



**Universal Cost-Shared
National School Food Program**



**FSC
RAD**

Food
Secure
Canada
Réseau
pour une alimentation
durable

KEY STATISTICS:

- Less than one-third of children under 12 years of age eat five or more servings of vegetables and fruit daily¹
- Over 50% of the total energy intake of children aged 4-18 is from ultra-processed foods²
- One-third of students in elementary schools and two-thirds of students in secondary schools do not eat a nutritious breakfast before school³
- From a purely financial perspective, the economic burden of nutrition-related disease is estimated to be \$13.8 billion per year in Canada. This cost on society could be reduced with an investment in school food programs
- Poverty-related food insecurity is an urgent public health challenge in Canada, affecting 1.15 million, or one in six, Canadian children under age 18 (with the percentage being much higher in Indigenous and northern communities - a staggering 52% in Nunavut)⁴

Context

School food programs offer a wide range of benefits to students and their communities that would advance the federal Healthy Eating Strategy and Food Policy for Canada. A cost-shared investment in healthy, universal school food programs would address many of the issues that Canadians have identified as priorities across the Food Policy for Canada's four themes of food security, health and food safety, environment, and economic growth:



¹ Statistics Canada. (2016). Fruit and vegetable consumption, 2016.

² Heart and Stroke Foundation. (2017). Ultra-processed foods in Canada: Consumption, impact on diet quality and policy implications.

³ Government of Canada. (2008). Report on the state of public health in Canada: 2008, Addressing health inequalities.

⁴ PROOF. (2019). Household food insecurity in Canada, 2015-16: Graphic preview series.

⁵ Tarasuk, V, Mitchell, A, Dachner, N. (2014). Household food insecurity in Canada, 2012.

Food Security

- Healthy, universal school food programs give children and youth access to nutritious and safe food in a non-stigmatizing manner where they can enjoy eating in the company of their peers.
- When children attend school hungry or undernourished, their energy levels, memory, problem-solving skills, creativity, concentration, and other cognitive functions are all negatively impacted. Students who consume a morning meal most days show an increase in skills such as independent academic work, initiative, conflict resolution, class participation and problem-solving at school.
- Poverty-related food insecurity is an urgent public health challenge in Canada, affecting 1.15 million, or one in six Canadian children under age 18⁵.

Health and Food Safety

- School food programs can increase students' consumption of fruits and vegetables and other healthy foods. Studies have shown that school food programs can contribute to reducing the risk of cardiovascular events and chronic disease such as stroke, heart disease, Type 2 diabetes, and certain types of cancer by increasing the intake of vegetables, whole grains, and macro- and micro-nutrients.
 - School food programs have been linked with positive impacts on both children's mental and physical health, including reductions in behavioural and emotional problems, and fewer problems associated with hunger, such as dizziness, lethargy, headaches, stomachaches and earaches
 - A lack of time and capacity means that even families who are not experiencing food insecurity are struggling to manage to provide healthy food to their kids. And all children, regardless of their parents' income, are vulnerable to eating too much processed food with too much sugar and salt, and not eating the vegetables and fruit servings recommended in Canada's new Food Guide. Universal school food programs are an opportunity to level the playing field so that all of our children have access to healthy food at school, enabling them to be prepared for their learning day and develop healthy eating habits that could stay with them for their entire lives.
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Environment

- When designed with sustainability goals in mind, school food programs provide a strong opportunity for students to experience food literacy education about our food systems including where food comes from, how to choose local and sustainable food, how to minimize food waste, and how to compost.

Economic Growth

- When local food is served in school food programs (e.g., through local procurement targets), the increased investment in the local economy will impact regional food production, household and business earnings, long-term gross domestic product, and part-time jobs created or sustained.



Citations and more information about each of these impacts are available on the Coalition for Healthy School Food's webpage.

