



***THE COALITION FOR HEALTHY SCHOOL FOOD:***  
**Proposals for a National School Nutritious Meal Program**  
October 25, 2022

The Coalition for Healthy School Food (the Coalition) is pleased to submit this document setting out proposals in support of your Government's commitment to develop a National School Food Policy and establish a National School Nutritious Meal Program as key elements of your evolving Food Policy for Canada.

As you know—and as detailed further in Appendix C to this submission—the Coalition is a Canada-wide, non-partisan network of more than 200 non-profit organizations advocating for public investment in a universal cost-shared nutritious school meal program, with consistent standards. Our vision is that the approximately five and a half million children aged 3-18 enrolled in elementary and secondary schools across Canada would have daily access to a healthy meal at school.

The Coalition has worked hard and consulted widely with its members, supporters and stakeholders across Canada to develop the proposals and supporting rationale in this submission. We present them with our very strong support for your commitment to advance a National School Food Policy and a National School Nutritious Meal Program.

We have framed our proposals in ways and language that will hopefully be useful in your consideration of commitments in Budget 2023 and in any subsequent Memoranda to Cabinet and/or Treasury Board Submissions to firm up your Program plans. We have also forwarded our proposals to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance in response to their call for written briefs to inform the 2023 budget. We stand ready to share our views, insights and experience at any stage in designing and delivering on this important Canada-wide initiative, and look forward to close collaboration with you and other partners and stakeholders.

Debbie Field, **Coordinator, Coalition for Healthy School Food**  
[schoolfood@foodsecurecanda.org](mailto:schoolfood@foodsecurecanda.org)  
416 537-6856

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## A NATIONAL SCHOOL NUTRITIOUS MEAL PROGRAM

### PROPOSAL FROM THE COALITION FOR HEALTHY SCHOOL FOOD

#### ISSUE

How to deliver on the Government's commitments to develop a National School Food Policy and work toward a National School Nutritious Meal Program as a critical element of the Government's evolving Food Policy for Canada.

#### RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) The Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (the Ministers), in close collaboration with the Minister of Health, the Minister of Indigenous Services and the Minister of Crown-Indigenous Relations, lead consultations and collaboration with provinces, territories, municipalities, Indigenous partners, experts and other partners and stakeholders in the development of proposals for Cabinet consideration on a National School Food Policy (the Policy) and a National School Nutritious Meal Program (the Program), along the lines of the Strategy, Guiding Principles, Program Elements, Roles, and Funding Arrangements set out in Appendix A.
- 2) While placing greatest priority on addressing the immediate nutrition needs of school children to the maximum extent possible within available new resources, the Program also includes sufficient measures to test, demonstrate and assess longer-term school food needs and opportunities in support of a robust permanent Program.
- 3) Following further consultation and engagement with partners and stakeholders in the initial years of the Policy and Program, the Ministers return to Cabinet within three years with a report on results and interim findings, together with proposals for a more comprehensive and permanent Program as an integral and ongoing element of a National School Food Policy.
- 4) While allocating a reasonable portion of initial Program funding to help meet immediate nutrition needs of Indigenous school children, the Ministers initiate immediate consultations and collaboration with Indigenous leadership on the urgent development, for Cabinet consideration, of proposals for the creation and/or enhancement of independent, self-managed and distinctions-based nutritious meal programs for First Nation, Métis and Inuit school children, in recognition of their unique needs, traditions and priorities, and in line with federal obligations and commitments for reconciliation, Indigenous self-determination and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

- 5) In designing the Program, close consideration be given to the eight Guiding Principles set out in Appendix A, particularly with regard to: the integration of consistent standards and best practices for application across Canada; alignment with *Canada's Food Guide*; strengthening of controls against food marketing to children; and emphasis on dignified, universal access and local food procurement.
- 6) The Ministers consult and collaborate with the Coalition for Healthy School Food—including through a possible school food advisory committee of objective experts and stakeholders that have no commercial conflicts of interest—in the development and subsequent launch, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of the Policy and Program.

## RATIONALE

**Overall health and social benefits:** The establishment of a universal, cost-shared National School Nutritious Meal Program along the lines set out in Appendix A will complement and enhance the existing network of diverse food programs across Canada. It will address critical gaps in school meal availability and ensure a more equitable and inclusive approach to meeting the food needs of school children. By ensuring improved access to adequate healthy food, the Program would begin to address critical problems associated with insufficient and non-nutritious food for millions of school children in Canada, affecting their physical and mental health, risks of lifelong chronic diseases, school attendance and performance, self-esteem, and longer-term personal development and well-being. This is of great—and growing—significance because of the rising challenges faced by many school children and their families in ensuring reliable access to healthy foods and avoidance of over-reliance on unhealthy cheap, ready-made and ultra-processed food.

**Child nutrition needs and food insecurity:** All of the approximately five and a half million children aged 3-18 enrolled in elementary and secondary schools across Canada need access to healthy food at school. School meal programs along the lines proposed can take the pressure off family budgets and can play an especially critical role in supporting the most vulnerable 1.4 million children and youth under the age of 18 living in food-insecure households who are unable to access healthy food. School meal programs are not a replacement for income security measures (e.g., child tax benefits), but indeed constitute a strategic and cost-effective complement to them. This is because they have a specific focus on the quality, adequacy and healthiness of food, are directly targeted to children, and serve as a highly efficient mode of delivery with a comprehensive and convenient reach to all children in local school settings.

