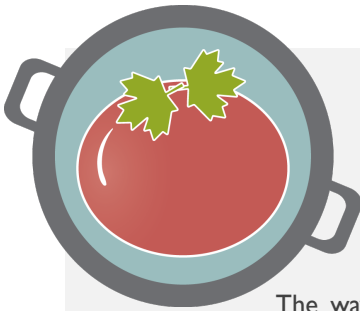


Champion Healthy and Sustainable Diets



Alarming increases in diet-related disease over the last several decades show that the current constellation of programs and policies is not encouraging Canadians to eat, or, in some cases, access, healthy food. In particular, Canadians who experience poverty are more vulnerable to these chronic diet-related health challenges¹, and health care costs are higher for people living with food insecurity.²

The way Canadians eat affects not only their health but also impacts climate change and the environment. We need to address unhealthy diets to reduce the rapidly growing rates of diet-related disease that threaten to overwhelm our health care system, while also addressing inequity, and localizing our food system. Changing food environments – to build capacity for individuals and institutions to prepare and serve fresh, healthy, delicious food, to increase access to healthy, local food for everyone, and to work with food industry to formulate healthier food and to stop marketing junk food to kids – is a key strategic area.

The development of a national food policy is an opportunity to create synergies between driving economic growth from localizing food systems and making food a priority for upstream health policy interventions to address the social determinants of health and encourage shifts to more healthy and sustainable diets.

Vital statistics

84% of Canadians rank “Creating agricultural programs that increase population health” as a high priority for national food policy.³

Only 1/3 of children consume five or more servings of fruits and vegetables, and nearly a quarter of children’s calorie consumption comes from foods not recommended by Canada’s Food Guide.⁴

30,000 deaths could be averted or delayed every year if Canadians adhered to dietary guidelines, particularly regarding the consumption of fruits and vegetables.⁵

Every year, 48,000 to 66,000 Canadians die from conditions linked to excess weight, nearly two thirds of adults and one third of children are obese or overweight, and obesity costs Canada between \$4.6 billion and \$7.1 billion annually in health care and lost productivity.⁶

Contracted and self-operated institutional foodservice was estimated to make up 10% of Canada’s \$83-billion foodservice industry in 2016, with market sales expected to grow to \$8.7 billion in 2017.⁷





What needs to be done

Cultural appropriateness and food access need to be at the forefront of understanding healthy eating and diets. Since our health is intimately linked to the environment, we need to improve the sustainability of food systems and redefine healthy food as going beyond its nutritional qualities alone.

We need to encourage shifting diets toward whole foods (not ultra-processed) that are locally and sustainably produced and harvested. In addition to meeting our nutritional needs, healthy food should be understood as coming from food-production systems that sustain our natural resources, increase the wellbeing of animals, and sustain the overall health of communities and cultures.

We need to support the scaling of innovations where there are benefits for both health and agriculture - e.g. local, sustainable food procurement by institutions, healthy corner store initiatives, farmers' market coupons for low-income families, fruit and vegetable prescriptions. Institutions - hospitals, long-term care facilities, campuses, schools and correctional facilities - all spend significant public dollars on food; however, very little of this is spent on local or sustainable food. This is an opportunity to shift institutional food purchasing to sourcing more from local and sustainable food producers to leverage the full health, economic and sustainability impacts.

The current development of the Healthy Eating Strategy by Health Canada presents an important opportunity to connect healthy eating and sustainability, and to reduce consumption of trans fats, sodium and sugar. The revised Canada's Food Guide should prioritize cultural appropriateness and sustainability in its guidelines - promoting cultural foods, local and sustainably produced, and increased consumption of whole foods (not ultra-unprocessed) - creating a strong policy link between healthy eating, sustainable food systems and responses to climate change.

National Food Policy Priority Actions

In partnership with the provinces and territories, create a cost-shared Universal Healthy School Food Program to ensure that all school children learn basic food skills and have access to healthy, nutritious meals every day. Work with Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada and Indigenous leadership to create a Healthy School Food Program for schools within First Nation reserves.

Create a foundation for strong links between agriculture, sustainability and health via the policy instruments of Health Canada and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada.

Develop a sustainable procurement policy framework for public institutions to ensure public dollars are generating best value and leveling the playing field for small producers to bid on contracts. Compile a national diagnostic, through FPT partnership, for local, sustainable food spending by institutions. Set benchmarks for increasing local, sustainable food spending.

Consider taxes and subsidies to encourage healthier eating (e.x. Tax on sugar- and artificially sweetened-beverages).

Consider health and food access in implementing food safety protocols, as they are often a significant barrier for growing and sourcing local, sustainable and country foods for institutional food services or community food initiatives.





Key resources

Community Food Centres Canada. [Diet Related Diseases and Healthy Eating](#).

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, UK (2014). [A Plan for Public Procurement: Food & Catering. Balanced scorecard for public sector procurement](#).

Food and Agriculture Organization (2015). [Key Recommendations for Improving Nutrition through Agriculture and Food Systems](#).

Food and Agriculture Organization (2016). [Plates, Pyramids, Planet](#)

GRAIN (2015). [Food and Climate Change: The forgotten link](#).

Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy Group (2017). [Ontario food and nutrition strategy: a comprehensive evidence informed plan for healthy food and food systems in Ontario](#).

¹ Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy Group (2017) [Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy: A Comprehensive Evidenced Informed Plan for Healthy Food and Food Systems in Ontario](#)

² Tarasuk et al. (2015) [Association between household food insecurity and annual health care costs](#)

³ Environics Research Group (2011). [Strategic Issues Survey Wave 3](#). Prepared for Agriculture and Agri-foods Canada.

⁴ Statistics Canada (2014). 2014 Canadian Community Health Survey.

⁵ Béllanger et al (2014). Modelling the impact of compliance with dietary recommendations on cancer and cardiovascular disease mortality in Canada. *Public Health* 128(3): 222-30

⁶ [Obesity in Canada: A Whole-of-Society Approach for a Healthier Canada](#) (2016). Report of the Standing Senate Committee on Social Affairs, Science and Technology.

⁷ f5STRATEGY (2017) [2017 Canadian Institutional Foodservice Market Report](#)

