

## Dietitian Issues for Manitoba Election 2019

August 1, 2019

Dietitians of Canada is a professional association that represents over 300 members in Manitoba, providing evidence-informed and actionable advice to inform policy.

Dietitians in Manitoba have identified three priority issues. We are calling on provincial parties to commit to addressing these issues in order to effectively meet the health care needs of Manitobans, improve health outcomes and achieve long term health system savings. If not addressed, these issues will continue to escalate, leading to increased health care costs and negative health outcomes.

### ELECTION PRIORITY #1: Take action on reducing food insecurity through income-based solutions.

Food insecurity is one of the most sensitive predictors for poor physical and mental health. Individual and household food insecurity is much more than a food problem – it is a result of income being too low or inconsistent. Food insecurity is ultimately reduced through income-based solutions that address the underlying problems of poverty or material deprivation.



#### Dietitians recommend:

- ✓ Collaboratively review and update Employment and Income Assistance (EIA) rates, including nutritional supplements/therapeutic diet supports, to ensure all Manitobans have sufficient income to pay for food.
- ✓ Use evidence-based data on the cost of healthy eating to inform health and social policy, including a commitment to collect and publish food cost data at minimum every three years. Currently, Manitoba is the only province that does not regularly collect data on the cost of healthy eating. A group of stakeholders, including Dietitians of Canada, worked together with the current Manitoba government to collect food cost data in 2017. These stakeholders committed both human and financial resources to collect this data. Unfortunately, the current Manitoba government has withheld the release of final data and no report has been released to stakeholders or the public.
- ✓ Commit to addressing household food insecurity specifically among Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous households have a much higher risk of household food insecurity when compared to non-Indigenous households and is influenced by additional aspects such as traditional food procurement and broader environmental factors.
- ✓ Commit to regular monitoring of household food insecurity levels.

### ELECTION PRIORITY #2: Invest in children's nutritional health and education.

Health and education are interdependent: healthy students are better learners, and better-educated individuals are healthier. Health status during early education years is critical as it is during this time that students develop healthy habits through what they learn and through the health-related choices they can make in their school environment. Supportive healthy school environments can improve health over a lifetime and be more effective than treating health problems as they arise later in life.

#### Dietitians recommend:

- ✓ Incorporate food literacy and food skills education throughout the K-12 curriculum.
- ✓ Support a collaborative approach, including consultation with dietitians, to create healthy school environments and develop nutrition-related curriculum.
- ✓ Strengthen mandatory reporting and monitoring of school nutrition policies, as required by the Manitoba Public Schools Act.
- ✓ Increase and sustain annual funding for school meal and snack programs to improve access to nutritious food in schools, ultimately enhancing students' health, well-being and academic success.

### **ELECTION PRIORITY #3: Invest in front-line dietitian services for primary care, home care, long term care and mental health settings.**

Access to front-line dietitian services is insufficient to meet the needs of Manitobans, despite the pivotal role and cost savings associated with dietetic interventions. For instance, there is only one full-time dietitian position dedicated to providing nutrition services to the nearly 15,000 adult home care clients in the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. There are no other front-line dietitian positions dedicated to providing nutrition services to home care clients in other health regions.

#### **Invest in dietitian services to improve health outcomes and save future health care dollars.**

##### **Dietitians in primary care:**

- ✓ Reduce the risk of chronic diseases at all stages of life. Dietitians help clients develop knowledge and skills to implement lifestyle changes that reduce the risk of developing diabetes by up to 70% in clients at risk and can reduce blood glucose, blood pressure and cholesterol levels.
- ✓ Enhance screening and identify malnourished clients to prevent admission to hospital. Malnutrition is a \$2 billion health care problem. One in three seniors are at risk for malnutrition and 45% of adults admitted to hospital are malnourished. Early detection and intervention in primary care can make a difference.
- ✓ Provide leadership to interprofessional teams on optimal nutrition intake and health promotion strategies for infants, children and youth. The number of children in Manitoba with type 2 diabetes is 12 times higher than any other province in Canada and 36.9% of Canadian children are admitted to hospital malnourished. An increased focus on pediatric nutrition in primary care will improve health outcomes and save future health care dollars.

##### **Dietitians in home care:**

- ✓ Reduce the demand on hospital-based services through enhanced management of acute and chronic diseases and malnutrition that enables clients to stay independent and healthy in their homes.
- ✓ Counsel and support clients, families and caregivers to optimize client nutrition intake.
- ✓ Provide continuity of care for hospital patients who go home malnourished in order to prevent readmissions and emergency department visits.

##### **Dietitians in long term care:**

- ✓ Address nutrition issues in this high-risk population including decreased food intake, loss of appetite, difficulty chewing or swallowing, gastrointestinal problems, and nutrition issues related to depression and dementia.
- ✓ Enhance management of malnutrition. Up to 60% long term care residents are malnourished which can lead to increased risk of infection, pressure ulcers and a decline in functional abilities.

##### **Dietitians in mental health:**

- ✓ Reduce nutrition-related side effects of psychiatric medications.
- ✓ Work with clients to improve food intakes and eating behaviors and promote a healthy body image.
- ✓ Enhance self-management of concurrent and comorbid conditions.

#### **CANDIDATE QUESTIONS**

1. How will you invest in front-line dietitian services for primary care, home care, long term care and mental health settings?
2. How will you commit to reducing household food insecurity through income-based solutions and regular monitoring of household food insecurity levels?
3. Will you commit to regularly collecting and publishing evidence-based data on the current cost of healthy eating to inform health and social policy?
4. How will you invest in children's nutritional health and education?
5. How will you include dietitians in policy development, implementation and evaluation related to household food insecurity, health care service delivery and healthy school environments?

Interested in learning more about these priority issues from dietitians?  
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