

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

By: Breakfast Club of Canada



Recommendation

That the Government of Canada invest \$250 million to deliver a National School Food Program, as outlined in Budget 2019, in partnership with the provinces and territories, as well as philanthropic and private sectors.

Overview

Since the COVID-19 crisis began, Breakfast Club of Canada (BCC), and our field partners across the country, took immediate action to transition from feeding kids at school to ensuring children and families have access to healthy food options while confined to their homes. To date, our crisis response initiatives have reached over 626,000 children and youth and this number continues to grow every day.

With students splitting time between online learning and in-class learning, BCC's operational model had to adapt quickly to provide innovative out of classroom solutions during these challenging times. We are not only providing support to a thousand schools and community organizations across the country, but we are working with the provinces and territories, the food security eco-system, and the private sector to support the delivery of healthy food and enhancement of local infrastructure.

When COVID-19 hit Canada, many households were already food insecure. 65% of households rely directly on their employment to survive and any impact on their income would undeniably put them more at risk. In spite of the Canada Emergency Response Benefit, many vulnerable families suffered substantial income loss, worsening their already delicate situation¹.

In May 2020, almost one in seven Canadians indicated that they lived in a household where there was food insecurity in the past thirty days, meaning that nearly 2.1 million households in Canada experienced food insecurity. This represents a 74% increase compared to the 2017-2018 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS), where 8.8% of Canadian households – approximately 1.2 million – experienced food insecurity².

Before the pandemic, statistics showed that over a million children in Canada, or one in four, risked going to school on an empty stomach. According to most recent data, indicators currently point to an 80% increase in food insecurity.

This means over 2 million students will potentially experience food insecurity in Canada and that out of three children, more than one may experience hunger daily.

¹ Library of Parliament (2020). COVID-19, Food Insecurity and Related Issues. <https://hillnotes.ca/2020/04/17/covid-19-food-insecurity-and-related-issues/>

² Statistics Canada (2020). Health Fact Sheets. Household food insecurity, 2017/2018. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/82-625-x/2020001/article/00001-eng.htm>

In Indigenous communities, this number is higher. One in two Indigenous children live in poverty and are at risk of not having access to a nutritious meal every day. With a population growth rate of 20.1%, which is significantly higher than the 5.2% of the wider population, and an unemployment rate of 22% on reserve, which is three times higher than the rest of the country, Indigenous children are more vulnerable and less likely to thrive than non-Indigenous children.

Based on our student nutrition experience and the feedback from our national network (schools, school boards, regional and provincial partners), we foresee that the economic impact from the pandemic will contribute to the number of children and youth attending school food programs. This will undeniably influence the need for school meal programs such as the ones supported by BCC and our field partners across the country in the upcoming school year.

These scenarios highlight one important fact: food insecurity is a major problem in Canada. In order to ensure children's success, we need to provide access to nutritious food collectively.

At present, Canada does not have the proper supports in place to guarantee that all schoolchildren have access to healthy food options. A National School Food Program, with costs shared between the federal, provincial, territorial governments and private and not-for-profit partners, is required to fully address the issue of food insecurity.

Poor nutrition also has a significant impact on a child's health and their ability to learn and function. National and international studies have proven that children with poor nutrition are sick more often, have more behavioral problems and struggle learning. According to the Ending Childhood Hunger Report, a Social Impact Analysis, prepared by Deloitte, "hungry children are sick more often and are 31% more likely to be hospitalized, at an average cost of approximately \$12,000 per pediatric hospitalization".

Studies have also shown that a healthy breakfast and having access to healthy food in a learning setting does make a positive difference. Well-nourished children grow up to have lower rates of diabetes, depression, obesity and heart disease. They achieve higher scores than their under nourished classmates, are more likely to graduate from high school and attend college or university. If children cannot take advantage of their education, they are less likely to reach their full potential in life which will have both short and long-term effects on the children, families, communities and ultimately on the national economic development.

According to the World Food Programme's Cost-Benefit Analysis of School Feeding, in a sample of ten countries providing school meals, take-home rations or biscuits, it showed that every USD 1 invested brought a USD 3 to USD 10 economic return from improved health and education among schoolchildren and increased productivity when they become working adults.

