS ONE 13(4): e0196333.

The bright side is that dietary choices can be strongly influenced by education and by developing healthy habits; especially when people are young and are starting to form their life-long food preferences.

Evidence shows that school food programs increase consumption of healthy foods, reduce the risk of chronic disease, and improve mental health. Canadian research has found that “school nutrition programs...positively influenced children’s nutritional knowledge, dietary behaviours, and food intake.”<sup>4</sup> School food programs also improve educational outcomes and increase graduation rates by reducing hunger in classrooms, a known barrier to concentration and learning.

School food programs can have significant positive economic and environmental impacts. A preliminary University of Guelph study suggests that a national program could contribute \$4.8 billion to the local economy by 2029 if 30% was spent on local food purchases as well as stimulate the development of as many as 207,700 new jobs.<sup>5</sup>

A program that follows and promotes the 2019 Canada’s Food Guide Snapshot would help students develop a palate for fresh vegetables, fruit and plant proteins, consistent with a diet that emits low amounts of greenhouse gasses.<sup>6</sup> School food programs may reduce, through proper planning and infrastructure, negative environmental impacts by facilitating the reduction and management of food waste, a major source of greenhouse gas emissions. A School Food Program for Canada, with strong food guidelines and governance principles, would enable school food initiatives throughout the country to advance the transition to a low carbon economy.

During the 2019 pre-budget consultations, Coalition members called for a National School Food Program. The March 19, 2019, budget then recognized “the critical importance of healthy meals for a child’s education”, and announced “the Government’s intention to work with provinces and territories towards the creation of a National School Food Program.” We urge you to continue to move this forward by including the development of a School Food Program for Canada in the mandate letter of the next Minister of Health.

A School Food Program for Canada would provide an excellent opportunity for schools to put into practice and model the revised [Canada’s Food Guide](#), enabling students to develop the taste receptivity for nutritious foods, food literacy, and habits needed for a lifetime of healthy eating. When designed with sustainability goals in mind, school food programs can provide a strong

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<sup>4</sup> [The Impact of Canadian School Food Programs on Children’s Nutrition and Health: A Systematic Review](#) Paige Colley MSc, Bronia Myer, Jamie Seabrook PhD, Jason Gilliland PhD <https://doi.org/10.3148/cjdpr-2018-037>

<sup>5</sup> Amberley T. Ruetz & Evan D.G. Fraser. 2019. National School Food Program a short-term opportunity for jobs creation and economic growth. *Canadian Science Policy Centre*. <https://www.sciencepolicy.ca/news/national-school-food-program-short-term-opportunity-jobs-creation-and-economic-growth>

<sup>6</sup> “Transformation to healthy diets by 2050 will require substantial dietary shifts. Global consumption of fruits, vegetables, nuts and legumes will have to double, and consumption of foods such as red meat and sugar will have to be reduced by more than 50%. A diet rich in plant-based foods and with fewer animal source foods confers both improved health and environmental benefits”. - EAT Lancet Report

opportunity for students to learn, in a hands-on way, how to choose local and sustainable food, how to minimize food waste, and how to compost.

We estimate that a universal healthy school food program would cost \$1.8 billion per year for food costs, some staff, infrastructure, and accountability measures. We envision a cost-shared model that would involve investments from the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal governments, as well as from not-for-profits and parents, where feasible.

**The Coalition for Healthy School Food recommends the Government of Canada invest \$360 million a year in a cost shared universal, healthy school food program, with the eventual goal of universal coverage, so as to improve the health of our children, the health of our planet, and significantly reduce the \$13.8 billion in costs of the treatment of and productivity losses due to nutrition-related chronic disease in Canada.**

Building on existing breakfast, lunch and snack programs, a School Food Program for Canada could be implemented through an accord with the provinces and territories, through Health Canada or through PHAC as has been done with the successful Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program (CPNP) that has been funded since 1989.

A school food program for Canada has been recommended by a House Standing Committee on Finance, a Senate Committee, an Ontario advisory panel, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Senate Motion #358, [House of Commons E-Petition 1957](#), a report of the former Chief Public Health Officer, Private Member's Bill C-4446, and a 1997 report of your Committee. The evidentiary basis for it has been established by reports published by Harvard University, the World Food Program and the World Cancer Research Fund.

We urge the Government to consult with provinces, territories, not-for-profit organizations, students, parents and Indigenous leaders to advance the health of future generations, the Canadian economy, and the health of our planet, with support for a School Food Program for Canada.