**Equity:** As detailed in Appendix B, there are currently serious social inequities in the access of school children to adequate and nutritious food. Significant food disparities face school children who live in low-income families, are from racialized populations, reside in rural and remote areas (e.g., where nutritious foods are limited and expensive), and/or live in Indigenous

communities. A universal and inclusive Program would ensure equitable access to healthy food and avoid the stigmatization of participants. It would have the added benefits of reducing burdens on families, especially mothers and single parents, who typically are responsible for daily meal preparation. The Program would also ensure that foods for all school children are healthy. Moreover, such a Program can be designed to promote and support culturally appropriate, locally-grown and sustainably-sourced and produced foods that reflect the values, traditions and circumstances of different communities and sectors of society.

***Sustainable local food economies:*** Establishment of a universal school meal program along the lines proposed presents a significant opportunity for the Government to contribute to the development and viability of green and sustainable local economies, in line with its commitments to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The approach is to: maximize reliance on local sources of foods; align school meals with the new dietary guidelines proposed in Canada’s Food Guide; and encourage green infrastructure. This will encourage the development and viability of local food production and preparation businesses that will: generate meaningful local jobs and sources of community income; respect and support the use of traditional and country foods in Indigenous and northern communities; and reinforce sustainable food production practices.

***Avoidance of food and plastic waste:*** The proposed approach to the Program’s design and implementation is to ensure the adoption of environmentally responsible practices that minimize food waste, eliminate use of plastics, and avoid other food preparation materials and processes that are harmful to the environment. In addition to limiting direct negative impacts on the environment, the Program will help strengthen knowledge and awareness of responsible approaches to food preparation and service, and promote the adoption of lifelong green practices.

***A practical and effective Program design:*** To address the above issues and yield optimum benefits, the proposed approach set out in Appendix A focuses on four essential Program elements:

- *Funding of school food programs* that help ensure that all school children have access to adequate and nutritious food for their daily needs
- *Building of food literacy, food skills* and lifelong healthy food habits
- *Strengthening of local capacity* to meet daily food needs through affordable and sustainable supply, and investment in school-based food preparation facilities
- *Fostering of supportive policies and practices* that reinforce healthy food choices and prevent school-based marketing of unhealthy foods

***Fulfillment of Government commitments:*** Implementation of the Program and advancement of the Policy along the lines proposed will deliver on commitments in the Prime Minister’s mandate letters to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development to develop a National School Food Policy and advance a National School Nutritious Meal Program. The proposed investment of \$1 billion over five

years—in line with the 2021 election commitments—will not fully meet the needs and potential of a comprehensive national Program. However, it will greatly augment current school meal offerings, build on the interest and commitment of a growing number of provinces and territories, and establish a solid foundation and evidence basis for future enhancements and refinements for an eventual permanent Program. It will also serve as a signal element of meaningful progress on the Government’s evolving *Food Policy for Canada* in support of its stated vision: “All people in Canada are able to access a sufficient amount of safe, nutritious and culturally diverse food. Canada’s food system is resilient and innovative, sustains our environment and supports our economy.”

## CONSIDERATIONS

***Cost-effectiveness of school meal programs:*** School-based delivery of a nutritious meal to children is equitable, efficient and cost-effective, especially given the economies of scale and the leveraging of provincial/territorial and other sources of support that can be achieved. It also allows school children to develop lifelong food literacy and dietary habits that will benefit their health, well-being and household economy through adulthood. All provinces and territories already fund some school meal programs and most are generally aligned with *Canada’s Food Guide*. Providing new federal funding through contributions to the provinces and territories would build on what is already in place and allow consistency with these existing structures and local capacities. Federal funding would also give incentives for the provinces and territories to further invest in school meal program development and delivery capacity, especially if federal funding is conditional on some level of matching provincial/territorial contributions and ensuring that nutrition standards are met. The proposed Canada-wide approach to provision of federal support to provinces and territories would ensure equitable treatment of children across Canada, and encourage and facilitate the sharing of insights, standards and best practices. Schools are also the most direct way to consistently and comprehensively target and reach *all* children and youth across Canada, to ensure full access to healthy food.

***Gaps in current school meal programs in Canada:*** All provinces and territories and some cities currently fund some forms of school meal programs. Overall, 35% of schools across Canada have some form of school meal program, but that means that two-thirds do not. Moreover, the current programs vary greatly in scope, consistency and quality. In the 2018-2019 school year provinces and territories contributed an estimated \$93 million to provide free breakfasts, snacks and/or lunches to some 1,018,000 students. Together with the patchwork of other local school meal programs, approximately 1 to 2 million school children participate at least to some degree in a school meal program. But that means that some 4 million or more school children across Canada do not. Moreover, many of the existing school food programs are not available to, or used by, all students. In addition, even where meal programs are available, program demand typically exceeds supply, and program monitoring is inconsistent. A further factor is that, while the programs that do exist enjoy the support of many thousands of committed volunteers, they must often operate without access to adequate equipment and facilities for efficient and reliable preparation and serving, thus placing undue strains on the volunteers.

**Canada lags the world:** According to the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP), over 388 million children in at least 161 countries—4/5 of all countries globally—receive free or subsidized school meals at school. However, Canada is one of the very few 38 nation state members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)—and the *only* member of the G7—that does not yet have a national school food program.

