



MEMO / NOTE DE SERVICE

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TO: Ottawa Board of Health

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**SUBJECT: OTTAWA PUBLIC HEALTH SUBMISSION TO EMPLOYMENT AND
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CANADA ON SCHOOL FOOD DATA AND RESEARCH
PRIORITIES**

**OBJET : MÉMOIRE DE SANTÉ PUBLIQUE OTTAWA À EMPLOI ET
DÉVELOPPEMENT SOCIAL CANADA SUR LES DONNÉES SUR L'ALIMENTATION
SCOLAIRE ET LES PRIORITÉS DE RECHERCHE**

PURPOSE

The purpose of this memo is to brief the Ottawa Board of Health on the response to the federal [consultation: School food data and research in Canada](#).

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Ottawa Public Health (OPH) submitted a response to Employment and Social Development Canada's (ESDC) consultation on school food data and research priorities. This memo outlines the key points of the submission and provides an update on the National School Food Program and the Ontario Student Nutrition Program (SNP).

BACKGROUND

National School Food Program

As part of the federal 2024 Budget, the Government of Canada announced plans to create a National School Food Program. On November 22, 2024, an agreement with the Government of Ontario was announced. The agreement outlines that the federal government will invest \$108.5 million over three years to increase free school meals to Ontario children. The federal funds for school food programs will help reduce costs for food transportation, storage and preparation equipment, allowing the delivery of healthy meals to over 160,000 kids in Ontario during the 2025 school year. This funding will complement what is already provided by the Ontario Student Nutrition Program (SNP) and the new funds are being allocated through this existing program.

Ontario Student Nutrition Program

In Ontario, the SNP, which is funded by the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services, helps schools provide meals and snacks to children and youth to support learning and healthy development. In Ottawa, the SNP lead agency is the Ottawa Network for Education (ONFE). ONFE provides breakfast programs in more than 200 schools and serves over 17,400 meals every school day. OPH and ONFE have a long-standing partnership, where OPH continues to provide in-kind support to implement the [Ontario Student Nutrition Program Nutrition Guidelines](#). In collaboration with ONFE, OPH launched in fall 2024 an [eLearning course](#) for School Breakfast Program coordinators to provide education and practical tools to implement these guidelines.

Ottawa Board of Health

The Ottawa Board of Health has over the years supported school and children-related nutrition work. This includes memos and reports relating to marketing of unhealthy food and beverages to kids, from policy updates at the federal level to the local community consultation. Most recently, in September 2023, an [Information Previously Distributed \(IPD\)](#) was prepared for the Ottawa Board of Health to provide an

update on the Health Canada policy change consultation on marketing of unhealthy food and beverages to kids. Furthermore, at the 2023 alPHa annual meeting, a [resolution](#), advocating for a national school food program in Canada was passed, which representatives of the Ottawa Board of Health supported.

DISCUSSION

Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) recently launched a consultation on school food in Canada. They were seeking input on school food data and research, including priorities and challenges, from those who have relevant knowledge regarding school food in Canada.

OPH submitted a response, with input from ONFE, to the recent survey which closed on February 28, 2025 (See Supporting Documentation for the survey response). The findings of this consultation will help guide future school food research activities in Canada, including efforts to share school food research effectively with different audiences. For further details on the consultation and the National School Food Program, please visit the [National School Food consultation page](#).

ESDC previously asked relevant parties to share their views about school food programming in Canada. This input helped shape the [National School Food Policy](#) and Canada's [National School Food Program](#). Results of this consultation are available online in a [What We Heard Report](#).

CONCLUSION

OPH will:

- Continue to update the Board of Health on the progress of the National School Food Program.
- Continue to support ONFE in their mandate to provide the School Breakfast Program in local schools.

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Consultation: School food data and research in Canada Introduction

Employment and Social Development Canada is carrying out data and research activities to support the National School Food Policy and Program. Input from this consultation will help identify gaps and priorities in school food data and research and guide future research activities in Canada.

We welcome you to send this questionnaire to anyone in your network who has relevant experience regarding school food in Canada and who may be interested in completing the questionnaire. This may include school food program personnel, non-governmental organization staff and volunteers, researchers, Indigenous communities, and others who work or volunteer in the education sector.

This questionnaire will be open until February 28, 2025. It will take approximately 15 minutes to complete. Your answers will be anonymous and confidential. Data will be reported in aggregate to protect respondent confidentiality.

We appreciate that you are taking the time to share your views.

Section 2 of 7

School food data and research evidence in Canada

We recognize that respondents may have varying levels of knowledge about the data and research available in this field. Please answer based on your own perspective and experience. The first five questions focus on the current evidence surrounding school food. Specifically, we will ask about five key areas of school food data and research.

Following these questions, you will be asked to rank the five broad topic areas in terms of priority for future research and will have the opportunity to provide additional details regarding your rankings. Please indicate, in your opinion, how much data and research evidence exists for the following school food topics in Canada:

Best practices for school food program operations and delivery in Canada.

Note: For the purpose of this question, best practices are defined as the specific school food programming approaches or features that research and experience have shown are the most effective, efficient, and/or equitable.

- No evidence at all
- Little evidence
- Moderate evidence
- Considerable evidence
- Extensive evidence
- Unsure

Challenges for school food program operations and delivery in Canada.

Note: For the purpose of this question, challenges could include those related to infrastructure or space, and financial, personnel, social, or other factors.

- No evidence at all
- Little evidence
- Moderate evidence
- Considerable evidence
- Extensive evidence

Unsure

Student-level outcomes

Note: For the purpose of this question, student-level outcomes could include academic achievement, health and well-being, hunger, classroom behaviour, food literacy, school attendance, etcetera.