Advocating for a National School Food Program

Grassroots organizations, charities, and provincial funding enable one in five children in Canada to access a school food program, and yet Canada is the only G7 country without a National School Food Program. A federal investment would leverage these efforts to expand their impact and improve all children's health and educational outcomes, lowering future healthcare costs while supporting farmers and local economies. According to Amberelly Ruetz and Evan Fraser, school food programs "have an impressive return on investment: every \$1 invested bought a \$3 to \$10 economic return from improved health and education among children and increased productivity as adults. Furthermore, if school nutrition programs purchase ingredients from local farmers, they help the agricultural sector as well"⁶.

The Coalition for Healthy School Food is a group of over 70 organizations from across Canada advocating for a national school food program. Members include passionate champions ranging from community based practitioners to indigenous leaders to national health and education organizations. The Coalition seeks an investment by the federal government in a cost-shared Universal Healthy School Food Program that will enable all students in Canada to have access to a healthy meal or snacks at school every day, at little or no cost to students.



⁶ Ruetz and Fraser. March 26, 2019. "National School Food Program a short-term opportunity for jobs creation and economic growth." Published in the Canadian Science Policy Centre.

Advocating for a National School Food Program

The March 19, 2019 Federal Budget included the first ever commitment to a National School Food Program. This is good news for those who have long advocated for the multitude of health, education and well-being benefits to students as well as local economic benefits of school food program. The Coalition was pleased to see that the Food Policy for Canada launch in June 2019 reiterated the government's commitment to work towards a national school food program and added that "not-for-profit organizations" would be consulted along with provinces and territories in this process.

The Coalition has launched #NourishkidsNow-Invest in School Food, a campaign to make support for a national school food program an election issue. Its goal is to have all major national political parties embed support for a universal cost-shared national school food program.



Policy Proposals

Implementing a universal healthy school food program across Canada:

By asking for a “national school food program” the Coalition is asking the federal government to invest in healthy, universal school food programs across Canada with the vision that all students in Canada would eventually have access to healthy meals at school every day. A cost-shared model would involve investments from the federal, provincial, territorial governments, as well as from municipal government, not-for-profits and parents, where applicable.

Financial Investments

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

Funding based on national principles

We encourage the federal government to establish national principles as a condition for cost-shared funding. These would include food quality guidelines based on the new Canada Food Guide and conflict of interest safeguards for program governance. Principles may also include minimum common national criteria for program evaluation, food literacy programming requirements, and local food purchasing targets



Policy Proposals

Coalition members would like to see the following qualities reflected in any federal investment:

Universal

Children come to school hungry for a number of reasons, including lengthy commutes, early morning sports practices, not being hungry first thing in the morning while getting ready for school, busy family routines in the morning, and household food insecurity. A universal program means that all students have the opportunity to access a meal or snack, provided in a non-stigmatizing manner.

Health-promoting

A federal investment in school food would provide an excellent opportunity for schools to model the revised Canada's Food Guide and enable students to learn about nutrition and food skills to order to eat healthier diets.

Cost-shared

Currently, a small percentage of children in Canada have access to a school food program. We are asking the federal government to invest, as a partner along with other funders, in a cost-shared model to expand these programs and their impacts.

Flexible food service model

School food programs look different depending on the particular context of the school and the region. Some schools find that a breakfast program works best while others prefer lunch or snack programs based on their school population and particular circumstances.

Supporting and enhancing existing programs

An investment in school food programs would build on the local knowledge, skills and relationships already in place in provinces and territories with the goals of:

- expanding existing programs
 - enabling existing programs to further improve the nutritional quality of the food served
 - offering programs in new schools; and building new food programs from the ground up
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Questions for candidates

- Will you support a cost-shared universal healthy school food program?
- Do you support the Coalition's request for a \$360 million investment in a \$1.8 billion cost-shared universal school food program?
- Will you ask your federal party to embed a commitment to a cost-shared national school food program in their platform?
- What excites you most about a local school food program in your community?

