



Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2026 Budget

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

The Coalition for Healthy School Food recommends that the Government of Canada:

Recommendation 1: Fulfill your committed investment of \$1 billion over 5 years for the [National School Food Program \(NSFP\)](#), extend the [School Food Infrastructure Fund](#) by investing \$20.2 million per year and make the Program permanent through legislation. Solidify Canada's leadership by joining the 56 countries that have made the School Meals Coalition's [National Commitments](#).

Recommendation 2: Allocate \$20 million per year for the [Buy Canadian in School Foods Program](#), as promised in the Liberal Party's 2025 platform.

Recommendation 3: Provide \$500,000 per year to the [National School Food Program Research Partnership](#), a group of 30+ Canada-wide academics, community partners, and the federal government who have developed a comprehensive, implementation-ready longitudinal research plan for monitoring and evaluation of the National School Food Program. This would ensure quality, cost-effective, and well-received community-based school food programs. This investment would be matched equally from non-governmental funders.

Recommendation 4: Expand your funding of the National School Food Program to align with cost-of-living growth, evaluation findings, and emerging needs so as to establish a Program that is consistent with the [National School Food Policy](#)'s vision and objectives. Based on these considerations, and to at least match the [\\$400 million](#) combined annual investment from provinces, territories, and municipalities, we recommend that Canada plan to increase its contribution to a minimum of \$400 million per year in subsequent years.

July 18, 2025

Karina Gould, MP, Chair
House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance

Subject: Make the National School Food Program permanent and fund school food infrastructure, local food in schools, and evaluation

Dear Ms. Gould and Committee Members,

The Coalition for Healthy School Food (CHSF) welcomed the launch of the National School Food Program (NSFP) and the National School Food Policy in 2024, as well as the transfer of funds to every province and territory and Indigenous partners throughout 2024 and 2025.

On behalf of the CHSF, we present these recommendations with strong support for the Government's leadership in advancing school food in Canada and its commitment to children's health and well-being in every province, territory, and First Nations, Inuit, and Métis communities.

Recommendation 1: Fulfill your committed investment of \$1 billion over 5 years for the [National School Food Program](#), continue to invest \$20.2 million per year as announced in Budget 2024 to extend the [School Food Infrastructure Fund](#), and make the Program permanent through legislation. This would ensure the long-term stability and existence of the NSFP and allow Canada to join other leading countries such as Finland, the US, Japan, and Brazil, who have all legislated their school food programs.

Sustaining federal investment in the NSFP will contribute to a more equitable, resilient future. As food prices rise, families struggle to buy nutritious food, putting children's nutrition and long-term health at risk. Many children across the income spectrum do not meet dietary guidelines and are at risk of chronic illness.¹ The NSFP is a critical response to ensure students have daily access to nutritious food, reducing children's food insecurity during school hours, improving health and learning outcomes, and supporting the development of positive lifelong eating habits into adulthood.²

The 2024 federal budget allocated \$20.2 million for the [School Food Infrastructure Fund](#) (SFIF). We ask Canada to continue to invest \$20.2 million per year to extend the SFIF. Ten non-profits were chosen and funds were allocated quickly to hundreds of community-based organizations to purchase needed infrastructure and equipment such as fridges, stoves, and delivery vehicles, allowing more school food programs to serve healthy food.

As a member of the [School Meals Coalition](#), made up of 109 countries, we encourage Canada to affirm its leadership in the global community and join the 56 governments that have made [National Commitments](#) to monitor, evaluate, build, enhance, and expand their investments in school food programs.

We urge the government to consult with those most affected by food insecurity, particularly Black families who experience the [highest rates of food insecurity](#) in Canada, to support community-informed solutions with regard to implementing the NSFP.

We emphasize continued and sustainable funding, through flexible distinctions-based agreements with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit partners, allowing substantial investment towards much-needed infrastructure, food costs, staffing, or other community needs. This will support Indigenous-led school food initiatives, designed and delivered by communities, which are essential for cultural relevance, self-determination, and impact.

¹ [Statistics Canada](#) (2023); [Heart and Stroke](#) (2025)

² [Cohen et al.](#), (2022); [Colley et al.](#), (2019)

Recommendation 2: Allocate \$20 million per year towards the [Buy Canadian in School Foods Program](#) as promised in the Liberal Party's 2025 pre-election platform. This new program, developed in consultation with key stakeholders, would support local food procurement in school food programs while creating stable markets for food producers, especially in rural and remote communities. The program would generate revenues for farmers, create employment for food service and distribution workers, and strengthen local and regional food systems.³ This aligns with broader buy-Canadian food strategies amid global tariff challenges.

Recommendation 3: Over the last year, over 30 academics and community partners in Canada have been meeting with the federal government to develop a [National School Food Program Research Partnership](#). The partnership has a comprehensive, implementation-ready longitudinal research plan to support the federal government to ensure that as the NSFP rolls out, researchers are there to study implementation. The plan includes monitoring, tracking, and evaluating a wide range of outputs and outcomes for children, families, and wider communities. This systematic research is essential to demonstrate short and long-term program impact and efficacy.

We recommend that the government provide \$500,000 in 2026 to the National School Food Program Research Partnership from already committed NSFP funds, and continue this annual investment to ensure robust and collaborative research as the NSFP expands. This investment would be matched equally from non-governmental funders.

