

January 13, 2016

Hon. Jane Philpott, PC, MP, MD  
Minister of Health  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, ON  
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Dear Minister Philpott:

Re: Healthy Diets

The HSF/CIHR Chair in Hypertension Prevention and Control and Food Secure Canada are working in partnership to bring health care stakeholders and the food movement together to address the leading risk to Canadians' health and well-being – unhealthy diets. As Health Ministers from across the country prepare their meeting in Vancouver on 20-21 January, we believe there is an extraordinary opportunity to tackle food as part of the recipe for a healthy Canada.

In 2013, unhealthy diet was the leading risk for death and disability in Canada, estimated to cause over 50,000 deaths, 890,000 years of disability and 710,000 years of life lost. Childhood and maternal malnutrition was estimated to cause an additional 420 deaths, 74,000 years of disability and 5,600 years of life lost. While other high-income countries have been implementing best practices to address similar challenges, Canada has not. Now is the time for Canada to catch up.

Please find attached our joint Food and Nutrition Fact Sheet – Unhealthy Diets (January 2016) which frames the complexity of the issue of unhealthy diets including the facts that:

- Most Canadian diets are unhealthy because they contain too many processed and prepared foods;
- Unhealthy diets cause heart disease, stroke, hypertension, diabetes, obesity, high cholesterol, mental disorders and up to 40 per cent of cancers;
- Health care spending comprises more than 35 per cent of all provincial expenditures and is becoming more expensive, threatening the sustainability of public health care in Canada; and
- Healthy local diets could boost the Canadian economy. An Ontario research study shows that replacing 10% of the top 10 fruit and vegetable imports with Ontario-grown produce would result in a \$250 million increase in provincial gross domestic product (GDP).

Canadian health promotion practices currently focus on individual nutrition education, which is important but ineffective on its own. **Educational interventions need to be supported by food environments and food systems that make healthy choices easy choices.** A mix of approaches is needed: regulatory, fiscal, voluntary, contextual and educational.

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Government needs to urgently invest in programs and policies for health promotion that take a food systems approach to addressing unhealthy diets including:

- Restrict the marketing of foods and beverages to children and youth;
- Develop and implement healthy food and beverage procurement policies in publicly funded and private sector settings. These institutions should procure more fresh food (locally grown wherever possible) and ensure that the food they serve is fresh, sustainable and promotes healthy eating;
- Regulate additions of sodium, free sugars, saturated fats and trans fatty acids in processing foods;
- Develop a National School Food program to ensure that all school children have healthy meals every day;
- Develop a comprehensive monitoring and surveillance program for the food supply to document the relationship between Canadians' diets, their health and sustainability, as well as evaluate the effectiveness of healthy food policies.

The HSF/CIHR Chair in Hypertension Prevention and Control has a great deal of knowledge and technical expertise on the relationship between unhealthy food and chronic disease and Food Secure Canada brings together a vast array of organizations and researchers who have expertise in food security and healthy, sustainable food systems. Together, we are uniquely positioned to advise your department on how to effectively engage the broad range of stakeholders needed to effect a change in diets at the population level.

Furthermore, we are enthusiastic about the prospect of the development of a national food policy as announced in the Prime Minister's mandate letter to Minister MacAulay. Such a policy should be comprehensive in nature and will therefore involve several different departments, including Health Canada which has a critical role to play.

**Can we count on you to urgently implement today's action plans on priority food issues such as sodium / trans fat reduction and restricting the marketing of food and beverages to kids while we work together on a strategy for tomorrow?**


We are poised to assist you, your fellow ministers, and your provincial and territorial counterparts as you move forward with your mandate to strengthen our publicly funded universal health care system, put more healthy foods on the plates of Canadian families and ensure that society adapts to face the challenges of chronic disease and food insecurity. We request a meeting with you at your earliest convenience to discuss how we can effectively improve the governance of the food system to improve the health of Canadians. We have the recipe for health, let's work together.

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Sincerely,



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CC: Hon. Lawrence MacAulay, Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food  
CC: Hon. Hunter Tootoo, Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard  
CC: Hon. Carolyn Bennett, Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs  
CC: Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, Minister of Families, Children and Social Development  
CC: Hon. Judy Foote, Minister of Public Services and Procurement  
CC: Hon. K. Kellie Leitch, MP, Simcoe-Grey  
CC: Don Davies, MP, Vancouver Kingsway

CC: Hon. Glen Abernethy, Minister of Health and Social Services, Northwest Territories  
CC: Hon. Gaétan Barrette, Minister of Health and Social Services, Québec  
CC: Hon. Sharon Blady, Minister of Health, Manitoba  
CC: Hon. Victor Boudreau, Minister of Health, New Brunswick  
CC: Hon. Dustin Duncan, Minister of Health, Saskatchewan  
CC: Hon. Leo Glavine, Minister of Health and Wellness, Nova Scotia  
CC: Hon. John Haggie, Minister of Health and Community Services, Newfoundland and Labrador  
CC: Hon. Robert Henderson, Minister of Health and Wellness, Prince Edward Island  
CC: Hon. Sarah Hoffman, Minister of Health, Alberta  
CC: Hon. Eric Hoskins, Minister of Health and Long-Term Care, Ontario  
CC: Hon. Terry Lake, Minister of Health, British Columbia  
CC: Hon. Mike Nixon, Minister of Health and Social Services, Yukon  
CC: Hon. Paul Okalik, Minister of Health, Nunavut

La lettre et la fiche d'information sont disponibles en français sur demande.