

# DIETITIANS OF CANADA (NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR)

## PRE-BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS

*February 2016*

### Dietitians of Canada (Newfoundland and Labrador)

**Dietitians of Canada (Newfoundland and Labrador) is pleased to provide input to the 2016 pre-budget consultations as part of the *Government Renewal Initiative*.** As the professional association that represents Registered Dietitians across Canada, including members in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL), Dietitians of Canada promotes evidence-based best practice in dietetics, advances the profession's unique body of knowledge of food and nutrition, and supports members in their diverse roles in health and wellness. Dietitians currently play an active role in health promotion and health care, and are poised to assume even greater responsibilities in the future to meet the needs of the population. We are cognizant of the economic pressures facing the province, and have carefully considered our recommendations to ensure that they are fiscally responsible. Investment in dietitian services to improve health is a cost-effective strategy for Newfoundland and Labrador.

Dietitians of Canada requests that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador and the Minister of Finance consider the following recommendations:

#### **Recommendations**

Dietitians of Canada requests the Minister of Finance ensure that the necessary supports are in place to facilitate:

##### **1. Access to nutrition services provided by Registered Dietitians**

- a. Adequate dietitian services and support for continuing care (including long-term care and home care) as indicated in June 2015 report from the Auditor General of Newfoundland and Labrador.

- b. Increased dietitian services in primary care settings including rural communities; to deliver cost-effective nutrition interventions aimed at health promotion and chronic disease prevention and treatment.
- c. Funding for the establishment and operation of dietitian services through a Dial-a-Dietitian program to allow more people from all geographic areas of NL to access dietitian services.
- d. Adding Registered Dietitian services to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's Group Insurance Plan.

## ***2. Access to healthy foods for all people living in Newfoundland and Labrador***

- a. Ensure Government policies, programs and initiatives consider the impact on food security.
- b. Ongoing commitment to existing strategies and initiatives that support healthy eating.
- c. A commitment to work collaboratively with other sectors to improve food security.
- d. The application of an excise tax to sugar-sweetened beverages.

In addition, we strongly recommend that a timely evaluation of any new or revised health program funding or policy change be undertaken by Government to ensure the effective use of resources.

### **About Dietitians of Canada**

Dietitians of Canada (DC) is the professional organization that represents Registered Dietitians across Canada, including members in Newfoundland and Labrador (NL). Our organization is committed to ensuring people from NL have access to the dietitian services they need and educating the public about the importance of nutrition to health. DC works closely with members and partners to provide resources, tools and best advice to diverse audiences. DC's vision is to advance health through food and nutrition; we accomplish this vision by providing trusted nutrition information to Canadians and advising governments, at all levels, on best practices in nutrition policy and practice.

### **About Registered Dietitians**

In NL, Registered Dietitians are licensed health professionals, who are uniquely trained to advise on food and nutrition. Dietitians' practice is based on evidence-based research and information. Dietitians continue to be the most trusted source of nutrition information, according to consumer surveys. They must complete rigorous university education and practical training to be eligible to write the Canadian Dietetic Registration Exam, and maintain ongoing competency requirements through the Newfoundland and Labrador College of Dietitians. Dietitians help people meet their nutritional needs in health or disease at all stages of the life cycle. They translate the science of nutrition into healthy food choices and use their expertise in the prevention and treatment of both acute conditions and chronic disease. Dietitians provide services in many settings throughout the province including community health teams; hospitals; long-term care homes; public health; health promotion; education; sports and recreation facilities; business, academic and research settings; and in private practice.

## **1. Access to nutrition services provided by Registered Dietitians**

**Access to dietitian services is not currently meeting needs**, despite the recognized burden of nutrition-related conditions in Newfoundland and Labrador. Newfoundland and Labrador has the highest rates of diabetes and obesity of all the provinces in Canada<sup>1,2</sup>. These conditions include a nutrition component for prevention, early intervention and management, which could provide huge economic benefits to the health care system. In fact, two recent U.S. studies demonstrated that for every one dollar spent on medical nutrition therapy by a dietitian, health care cost savings approach \$4.00<sup>3</sup>.

Dietitians of Canada has identified three specific areas that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador should invest in dietitian services:

**a. Adequate dietitian services and support for continuing care (including long term care and home care) as indicated in the June 2015 report from the Auditor General of Newfoundland and Labrador.**

Registered Dietitians are important members of the interprofessional health care team in continuing care settings such as long term care (LTC) and home care. They play key and unique roles in assessing and managing malnutrition, which in turn positively impacts key areas of care including: unintentional weight loss, functional dependence, dysphagia care, skin integrity and infection rates across disease states. In LTC, Registered Dietitians also establish standard and therapeutic menus and develop care plans to address the key areas noted above. These key areas directly affect resident/client safety and quality of life, and provide health care costs savings.

As stated in the January 2016, Our Fiscal Future discussion paper <sup>4</sup>, Newfoundland and Labrador has an aging population. The necessity of proper nutrition and the services of Registered Dietitians with expertise in continuing care must be considered. Proper nutrition and access to Registered Dietitians while living in the community will keep residents at home longer as nutrition also plays a key role in the prevention and treatment of chronic disease. Registered Dietitians follow evidence-based specialized practice in both dietetics and food services, which greatly improves outcomes in continuing care.

