



**Written Submission for the Pre-Budget  
Consultations in Advance of the 2024 Budget**

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

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

1. **Allocate \$1 billion over five years and collaborate with provinces, territories, and Indigenous partners to provide them with an initial \$200 million** as soon as possible to fund existing school food programs.
2. **Create a separate School Food Infrastructure Fund grants program** of, at minimum, \$50 million.
3. **Negotiate independent School Food Policy agreements with First Nation, Inuit and Métis leadership** to ensure long-term and sustainable funding for Indigenous school nutritious meal programs.

***Re: Invest in children's health and support food affordability and access through a national school nutritious meal program for Canada further to Mandate letters***

Dear Mr. Fonseca and Committee Members:

Canada's Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister of Families, Children and Social Development have been mandated to develop a national school nutritious meal program and National School Food Policy together with provinces, territories, municipalities, Indigenous partners and stakeholders. The Coalition for Healthy School Food<sup>1</sup> urges the government to:

- (1) **Allocate \$1 billion over five years in Budget 2024 and collaborate with provinces, territories and Indigenous partners to provide them with an initial \$200 million** as soon as possible to fund existing school food programs.<sup>2</sup> This initial funding would be provided to provinces and territories to continue to deliver programs that serve food based on Canada's 2019 Food Guide, provide universal access to students, do not market to kids, and gather standardized program data.<sup>3</sup> Funds would also be provided directly to First Nation, Inuit and Métis partners.
- (2) **Create a separate School Food Infrastructure Fund grants program** of, at minimum, \$50 million for schools or community organizations that provide programs in schools to fund the improvement of kitchen, food service, food distribution, garden and other facility infrastructure. This would enhance their ability to offer healthy and, where possible, local food. In many communities this equipment and infrastructure will become a community asset that can support other underserved community members, including seniors, to access food.<sup>4</sup>
- (3) **Negotiate independent School Food Policy agreements with First Nation, Inuit and Métis leadership** to ensure long-term and sustainable funding for Indigenous school nutritious meal programs.

**In the longer term, (2+ years) we recommend that you continue to expand funding to provinces and territories and First Nation, Inuit and Métis partners** in a process of ongoing collaboration for a truly national, universal school food program for Canada. This program would be a new and important component of the Canadian social safety net which, along with the government's National Childcare Program and Child Tax Benefits initiatives, have made a real difference to the

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<sup>1</sup> With [265+ organizational members](#) and [125+ endorsers](#), we are the largest school food network in Canada.

<sup>2</sup> The Liberal Party's 2021 election platform committed \$1 billion over 5 years and the NDP Platform committed \$1 billion over 4 years. Since then food prices have risen by up to 30-50% and many school food program providers have seen their costs increase by 40-80%. An investment of more than \$200 million per year will be needed in 2024 to have the same impact as what was set out in the platform commitments.

<sup>3</sup> Providing direct funding to provinces and territories would: allow consistency with existing P/T programs that already (in conjunction with municipalities) provide \$93 million to school food programs; respect P/T jurisdiction; support existing programs and program structures; create a structure where best practices can be shared between P/Ts; and create consistency between P/Ts based on common principles and objectives.

<sup>4</sup> See our [pre-submission in advance of the 2021 budget](#) for details about what this Fund could look like.

health and well-being of Canadian families and children.

**The Issue:**

Only [one-third of children](#) aged 4 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. Covid-19 has led children and their families to eat even more pre-packaged and processed food. *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.

The Covid-19 crisis has revealed the essential service that school food plays in children's nutrition and in their capacity to learn. 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.

However, rising costs of food, spurred by inflation and higher interest rates, have stretched school food program budgets and left many families across the country struggling to make ends meet. Programs across the country are reporting increasing demand for their programs because of the number of children and youth that are unable to access healthy food. The importance of federal investments in a cost shared school food program cannot be overstated.

**It is extremely important that the federal government invest in a School Food Program for Canada that will leverage economies of scale, take pressure off of the family budget and support the millions of children and youth who are increasingly unable to access healthy food.** Investing in a School Food Program for Canada, without means-testing and accessible to all children and youth in schools that have a program, 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 support for the unacceptable number of Canadians living in poverty.

