
Policy Recommendations for a Healthier Canada

Healthy Food Procurement and Nutrition Standards in Public Facilities

Policy Opportunity Windows: Enhancing Research Uptake in Practice (POWER UP!)
Consensus Statement



Background

About POWER UP!

POWER UP! stands for **Policy Opportunity Windows: Enhancing Research Uptake in Practice**. We are a team of researchers, practitioners, and policy makers who have come together to gather and share evidence on chronic disease prevention with Canadians.

POWER UP! is funded by the federal government through the Canadian Partnership Against Cancer's Coalitions Linking Action and Science for Prevention (CLASP) initiative.

The Consensus Process

The recommendations shared in this statement were developed as part of a consensus process led by the POWER UP! project, which took place in Edmonton, AB in September 2014. The conference brought together national and international experts to review evidence and share their experiences on the implementation of healthy food procurement policies and nutrition standards in public institutions.



Policy Recommendations: Healthy Food Procurement and Nutrition Standards in Public Facilities

Unhealthy foods have become widely available in public settings across Canada, including schools, recreational facilities, workplaces, and health care facilities, contributing to societal health issues such as obesity and chronic disease¹⁻³. In recent years, the development of healthy food procurement policies and nutrition standards in public settings has emerged as a promising strategy to help tackle this problem by increasing access to healthier foods.⁴⁻⁶ Healthy food procurement refers to the process of procuring, distributing, selling, and/or serving food to facilitate healthier dietary behaviours.⁷ Nutrition standards/guidelines help to determine the types of food obtained and purchased throughout this process.^{6,7}

This statement outlines recommendations for healthy food procurement and nutrition standards in Canada, encouraging all publically funded institutions to implement healthy food procurement policies as part of a broader vision of food policy that promotes health, environmental sustainability, and local economies.

Key recommendations for government, publically funded institutions, healthcare facilities, decision-makers and professionals, citizens, and researchers are outlined below.

All Levels of Government

Governments have the responsibility to provide stewardship of public funds and ensure that food and beverages purchased promote the health of the population served. As such, all levels of government are urged to show leadership within their own institutions and facilities, as well as in institutions and facilities receiving public funds, by implementing mandatory healthy food procurement policies.

We recommend that all levels of government:

- Aid implementation of healthy food procurement policies by providing:
 - Innovative funding models, including the provision of transition funds, subsidies, and incentives, to organizations that adopt healthy food procurement policies
 - Funding to support innovation through pilot projects, implementation and evaluation research, and knowledge translation to create an actionable evidence base
 - Long-term dedicated funding and technical expertise to support policy implementation

Federal Government

To support the implementation of healthy food procurement policies (both internal and external to government), **we recommend that the federal government:**

- Provide technical assistance in the development of standards and practices for healthy food procurement¹:
 - Establish a nutrition profiling system to enable assessment of products that meet an agreed-upon definition of “healthy” for procurement standards
 - Develop, regularly update, and monitor a list of acceptable products and vendors that meet universal food procurement standards
 - Develop a repository of implementation experiences and best practices in healthy food procurement for jurisdictions across Canada

Provincial and Territorial Governments

We recommend that provincial and territorial governments:

- Adopt federal healthy food procurement standards, recognizing the need for flexibility with respect to cultural and geographic context
- In provinces where implementation of nutrition guidelines is voluntary, move toward mandatory healthy food procurement policies, at minimum, in settings where vulnerable populations are present (e.g. where decision-making capabilities are underdeveloped or impaired, such as daycares, schools, and long-term care facilities)
- Integrate healthy food procurement policies into accreditation standards for institutions subject to accreditation (e.g. daycares, long term care facilities)
- Provide technical expertise from the health sector to support jurisdictions and institutions in implementing, monitoring, and evaluating healthy food procurement policies

Regional and Municipal Governments

We recommend that regional and municipal governments:

- Move toward mandatory healthy food procurement policies, at minimum, in settings where children and youth gather (e.g. schools, recreation facilities)
- Create or support food policy councils that adopt and monitor food procurement policies within a broader food policy mandate
- Support food procurement from local providers when feasible

¹ While our aim is not to be prescriptive, we understand this work to be coordinated through the Office of Nutrition Policy and Promotion, Health Canada.

Publicly Funded Institutions

We recommend that publicly funded institutions (e.g. hospitals, schools, universities, prisons):

- Develop healthy food procurement contracts that adhere to nutrition standards, encompassing all food and beverages served within the institution, including third-party vendors (e.g. franchises, pouring rights contracts, fundraising)
- Leverage contracts as motivators for organizational change, such as:
 - Terminate non-compliant contracts, or re-negotiate contracts prior to expiry using new contract development as an impetus to develop healthy food procurement policies
 - Where food service is not part of business operations, use food procurement contracts as an opportunity to coordinate efforts between food services and business operations
 - Use expertise from food services to inform technical criteria for contracts and food purchasing
 - Frame healthy food procurement policies as an investment in quality service delivery to boards and senior administration
 - Seize opportunities for aggregated food procurement among consortia of small institutions/facilities
- Dedicate staff time to implementation and monitoring compliance with healthy food procurement policies
- Collaborate with vendors to develop and stock products that meet nutrition standards. This includes:
 - Framing procurement as a benefit to vendors (e.g. filling a growing market niche, supporting local economies)
 - Applying penalties for vendors' noncompliance with healthy food procurement policies

Health Care Facilities

We recommend that health care facilities:

- Whereas meals are medically necessary hospital services under the Canada Health Act, prioritize health through the re-classification of nutrition and food services from operations to patient care
- Remove nutrition supplements (e.g. specialized or prescribed supplements or feedings) from the food budget

Decision-Makers and Professionals

We recommend that decision-makers and professionals:

- Engage and involve citizens, students, parents, and vulnerable populations in informing the development and implementation of healthy food procurement policies at appropriate institutions
- Empower citizens through advocacy training and capacity building (e.g. skill building in media advocacy)
- Share success stories and best practices, as well as barriers and facilitators to healthy food procurement
- Serve as champions for healthy food procurement within their own institutions and engage as change agents in creative problem solving
- Educate the public on the value of healthy food procurement; frame public opinion to create demand for healthy food through strategies such as earned media:
 - Use innovative social marketing techniques to market healthy food procurement policies to the public to help citizens recognize the value and service that is offered to them

Citizens

We recommend that citizens:

- Make institutions and governments aware of the demand for healthy food procurement
- Advocate as part of citizen groups and coalitions to support the development of healthy food procurement policies

Researchers

We recommend that researchers:

- Broker knowledge of solutions through implementation and evaluation research, including filling gaps in knowledge (e.g. effectiveness of healthy procurement beyond the school context)
- Explore potential synergies of healthy food procurement policies within a larger wellness policy framework (e.g. promotion of active transportation, employee fitness, institutional hygiene, etc.)

References

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