

# Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance 2020 Pre-Budget Recommendations *August 2019*

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Dietitians of Canada is a pan-Canadian health professional association, representing the voice of dietitians.

There are more than 10,000 dietitians in Canada and we all share deep appreciation of food, a curiosity to understand the science behind it, and the tools to unlock its potential. Like all regulated health professionals, we undergo comprehensive and rigorous training, both on the job and in universities. We are committed to collaborating with patients, clients and communities to achieve their shared goals of better eating and improved health. By translating the science of nutrition into terms everyone can understand, we unlock food's potential and support healthy living for all Canadians.

**Dietitians of Canada recommends that the Government of Canada:**

1. Commit to targets for reduction of food insecurity and annual monitoring of prevalence and severity across all of Canada;
2. Provide incentives to provinces and territories to support access to interprofessional health care services, including dietitians, especially for seniors' care and mental health care.

**Recommendation 1: Commit to targets for reduction of food insecurity and annual monitoring of prevalence and severity of food insecurity across all of Canada.**

Dietitians of Canada recommends that the Government of Canada implement a comprehensive poverty reduction strategy, including a commitment to monitor its effectiveness at reducing the prevalence of household food insecurity. Climate change will affect agriculture in Canada and globally, potentially changing food supply and pricing, which may impact household food insecurity. However, the root cause of food insecurity is poverty—government policies that support stable and sufficient incomes for households are needed to reduce rates of food insecurity.

Implementation of a comprehensive national poverty reduction strategy with clear targets and accountability mechanisms would contribute to ensuring that all Canadians can buy healthy food. Food insecurity (inadequate or insecure access to food because of financial constraints) is a significant social and health problem in Canada, which affects 4 million Canadians. Strategies and initiatives to reduce poverty and food insecurity must be designed and implemented to ensure all households in Canada have adequate and secure incomes.

Food insecurity is strongly linked to negative health outcomes, including higher prevalence of chronic diseases, including depression, diabetes, and heart disease. Adults living in food insecure households are more likely to suffer from 3 or more chronic conditions, and to be high-cost users of the health system. Food insecurity increases the risk of developing poor health and chronic diseases, while the presence of poor health and chronic diseases make it more difficult to cope, work and care for oneself, thus increasing the risk of food insecurity, a bi-directional relationship among these variables.

Given food insecurity is a sensitive indicator of income inadequacy/insecurity, all poverty reduction initiatives must be monitored to ensure effectiveness – this should include measuring food insecurity prevalence in all communities and regions, including First Nations people living on-reserve, as an outcome measure for a poverty reduction strategy. Specifically, we recommend that all provinces and territories be required to use the Household Food Security Survey Module in every Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) cycle, to provide indication of impact of poverty reduction strategies implemented across Canada.

**Recommendation 2: Access to evidence-based nutrition care from dietitians, especially in seniors' care and mental health care.**

Team-based care, particularly in primary care settings and home care, continues to evolve across Canada. However, access to dietitians' services within teams varies significantly, and many Canadians do not have adequate access to dietitian services. In 2018, Dietitians of Canada commissioned environmental scans of dietitian services within [primary care](#), [home care](#), and [long term care](#) settings across Canada. The results of these scans highlight great inequities for access to dietitian services between and within provincial/territorial health systems. Evidence shows that nutrition counselling provided by dietitians leads to better outcomes compared to usual care. Considering the important linkages

between nutrition and health, investment in increasing Canadians' access to dietitian services could contribute to significant benefits. Dietitians can guide consumers and clients to make healthy food choices that are also environmentally sustainable and that contribute to sustainable food systems through purchasing advice.

Dietitians of Canada supports the [recommendations of Organizations for Health Action \(HEAL\)](#) for investments in seniors' health. In particular, investments in home care have potential to save health system dollars. We urge the Federal Government to provide incentives to provincial and territorial health systems to increase access to dietitian services, particularly in the areas of seniors' care and mental health.

**Our recommendations and rationale are based on peer-reviewed evidence. References available on request.**

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