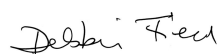
An investment in school food that embeds local food procurement, infrastructure development and community building would support job growth while helping to strengthen the physical and mental health and wellbeing of students, their families and communities. Investments in school food programs would **reach 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** (see more information below). This investment would also [directly advance](#) Canada's Sustainable Development Goal commitments.

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,



Marissa Alexander  
Co-ED Board Food Secure Canada



Debbie Field, Coordinator  
Coalition for Healthy School Food

## **Additional Information:**

**1** \$200 million investment in Budget 2024 is a first step for a quality school food program in Canada.

For an accurate assessment of the longer term 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, 2021](#)).

**2** Canada is the only country in the G7 without a national school food program, and we rank 37th out of 41 among the world's richest countries for providing healthy food for kids. As the 10th largest economy in the world and the fastest growing population in the G7, we can support the wellbeing of our children and youth and achieve long-term economic impacts by implementing a national school food program as quickly as possible.

Investing in school food would enable your government to advance your [Budget 2022](#) 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 in addition to the following policy priorities:

### **Health**

Families struggle to feed their children whole, healthy foods for a variety of reasons. When children attend school hungry or undernourished their energy levels, memory, problem-solving skills, creativity, concentration, and other cognitive functions are all negatively impacted.

School food programs:

- Increase children's consumption of healthy foods.
- Benefit children's lifelong eating patterns (regardless of income, social background and family circumstances).
- Reduce students' risks of chronic disease and improve their physical development.
- Help build food literacy.
- Enable schools to model and bring to life *Canada's Food Guide*.
- Are a natural extension of Canada's *Healthy Eating Strategy* and *Food Policy for Canada*.

*The economic burden and preventable cost of nutrition-related disease in Canada is [estimated at \\$13.8 billion annually](#). This would shift if our children and youth were supported to access healthy food and build healthy eating habits in line with *Canada's Food Guide*.*

### **School Performance and Educational Outcomes**

School food programs:

- Improve academic achievement, attendance, punctuality and graduation rates.
- Improve students' interpersonal behaviours, discipline, and cooperation.

A [study of the Swedish school lunch program](#) demonstrated that pupils exposed to the program during their entire primary school period have 3 percent greater life-time earnings.

### **Mental Health and Wellbeing**

Children and adolescents with unhealthy dietary patterns experience poorer mental health including greater symptoms of depression, anxiety and emotional problems.

School food programs:

- Reduce behavioural issues including bullying, aggressive behaviour and violence, anxiety and depression.

### **Economic Growth and Job Creation**

As named in the Food Policy for Canada, a buy-Canadian food strategy 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](#). This would also support the federal goal of increasing public trust in Canadian grown and produced food.

School Food programs:

- [Create jobs](#) and related opportunities for food service workers and local food producers.
- Support stronger and more resilient local food systems as well as rural economies.

A [preliminary analysis](#) shows that if \$1.6 billion per year was spent on food, and if Canada modeled Brazil where 30% of these funds are spent on local agriculture supporting family farms, the program could contribute \$4.8 Billion in domestic food purchases by 2029.

### **Sustainable Environmental Practices**

School food programs can help:

- Students develop a palate for fresh vegetables, fruit and healthy proteins (consistent with a diet that emits low amounts of greenhouse gasses).
- Stimulate public food procurement, which has become seen as an important “game changer” to support and promote more sustainable food systems.
- Facilitate the reduction and management of food waste.

### **Women and Families**

School food programs can help:

- Support families who struggle to introduce minimally processed healthy foods into children and youths' diets.
- Take the pressure off the family budget, especially in light of rising costs of food.
- Benefit women, who invest a significant amount of time preparing food for school.

The [Rockefeller Foundation and the Center for Good Food Purchasing](#) found that while school meal programs in the US cost \$18.7 billion per year to run, they provide nearly \$40 billion in human health and economic benefits.