- No evidence at all
- Little evidence
- Moderate evidence
- Considerable evidence
- Extensive evidence
- Unsure

Household-level outcomes

Note: For the purpose of this question, household-level outcomes could include household food insecurity, reduced household food costs, better household health and nutrition, food literacy, connection to cultures and food traditions, etcetera.

- No evidence at all
- Little evidence
- Moderate evidence
- Considerable evidence
- Extensive evidence
- Unsure

Community-level outcomes

Note: For the purpose of this question, community-level outcomes could include community food security, community economic development, employment opportunities, food loss and waste, local food purchasing, community involvement and empowerment, health outcomes, etcetera.

- No evidence at all
- Little evidence
- Moderate evidence
- Considerable evidence
- Extensive evidence
- Unsure

Please rate the following list of school food research topic areas (described above) from most to least important to prioritize in research activities.

To do this, please select a number for each topic area, with 1 indicating the most important topic area and 5 indicating the least important topic area - each number may only be used once:

- Best practices
- Challenges
- Student-level outcomes
- Household-level outcomes

- Community-level outcomes

-- Please Select --

1. Student-level outcomes
2. Household-level outcomes
3. Community-level outcomes
4. Best practices
5. Challenges

If desired, please provide further detail about your views on the research evidence in these categories and/or specific topics that are not studied enough in the textbox below: (maximum 250 characters)
[Research needs to focus on the children's outcomes, academic and behaviour. This reinforces universality, the essence of the school food programs. These programs do not address the root cause of food insecurity, they do not replace income-based solutions.]

Section 3 of 7

Challenges in school food data and research in Canada

From the following list, please select the three main challenges that should be addressed first to have a positive impact on school food data and research in Canada. Challenges are presented in alphabetical order.

- Differing definitions and ways of monitoring and evaluating programs
- Limited application of research findings to school food practice and programs in Canada
- Limited coordination among researchers
- Limited diversity of the Canadian school food research community (for example, with respect to geography, Indigeneity, etcetera.)
- Limited funding
- Limited existing research and information available to help determine research priorities
- Limited ways for stakeholders to share knowledge on school food programming
- Obtaining approvals for access to schools and school food programs' data
- Other (please specify): limited connections between researchers and local school food programs

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School food data and research priorities in Canada

From the following list, please select the three main process topics that you feel are most important for school food research in Canada to address. Topics are presented in alphabetical order.

Note: process topics are related to school food program design and features.

- Approaches and barriers related to local food procurement (for example, assessments of promising food procurement models and those that received School Food Infrastructure Fund funding)
- Barriers to participation in school food programs (other than stigma)
- Best methods for tracking student participation
- Community and/or school-level infrastructure needs
- Consistency of school food programming with healthy eating recommendations (including adherence to Canada's Food Guide and provincial or territorial nutrition guidelines)

- Cultural appropriateness of school food programming
- Different payment models (for example, pay-what-you-can and free programming)
- Economic sustainability of school food programming, funding sources, and amounts, including cost efficiency
- Efforts to reduce stigma associated with school food program participation
- Environmental sustainability of school food programming, including food loss and waste
- Factors that increase school food programming participation
- Integration of school food programming and food literacy into educational curricula
- Regional differences in school food programming operations and delivery
- Roles of for-profit and not-for-profit school food delivery organizations

Are there any priority research areas you feel are missing from the previous list? (maximum 250 characters)

[*Federal government should fund a longitudinal cohort study, research that would follow a large group of people over a long time to understand the long-term impacts of programs as children grow into adults, as we have from multi-year research from Sweden.*]

From the following list, please select the three main impact topics that you feel are most important for school food research in Canada to address. Topics are listed in alphabetical order.

Note: impact topics are related to outcomes or positive effects of school food programs.

- Caregiver stress
- Children's academic performance
- Children's behaviour
- Children's eating habits
- Children's physical and mental health
- Community food security
- Community involvement and empowerment
- Culture and food traditions
- Effects on employment
- Environmental sustainability, such as food loss and waste
- Food literacy
- Household food insecurity and food spending
- Household nutrition
- Knowledge of sustainable and local food systems
- Local food system and community economic development
- School attendance

Are there any priority research areas you feel are missing from the previous list? (maximum 250 characters)

Section 5 of 7

Sharing research about school food in Canada

From the following list, please select what you feel are the three most effective types of products or media for sharing data and research about school food in Canada. Options are presented in alphabetical order.

- Audio podcasts
- Educational videos

- Infographics
- News releases
- Published journal articles
- Research reports
- Other (please specify)

From the following list, please select what you feel are the three most effective methods for sharing data and research about school food in Canada. Options are presented in alphabetical order.

- In-person conferences
- In-person workshops or training
- Online conferences
- Roundtable discussions
- Social media (for example, LinkedIn)
- Video webinars with question-and-answer periods
- Other (please specify)

Section 6 of 7

Please tell us about yourself

These last few questions will provide valuable context to help us understand the responses provided.

What is your gender identity?

- Man
- Non-binary
- Woman
- Another gender identity not listed above
- Prefer not to answer

Do you work/volunteer with or represent an Indigenous government or Indigenous community/advocacy organization?

- Yes
- No

What is your role or what type of organization do you represent in the school food community?

- Corporation staff
- Non-profit or community/advocacy organization staff/volunteer
- Researcher
- School board staff/volunteer group
- Other (please specify)
- Prefer not to answer

Please specify what your role is in the school food community or what type of organization you represent.

local Ontario public health agency

Do you identify as Indigenous?

- Yes
- No
- Prefer not to answer

Where do you currently reside?

Ontario

Section 7 of 7

Future engagement about school food research

Would you be interested in participating in future engagement opportunities about school food research in Canada (for example, focus groups and interviews)?

Yes

No

Prefer not to answer