

**Written Submission for the Pre-Budget
Consultations in Advance of the 2019 Budget**

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

The Coalition for Healthy School Food recommends the Government of Canada invest \$360 million, through provincial and territorial transfers, in healthy school food programs, with the eventual goal of universal coverage.



Hon. Wayne Easter, PC, MP, Chair
Standing Committee on Finance
House of Commons, Parliament Buildings
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A9

August 2, 2018

Re: Invest in Canada's children through a National Healthy School Food Program

Dear Mr. Easter and Members of the Standing Committee:

We are concerned about the state of school food in Canada. 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.

The Coalition for Healthy School Food is a network of over 40 health- and education-focused organizations from every province and the North seeking federal investment in a national, universal school food program that would see all Canadian children given daily access to healthy food at school. The Coalition is a network coordinated by Food Secure Canada.

A recent UNICEF report ranked Canada 37th out of 41 high-income countries on providing access to nutritious food to children. The report recommended the creation of a national school food program as a solution to this urgent problem. Only one-third of children aged four to 13 eat five or more servings of fruits and vegetables, and an average of one-quarter of children's caloric intake is from foods not recommended by the relatively loose nutrition standards set by the 2007 edition of *Canada's Food Guide*.

Poor diet and food insecurity can also lead to educational under-performance. When children attend school hungry or under-nourished, their energy levels, memory, problem-solving skills, creativity, concentration, and other cognitive functions are negatively impacted.

A national, universal, healthy school food program will help redress both ill-health and inequity by ensuring that children can access nutritious foods in schools. Evidence shows that school food programs increase children's consumption of healthy foods, reduce the risk of chronic diseases, and improve mental health. School food programs also improve educational outcomes and increase graduation rates by reducing hunger in classrooms, a known barrier to concentration and learning.

Furthermore, school food programs have the potential to create thousands of new jobs and to grow local economies by investing in local agriculture and food businesses. Indeed, many countries tie funding for their national school food programs not only to health but also to educational attainment and economic growth.

In response to this evidence and the need that exists, on June 14, 2018, Senator Art Eggleton introduced Motion #358: *"That the Senate urge the government to initiate consultations with the provinces, territories,*

Indigenous people, and other interested groups to develop an adequately funded national cost-shared universal nutrition program with the goal of ensuring healthy children and youth who, to that end, are educated in issues relating to nutrition and provided with a nutritious meal daily in a program with appropriate safeguards to ensure the independent oversight of food procurement, nutrition standards, and governance.”

We applaud Senator Eggleton’s motion and believe that schools would be an ideal setting for this health initiative to be implemented.

Based on our costing, we estimate that a national, universal healthy school food program would cost \$1.8 billion per year, mostly for the costs of food but also for 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 applicable.

The Coalition for Healthy School Food recommends the Government of Canada initially invest \$360 million, through provincial and territorial transfers, in healthy school food programs, with the eventual goal of universal coverage.

Over the years a national, universal, healthy school food program has been recommended by a former House Standing Committee on Finance, a Senate Committee, an advisory Committee appointed by the Ontario Government, the federation of Canadian Municipalities, and scores of provincial and local politicians. The evidentiary basis for it has been established by reports published by the World Food Program and the World Cancer research Fund.

We see leadership emerging from the Governments of Alberta, Ontario, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, and the City of Toronto, and sincerely hope that the federal government will act on Senator Eggleton’s motion and lead a collaborative approach on school food programs with provincial, territorial, municipal and Indigenous governments. National investments and political leadership could help spur fundamental public health benefits and redress social inequality in our most important and vulnerable social infrastructure— children and youth—at the place where equal opportunity can matter most: school.

We urge the Committee to help facilitate a consolidation of this leadership.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of the Coalition,



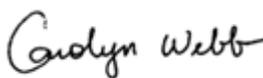
Diana Bronson, Executive Director
Food Secure Canada



Margo Riebe-Butt, Executive Director
Nourish Nova Scotia



Bill Jeffery, LLB, Executive Director
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References

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

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. This type of partnership approach could apply to other organizations and initiatives as well. [citing Martha O'Connor, former Director General of the now defunct, Breakfast for Learning 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. Almost one quarter of Canadian children in Grade 4 do not eat breakfast daily and, by Grade 8, that number jumps to almost half of all girls. 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. A November 2008 scientific literature review by experts at Harvard University concluded that, even before the U.S. government strengthened its nutrition standards:

...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 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 childcare facility and 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 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 recommended:

SCHOOLS:

Provide healthy daily meals for all staff and pupils, together with facilities for active recreation, activity and sports

Incorporate food and nutrition (including food preparation and cooking skills) and physical education 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>