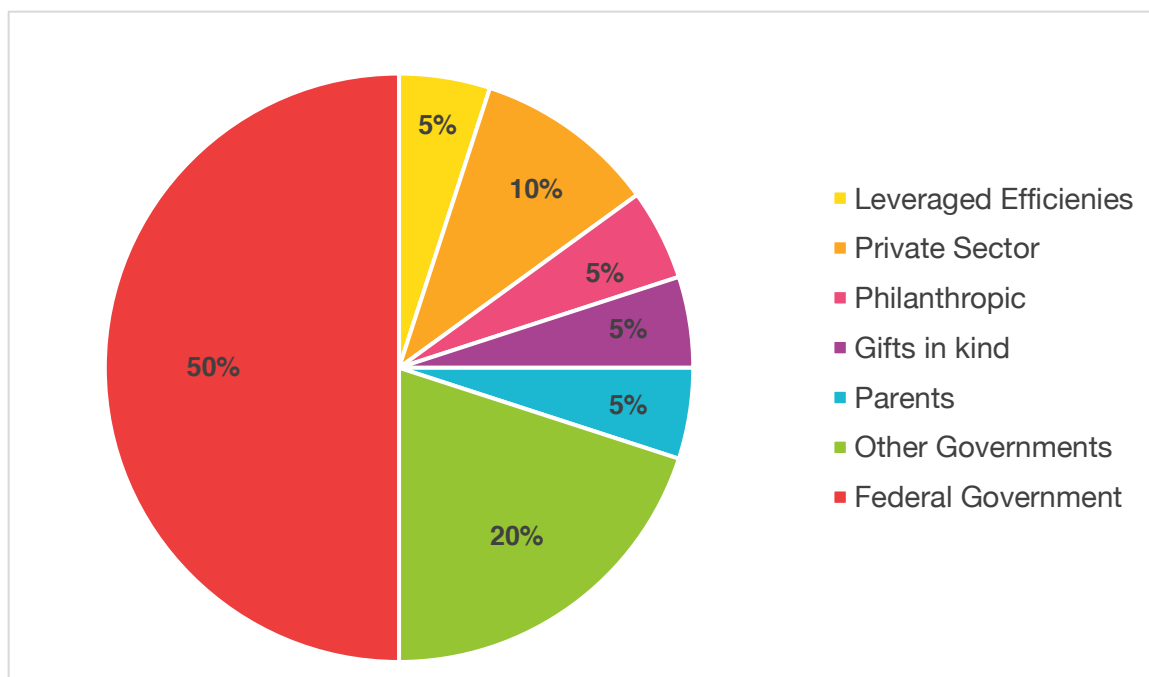
Simply put, it starts with food. To level the playing field for all children we must ensure that our most vulnerable begin their day with a nutritious meal.

Funding a National School Food Program

Budget 2019 committed to establishing a National School Food Program. Below we outline our proposal for how this program could be structured and delivered. Through the guidance of a National Multi-Sectorial Advisory Board, BCC, our community partners, and the Government of Canada would work collaboratively with the provinces and territories, corporations, subject matter experts and community leaders to create a National School Food Program, the first of its kind in Canada.

BCC would build community capacity in collaboration with its regional partners and create a digital marketing strategy to engage the Canadian public and increase awareness to feed kids in and out of the classroom to accommodate our new learning reality due to COVID-19. An investment of \$250 million would provide 1 million Canadian children with a healthy breakfast or access to a healthy meal throughout the day at an average cost of \$1.00, per child, per day and help build capacity across Canada.

For every dollar invested by the Government of Canada, another dollar would be matched through contributions from provincial governments, municipalities, the private sector, philanthropic giving, parents, local fundraising and leveraged efficiencies created by in-kind donations, etc.



Conclusion

Collectively, alongside our network of national partners, BCC has a proven track record of working with government to deliver much-needed aid to children and families, and we have adapted our approaches and organization to the unique challenges of COVID-19.

A properly funded National School Food Program, would allow the existing national network to maintain, improve, and expand programs to continue to deliver aid to the Canadians in greatest need. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated inequalities and need for social supports, and a National School Food Program would play a critical role in Canada's recovery from the pandemic. We encourage the Government of Canada to consider past submissions from BCC when making determinations surrounding the implementation of a National School Food Program and would be pleased to provide further materials or discuss our submission in greater detail, upon request.

We thank the Standing Committee on Finance for its consideration and look forward to working together to ensure that no child goes hungry, now and into the future.