**International approaches and success:** Other countries have demonstrated great success with approaches along the lines proposed in Appendix A. Leading countries with robust nationally-supported school food programs—some in place for many years—include Finland, Japan, France, Brazil, Scotland, Italy, India, Denmark, Sweden, Germany and the United States. Many of these school food programs emphasize wide access, with many also taking advantage of their basic meal offerings to integrate other related aspects of food quality, sourcing and policy. For example, Finland and Japan offer universal coverage, with the latter supported by a national *School Lunch Act*. Italy’s program ensures a focus on local food sourcing, while Brazil’s law stipulates that 30% of all school program foods be purchased from small family farms. School food programs in France integrate a commitment to teaching children about food taste, in support of quality food programming. In Denmark, an emphasis is placed on organic foods. US programs have for decades invested in school food preparation infrastructure and staffing. The proposed approach for Canada set out in this proposal will include measures to share insights and best practices with such leading national-level programs in other countries.

**Respect for jurisdiction in education:** While schools are the focus as the point of delivery for the National School Nutritious Meal Program, the initiative does *not* constitute an incursion into provincial or territorial jurisdiction for education. As detailed in Appendix A, the federal Government has substantial roles and interests in contributing to school food programs, especially when—as proposed—they are delivered in close collaboration with provinces and territories, Indigenous peoples and other partners and stakeholders at national, regional and local levels, and when they focus on well-established areas of federal jurisdiction and leadership:

- Health promotion and disease prevention
- Social development, equity and inclusion
- Indigenous rights, services and self determination
- Sustainable local food economies, including traditional and country foods
- Agriculture and agri-food policy and programming
- Rural and regional development
- Environmental protection and a green economy

**Integral element of the Canada Food Policy:** The evolving Food Policy for Canada will be supported by—and will provide an overarching framework for—the National School Food Policy and National School Nutritious Meal Program. The proposed National School Nutritious Meal Program will help deliver on the Food Policy’s commitments to “*help Canadian communities access healthy food*” ... through “*community-based initiatives (that) will invest in projects that*

*increase access to food, with the potential to provide social, health, environmental, and economic benefits in support of vibrant communities across Canada.” More specifically, the Program will deliver on the Government’s Food Policy Commitment to “engage with provinces, territories, and key stakeholder groups to work toward the creation of a National School Food Program.”*

**Strong Canada-wide interest and readiness:** There is a broad existing base of support and good momentum across Canada to facilitate the timely and responsible take-up and delivery of an expanded and enhanced school food Program. The Coalition’s 200+ members, 100+ formal endorsers, and thousands of supporters from all provinces and territories—including thousands of active school-food providers, academics and experts—attest to a strong nationwide consensus that the time is right to proceed apace with a National School Nutritious Meal Program. Among the vast network of existing and active partners, deliverers and experts, there is a solid ready-made base of knowledge on how to deliver and augment school food programs efficiently and effectively; learning curves will be short and straightforward.

**Advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals:** A National School Nutritious Meal Program along the lines proposed would contribute greatly to Canada delivering on its commitments to meeting the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in harmony with *Moving Forward Together: Canada’s 2030 Agenda National Strategy*. In particular, Canada could advance its commitments to the following SDGs through a National School Nutritious Meal Program: (1) No Poverty, (2) Zero Hunger, (3) Good Health and Well-Being, (4) Quality Education, (5) Gender Equality, (8) Decent work and economic growth, (10) Reduced inequalities, (12) Responsible consumption and production, and (16) Peace, justice and strong institutions. Information about how a well-designed Program for Canada can help meet the Sustainable Development Goals is illustrated in Appendix D.

**Provincial/territorial interests and co-funding:** Provincial/territorial participation and local co-investment and take-up will be largely positive and strong. Notably, Manitoba, British Columbia, Québec, Newfoundland and Labrador have recently announced increases to their annual funding for school food programs. Manitoba more than doubled its annual funding from \$1.2 million to \$2.5 million; BC added \$63.8 million to its current programming; Quebec increased funding by \$5.3 million, bringing its total to more than \$53 million; and Newfoundland and Labrador increased its annual funding fivefold, from \$125,000 to \$625,000. Ontario’s Student Nutrition Program—available to all children and youth at each site where the program operates—offers school-age children and youth nutritious food through breakfast, lunch and snack programs. In addition, Ontario’s First Nations Student Nutrition Program—a First Nations-led initiative—helps provide access to nutritious meals and snacks at 120 sites across 63 First Nations.

**Parliamentary support:** The initiatives are expected to enjoy broad Parliamentary support, with the New Democratic Party advocating for investments comparable to the Liberal Party’s election proposal—indeed the same \$1 billion initial amount, but over four years, not five. The Green

Party has stated its support for “*increasing access to healthy food including a national school lunch program*”. While federal Conservative Party platforms have not to date included school food, Conservative provincial governments do fund school food programs.

***International commitments:*** The Government recently joined 60+ countries in signing the declaration of the global *School Meals Coalition*, pledging to provide “*A healthy meal for every child, every day by 2030*” (the deadline for achieving the SDGs). This also aligns with the 2013 United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child’s General Comment No. 15 to all governments, stressing that: “*School feeding is desirable to ensure all pupils have access to a full meal every day, which can also enhance children’s attention for learning and increase school enrolment. The Committee recommends that this be combined with nutrition and health education, including setting up school gardens and training teachers to improve children’s nutrition and healthy eating habits*”. The establishment now of a National School Nutritious Meal Program will go a long way towards delivering on these international commitments and aspirations.

***Indigenous peoples’ rights and interests:*** It is essential that Indigenous leaders, organizations, and families play key roles in designing, implementing and evaluating nutritious school food programs in their own communities as well as other locations where First Nations, Métis or Inuit children comprise a significant portion of the student population. To strengthen local economies, provide opportunity for environmental stewardship and support food sovereignty, First Nations, Métis, and Inuit food systems must be prioritized when procuring and distributing school meals to Indigenous children. This proposal encourages the immediate initiation of focused consultations and collaboration on the development of independent, Indigenous-led distinctions-based school meal programs for First Nations, Métis and Inuit school children.



