

# Advancing the Health of the Population Through Public Health Nutrition Practice

## A Message from the Pan Canadian Task Force on Public Health Nutrition Practice

Strong public health nutrition practice is critical to protecting and enhancing the health of the population. In many areas, as the examples on the next page show, this is already happening. The following definition is a policy tool that will help increase consistency in practice and improve the health of Canadians.

### A national definition of public health nutrition practice

As a result of comprehensive research and consultation, the Task Force has identified a national definition of public health nutrition practice:

**Public health nutrition practice requires the leadership of dietitians with expertise in nutrition, food systems and related public health sciences.**

**Public health nutrition practice encompasses the assessment, promotion, protection and enhancement of health and the prevention of nutrition-related diseases.**

**Using population health and health promotion approaches, strategies focus on the interactions among the determinants of health, food security and nutritional and overall health.**



### A call to action

The Task Force recommends, in part, that policy makers and employers:

- **Adopt and promote** the definition to improve public health and strengthen nutrition practice.
- **Use** the definition in developing nutrition programs, services and research, educational resources and in human resource planning.
- **Provide** all dietetic students and interns with public health experiences in their education and practical training.
- **Identify, promote and support** advanced level public health nutrition practice.
- **Provide** opportunities for public health nutrition staff to strengthen their practice for greater consistency.

For complete recommendations, see Strengthening Public Health Nutrition Practice in Canada: Recommendations for Action ([www.dietitians.ca/publichealthnutrition](http://www.dietitians.ca/publichealthnutrition)).

### About the Task Force

The Pan Canadian Task Force on Public Health Nutrition Practice was formed in 2006 to provide strategic guidance on enhancing public health nutrition practice in Canada.

It comprises leaders in public health nutrition and organization liaisons from across Canada.

The work of the Task Force was funded by the Public Health Agency of Canada and administered by Dietitians of Canada.

It is part of a large collection of pan Canadian activities that are strengthening the public health system to better respond to current and emerging issues.

# Addressing public health issues

Public health nutrition professionals at various levels of influence are already enacting the definition of practice and providing leadership. Here are some examples.

## Promoting healthy choices to combat chronic disease and obesity

Chronic diseases account for 89% of all deaths in Canada.\* In 2004, 23% of adult Canadians were considered obese and 36% overweight. Prevalence of overweight is expected to increase.

- As a Junior Nutritionist at Health Canada, **Joëlle** provides support for a report by the Sodium Working Group, which will recommend a national strategy for optimizing sodium intake.
- **Melinda**, a Public Health Dietitian at Toronto Public Health, works on a diabetes prevention project targeting two priority communities. She provides customized education in nutrition, physical activity and diabetes prevention, plus food skills and cooking sessions.
- As Program Advisor for the Office of the Chief Medical Officer of Health in New Brunswick, **Suzanne** is actively involved with provincial policy. She has analyzed federal recommendations on trans fat and will advise the Deputy Minister on the implications of the federal Sodium Working Group report.

## Advocating for food security

More than 2.7 million Canadians experience household food insecurity. Nearly 800,000 Canadians are assisted by a food bank each month, more than a third of them children.

- **Laura**, the Traditional Diet Coordinator at the Yukon Hospital Corporation, has partnered with others to introduce a new community gardens initiative, develop a traditional foods resource and a train-the-trainer tool for diabetes prevention.
- As the sole regional nutritionist for Labrador North, **Sarah** participates in a number of working groups addressing food security through social determinants such as education, income and social support.
- **Lise** works at Agence de la santé et des services sociaux de Montréal, where she oversees 17 initiatives that advocate for policies and programs to enhance health, improve nutrition and address social inequalities.

## Enhancing childhood and maternal health

The earliest years are pivotal to growth and development. In 2005, only 17% of mothers breastfed exclusively for at least 6 months. Children from families with lower income and lower levels of education generally have poorer overall health.

- A Public Health Dietitian in Kingston, Ontario, **Stephanie** plans and implements healthy eating programs for pregnant women, infants and young children and works with community groups on feeding workshops and breastfeeding promotion initiatives.
- **Twyla** oversees a multidisciplinary team with the Health Promotion Department in Saskatoon Health Region responsible for breastfeeding, infant and preschool nutrition, food security and healthy living initiatives.
- As the Provincial Nutritionist in B.C., **Lisa** works across government ministries and with key stakeholders to implement programs and policies that build healthy food environments. For example, through a partnership between agriculture, education and health, her team established a fruit and vegetable program that reaches all school children in the province.

## Get more information

The work of the Task Force, including recommendations, literature review and report on the consultative process, are available at [www.dietitians.ca/publichealthnutrition](http://www.dietitians.ca/publichealthnutrition).

In particular, please refer to Public Health Nutrition Practice Scenarios: A Workforce Development and Professional Practice Tool for in-depth case studies of public health nutritionists at work.

Important works that have influenced or guided the Task Force include:

- The Core Competencies for Public Health in Canada: Release 1 (2008), [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ccph-cesp/index-eng.php](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ccph-cesp/index-eng.php)
- Building the Public Health Workforce for the 21st Century (2006), [www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/php-ppsp/pdf/building\\_the\\_public\\_health\\_workforce\\_fo\\_20the-21stc\\_e.pdf](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/php-ppsp/pdf/building_the_public_health_workforce_fo_20the-21stc_e.pdf)

\*For a list of sources used for statistics referenced in this document, please refer to the original presentation, which can be downloaded at: [www.dietitians.ca/publichealthnutrition](http://www.dietitians.ca/publichealthnutrition). © Dietitians of Canada 2010. This document is published by Dietitians of Canada. A copy can be downloaded at: [www.dietitians.ca/publichealthnutrition](http://www.dietitians.ca/publichealthnutrition). Permission is granted to reproduce copies in its entirety for personal or educational purposes, provided credit to the publishers is given. The views expressed herein are those of the Task Force and do not necessarily represent the views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.