Yours sincerely,



Gisèle Yasmeen, Executive Director  
Food Secure Canada



Debbie Field, Coordinator  
Coalition for Healthy School Food

## Studies and Reports Recommending the Development of a National School Food Program

1. World Scientific. *Global School Feeding Sourcebook*. Lessons from 14 countries. 2016. (Singapore/Geneva: World Scientific, 2016); and World Food Program, *State of School Feeding Programs Worldwide* (Rome: WFP, 2013):  
[https://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/communications/wfp257481.pdf?\\_ga=2.30297657.70688965.1531516853-1353648354.1531516853](https://documents.wfp.org/stellent/groups/public/documents/communications/wfp257481.pdf?_ga=2.30297657.70688965.1531516853-1353648354.1531516853)
2. House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance. 1997:  
<http://www.ourcommons.ca/DocumentViewer/en/36-1/FINA/report-2/page-45#D> which stated:  
*The Committee further recommends that the federal government partner with communities, parents, provincial governments, private corporations, the agri-food industry and voluntary organizations such as the Canadian Living Foundation to create a national school nutrition program...70% of Canadians believe that child hunger in Canada is more important than national unity or the deficit. Strategic investment in a national school nutrition program is an investment in the future of all Canadians.*
3. David Butler-Jones, *The Chief Public Health Officer's Report on the State of Public Health in Canada 2008*, (Ottawa: Public Health Agency of Canada, 2008) at 41 states: *When children go to school hungry or poorly nourished, their energy levels, memory, problem-solving skills, creativity, concentration and behaviour are all negatively impacted. Studies have shown that 31% of elementary students and 62% of secondary school students do not eat a nutritious breakfast before school... The reasons for this vary – from a lack of available food or nutritious options in low-income homes, to poor eating choices made by children and/or their caregivers. As a result of being hungry at school, these children may not reach their full developmental potential – an outcome that can have a health impact throughout their entire lives.*
4. J Larry Brown, William H. Beardslee, Deborah Prothrow, *Impact of School Breakfast on Children's Health and Learning: An Analysis of the Scientific Research* (Nov. 2008) Unpublished Manuscript. Harvard School of Public Health. Available at:  
[http://www.sodexofoundation.org/hunger\\_us/Images/Impact%20of%20School%20Breakfast%20Study\\_tcm150-212606.pdf](http://www.sodexofoundation.org/hunger_us/Images/Impact%20of%20School%20Breakfast%20Study_tcm150-212606.pdf). A literature review by Harvard University concluded that: *...more than 100 published research articles, provides the scientific basis for concluding that the [US] federal School Breakfast Program is highly effective in terms of providing children with a stronger basis to learn in school, eat more nutritious diets, and lead more healthy lives both emotionally and physically...significantly improves their cognitive or mental abilities, enabling them to be more alert, pay better attention, and to do better in terms of*

*reading, math and other standardized test scores. Children getting breakfast at school also are sick less often, have fewer problems associated with hunger, such as dizziness, lethargy, stomach aches and ear aches, and do significantly better than their peers who do not get a school breakfast in terms of cooperation, discipline and inter-personal behaviors.”*

5. Senate Standing Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology, *Obesity in Canada*, 2016:  
[https://sencanada.ca/content/sen/committee/421/SOCI/Reports/2016-02-25\\_Revised\\_report\\_Obesity\\_in\\_Canada\\_e.pdf](https://sencanada.ca/content/sen/committee/421/SOCI/Reports/2016-02-25_Revised_report_Obesity_in_Canada_e.pdf) recommended: *that the Minister of Health in discussion with provincial and territorial counterparts as well as non-governmental organizations already engaged in these initiatives:... Advocate for ... school programs related to breakfast and lunch programs...and nutrition literacy courses.*
  
6. Ontario Healthy Kids Panel, *No Time to Wait: The Healthy Kids Strategy*, 2013 (Toronto: Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-term Care):  
[http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/healthy\\_kids/healthy\\_kids.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/common/ministry/publications/reports/healthy_kids/healthy_kids.pdf) recommended: *2.8 Establish a universal school nutrition program for all Ontario publicly funded elementary and secondary schools. 2.9 Establish a universal school nutrition program for First Nations communities.*
  
7. World Cancer Research Fund, *Policy and Action for Cancer Prevention Food, Nutrition, and Physical Activity: a Global Perspective*, (London: WCRF, 2009):  
[https://www.wcrf.org/sites/default/files/Policy\\_Report.pdf](https://www.wcrf.org/sites/default/files/Policy_Report.pdf) recommended: *SCHOOLS: Provide healthy daily meals for all staff and pupils... Incorporate food and nutrition (including food preparation and cooking skills)...into the mandatory core curriculum Ensure that teaching materials are independently originated and free from commercial bias. Do not allow vending machines that offer snacks high in sugar, fat or salt, or sugary drinks and withdraw such ‘fast’ foods and drinks from school canteens.*
  
8. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities resolved in its 2018 annual meeting (see: ) to:  
*WHEREAS, 1.7 million Canadian households experience food insecurity, and the current patchwork of school food programming reaches only a small percentage of our over 5 million students, with Canada remaining one of the only Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development nations without a national school food program;*  
*WHEREAS, the Coalition for Healthy School Food is working at a national level to advocate for the creation of a cost-shared Universal Healthy School Food Program that will enable all students in Canada to have access to healthy meals at school, serving culturally appropriate, local, sustainable food to the fullest extent possible;*

*RESOLVED, that the Federation of Canadian Municipalities advocate for a Universal Healthy School Food Program to the federal government.*

See:

<https://www.fcm.ca/home/about-us/corporate-resources/fcm-resolutions.htm?lang=en-CA&resolution=8cf4c343-602c-e811-adbf-005056bc2614&srch=%25food%25&iss=&filt=false>