## APPENDIX A: A PROPOSED NATIONAL SCHOOL NUTRITIOUS MEAL PROGRAM

### Strategy

The proposal is for the Government of Canada to work in partnership with provinces and territories, Indigenous peoples and non-profit organizations to develop and implement a National School Nutritious Meal Program and related School Food Policy, in support of and in line with the evolving Food Policy for Canada.

Implementation should proceed as follows:

- **Investment:** Allocate \$1 billion over five years in Budget 2023, with \$200 million per year to contribute to provinces, territories and First Nation, Métis and Inuit partners to fund their school food programs that: serve food based on the 2019 *Canada's Food Guide*; are universal; do not market to kids; and provide effective monitoring, accountability and reporting that will support future evidence-based decisions on a comprehensive permanent Canada-wide Program.
- **Cost-Sharing:** Negotiate cost-sharing funding agreements with P/Ts that are willing and ready to co-invest in, and implement, school meal programs in line with the proposed Guiding Principles set out below.
- **Indigenous-led programs:** Enter into immediate discussions with Indigenous leaders to negotiate agreement for the creation and/or enhancement of independent distinctions-based First Nation, Métis and Inuit school meal programs, with long-term and sustainable funding.
- **Global School Meals Coalition:** Actively participate as a member of the global School Meals Coalition to ensure that every child has the opportunity to receive a healthy, nutritious meal in school by 2030.
- **School Food Policy:** Proceed with the development of a more comprehensive National School Food Policy: a) addressing such factors as food literacy, local production and supply, and best practices and standards; b) aligned with the Coalition's eight Guiding Principles; and c) supportive of the further development of the Food Policy for Canada and deliberations of the Canadian Food Policy Advisory Council's School Nutrition Working Group.
- **Equipment and infrastructure:** Create an additional dedicated school food infrastructure fund to enhance kitchen, food service, and other production and preparation equipment and facilities so that they can reliably and efficiently serve healthy food in adequate volumes.

This approach to Program design and implementation will enable immediate action and progress on a consistent Canada-wide approach to school meal programming, while: a) recognizing the unique needs and circumstances of Indigenous peoples and the need for much more substantial and dedicated funding for their school meal programs; b) ensuring consideration of needs and opportunities for a more comprehensive permanent Canada-wide Program; and c) addressing critical needs for investments in local capacity.

## Program Elements

The Program should provide for funding and guidance of the following mutually-complementary elements and related objectives:

- 1. Delivery of healthy school meals:** support to provinces and territories to augment their investments in school meal programs, delivered through appropriate local partnerships in line with proposed standards and best practice.
- 2. Strengthening of food literacy and lifelong dietary habits:** influence of children's food awareness, knowledge and habits through a combination of leading-by-example in the sourcing, preparation and delivery of school meals, and support for development and sharing of knowledge, information and skills in initiatives aligned with the school meal Program.
- 3. Promotion of responsible and supportive school food policies and practices:** advocacy and action to promote school-based access to healthy foods and prevent marketing of unhealthy foods to students.
- 4. Development of local, environmentally sustainable and culturally appropriate food sourcing and production:** policies and practices to emphasize production and sourcing of appropriate foods for school meal programs and that support the establishment and viability of local, sustainable producers, suppliers and food preparers, including traditional and country foods.
- 5. Enhancement of equipment and infrastructure to support school-based meal delivery:** support for a range of in-school facilities and off-site operations such as community kitchens or gardens, that support efficient and accessible supply, preparation and delivery of school meals.

## Guiding Principles

The National School Nutritious Meal Program should be designed and delivered in close alignment with the following Guiding Principles that have been developed and endorsed by the Coalition for Healthy School Food:

- **Health-Promoting:** Serve tasty, nourishing and culturally appropriate foods to all children, focusing on vegetables and fruits. Ensure that programs are in line with *Canada's Food Guide*, foster a healthy food environment, and promote mental health and wellbeing.
- **Universal:** Ensure that ALL children in a school can access the program in a non-stigmatizing manner. Over time, all children in Canada will be able to participate in a school food program.
- **Cost-shared:** Use federal funding to both expand on current provincial, territorial, city, parental and community funding and to initiate new programs in a cost-shared model.
- **Flexible and Locally Adapted:** Successful school food programs reflect the local context of the school and region and are connected to and informed by students and their parents or caregivers. Ensure that funding builds on existing programs, local knowledge, skills and relationships and that it supports different food service models, from breakfast to lunch to snacks.
- **Committed to Indigenous Control over Programs for Indigenous Students:** Embed Indigenous Food Sovereignty in a School Food Program for Canada and negotiate funding for school food programs with First Nation, Métis and Inuit leaders.
- **A Driver of Community Economic Development:** Encourage school food programs to set local and sustainably produced food purchasing targets, which would create jobs for Canadian farmers and local food producers.
- **Promoting of Food Literacy:** Support the conditions for school food programs to be integrated into the curriculum and enable food literacy and experiential food skills education.
- **Supported by Guidance and Accountability Measures:** Build on provincial and territorial school food funding and policies to ensure that programs have strong public accountability measures in place and are guided by Canada-wide nutritional standards, conflict of interest safeguards that prevent programs from marketing unhealthy food and specific products, as well as a framework for consistent Canada-wide program evaluation.

