

NutriSTEP® Advocacy Support Letter

Advocacy “Ask”

The Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH) has recently sent a letter to the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care outlining issues that have arisen for the NutriSTEP® (Nutrition Screening Tool for Every Preschooler, and Toddler NutriSTEP®) programs and urging remedial action.

Specifically, OSNPPH’s letter includes the following requests:

1. A staff person to provide coordination of NutriSTEP®, including offering ongoing training, professional development and support for practitioners, and resource revisions as needed,
2. Provincial organizational support for NutriSTEP® to house staff and resources,
3. No cost access to Toddler and Preschooler NutriSTEP® licenses,
4. Printing of Preschooler NutriSTEP® and How to Build a Healthy Preschooler made available at no cost when current supply is diminished.
5. Printing of Toddler NutriSTEP® and How to Build a Healthy Toddler made available at no cost to health units/departments, and

OSNPPH encourages individual health units as well as interested organizations to express support for OSNPPH’s NutriSTEP® letter and its specific requests.

Background

The Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS) 2008 pertaining to Child Health requires that health units facilitate access to screening tools to monitor child health and development, as well as that there be provision for follow-up of results. The OPHS lists NutriSTEP® as a valid and reliable tool, and it is included in several OPHS Guidance Documents.

Preschooler NutriSTEP® is a 17-item valid, reliable, community-based nutrition risk screening tool that can be completed by a parent/caregiver of a preschooler (3-5 years) in about five minutes; Toddler NutriSTEP®, which was recently validated, is appropriate for children aged 18-35 months. In addition to being a screening tool, NutriSTEP® is also an educational and referral tool for parents. A goal for NutriSTEP® is generation of evidence through a centralized surveillance and monitoring database to better inform local and provincial programs and services.

Integration of NutriSTEP® into existing provincial programs is a cost-effective method to identify children 18 months to five years who are at increased nutrition risk, which allows early intervention to prevent childhood obesity, failure to grow, iron deficiency, inadequate eating skills, as well as potential cognitive delays including reduced school readiness. NutriSTEP® is suited to inclusion in various existing services, including Healthy Babies, Healthy Children program, family home visitors, and well-baby visits by public health nurses. It is also applicable in various settings, such as school readiness events, physician offices,

community health centres, family health teams, dental clinics, child care centres, and child mental health agencies.

There is little else available besides NutriSTEP® in the way of nutrition screening or early intervention for the toddler and preschooler age group.

Issue

Negative impacts on provincial coordination and support for NutriSTEP® resulted from changes announced July 13, 2012 to Nutrition Resource Centre (NRC) programming. The University of Guelph has recently begun providing some supports for NutriSTEP® implementation; however, this doesn't include on-going training/professional development, or revision, printing, housing and distribution of materials. As well, the requirement to pay for licenses and printing of materials represents a barrier to implementation.

Provincial supports are critically needed to assist health units with implementing NutriSTEP®, as well as for coordination of aspects such centralized data collection and on-going training.