



Eat Well
SASKATCHEWAN

A Briefing on the Eat Well Saskatchewan Program

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Eat Well Saskatchewan is a trusted, free provincial service offered at the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition, University of Saskatchewan. The service helps people improve their nutrition knowledge and intake by providing direct access to a registered dietitian via a toll free line or email for anyone in the province. Social media is used to provide education for trending food and nutrition topics. Expansion of this service as well as its continuation is warranted.

Background

An unhealthy diet can result in an increased risk of chronic illness like diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. In Saskatchewan, food insecurity is a nutrition-related problem that has further been exacerbated by the COVID-19 epidemic. According to the 2015 First Nations Food, Nutrition and Environment Study, 37% of First Nation households in Saskatchewan are food insecure and many Indigenous adults eat fewer than recommended fruits and vegetables, grain products and milk and alternatives (Chan et al., 2018).

Some common food security issues in Northern Saskatchewan include:

1. Government policies that support food security are lacking.
2. Grants that support community and other food security initiatives often do not allow for funds to support salary and therefore although initial uptake is good, the sustainability is often poor.
3. According to the 2018 Cost of Healthy Eating Report in Saskatchewan, the cost of healthy food is 72% higher in the far North and 30% higher in the North compared to the Saskatchewan provincial average (Food Costing Task Group, 2018).
4. Boil water advisories often limit access to potable water. Bottled water is often equal to or more expensive than sugar sweetened beverages.
5. Access to food stores are often limited. Many rural and remote communities do not have local grocery stores and people rely on food available at convenience stores or gas stations. The cost of fresh fruits and vegetables is high and often, due to travel, the quality is poor.
6. Provincial food safety legislation limits the use of traditional foods such as local fish, elk and caribou to be served in public facilities off reserve without the use of an abattoir.
7. More affordable and highly accessible food options such as pulses are available but are unfamiliar and therefore often not utilized.
8. Better collaboration between provincial and federal government would help ensure food security initiatives are effective both on and off reserve.

A recent study estimated that economic burden of not meeting food recommendations in Canada was \$13.8 billion in 2014 (Lieffers, et al., 2018). As the only regulated food and nutrition professionals in Canada, registered dietitians are the most qualified health care professionals to provide individuals and communities with evidence-based food and nutrition interventions to drive positive health outcomes. Although more long-term government initiatives are needed to support food affordability and availability, dietitians can support individuals and families to become more food secure by supporting food usage. Providing education to improve nutrition knowledge and supporting initiatives that encourage more traditional food practices and food skills can help residents better meet their nutrition needs. Unfortunately, access to dietitian services in rural and remote communities in Saskatchewan and other parts of Canada are often extremely limited or non-existent.

Eat Well Saskatchewan

Eat Well Saskatchewan (EWS) is a Dietitian Contact Service that provides reliable nutrition advice and education through a toll free phone line, email, and via social media channels. Our program is accessible from anywhere in the province, helping to address gaps in dietitian services in urban, rural and remote communities. Since its launch in March 2019, Eat Well Saskatchewan has received over 1100 calls and emails from people in more than 100 rural, remote and Indigenous communities in Saskatchewan.

A priority for Eat Well Saskatchewan is to grow the program's reach to Indigenous communities and we have made significant efforts to promote the service and build relationships with Indigenous leaders and communities across Saskatchewan. In a short period, the service has identified gaps in nutrition knowledge and education, and gained the support of health professionals, professional organizations and Indigenous communities. Our service is being accessed at a level far beyond what we originally anticipated. As promotion efforts continue to be successful and more residents, health professionals and Indigenous communities become aware of Eat Well Saskatchewan, the demand for our services has quickly grown beyond our capacity.

How does the service work?

Clients can use a toll free line or the Eat Well email to connect with a registered dietitian for their nutrition questions. Eat Well Saskatchewan dietitians use the most current nutrition information supported by the latest research to answer questions and provide advice. The dietitian can email or mail additional resources to the patient, and put them in touch with other community services. Our service is available in English, but we can offer other languages via multilingual community interpreter services including First Nations languages. This service is free and is available to all residents of Saskatchewan, including both the general public and health professionals.

Benefits of Eat Well Saskatchewan Service

Our program improves access to high-quality care and addresses gaps in dietitian services for rural, remote and Indigenous communities, and vulnerable populations including seniors, newcomers, infants and children, and those with mental health concerns. We have become a well-known and trusted service with health care providers; more than 350 clients have been referred to our service directly by physicians, Saskatchewan's Health Line and allied health professionals.

We receive questions relating to a wide range of issues, from general healthy eating and infant and childhood nutrition, to chronic disease management. The broad range of inquiries we receive emphasizes the need and desire from the public for credible nutrition information and presents an opportunity for Eat Well Saskatchewan to become Saskatchewan's central hub for reliable nutrition information.

In addition to being a Dietitian Contact Service, Eat Well Saskatchewan has emerged as an important resource in the province during the COVID-19 pandemic. At a time when many health professionals have been unable to provide outpatient services, Eat Well Saskatchewan has been able to fill a gap by offering accessible nutrition services and by helping the public navigate through myths and misinformation related to nutrition and COVID-19.