Dietitians of Canada strongly supports the recommendations regarding nutrition in long term care that were published in the June 2015 report from the Auditor General of Newfoundland and Labrador <sup>5</sup>. The Auditor General's Report to the House of Assembly on Reviews of Departments and Crown Agencies, made a number of recommendations with regards to operational standards for long-term care facilities and recommendations that food and nutrition service policies and procedures be consistent with those standards. The importance of providing meals that comply with Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating that are regularly assessed by a dietitian as well as careful accordance with food safety standards was also emphasized.

**b. Increased dietitian services in Primary Care settings including rural communities; to deliver cost-effective nutrition intervention aimed at health promotion and chronic disease prevention and treatment.**

Nutrition is recognized as a major factor in health promotion and in disease prevention and treatment, especially certain chronic diseases like diabetes and cardiovascular conditions. Professional nutrition services have an important role in

the primary health care setting, supporting other team members to provide comprehensive primary health services, and alleviating pressure on the health care system.<sup>6,7</sup> A recent systematic review concluded that “Dietitians working in primary health care can also have significant economic benefits, potentially saving the health care system NZ\$5.50–\$99 for every NZ\$1 spent on dietetic intervention.”<sup>8</sup> These savings are the result of health outcomes such as decreasing the risk and incidence of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity and malnutrition. Other studies, including one focused on outpatient settings and worksite wellness programs, found that “Nutrition interventions that include nutrition counselling by a registered dietitian targeting at-risk groups, have been demonstrated to improve health outcomes and be delivered at a low cost or be cost-effective”.<sup>9</sup> Nutrition services in primary health care settings across Canada also provide evidence of cost-effectiveness.<sup>10</sup> Access to Registered Dietitians in the primary health care setting is crucial to supporting the health promotion and health care management objectives of the Provincial Government. Prevention is an investment in the future and saves money.

The evidence shows that Registered Dietitians have a positive effect on outcomes and their practice saves health care dollars. Dietitians of Canada strongly encourages that Registered Dietitians be an essential member of Primary Health Care teams across all of the Regional Health Authorities.

In the Liberal platform, A Stronger Tomorrow Improving Health and Healthcare<sup>11</sup>, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador states that a health promotion and healthy living strategy is one of their top three priorities. Dietitians are key as the Government brings this strategy forward as dietitians work with people across the lifespan from pre-pregnancy through to senior care. As the health care system is poised for transformation, helping all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians access dietitian services can have a significant impact.

**c. Funding for the establishment and operation of Dietitian telephone services (Dial-a-Dietitian program) to help more Newfoundlanders and Labradorians access dietitian services.**

In the widely expanding telepractice market, telephone counseling continues to be an effective means to deliver and support healthy lifestyle modifications. Systematic reviews of telephonic interventions have confirmed the effectiveness of interventions targeted at improvements in nutritional intake and improved health outcomes.<sup>12</sup>

Easy access to trusted and consistent advice from dietitians will enable the residents of Newfoundland and Labrador to develop the knowledge and personal skills required to achieve the desired outcomes as outlined by the Newfoundland and Labrador Department of Health and the Department of Seniors, Wellness and Social Development. A dietitian phone advisory service will enhance the continuum of nutrition services within the health care system as well as provide support and build capacity for health service providers.

Nutrition and healthy eating advice and information would be provided by Registered Dietitians in Newfoundland and Labrador for, or to, persons calling a toll-free telephone number established for this purpose. This includes the provision of nutrition and healthy eating-related information to the public and other professionals located within NL. DC’s experience with Dial-A-Dietitian services in other areas of the country has shown these services as effective supports for many individual needs, and are well received by health service providers. The advisory service infrastructure provides support to the implementation of government policy, strategies and programs.

This proposed program would be similar to the Health Line (811), which the government of Newfoundland and Labrador currently offers<sup>13</sup> and could be considered an extension of the existing services.

#### **d. Adding Registered Dietitian services to the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador's Group Insurance Plan**

It is also essential that the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador update its employee group insurance plan by providing access to reimbursable nutrition counselling services delivered by Registered Dietitians.

In addition to improvements in health, consulting with a Registered Dietitian can decrease health-related lost productivity by 64% and decrease disability days by 87%<sup>14</sup> compared to unusual medical care. Healthy eating in the workplace can also reduce employee sick time, rates of injury and disability, prescription drug costs, medical costs and insurance premiums<sup>15</sup>, which will result in, cost savings to the Government. Such action also emphasizes the value Government places on healthy eating, nutrition and the role of the Registered Dietitian. Dietitians of Canada and the Dietitians of Newfoundland and Labrador were pleased to recently meet with the Government Insurance Committee led by Mr. James Dooley, to provide details on the benefits of this addition.

