



**Written Submission for the Pre-Budget
Consultations in Advance of the 2022 Budget**

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

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

Allocate \$2.7 billion in Budget 2022 as a Year 1 investment towards establishing a cost-shared, universal School Food Program for Canada with strong federal standards to improve the health of our children, support families experiencing food insecurity, advance economic recovery and reduce the \$13.8 billion/year in costs of treatment and productivity losses due to nutrition-related chronic disease in Canada.

Re: Invest in children's health, support families experiencing food insecurity and advance economic recovery through a School Food Program for Canada further to Budget 2019 commitments

Dear Mr. Easter and Committee Members:

As Canada plans for a recovery from the pandemic, the [170+ Organizational Members](#) of the Coalition for Healthy School Food urge the government to **allocate \$2.7 billion in Budget 2022 as the Year 1 investment towards establishing a cost-shared, universal School Food Program for Canada with strong federal standards**. Such a program would improve the health of our children, support families experiencing food insecurity, advance economic recovery, reduce the [\\$13.8 billion/year in costs of treatment and productivity](#) losses due to nutrition-related chronic disease in Canada, help the government meet key federal policy priorities including its 2030 Sustainable Development Goal commitments, and enable Canada to join the rest of the G7 countries in investing in school food.

The [Coalition for Healthy School Food](#), Canada's recognized voice for school nutrition and 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 their own provincial and territorial jurisdictions. The Coalition is hosted by [Food Secure Canada](#).

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 *Canada's Food Guide*. A Canadian survey found that only 10% of youth in grades 6-12 met fruit and vegetable recommendations. [Media](#) are reporting that Covid-19 has led children and their families to eat more pre-packaged and processed food, exacerbating poor diets. *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.

The Covid-19 crisis has revealed the essential service that schools play in children's nutrition. When schools have had to shut down, governments, public health, organizations and many other community partners have taken action to make sure that children and youth have had access to healthy food including distributing meals, gift cards and food boxes.

[Canadian research shows](#) that school food programs increase consumption of healthy foods, reduce the risk of chronic disease, and improve mental health. They positively influence 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 School Food Program for Canada would have a positive impact on families, particularly women who invest significant time preparing food for school. This initiative, along with childcare, would be a key component of a Gender Based Analysis Plus ([GBA+](#)) approach that would support women who have been hard hit during COVID as they return to work.

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 shared at the start of the pandemic 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 School Food Program for Canada 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. Investing in a School Food Program for Canada that is universal and without means-testing can help level the playing field and ensure that all students are able to access a healthy meal or snack each day. It would, however, not be a replacement for needed income supports for the unacceptable number of Canadians living in poverty.

An investment in school food that embeds local food procurement, infrastructure development and community building would support job growth while helping to strengthen the health and wellbeing of students, their families and communities. Investments in school food programs would **reach all regions of the country and create jobs in diverse sectors, including agriculture, food services, food manufacturing and distribution, construction, environmentally sustainable industries, and health.**²

After intensive consultations with diverse stakeholders, the Coalition developed 8 [Principles](#) to guide the development of a School Food Program for Canada that we recommend to your government. They include committing to Indigenous food sovereignty. We stress the importance that you consult with Indigenous Nations and leaders and provide separate additional funding to Indigenous Nations and communities to advance Indigenous-led school food initiatives.

The Coalition for Healthy School Food was pleased when the [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 2022 supports this commitment to work with provinces and territories, Indigenous leaders and non-profit organizations towards the creation of a School Food Program for Canada** by providing funds for the next steps in the implementation process.

All provinces and territories and a growing number of cities already invest in school food. Our Coalition is working with these governments to build their interest in partnering with the Government of Canada to welcome federal standards and funding. We urge you to **allocate \$2.7 billion¹ in Budget 2022 as the Year 1 investment towards establishing a strong cost-shared, universal School Food Program for Canada** that would improve the health of our children, support families experiencing food insecurity, advance economic recovery, and reduce the burden of nutrition-related chronic disease.

There is so much to be gained by laying the basis for a cost-shared, universal School Food Program for Canada as an essential service for all children and youth in Canada. We urge you to act now.

Yours sincerely,



Gisèle Yasmeen, Executive Director
Food Secure Canada



Debbie Field, Coordinator
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Additional Information:

- 1 For an accurate assessment of the costs of a School Food Program for Canada, the Government of Canada will need to undertake a full costing in partnership with provinces and territories. The Coalition has calculated our proposed \$2.7 billion Year 1 investment based on: 5,575,691 students ([Stats Canada](#)) x 190 school days at an average of \$5.00 per school meal (including the cost of food, labour, equipment and northern food allowance = \$5.4 billion annual cost. This is similar to costing of the Finnish school food program calculated by Ruetz & McKenna, 2021¹).
- 2 Investing in school food would enable your government to advance your [Budget 2019](#) commitment to develop a School Food Program for Canada, implement and advance the [Food Policy for Canada](#), promote the [Healthy Eating Strategy](#) including [Canada's 2019 Food Guide](#), and advance Canada's [Sustainable Development Goal](#) commitments. Such an investment would support the following policy priorities:
 - **Health and well-being:** Families struggle to feed their children whole, healthy foods for a variety of reasons including limited family budget and working long hours. When children attend school hungry or undernourished their energy levels, memory, problem-solving skills, creativity, concentration, and other cognitive functions are all negatively impacted. They are also more likely to repeat a grade. School food programs increase consumption of healthy food, reduce the risk of chronic disease, and improve mental health. An evaluation of a morning meal program in the Toronto District School Board found that students who consume a morning meal most days show at least a 10% increase in skills such as independent academic work, initiative, conflict resolution, class participation and problem-solving at school. A School Food Program for Canada 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.
 - **Support families at risk of food insecurity:** Along with income transfers such as the Canada Child Benefit, school food programs are part of our social safety net. 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. This is particularly important in light of how many families have felt the impacts of Covid-19 and have been unable to access healthy food.
 - **Job creation:** [Preliminary research](#) shows that a School Food Program for Canada can create jobs for food service workers, Canadian farmers and local food producers. This will lead to economic multipliers and support stronger regional food systems ([Ruetz & Fraser, 2019](#)). Investing in school food would support local economies, employing thousands of food service and nutrition professionals and getting this hard-hit sector back into employment ([Ruetz, Fraser, Smithers, Haines, 2020](#)).
 - **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

¹ Amberley T. Ruetz & Mary L. McKenna. 2021. Characteristics of Canadian School Food Programs Funded by Province and Territories. Canadian Food Studies. Volume 8. Issue 3.

and business earnings, long-term gross domestic product, and 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 ([Ruetz & Fraser, 2019](#)) 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 Canada-wide School Food Program would have a positive impact on families, particularly women who invest significant time preparing food for school. Along with childcare, this is a key component of a Gender-Based Analysis Plus ([GBA+](#)) approach to supporting women hard hit by COVID as they return to work.
- **Environment:** A program that follows and promotes the 2019 Canada's Food Guide 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 ([Powell & Wittman, 2018](#)).