

About

The Coalition for Healthy School Food is a growing network of over 160 non-profit member organizations who are seeking public investment in and federal standards for a cost-shared school food program that would see all children having daily access to healthy food at school. Our members in every province and territory advocate for stable funding and support from their jurisdictions. The Coalition's vision is endorsed by government agencies and other organizations. The Coalition is hosted by Food Secure Canada.

The Issue

Canada experiences \$13.8 billion in treatment and productivity losses due to nutrition-related chronic disease every year. Only one-third of children aged 4 to 13 eat five or more servings of fruit and vegetables, and over 50% of the total energy intake of children aged 4-18 is from ultra-processed foods. Canada is one of the only industrialized countries without a national school food program and was recently ranked 37th of 41 countries around providing healthy food for kids. 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 diet including inadequate access to healthy food.

Health and well-being: Canadian research shows that school food programs increase consumption of healthy foods, build food literacy and positively influence children's eating patterns. These programs reduce student's risk of chronic disease and improve their mental health.

Learning: School food programs improve educational outcomes and increase graduation rates by reducing hunger in classrooms, a known barrier to concentration and learning. They help students feel connected and that they belong.

Job creation: Preliminary research shows that a National School Food Program can create jobs for food service workers, Canadian farmers and local food producers, creating economic multipliers and supporting stronger regional food systems.

Families: A universal National School Food Program would take pressure off the family budget, provide children equitable and dignified access to healthy food and provide support to low income families (although it would not replace needed income supports for the unacceptable number of Canadians living in poverty).

Environment: A program designed with sustainability goals in mind can help students develop a palate for fresh vegetables, fruit and plant proteins, and help students to learn how to choose local and sustainable food, minimize food waste, and how to compost.

Developing a Healthy, Universal, Cost-Shared School Food Program for Canada

A successful National School Food Program will be:



Health-Promoting

Serve tasty and culturally appropriate whole foods, focusing on vegetables and fruit in line with the revised [Canada's Food Guide](#) that models healthy eating habits.



Universal

Ensure that ALL children in a school can access the program in a non-stigmatizing manner. Over time, all children in Canada will participate in a school food program.



Cost-shared

Use federal funding to both expand on current provincial, city, parental and community funding and to initiate new programs in a cost-shared model.



Flexible and Respectful

Successful school food programs reflect the context of the school and region. Ensure that funding supports different food service models, from breakfast to lunch to snacks. Programs should respect local conditions, be culturally appropriate and locally adapted.



Connected

Build on existing programs, local knowledge, skills and relationships. School food programs can support local food producers where possible and set local and sustainably produced food purchasing targets.



Comprehensive

Promote the values of food literacy and explore how school food programs can be integrated into the curriculum through nutrition and hands-on food systems education.



Guided by National Principles

Ensure that programs are guided by Canada-wide program evaluation; a national multi-sectoral advisory body with community/cultural leadership; and conflict of interest safeguards that prevent programs from marketing unhealthy food and specific products.



Committed to Indigenous Control over Programs for Indigenous Students

Ensure Indigenous Food Sovereignty in a School Food Program for Canada.