## Roles

Design and implementation of the Program take into account the following general allocation of roles and responsibilities amongst different parties:

- **Federal government**

- o Co-funding arrangements, with contributions primarily to Provinces and Territories for their use and allocation in school food programming, on some form of cost-sharing agreement with appropriate conditions
  - o Science and knowledge development and transfer, including development and sharing of standards and best practices
  - o Articulation and promotion of *Canada's Food Guide* and food safety standards
  - o Some pilot and demonstration initiatives, particularly of broad national benefit
  - o Program monitoring, oversight, evaluation and reporting
  - o Whole-of-government approach and coordination, including Employment and Social Development Canada, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Indigenous Services Canada, Crown-Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada, Health Canada, Environment and Climate Change Canada, and regional development agencies
  - o Overall coordination and collaboration with all partners
- **Provincial/territorial governments and related education authorities**
    - o Design and shared funding of school food programs
    - o Alignment of P/T and local school board curricula and other pedagogic measures to support food literacy, best practices, food literacy, etc.
    - o Development and maintenance of food meal infrastructure and equipment
    - o Coordination with NGOs, including providers and supporters
    - o Whole-of-government approach and coordination, including provincial and territorial departments of education, health, and children's, community and social services
    - o Monitoring of Program needs, take-up and results
- **Municipal governments and authorities** (where applicable)
    - o Design and shared funding of school meal programs
    - o Public health regulation and inspection of school food programs
    - o Public health dietitians and nurses support for menu development
    - o Whole-of-government approach and coordination, including local school, public health and social/community service authorities
    - o Development and maintenance of food and meal infrastructure and equipment
    - o Coordination with NGOs, including providers and supporters
    - o Monitoring of local needs, take-up and results
- **Indigenous organizations, governments and authorities**
    - o Development and implementation of distinctions-based Indigenous school meal programs and related policy initiatives for First Nations, Métis and Inuit and their schools
- **Civil Society**
    - o Mobilization of community support and contributory funding

- o Use of some federal funding to promote and advance initiatives and innovations
- o Development of innovative school food programs that can then be delivered in partnership with schools
- o Engagement in policy and program planning, priority setting and evaluation
- o Ensure robust conflict of interest safeguards are in place.

## Funding Arrangements

Federal funding for the Program should provide for the following arrangements:

- **Federal contributions to P/Ts:** The majority of federal funding should be devoted to cost-shared contributions to P/Ts, for school meal programs that are based on the 2019 *Canada's Food Guide*, are universal, and do not market to kids. These funds are to enable P/Ts to augment their own investments and expand school meal offerings and related supportive initiatives.
- **Federal contributions to Indigenous governments, organizations and/or schools:** A reasonable portion of Program funds in the initial years should contribute directly to Indigenous-led school meal programs, pending completion of consultations and negotiations on the establishment of independent, Indigenous-led, distinctions-based First Nations, Métis and Inuit school meal programs.
- **Federal contributions to NGOs and research organizations:** A minor allocation of federal funding should be devoted to support further needs assessments, research of standards and best practices, monitoring and evaluation of results, and general outreach, consultation and engagement leading to proposals and supporting rationale for a comprehensive permanent Program and robust Policy.
- **Direct federal operations and initiatives:** A modest portion of funding should be allocated for general Program oversight, coordination and policy development activities consistent with responsible governance and administration.

Within the allocation envelopes above, contribution funding for P/Ts and any other NGO initiatives would cover appropriate amounts for the following categories of eligible expenses:

- *Food program costs*, including wild/country food access costs
- *Staffing costs*, including program and procurement coordinators, chefs, food prep staff, dietitians, etc. as well as related training and professional development
- *Infrastructure and equipment*, consisting of minimal one-time costs for equipment and renovations, with modest periodic replacements and repairs
- *Pilot and demonstration projects*, to showcase and test innovative approaches, tools and practices
- *Monitoring and evaluation*, to track and assess results and contribute to knowledge development and sharing for future applications

- *Research and development*, including conduct of needs assessments and development of standards and best practices
- *Outreach and engagement*, including Program promotion and take-up
- *Food literacy resources*, including development of guides and tools for effective Program implementation and the fostering of lifelong nutrition habits and practices
- *Program governance and oversight*, including engagement in a potential advisory group or equivalent

## APPENDIX B: RATIONALE FOR A NATIONAL SCHOOL NUTRITIOUS MEAL PROGRAM

The following data and analyses expand upon the rationale set out in the main section of this document:

### Poor Student Diet and Inadequate Nutritious Food

Canadian research shows that school food programs increase children's consumption of healthy foods (e.g., fresh vegetables, fruit, whole grains, and plant-based proteins), build food literacy and positively influence children's lifelong eating patterns, regardless of income, social background or family circumstances. These programs reduce students' risks of chronic disease and improve their physical development and mental health. They also provide excellent opportunities for schools to model and bring to life the revised *Canada's Food Guide*, and would be a natural extension of the federal *Healthy Eating Strategy* and *Food Policy for Canada*.

A national Program along the lines proposed would address serious nutrition deficiencies among many Canadian school children:

- Research shows that the diet quality of Canadian children across the entire socio-economic spectrum during school hours is poor.
- Less than one-third of children under 12 years of age eat five or more servings of vegetables and fruit daily, and at least 1/3 of school-aged children in Canada report eating vegetables and fruits less than once daily.
- In 2012 and 2013 only a small proportion of Canadian children met the 2007 Canada's Food Guide recommendations; low vegetable and fruit consumption are of particular concern.
- Over 50% of the total energy intake of children aged 4-18 is from ultra-processed foods, and many families struggle to introduce minimally processed healthy foods for a variety of reasons.
- One-third of students in elementary schools and two-thirds of students in secondary schools do not eat a nutritious breakfast before school.
- The majority of school children lack an understanding of how food is produced and why healthy eating habits are part of maintaining a healthy lifestyle.
- 16% of calories consumed in Nunavut are derived from country foods yet this has been steadily decreasing for decades.

