Dietitians of Canada (Nova Scotia) is pleased to provide input to the 2016 Action Plan For An Aging Population

Dietitians of Canada (DC) commends the government of Nova Scotia for considering strategies to support older adults to live active and healthy lives through the discussion of paid work, volunteering, remaining at home, and active and healthy living. Being healthy and having appropriate nutritional status can ensure the opportunity for participation in all of these areas and promote older adults’ contributions to our communities and our province.

**Dietitians of Canada recommends that the following items be considered as the Action Plan For An Aging Population is developed:**

**Recommendations:**

1. **Increase access to credible nutrition information provided by licensed Dietitians and Nutritionists**

   Access to accurate and credible nutrition information and support for older adults across the province is essential to ensure effective prevention and management of chronic disease, and to support active and rewarding participation in society. 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.

   The Nova Scotia Department of Health and Wellness’ Nova Scotia Health Profile, reports that Nova Scotia has one of the highest rates of chronic disease and disability in Canada\(^1\), which often affect older adults. Preventing and managing these conditions through early intervention with evidence-based nutrition care and accessible nutrition information could provide a significant difference in older adults’ functionality and well being.

   **a. Inclusion of nutrition care as part of Home Care services**

   Throughout Canada, registered dietitians are considered important members of interprofessional home care teams. Dietitian services and support is not currently part of home care services in Nova Scotia. In other provinces, dietitians providing nutrition assessment and care in clients’ homes, play key and unique roles in assessing and
managing malnutrition which positively impacts key areas of health including: unintentional weight loss, functional dependence, dysphagia care, skin integrity, and infection rates across disease states. Appropriate nutrition and timely access to dietitian services while living in the community will assist older adults to live at home longer. In addition to benefitting the older adult, living at home longer can decrease hospital congestion and the use of acute care settings to provide long term and chronic care that can be provided at home.

b. Funding for the establishment and operation of Dietitian telephone services
In the widely expanding telepractice setting, telephone services continue to be effective in delivering nutrition information and advice and in supporting healthy lifestyle modifications. Dietitian telephone services should be considered as part of a comprehensive approach to increasing access to credible and reliable nutrition information for older adults in Nova Scotia. Systematic reviews of telephone interventions have confirmed the effectiveness of interventions targeted at optimizing nutritional intakes and improved health outcomes.6

Easy access to trusted and consistent advice from dietitians over the telephone will enable older adults in Nova Scotia to develop the personal skills required to achieve the desired health and social outcomes. By building on the existing 811-phone service available to Nova Scotians, a dietitian telephone service will enhance the continuum of nutrition services available for older adults and other Nova Scotians.

DC’s experience with Dietitian telephone services in other areas of the country has shown that these services are effective supports for many individual needs. Telephone advisory service infrastructure also provides support to implementation of government policy, strategies and programs. Specific to the care of older adults, the Ontario program receives 50% of calls from older adults, and also provides support to online nutrition screening for seniors, Nutri-eSCREEN at http://www.eatrightontario.ca/en/Seniors. Implementing the Nutri-eSCREEN program in Nova Scotia would support caregivers and older adults in achieving and maintaining healthier outcomes.

c. Increased dietitian services as part of Collaborative Care Teams, including those in rural communities
Dietitians of Canada strongly encourages that dietitians be considered an essential key member of Nova Scotia Collaborative Care Teams to deliver cost-effective nutrition intervention aimed at health promotion and chronic disease prevention and treatment. Dietitians have proven to play an important role in the primary health care setting, supporting other team members to provide comprehensive primary health services, and alleviating pressure on the healthcare system3,4. Nutrition services in primary healthcare settings across Canada also provide evidence of cost-effectiveness.5 Access to dietitians in the primary health care setting for older adults is crucial to supporting older adults to continue to participate fully in their communities.

d. Dietitians services as part of Extended Health Care Benefits
Providing older adults with access to the services of a dietitian through group insurance plans is another effective strategy to provide accurate nutrition information. Many older adults who are or were active in the workforce will be part of a private health care insurance plan.
In addition to improvements in health, consulting with a dietitian can decrease health-related lost work productivity by 64% and decrease disability days by 87% compared to usual 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, which will result in cost savings to the employer. Such actions can also alleviate pressure on the public health care system so that older adults and others who do not have private insurance can utilize these services.

2. **Ongoing commitment to policies and initiatives that support healthy eating for older adults.**

With rates of diet-related chronic conditions including cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and obesity among the highest in Canada, the Government of Nova Scotia has worked with partners to create a number of policies, strategies, and programs to give all Nova Scotians more opportunities to eat healthy in homes and in communities. For example, the *Healthy Eating Nova Scotia Strategy, Healthy Eating Guidelines for Sport and Recreation*, and *Thrive! A Plan for a Healthier Nova Scotia*, were designed to create conditions where healthy eating and physical activity become part of the daily environments and lifestyles in Nova Scotia. The Government of Nova Scotia has also committed to updating the Continuing Care Strategy and has released a Dementia Strategy. It is important that the outcomes of all strategies across sectors be linked to ensure work is cohesive and that momentum is created.

Dietitians of Canada recommends the Government of Nova Scotia continue to fund and evaluate these policies, strategies, and programs in order to continue the positive impact on the current and future health of Nova Scotians. 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 needs for future policy direction. Planned and resourced comprehensive evaluations will ensure the Government of Nova Scotia remains up to date with what is happening related to healthy eating and older adults throughout the province. These strategies will assist the Government of Nova Scotia continue to build healthy food environments for all Nova Scotians, including older adults.

**Conclusion**

Dietitians of Canada along with local DC members in Nova Scotia, including in the NS Dietitians’ Continuing Care Action Group, are committed to working with the Nova Scotia Department of Seniors to develop and implement an action plan for older adults which includes safe and healthy foods, evidence-based nutrition information, and professional dietitian services. This work will support the health and well being of older adults in Nova Scotia to ensure they are able to participate in and contribute to our diverse communities and our economy. We look forward to further engagement in the development and implementation of the strategy.

**About us and the work we do**

**Dietitians of Canada (DC)** is the professional organization that represents registered dietitians across Canada with over 350 members in NS. 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. DC is committed to ensuring people from NS have access to the dietitian services they need, and to educating the public.
about the importance of nutrition to health. DC works closely with members and partners to provide resources, tools, and advice to diverse audiences.

The **Nova Scotia Continuing Care Dietitians (NSDCC) Action Group** is a local action group of DC; its purpose is to advocate for nutrition services and supports to enhance the nutritional health and well-being of continuing care clients/residents in Nova Scotia. NSDCC Action Group members include dietitians working with older adults from all health zones, nutrition researchers from Acadia and St. Francis Xavier Universities, and representatives from the DC Gerontology and Dysphagia Networks.

**Professional (Registered) Dietitians (PDts)** are licensed health professionals uniquely trained to advise on food and nutrition through evidence-informed practice. To become registered with a provincial college or association, dietitians complete rigorous university education and practical training to be eligible to write the Canadian Dietetic Registration Exam. In NS, PDts maintain competency requirements through the NS Dietetic Association. Dietitians help people meet their nutritional needs in health or disease at all stages of life by translating the science of nutrition into healthy and appropriate food choices, and using their expertise in the prevention and treatment of acute and chronic health conditions. Dietitians provide services throughout the province in varied settings including community health teams, hospitals, long-term care homes, public health and health promotion, education, sports and recreation facilities, business, academic and research settings, and in private practice.

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References