Recommendation 4: Expand your funding of the NSFP to align with cost-of-living growth, evaluation findings, and emerging needs so as to establish a Program that is consistent with the [National School Food Policy](#)'s vision and objectives. The CHSF was delighted with the 2024 commitment of \$1 billion over five years to the NSFP. However, this amount of funding is not yet sufficient to build a universal national school food program. Canada's initial investment provides approximately \$0.20 per student per day if every student in Canada participated, while the cost of a nutritious meal averages \$4.50.⁴ In future years, the government will need to consider expanding its annual funding contribution to create an adequately funded universal school food program. Based on these considerations, and to match the [\\$400 million](#) combined yearly investment from provinces, territories, and municipalities, we recommend that Canada increase its contribution to a minimum of \$400 million per year in subsequent years.

On behalf of Canada's largest school food network of over 500 organizational members and endorsers in Canada, we urge continued growth and permanence of the NSFP to ensure a generational impact on the health and well-being of all the children, families, and communities in Canada. We look forward to collaborating with all levels of government and Indigenous partners to strengthen and sustain this vital program.

Yours sincerely,



Debbie Field, National Coordinator
Coalition for Healthy School Food



Jesse Veenstra, Executive Director
Farm to Cafeteria Canada, host CHSF

³ [Ruetz and Fraser](#) (2019); [Heart and Stroke](#) (2025)

⁴ Based on [Flourish! School Food Society](#) estimates, average lunch costs approximately \$6.50/meal, while breakfasts and snacks cost around \$2.50/meal.

A permanent NSFP, grounded in the 2024 National School Food Policy and sustained by federal funding, will ensure stable school food programs in Canada. Legislation will strengthen federal, provincial, territorial, and Indigenous collaboration to advance key priorities in health, education, affordability, food security, and economic resilience, including the following elements and objectives:

1. Delivery of healthy school meals

The NSFP supports provinces, territories, and Indigenous partners to expand initiatives and provide nutritious school meals through local partnerships, aligned with the Policy's vision of universality, dignity, and health promotion.

2. Assisting families with the cost of living

Research shows universal school food programs save families up to \$130 to \$190 per child per month on groceries, or \$2,600 to \$3,800 annually for two children. These savings are significant amid inflation and food price volatility.⁵

3. Improving educational outcomes

Evidence shows that children with consistent access to nutritious food at school demonstrate stronger attention, academic performance, behaviour, and cognitive engagement - critical foundations for educational equity and success.⁶

4. Strengthening food literacy and lifelong habits

When students plan, grow, cook, or serve food in school food programs, they learn practical life skills and build healthy lifelong habits. Students also gain an understanding and connection to food systems and how to take action supporting sustainability and equity. This helps students build [food literacy](#) and aligns with the National School Food Policy.

5. Supporting economic growth, job creation, and local food systems

The NSFP and Policy prioritize local procurement in school food programs, which stimulates domestic supply chains, creates jobs, and strengthens regional economies - an approach proven effective in several Canadian provinces and global models.⁷

6. Promoting responsible and supportive school food policies and practices

The NSFP can help foster school settings that normalize healthy eating while limiting exposure to the marketing of ultra-processed products. These efforts are consistent with the National School Food Policy and global public health recommendations.

7. Advancing local, sustainable, culturally appropriate food sourcing and production

School food programs have the potential to strengthen local food systems while reflecting diverse cultural foodways. By sourcing food locally, incorporating traditional and country foods, and adopting environmentally responsible practices, these programs reduce emissions, support climate resilience, and foster food sovereignty.

8. Addressing gender equity

Universal school meals ease the caregiving burden - particularly on mothers - and support workforce participation. A study from Sweden found that free lunch programs increased mothers' labour market participation by 5%, while parents and working women in particular benefit from reduced stress and time spent packing school meals.⁸

⁵ [Ruetz et al.](#), (2023)

⁶ [Anderson et al.](#), (2017); [Centre for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (2015)

⁷ [Coalition for Healthy School Food](#); [Public food procurement for sustainable food systems and healthy diets](#) (2021)

⁸ [Lundborg et al.](#), (2022), as cited in [Ruetz et al.](#), (2023)

9. Improving health outcomes

Children eat a large percentage of their daily food at school, making school food programs a key opportunity to support healthy eating. School food programs prevent diet-related diseases and reduce future healthcare costs estimated at \$26 billion annually in Canada.⁹

10. Alignment with other government objectives

School food programs are a vital component of Canada's social infrastructure, complementing initiatives like universal child care and the Canada Child Benefit. These programs yield significant economic and social returns - estimated at \$2.50 to \$7 for every dollar invested.¹⁰

The Coalition for Healthy School Food's 380+ non-profit member organizations and 150+ endorsers are non-profit organizations, cities, school boards, schools, and other government agencies that comprise thousands of supporters in Canada. We advocate for a permanent, universal, cost-shared NSFP with the vision that, over time, all 5 million students in Canada from Kindergarten to Grade 12 will have daily access to healthy food at school, offered through programs that align with the National School Food Policy and our [8 Guiding Principles](#).

⁹ [Loewen et al.](#), (2019), as cited in [Ruetz et al.](#), (2023)

¹⁰ [Ruetz et al.](#), (2023)