### Food Insecurity

A recent analysis of food insecurity by researchers at the University of Toronto focused on the nature, scope and implications of food insecurity in Canada. Household food insecurity, as measured and monitored in Canada, refers to the inadequate or insecure access to food due to financial constraints. The experience of food insecurity can range from concerns about running out of food before there is money to buy more, to the inability to afford a balanced diet, to

going hungry, missing meals, and in extreme cases, not eating for whole days because of a lack of food and money for food.

Food insecurity is a serious public health problem in Canada because an individual's physical well-being is closely related to household food security status. People living in food-insecure households are much more likely than others to be diagnosed with a wide variety of chronic conditions, including mental health disorders, non-communicable diseases, and infections. The relationship between food insecurity and health is graded, with adults and children in severely food insecure households most likely to experience serious adverse health outcomes. People who are food-insecure are less able to manage chronic conditions and therefore more likely to experience negative disease outcomes, to be hospitalized and to die prematurely. Because of its toxic effects on health, household food insecurity places a substantial burden on the health care system and expenditures.

In 2021, 16% of households in the ten provinces experienced some level of food insecurity in the previous 12 months. That amounts to 5.8 million people—including almost 1.4 million children under the age of 18—living in food-insecure households. These estimates do not even include people living in the territories or in First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, who are known to experience high vulnerability to food insecurity. Inuit in Canada face the highest documented prevalence of food insecurity of any Indigenous population in the developed world. Almost four fifths (78%) of Inuit in Nunavut—the most food insecure region in Canada—are currently experiencing food insecurity. Food insecurity in Inuit Nunangat has been termed one of the longest-lasting public health emergencies in Canadian history.

Household food insecurity is racialized. Indigenous peoples face extraordinary vulnerability, with almost one third (31%) of off-reserve Indigenous peoples in the ten provinces being food-insecure in 2021. With the high consumer price inflation experienced since 2021, Canada can expect the prevalence and severity of food insecurity to rise, especially among people dependent on provincial and territorial government programs and minimum wages that are generally not indexed to inflation.

### **Child Health Risks and Benefits**

Nutritious school meal programs contribute to improved health outcomes, including healthy lifelong dietary habits and benefits:

- The economic burden of chronic diseases that can be influenced by poor diet in Canada has been estimated at anywhere between \$14 billion and \$26 billion annually.
- Children who have a school breakfast program available consume a better overall diet and consume less saturated and trans fat, sodium and added sugars. School nutrition programs may be an effective way to combat both nutritional deficiencies and excess consumption of non-healthy foods among children and their families.
- Students who participate in school meal programs consume more fruits, vegetables, and milk during meal time and have a better intake of calcium and fiber.



- International research on the health and dietary behaviour impacts of school food programs in high-income countries finds modest positive effects overall, including higher vitamin intakes and increased vegetable and fruit consumption, especially in younger children.
- Whole grains, fruits and vegetables, such as those provided in student nutrition programs, can contribute to reducing the risk of cardiovascular events and chronic diseases such as stroke, heart disease and Type 2 diabetes.
- Children who eat a morning meal are sick less often, have fewer problems associated with hunger, such as dizziness, lethargy, headaches, stomachaches and earaches, and do significantly better than their peers in terms of cooperation, discipline, and interpersonal relations.
- Extensive research from various parts of the world that compares the nutritional quality of food consumed at school that was brought from home versus food acquired through school food programs has found that school food programs provide healthier food overall (regardless of the socioeconomic status of child participants).

### **Food Literacy and Lifelong Nutritional Habits**

School meal programs can positively influence child and youth food literacy and knowledge, and shape healthy lifelong dietary and nutritional habits. This is achieved through a combination of demonstration-by-example via school meal planning, sourcing and preparation, and through related food literacy and skill development initiatives aligned with the school meal program:

- School food programs with a food skills component or garden-based learning have been shown to increase fruit and vegetable consumption.
- Initiatives that include vegetables and fruits have been shown to increase rates of fruit and vegetable consumption, acceptability and willingness to try fruit and vegetables, as well as student’s attitudes and knowledge about nutrition and health.
- School food programs that include food and nutrition curriculum offer a unique way to introduce food skill development at an early age, expose students to foods from diverse cultures, expand their food preferences, and overall improve their understanding of where food comes from and why healthy food is part of a healthy lifestyle. This can have a direct impact on health as the quality of the diets of adolescents has been correlated with the frequency of their participation in food preparation.
- School garden programs increase food literacy.

### **Student Mental Health and Well-Being**

Nutritious school meal programs—especially when universally delivered in an inclusive, culturally-appropriate and non-stigmatizing way, help reduce incidence of mental issues and related negative behaviours among school children and support improved mental well-being, confidence and self-esteem:

- Healthy, universal school food programs that give children and youth access to nutritious and safe food in a non-stigmatizing manner help students feel connected and that they belong.
- Healthy dietary patterns are also recognized to contribute to better mental health.
- An analysis of Statistics Canada’s *Canadian Community Health Survey* found that lower fruit and vegetable intake was related to increased risk of distress and depression.
- Children and adolescents with unhealthy dietary patterns experience poorer mental health including greater symptoms of depression, anxiety and emotional problems.
- Student nutrition programs have positive impacts on children’s mental health, including reductions in behavioural and emotional problems, bullying, aggression, anxiety, and depression.
- Participation in school breakfast programs has been linked to better functioning on student-reported measures of depression and anxiety, and teacher-reported hyperactivity.
- School breakfast programs provide children with a stronger foundation to lead more emotionally healthy lives.
- There is strong evidence that school breakfast programs decrease students’ rates of aggressive behaviour and violence.
- An overall pattern of positive eating behaviours is associated with lower feelings of depression and/or better mental health in children and youth.