## **2. Access to Healthy Food for all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians**

It is the position of DC that “all Canadians must have food security”<sup>16,17</sup>. Recognizing food security as a social determinant of health, DC recommends, “[a] population health approach [which] addresses the root cause of individual and household food insecurity – poverty – through improvements to the social safety net.”<sup>16</sup> Social determinants of health; such as early childhood development, education, employment, income, environmental quality and safety, as well as biological factors; account for the major proportion of population health outcomes.<sup>17</sup> Food insecurity is associated with adverse health effects, including developmental (among children) and mental health problems, greater risk for acute illness (often requiring treatment through the health care system) and greater prevalence of non-communicable diseases.<sup>17</sup> Health inequalities (i.e., less health and well-being, more disease) are particularly prevalent among Canadians with low incomes, people living with mental health challenges and Canada’s Aboriginal communities.

Food First NL shared key facts about food security in NL in their 2015 discussion paper, Everybody Eats<sup>18</sup>. Below are some of these facts:

- Only 10% of the fresh vegetables available through major wholesalers is produced in the province, meaning that 90% of fresh vegetables are imported.
- NL’s largest food industry—the fishery—is mostly for export; more than 80% of the province’s seafood products are exported.
- From 2007 to 2012, Newfoundland and Labrador was the only province in the country showing a constant drop in rates of Household Food Insecurity. The rates dropped from 15.7% in 2007 to 10.6% in 2011. However, the rates increased in 2012 to 13.4%.
- In 2015, over 25,000 individuals in the province used a food bank—with 40% of this population being children. Evidence has also shown that food banks are only used by a portion of people experiencing household food insecurity.

- Food has to be transported long distances to reach retail outlets in communities across the province. Not only can this increase the price and impact the quality of food, disruptions in distribution can limit consistent availability of food options.
- Changes in climate and wildlife availability have made accessing wild food increasingly challenging in Nunatsiavut and other areas of Northern Labrador.
- In 2014, only 25.7% of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians consumed fruit and vegetable five or more times per day, compared to the national average of 39.5%.

**a. Ensure Government policies, programs and initiatives consider the impact on food security**

To improve food security the Government of Newfoundland must be committed to ensuring that the development of policies, programs, and initiatives take into account all five elements of the food system including food production, distribution, access, consumption and disposal. This includes policies on agricultural land preservation, fish quota, fisheries and wildlife conservation, health, food safety, institutional food procurement and poverty reduction.

**b. Ongoing commitment to policies and initiatives that support healthy eating.**

With extremely high rates of diet-related chronic conditions, including diabetes and obesity, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador has worked with partners to put a number of strategies, policies and programs in place to give all Newfoundlanders and Labradorians more opportunities to eat healthy – in schools, homes, and communities. For example, the Poverty Reduction Strategy, the Provincial Wellness Plan, the Provincial Food and Nutrition Framework and Action Plan, which includes the Healthy Students Healthy Schools Initiative and the Provincial School Food Guidelines, and the Eat Great and Participate Program.

Dietitians of Canada commends the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador for this effort and recommends that funding and evaluation of these strategies, policies and programs is continued. In addition, support for research and surveillance in the areas of healthy eating policies will build an understanding of the impact of existing policies and identify need for future policy direction. These strategies will assist the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to continue building a healthy food environment for Newfoundlanders and Labradorians.

**c. A commitment to work collaboratively with other sectors to improve food security.**

The government alone cannot achieve food security and therefore Dietitians of Canada encourages the Government of NL to commit to working with partners in various sectors in a collaborative fashion to ensure Newfoundlanders and Labradorians have access to healthy food in all geographic regions of the province.

**d. The application of an excise tax to sugar-sweetened beverages**

Dietitians of Canada recommends that an excise tax of at least 10-20% be applied to sugar-sweetened beverages sold in Newfoundland and Labrador given the negative impact of these products on the health of Newfoundlanders and Labradorians and the viability of taxation as a means to reduce consumption. For the greatest impact, taxation measures should be combined with other policy interventions such as increasing access to healthy foods while decreasing access to unhealthy foods in schools, day cares, and recreation facilities; restrictions on the marketing of foods and beverages to children; and effective, long-term educational initiatives.

This position is based on a comprehensive review of the literature<sup>19</sup>. There is moderate quality evidence linking the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages to excess weight, obesity and chronic disease onset in children and adults. Taxation of sugar-sweetened beverages holds substantiated potential for decreasing its consumption. Based on economic models and results from recent taxation efforts, an excise tax can lead to a decline in sugar-sweetened beverage purchase and consumption. Taxation of up to 20% can lead to a consumption decrease by approximately 10% in the first year of its implementation, with a postulated 2.6% decrease in weight per person on average. Revenue generated from taxation can be used to fund other health promotion initiatives.

## Conclusion

Dietitians of Canada and Dietitians of Newfoundland and Labrador are committed to working with the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador to develop and implement policies, programs and services that will increase access to safe and healthy foods, evidence-based nutrition information and professional dietitian services. This work will not only improve health outcomes and achieve long-term health system savings, but will be sustainable and effectively meet the health care needs of everyone in the province.

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