Public Education

Social Media as a Tool for Education

We use social media platforms to promote our service and educate the public on credible nutrition related topics and we are quickly gaining a presence on social media, including Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, with posts reaching over 400,000 people. As a result of COVID-19, Eat Well Saskatchewan social media channels have proven to be a successful mode of educating the public and responding to misinformation quickly and effectively. In March and April 2020, our service saw a 21% spike in usage, and COVID-19 related social media posts reached upward of 58,000 people. Food security related posts such as eating on a budget, basic food skills and affordable recipe ideas have recently grown in popularity. This content alone has reached over 50,000 people in two short months and the reach continues to grow, emphasizing the interest and need for support around food security. We have also effectively used social media to guide two successful social media campaigns.

Story Telling as a Model for Indigenous Engagement



“Find a routine of eating healthy foods that works for your body and athletic schedule.”

Michael Linklater, member of the Thunderchild First Nation

Michael Linklater, who recently retired from his professional basketball career, knows first hand the importance of eating well for top athletic performance. He talked about the important role nutrition played in fueling his body for overall performance and recovery as he stated, “the faster you recover, the better chance you give yourself to perform at a high level”. Among some of his tips were drinking water to stay hydrated and fueling with adequate carbohydrates prior to competition for optimal performance. He mentioned that consuming snacks such as fruit helped maintain his energy levels and including foods with protein such as almonds or yogurt helped him feel full longer. “I’ve wanted to fuel your body, not fill it,” said Michael, who emphasized using self determination to make healthy choices but still including his ‘guilty pleasures’ in moderation.

QUESTIONS?
Call us at 1-833-966-5541 to talk to a dietitian for free.

Eat Well SASKATCHEWAN

Eat Well Saskatchewan has successfully promoted the #Eatwellchampion campaign which features Indigenous nutrition champions from First Nations communities across Saskatchewan. The purpose of the campaign is to create awareness of the importance of healthy eating and to encourage residents to contact a registered dietitian to improve their eating habits in the prevention and management of chronic disease. This campaign, which uses personal stories and social media influencers, has been gaining support from health organizations and Indigenous networks across the province and has reached over 80,000 people, including a high engagement from Indigenous users.

Michael Linklater, Retired Professional Basketball Player and Member of the Thunderchild First Nation

Twelve #Eatwellchampions were also featured in a 2021 calendar; 5000 copies were printed and delivered to Indigenous communities across Saskatchewan. This has allowed for better promotion of our service and exposure of our campaign directly to Indigenous homes who may not have access to social media.



#Eatwellcovid19 - A social media campaign in Saskatchewan to enhance food security during the COVID-19 pandemic

We launched the **#Eatwellcovid19** campaign to help address some of the challenges that have arisen because of COVID-19. In particular, the pandemic has impaired people's ability to purchase, access and prepare healthy food. The **#eatwellcovid19** campaign collected and shared personal success stories about how residents coped with the challenges of COVID-19. Stories, along with educational posts, were shared across the province from April to August 2020, to help support and inspire residents to make healthy eating choices, feed their families and manage chronic conditions. Some common story themes that emerged were having more time to cook with kids, food



foraging in Saskatchewan, eating more traditional foods/food practices, navigating food safety and grocery shopping, more time for family meals, more time for cooking and meal planning, and growing food (gardening, food scraps). The campaign was supported by a grant from the Saskatchewan Health Research Foundation and reached over 130,000

people. The use of social media resulted in a quick and effective way to provide education to the public and help residents cope with the food security challenges of COVID-19. A research article highlighting the results of this project has been submitted to a peer reviewed journal.

Feedback about the Service

The response from the public and the medical community regarding this service has been very positive. Many members of the public have expressed the benefits of having such as a service as it has removed barriers to allow them access to a dietitian, has reduced wait times and has allowed them quick response time to quality advice which has made a positive impact on their personal and family health.

Thank you so much!! It meant so much to me to discuss with you. Again it's been a bit of a struggle without being able to learn this stuff off of other moms due to COVID and the support was greatly appreciated more than you can ever know. "

- Public

"Again, thank you very much for your information. I am so impressed with this service I try to promote it to all my mom's – having a registered dietitian available at all times is so beneficial to them as well as myself." – Registered Nurse

"This service is very beneficial. I had to see a dietitian in the past and there was a long wait. This was much more accessible to get my questions answered." - Public

Expanding the Eat Well Saskatchewan Service

Eat Well Saskatchewan is funded by a partnership between the University of Saskatchewan and Indigenous Services Canada until 2023. Housing the service out of the College of Pharmacy and Nutrition also provides invaluable support in the area of credible expertise and research and allows for experiential learning for nutrition students. Our current funding allows for one dietitian to provide services from 10am to 4pm, Monday to Thursday. With additional funding we could expand the Eat Well Saskatchewan hours and days of operation and ensure future operation of this beneficial service. This would enable us to help more people to improve their nutrition and thus improve health outcomes in the province.

For more information, please contact Carrie Verishagen at 306-966-5541 or by emailing eatwell@usask.ca.

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