

**Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2026 Budget
Submitted by Dietitians of Canada**



Recommendations

1. **Address Recruitment & Retention for Dietitians:** Expand the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness program to include Registered Dietitians
2. **Optimize the Integration of Registered Dietitians:** Leverage federal spending power to modernize the health workforce in the next bilateral health agreements.
3. **Reduce Food Insecurity:** Address Household Food Insecurity through income policy.

Modernizing the Healthcare Workforce: Optimizing the Role of Registered Dietitians to Enhance System Efficiency and Patient Outcomes

Executive Summary

Canada's healthcare system is at a breaking point due to workforce shortages and inefficient utilization of specialized health professionals. Registered Dietitians are the only regulated health professionals specialized in nutrition, yet they remain one of the most underutilized assets throughout Canada's healthcare systems. To address growing rates of chronic disease and hospital readmissions, the Government of Canada must support the retention and optimized integration of Registered Dietitians.

Registered Dietitians are the principal providers of nutrition care. Dietitians play a critical role in healthcare by assessing individual and population needs and providing expert dietary advice to prevent and manage physical and mental health conditions throughout life stages. By bridging nutrition and health, dietitians empower individuals to make informed food choices. Whether collaborating with other healthcare professionals, undertaking scientific research, driving innovation in the food industry, informing public policy, or working with patients and communities across the country, dietitians improve the health and well-being of Canadians.

Investing in Registered Dietitians is not just a health imperative; it is a fiscal one.

- **Malnutrition** in Canadian hospitals increases the cost of care by **\$2 billion annually** due to increased length of stay and readmissions.¹ Furthermore, the Dietitians of Canada Position Statement on Household Food Insecurity in Canada found that **food insecurity** in Canada is estimated to incur **\$6.2 billion** in acute healthcare costs annually, driven by more frequent emergency department visits and prolonged hospital stays.²
- **Diabetes management** led by a Registered Dietitian can reduce A1C levels as effectively as some medications, at a fraction of the long-term cost of complications like dialysis or amputation.³

By supporting dietitians and addressing food insecurity, we can build a stronger, healthier Canada.

Dietitians of Canada recommends that the Federal Government:

1. **Address Recruitment & Retention for Dietitians:** Expand the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness program to include Registered Dietitians
2. **Optimize the Integration of Registered Dietitians:** Leverage federal spending power to modernize the health workforce in the next bilateral health agreements.

¹ [Canadian Malnutrition Taskforce, Malnutrition in Canada: Unveiling the Need for Priority and Policy Whitepaper, 2024.](#)

² Men F, et al., Food Insecurity Is Associated With Higher Health Care Use And Costs Among Canadian Adults. Health Aff (Millwood, 2020 Aug;39(8):1377–85.

³ [Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics Evidence Analysis Library. DM: executive summary of recommendations. 2015.](#)

3. **Reduce Food Insecurity:** Address Household Food Insecurity through income policy.

Recommendation 1: Address Recruitment & Retention for Dietitians

Significant recruitment and retention challenges have created a critical shortage of Registered Dietitians in rural and remote communities, which has been highlighted by the Government of Canada's Canadian Occupational Projection System.⁴ Because current compensation and incentives for Registered Dietitians often lag behind other allied health professions, these underserved regions are left without essential medical nutrition therapy, deepening the health equity gap between urban and rural Canada.

Dietitians of Canada recommends that the Federal Government:

- **Federal Student Loan Forgiveness:** Expand the list of eligible professions for the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness program to include Registered Dietitians practicing in rural, remote, and under-served urban communities.
- **Health Human Resources (HHR) Strategy:** The Government of Canada must, through funding and any other required mechanisms, enable the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) and Health Workforce Canada to collect and report on enhanced health workforce data for allied health professions, including the dietetics profession, to identify and address workforce challenges that threaten the health system.

Recommendation 2: Optimize the Integration of Registered Dietitians throughout Primary Care

Nutrition intervention is a primary driver in reducing hospital stays and managing population needs. To modernize the health system, Registered Dietitians must be empowered to work at the top of their scope and be better integrated into health system workforce approaches. Currently, systemic barriers—such as a dietitian's scope more narrowly defined than their actual capabilities—prevent Registered Dietitians from optimizing care for nutrition-related chronic diseases.

- **Primary Care Integration:** Prioritize workforce modernization in new bilateral health agreements with provinces and territories to encourage improved utilization across all health professions, including better integration of Registered Dietitians. Federal health transfers should also be directly linked to the mandatory inclusion of Registered Dietitians within inter-professional primary care teams. Nutrition-related chronic diseases cost the Canadian economy billions. We know that embedding Registered Dietitians in primary care is a cost-avoidance strategy. Supporting the integration of dietitians in primary care settings can also reclaim high-cost physician hours for acute care, effectively increasing primary care capacity without increasing the physician bottleneck.

⁴ <https://occupations.esdc.gc.ca/sppc-cops/occupationssummarydetail.jsp?tid=142&lang=eng>

Recommendation 3: Reduce Food Insecurity.

Household Food Insecurity (HFI) remains a significant and persistent crisis in Canada. In 2024, 25.5% of people in the ten provinces lived in a food-insecure household.⁵ HFI is also associated with higher public-payer health services costs and utilization among children and youth across Canada.⁶

Because the fundamental cause of household food insecurity is economic, it cannot be mitigated through food charity, waste diversion, or community-led programming. Household food insecurity necessitates targeted economic intervention while governments and civil society work together to develop and implement more permanent solutions. As Canadians navigate an escalating cost-of-living crisis driven by global instability, the Government of Canada needs to address the underlying issue through more permanent income policy reform.

- **Address Household Food Insecurity (HFI) through Income Policy Reform:** Implement permanent financial measures to increase household incomes, with the goal of reducing food insecurity by 50% by 2030. Furthermore, we note that clinical nutrition interventions are most effective when patients have the financial means to access a nutritious diet.

Finally, to support effective public health policy, the Government of Canada must urgently **undertake a new Canadian Community Health Survey** addressing nutrition (CCHS-Nutrition). The lack of recent data severely hinders impactful research and evidence-based regulatory development. To ensure Canadians have confidence that national health policies and programs are built on accurate, current information, we strongly urge Statistics Canada, Health Canada, and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada to commit to conducting an updated CCHS-Nutrition as soon as possible.

About Dietitians of Canada

Originally founded as the Canadian Dietetic Association in 1935 and formally established as Dietitians of Canada in 1997, our association is dedicated to advocacy, professional excellence, and fostering a diverse and inclusive leadership community. We lead national efforts to expand access to dietitian services within both the public healthcare system and private health benefits. Our mission is to support our members while elevating the profile and perceived value of the profession. With a legacy of over 90 years, we remain an innovative, member-led organization committed to shaping the future of nutrition and health in Canada.

⁵ [PROOF, University of Toronto, New data on household food insecurity in 2024.](#)

⁶ [Clemens KK et al., The association between household food insecurity and healthcare costs among Canadian children. Can J Public Health. 2024 Feb;115\(1\):89-98. doi: 10.17269/s41997-023-00812-2. Epub 2023 Aug 23.](#)