

About

The Coalition for Healthy School Food is a growing network of over 210 non-profit member organizations who are seeking public investment in and Canada-wide 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 over 100 government agencies and other organizations.

The Issue

Canada experiences \$13.8 billion in treatment and productivity losses due to nutrition-related chronic diseases 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 federally supported 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.

Why a Canada-wide School Food Program?

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 students' risk of developing 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 feel that they belong.

Job creation: Preliminary research shows that a Canada-wide School Food Program would create jobs for food service workers, support Canadian farmers and local food producers, create and support stronger regional food systems, particularly if it incorporated local food procurement practices.

Families: Families: A universal School Food Program for Canada would free up time for working parents, especially women, 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 reduces food system-related carbon emissions, helps students develop a palate for fresh vegetables, fruit and plant proteins, and helps students learn how to choose local and sustainable food, minimize food waste, and how to compost.

International commitments: A School Food Program for Canada would help the Government of Canada advance its Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) commitments and meet carbon reduction targets.

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

A successful Canada-wide School Food Program will be:



Health-Promoting

Serve tasty, nourishing and culturally appropriate foods to all children, focusing on vegetables and fruits. Ensure that programs are in line with [Canada's Food Guide](#), foster a healthy food environment, and promote mental health and wellbeing.



Universal

Ensure that ALL children in a school can access the program in a non-stigmatizing manner. Over time, all children in Canada will be able to 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 Locally Adapted

Successful school food programs reflect the local context of the school and region and are connected to and informed by students and their parents or caregivers. Ensure that funding builds on existing programs, local knowledge, skills and relationships and that it supports different food service models, from breakfast to lunch to snacks.



Committed to Indigenous Control over Programs for Indigenous Students

Embed Indigenous Food Sovereignty in a School Food Program for Canada and negotiate funding for school food programs with First Nation, Métis and Inuit leaders.



A Driver of Community Economic Development

Encourage school food programs to set local and sustainably produced food purchasing targets, which would create jobs for Canadian farmers and local food producers.



Promoting of Food Literacy

Support the conditions for school food programs to be integrated into the curriculum and enable food literacy and experiential food skills education.



Supported by Guidance and Accountability Measures

Build on provincial and territorial school food funding and policies to ensure that programs have strong public accountability measures in place and are guided by Canada-wide nutritional standards, conflict of interest safeguards that prevent programs from marketing unhealthy food and specific products, as well as a framework for consistent Canada-wide program evaluation.