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

Research shows that poor nutrition undermines student school performance, while access to regular nutritious food through school food programs contributes to improved school attendance, performance and achievements—with lifelong benefits:

- When children attend school hungry or undernourished their energy levels, memory, problem-solving skills, creativity, concentration, and other cognitive functions are all negatively impacted.
- Food insufficiency is associated with reduced academic, cognitive, and psychosocial outcomes for children and teens.
- Undernutrition has a negative impact on cognitive development, overall health, and school performance.
- Studies on school food programs and academic achievement, attendance, tardiness, and drop-out rates point to important impacts of school food programs. Attendance and tardiness appear to be most affected, but some studies have found improvements in academic achievement with the introduction of school food programs.
- 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.
- Students who eat breakfast on most days were more on track for high school graduation compared to those who did not eat breakfast.

- When school children have access to breakfast at school, there is a significant improvement in their ability to pay attention, alertness, and performance on math, reading, and other standardized test scores. They also show better interpersonal behaviours, discipline, and cooperation.
- Eating a healthy breakfast is associated with improved mood, reduced absenteeism, improved cognitive function (especially memory), improved ability to stay on task, improved problem solving, increased class participation, reduced incidence of disciplinary problems, and reduced likelihood of being suspended.

### **Sustainable Environmental Practices**

School food programs provide an effective means to build awareness and lifelong practices for sustainable approaches to food production, preparation and consumption, for the benefit of the natural environment and local agricultural and food operations, including traditional and country food sources of cultural significance to Indigenous peoples and others:

- When designed with sustainability goals in mind, school food programs provide a strong opportunity for students to experience food literacy education about food systems including where food comes from, how to choose local and sustainable food, how to minimize food waste, and how to compost.
- A Program that follows and promotes the 2019 *Canada's Food Guide Snapshot* would help students develop a palate for fresh vegetables, fruit and plant-based and wild proteins, which is consistent with a diet that emits low amounts of greenhouse gasses.
- Public food procurement is increasingly being recognized as an important “game changer” to support and promote more sustainable food systems.
- School food programs could reduce, through proper planning and infrastructure, negative environmental impacts by facilitating the reduction and management of food waste, a major source of greenhouse gas emissions.
- School food programs can contribute to teaching about culinary heritage, social norms around food, and environmental sustainability.
- When students are engaged in learning about food systems, they are more informed about the environment and their health and are empowered to make changes.

### **Economic Growth, Job Creation and Sustainable Local Food Production**

A universal Canada-wide school food Program would create jobs and related opportunities for food service workers, Canadian farmers and local food producers, and would support stronger and more resilient local and regional food systems:

- When local food procurement targets are set and local food is served in school food programs, the increased demand for local food purchases will support regional food production and related employment and business opportunities.

- School food programs that employ a farm-to-school approach can provide more stable and expanded markets for local agriculture, particularly for products grown by small and medium-scale farmers, and may help to boost rural economies.
- Farm-to-school strategies increase access for local farmers to new markets and new business opportunities.
- Although more research is needed, evidence from one review suggests that 2-5% of farmers' overall sales in Canada are from income generated through school food services; this percentage is larger for small operators.

