



Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2021 Budget

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

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

- 1) **Allocate \$200 million towards a dedicated School Food Fund** to support the health and wellbeing of children, families and communities, stimulate the Canadian economy and inform the government's development of a National School Food Program.
- 2) **Allocate \$360 million as the Year 1 investment in a cost-shared, universal National School Food Program with strong national standards** to improve the health of our children, support families experiencing food insecurity, and reduce the \$13.8 billion in costs of treatment and productivity losses due to nutrition-related chronic disease in Canada.

By email to: wayne.easter@parl.gc.ca, FINA@parl.gc.ca and finapbc-cpb@parl.gc.ca

Re: Invest in economic recovery and children's health through a National School Food Program further to Government of Canada Budget 2019 commitments

Dear Mr. Easter and Committee Members:

As Canada plans for a recovery in the face of Covid-19, the [128+ Organizational Members](#) of the Coalition for Healthy School Food urge the government to:

- 1) **Allocate \$200 million towards a dedicated School Food Fund** to support the health and wellbeing of children, families and communities, stimulate the Canadian economy and inform the government's development of a National School Food Program.
- 2) **Allocate \$360 million as the Year 1 investment in a cost-shared, universal National School Food Program with strong national standards** to improve the health of our children, support families experiencing food insecurity, and reduce the \$13.8 billion in costs of treatment and productivity losses due to nutrition-related chronic disease in Canada.

The Coalition for Healthy School Food, a growing network of health, education, Indigenous and environmental organizations, is seeking federal investment in 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 funding and support from these jurisdictions. The Coalition is hosted by [Food Secure Canada](#).

1) Allocating \$200 million towards a School Food Fund to stimulate the Canadian Economy

An investment in school food would **support job creation in agriculture, food service, construction and other hard-hit sectors** while helping to strengthen the health and wellbeing of students, their families and communities. Given the range of social, economic, and environmental policy priorities¹ that would be advanced with investments in school food we ask that you **create a dedicated School Food Fund of \$200 million** that could be administered through existing provincial and territorial departments that fund school food programs or partnerships with community-based NGOs through a transparent application process². Applicants could request funding for:

- a. **Infrastructure and equipment** such as kitchen and cafeteria retrofits, greenhouses and gardens, and the purchase of appliances and tools, with an emphasis on purchasing from Canadian retailers and manufacturers.³
- b. **Funding to pilot innovative food processing, distribution and food preparation models for school food programs** in partnership with provinces and territories and community groups. These could help inform the government's process to develop and implement a universal cost-shared National School Food Program.⁴

c. **Evaluation of the emergent and existing best practices for school food delivery models to inform the government's implementation of a National School Food Program.**⁵

Each of these measures would **reach all regions of the country and create jobs in diverse sectors, including: agriculture, food services, food manufacturing and distribution, environmentally sustainable industries, and health.**¹

We also recommend that you consult with Indigenous Nations and leaders and provide additional funding to Indigenous Nations and communities to advance Indigenous-led school food initiatives.

2) Allocating \$360 million as an initial Year 1 investment towards the establishment of a cost-shared, universal National School Food Program with national standards as an investment in our children's health

Only one-third of children aged four to 13 eat five or more servings of fruit and vegetables, and a quarter of children's caloric intake is from foods not recommended by the 2007 edition of *Canada's Food Guide*. A Canadian survey found that only 10% of youth in grades 6-12 met fruit and vegetable recommendations. [Media](#) are now reporting that Covid-19 has exacerbated poor diets, leading families to eat more pre-packaged and processed food. *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.

Putting this into even more context, it is widely recognized that structural racism and systemic inequity have created the economic and social conditions for increased rates of high blood pressure, high cholesterol and diabetes, which are among the biggest risk factors for sickness and mortality from Covid-19.

The Covid-19 crisis has revealed the important role that schools play in children's nutrition as community organizations from coast to coast to coast have partnered with schools and governments to distribute meals, gift cards and boxes of healthy foods for children and youth who no longer have access to meals and snacks through school food programs.

[Canadian research shows](#) that school food programs increase consumption of healthy foods, reduce the risk of chronic disease, and improve mental health, positively influencing children's nutritional knowledge, dietary behaviours, and food intake. 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; feelings that have been eroded during Covid-19. A National School Food Program would have a positive impact on families, particularly women who invest significant time preparing food for school.

