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NEWS ROOM

NEWS RELEASE 14-25

Overview

School-Based Meal Programs Need to Be Available to All Canadian Children

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Canada is the only G8 country without a national program

In the News

Ottawa, August 27, 2013 – All schools in all provinces and territories should provide meal programs to help their students alleviate hunger and poor nutrition and to support their performance at school, The Conference Board of Canada recommends in a new report from its [Centre for Food in Canada](#).

Children and youth are over-represented among the almost two million individuals in Canada that suffer from “food insecurity” – a situation in which nutritious food is sometimes or always unavailable or unaffordable.



“As students head back to school this fall, only some will have the benefit of good meal programs operating across the country. Canada is the only G8 country without a national school-based feeding program,” said [Alison Howard](#), Principal Research Associate, and co-author of [Enough for All: Household Food Security in Canada](#).

“Children that lack proper diets are less able to concentrate and perform well at school, which makes it more difficult to learn the skills they will need as adults. Ensuring that all children and youth have access to sufficient, safe and nutritious foods for their everyday activities are critical for a vulnerable population.”

Highlights

- Household food insecurity is defined as a state in where nutritious food is unavailable or unaffordable, or the supply is not stable. About 7.7 per cent of Canadian households were “food insecure” in 2007-08.
- Household income has the greatest impact on whether a household or family will be food insecure.
- Children that are deprived of proper diets are both less healthy and less likely to succeed at school, which affects their physical and economic well-being for the rest of their lives.

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This report recommends that all 13 provincial and territorial governments participate in a pan-Canadian program that provides or manages funding for breakfasts or lunches and/or snacks in each school or school board. If programs cannot be free of charge to students, fees should be based on the income level of each participating family. Ongoing assessments of effectiveness and results must also be part of any school meal program.

Household food insecurity is associated with poor health in both adults and children. Among children in particular, food insecurity is associated with poor academic achievement, and health problems. Almost 10 per cent of households with children said they felt insecure about their access to affordable and nutritious food, compared to less than seven per cent of households without children.

In addition to implementing a pan-Canadian school nutrition program, the report identifies several other short-term and long-term solutions.

Short-term actions:

- Support collaboration among industry, government, and communities to make food more accessible to households.
- Increase support for outreach efforts to the isolated and at-risk populations, such as Aboriginal peoples, lone-parent families, women, children, recent immigrants and the elderly.
- Encourage volunteerism and engagement in food security initiatives.

Long-term actions:

- Improve food literacy levels, through, for example, educating the public on buying and cooking nutritious meals.
- Make public transportation more affordable for low-income households so that individuals can travel to grocery stores and other places to obtain nutritious food.
- Ensure agricultural policies address household food security through, for example, subsidies for fruit and vegetable products, producers and transportation.
- Invest in strategies to address low income/poverty, since household income is the strongest predictor of food security or insecurity.
- Track, study, and evaluate household food security initiatives to find effective programs to support and replicate.

The principal goal of the Centre for Food in Canada is to engage stakeholders from business, government, academia, associations, and communities in creating a [Canadian Food Strategy](#)—one that will meet the country's need for a coordinated, long-term strategy on industry prosperity, healthy and safe food, household food security, and environmental sustainability.

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