## **Women and Families**

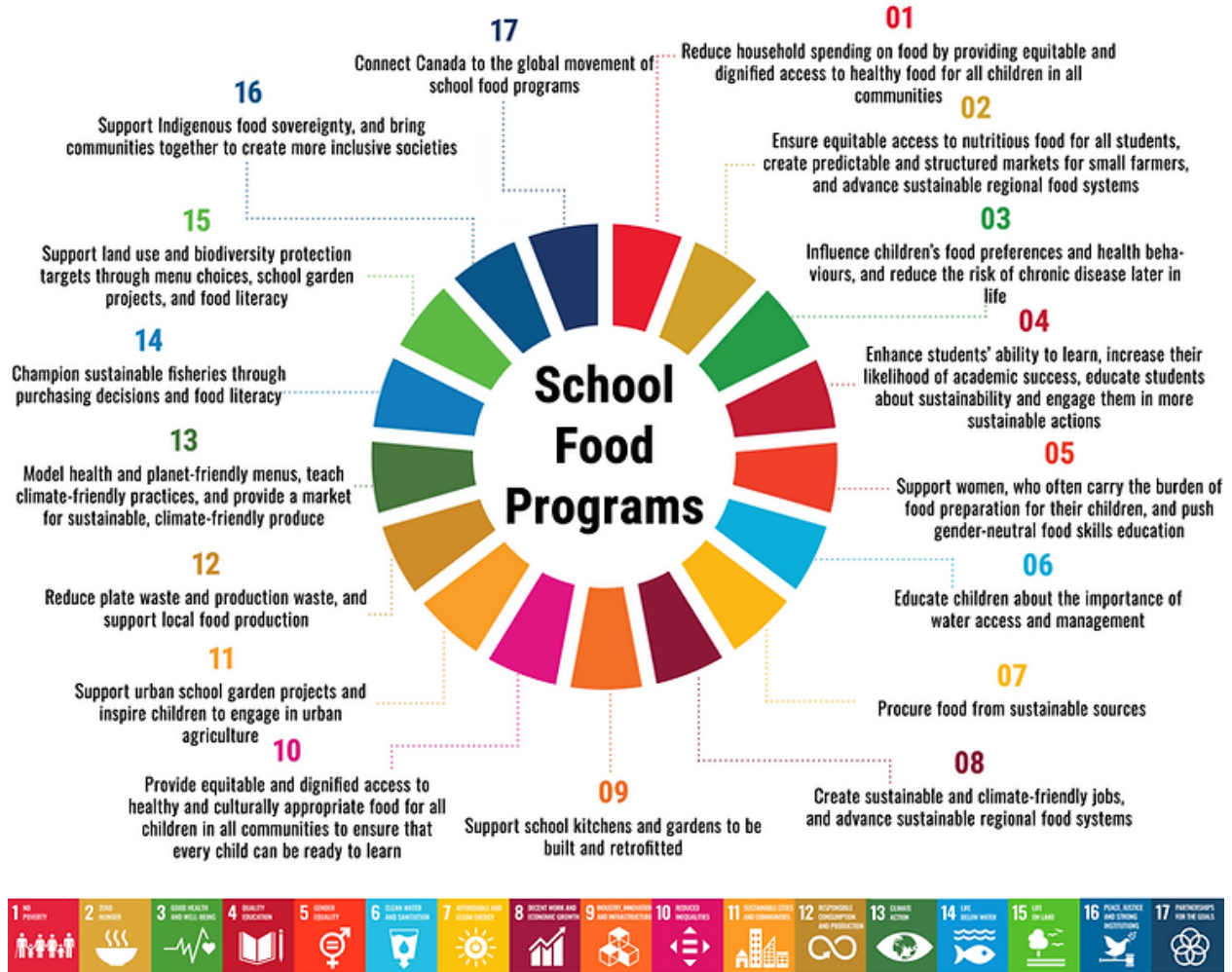
A Canada-wide school meal Program would have a positive impact on all families, particularly for women who invest a significant amount of time preparing food for school:

- A universal Program would support children who—for various reasons beyond their control—are unable to access healthy food on a regular basis.
- The proposed initiative would provide children equitable and dignified access to a regular healthy meal delivered conveniently and efficiently in their school setting.
- Families struggle to introduce minimally processed healthy foods into children and youths' diets for a variety of reasons.
- Provision of healthy school lunches is made more challenging for parents working long hours, and families are struggling to adopt healthy food behaviours.
- Access to nutritious school meals would reduce the tendency for struggling and time-challenged parents to rely on unhealthy, cheap, and ready-made highly processed foods that are low in nutritious whole foods, key nutrients and ingredients, but high in salt, sugar and fat.

## ***Advancement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)***

A National School Nutritious Meal Program as proposed will help Canada advance many significant elements of the 17 United Nations SDGs that have been endorsed by the Government of Canada, as detailed in *Moving Forward Together: Canada's 2030 Agenda National Strategy*. Canada could advance its commitments to all of the SDGs through a well-designed National School Nutritious Meal Program as illustrated in the diagram below.

Universal healthy school food programs designed with the SDGs in mind have great potential to:



## APPENDIX C: THE COALITION FOR HEALTHY SCHOOL FOOD

The Coalition for Healthy School Food (CHSF) (“the Coalition”) is a Canada-wide, non-partisan network of more than 200 non-profit organizations advocating for public investment in, and consistent standards for, universal cost-shared school food programs that would ensure that all school children have daily access to healthy food at school. The Coalition’s vision is that all schools in Canada will soon serve a healthy meal and/or snack at little or no cost to students. These programs would include food education and serve nutritious, culturally appropriate, locally sourced and sustainable food to the fullest extent possible.

The mandate of the Coalition focuses on three complementary efforts:

- *Advocate* for and advance the establishment of a universal cost-shared healthy national school food Program
- *Strengthen* commitments from provinces and territories, parents and communities, and provider organizations to establish, operate and enhance healthy school food programs
- *Support* research, replication, networking and sharing of best practices for the thousands of diverse school food programs and models across Canada.

Membership in the Coalition—which is free—is open to non-profit organizations, including non-profit co-ops and social enterprises, unions and networks made up of non-profit organizations, who support the mandate of the Coalition and are willing to publicly support the CHSF’s position. This includes a diverse range of interested parties:

- Food and nutrition advocacy organizations
- School food providers
- Food banks and community food centres
- Public Health Associations
- Health promotion and advocacy organizations
- Child and youth advocacy and service organizations
- Agriculture and food organizations
- Labour organizations
- Indigenous governments and organizations
- Medical profession organizations
- Health research institutions
- Chronic disease-focused organizations and associations
- Charitable foundations
- Community organizations
- Anti-poverty and social equity organizations

In addition to its active members, the Coalition enjoys the support of more than 100 formal endorser organizations, such as school boards, teacher associations, family and community service organizations, municipal governments, health boards and food policy organizations.

With member and endorser representation in every province and territory, the Coalition brings together the collective energy, dedication, insights and reach of thousands of experienced and passionate community-based school food practitioners, Indigenous leaders, health experts, education institutions, and community development and service organizations at national regional and local levels.

For the purposes of hiring staff, receiving grants and contributions, undertaking administrative operations, the Coalition is hosted by one of its members—Food Secure Canada (FSC). FSC is a pan-Canadian alliance of organizations and individuals working together to advance food security and food sovereignty through three interlocking goals: zero hunger, healthy and safe food, and sustainable food systems. FSC was incorporated federally as a non-profit organization in 2006 and is governed by a board of directors.