Covid-19 has brought significant unemployment and rising food insecurity, and an increasing number of families have had to turn to emergency food aid. Statistics Canada recently shared that 19.2% of Canadians living in a household with children reported experiencing food insecurity. We also know that Black households experience [significantly more food insecurity](#) than white

households and this has almost certainly been exacerbated by Covid-19. Now is the time to support a National School Food Program that will take pressure off of the family budget and be a support for the millions of children and youth who are unable to access healthy food at this time. Investing in a National School Food Program that is universal and without means-testing can contribute to leveling the playing field and ensuring that all students are able to access a healthy meal or snack each day, although it would not be a replacement for needed income supports for the unacceptable number of Canadians living in poverty.

The Coalition for Healthy School Food was pleased when your government's [March 2019 federal budget](#) recognized "the critical importance of healthy meals for a child's education," and announced "the Government's intention to work with provinces and territories towards the creation of a National School Food Program." **We ask that Budget 2021 supports your commitment to continue to work with provinces and territories, Indigenous leaders and non-profit organizations towards the creation of a National School Food Program** including next steps in the consultation and implementation process.


All provinces and territories and a growing number of cities already invest in school food. We urge you to **allocate \$200 million to create a dedicated School Food Fund** that would stimulate the Canadian economy and inform the development of a National program, and that you **allocate \$360 million as an initial Year 1 investment towards the establishment of a strong cost-shared, universal National School Food Program** to advance the health of children and youth in Canada.

There is so much to be gained by laying the basis for the creation of a cost-shared, universal National School Food Program as an essential service for all Canadian children.

Yours sincerely,



Gisèle Yasmeen, Executive Director
Food Secure Canada



Debbie Field, Coordinator
Coalition for Healthy School Food

Additional Details: Benefits of a School Food Fund:

- 1** Investing in school food would enable your government to advance your **Budget 2019 commitment** to develop a National School Food Program, implement and advance the **Food Policy for Canada**, and promote the **Healthy Eating Strategy** including Canada's 2019 Food Guide. Such an investment would advance the following policy priorities:

Health and well-being: School food programs increase consumption of healthy food, reduce the risk of chronic disease, and improve mental health. A National School Food Program would provide an excellent opportunity for schools to put into practice the revised [Canada's Food Guide](#), enabling students to develop the taste receptivity for nutritious foods, food literacy, and habits needed for a lifetime of healthy eating.

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. Investing in a School Food Fund would support local economies, employing thousands of food service and nutrition professionals and getting this hard-hit sector back into employment.

Support domestic agriculture: When local food procurement targets are set and local food is served, the local multiplier of local food purchases will impact regional food production, household and business earnings, long-term gross domestic product, and part-time jobs. A buy-Canadian strategy, as named in the Food Policy for Canada, would help create a market for Canadian producers and food manufacturers, contribute to the overall goal of reaching Canada's target of an [additional \\$30 billion](#) in domestic agri-food sales by 2025 as set by the [Canadian Agri-food Economic Table](#), and support your goal of increasing public trust in Canadian grown and produced food.

Families and Gender Equity: A national school food program would have a positive impact on families, particularly women who invest significant time preparing food for school.

Environment: A program that follows and promotes the 2019 Canada's Food Guide Snapshot would help students develop a palate for fresh vegetables, fruit and plant proteins, consistent with a diet that emits low amounts of greenhouse gasses. School food programs may reduce negative environmental impacts by facilitating the reduction and management of food waste, a major source of greenhouse gas emissions. When designed with sustainability goals in mind, school food programs can provide a strong opportunity for students to learn in practice how to choose local and sustainable food, how to minimize food waste, and how to compost.

- 2** We suggest that the School Food Fund include a transparent application process where applicants demonstrate a multi-stakeholder approach with strong community partnerships. Projects should include strong evaluation and communications components so that best practices can be learned and integrated into efforts to develop a national cost-shared universal school food program.

- 3** An investment in **infrastructure and equipment** such as kitchen and cafeteria retrofits, greenhouses and gardens for growing food, and the purchase of Canadian appliances and tools would enable schools and community sites that support school food programs to better prepare, serve, grow, and preserve healthy foods and would help to retain and create employment during the recovery period.
- 4** Many cooks, trained chefs and other foodservice workers have been out of work and farmers have had their supply chains disrupted. Schools and organizations can be supported to establish and expand relationships with these food service workers to initiate new meals, innovative products and food delivery models as well as small and medium-sized farms to source nutritious local food where feasible, providing new market opportunities for local farmers and producers. **Food processing, distribution and food preparation pilots for school food programs** would strengthen programs as Canada moves to develop a successful national school food program.
- 5 Evaluation of emergent and existing best practices for school food delivery models will be** supported by the Canadian Association of Food Studies' School Food Working Group.