



Ontario Society of Nutrition  
Professionals in Public Health

La société ontarienne des professionnel(le)s  
de la nutrition en santé publique

[www.osnpnh.on.ca](http://www.osnpnh.on.ca)

January 10, 2013

Kate Manson-Smith  
Assistant Deputy Minister, Health Promotion Division  
Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care  
College Park  
19 Floor Suite 1903  
777 Bay St  
Toronto ON M7A 1S5

**Re: Request for continued provincial support for NutriSTEP®**

Dear Ms. Manson-Smith,

We are writing to request continued provincial support for NutriSTEP®. This is in response to Laura Pisko-Bezruchko's letter dated July 13, 2012 outlining the future roles of the Nutrition Resource Centre, as well as a letter from Siu Mee Cheng, OPHA Executive Director re: Nutrition Resource Centre Programming Changes 2012-13 that same day.

Since September 2012, the University of Guelph is supporting implementation of NutriSTEP® which includes:

- The NutriSTEP® website ([www.nutristep.ca](http://www.nutristep.ca))
- The NutriSTEP® online community ([www.nutristep.ca/en/online\\_community.aspx](http://www.nutristep.ca/en/online_community.aspx))
- The NutriSTEP® implementation toolkit available from the NutriSTEP® website
- Licenses for both Preschooler NutriSTEP® and Toddler NutriSTEP® available from [www.Flintbox.com](http://www.Flintbox.com)
- Development of English and French versions of both Preschooler and Toddler NutriSTEP® questionnaires for online completion by parents (available as Nutri e-STEP™ on the Dietitians of Canada website in the spring of 2013)

Support that is not included is on-going training and professional development for practitioners, revision of resources, and printing and distribution of the Toddler NutriSTEP® questionnaire and accompanying educational resource (How to Build a Healthy Toddler). Previously, under the coordination of the Nutrition Resource Centre, with funds from the Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport, copies of Preschooler NutriSTEP® and the educational resource (How to Build a Healthy Preschooler) were made available free of charge through Service Ontario. According to a letter from OPHA and the University of Guelph, dated August 14, 2012, there is stock left for only the next 1-3 years of Preschooler NutriSTEP®.

**In order to effectively and efficiently implement Preschooler NutriSTEP® and Toddler NutriSTEP® locally, we request provincial coordination, including the following:**

1. A staff person to provide coordination of NutriSTEP®, including ongoing training, professional development and support for practitioners, as well as resource revision 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 Toddler NutriSTEP® and How to Build a Healthy Toddler made available at no cost to health units/departments, and
5. Printing of Preschooler NutriSTEP® and How to Build a Healthy Preschooler made available at no cost when current supply is diminished.

As you are aware, 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<sup>1</sup>. A rigorous and extensive development process for NutriSTEP® began in 1997 with validation established in 2007 based on comparison of nutritional risk as assessed by Registered Dietitians in 269 preschoolers. Toddler NutriSTEP®, which was recently validated, is appropriate for children aged 18-35 months. Both questionnaires fill a gap in surveillance and screening needs by assessing food and nutrient intake, physical growth, developmental and physical capabilities, physical activity, food security and the feeding environment of children 18 months to five years. In addition to being an early identification nutrition screening tool, NutriSTEP® is also an educational and referral tool for parents.

Young children with nutritional problems are at risk for growth, behaviour and development problems. Inadequate or inappropriate intervention has both short- and long-term health consequences including overweight, failure to grow, iron deficiency, inadequate eating skills, as well as potential cognitive delays including reduced school readiness. The NutriSTEP® research team has demonstrated that completion of NutriSTEP by parents may reduce these negative consequences through improvements in parental nutrition awareness, knowledge and behaviours<sup>2,3</sup>.

NutriSTEP® is an upstream, prevention/early intervention program and is suitable for use in a variety of settings such as school readiness and screening fairs, as well as primary health care settings such as physicians' offices and Healthy Babies Healthy Children (HBHC) home visits. Currently it is used in these settings as well as by dietitians in community health centres and family health teams, public health nurses during well-baby visits, family home visitors, dental staff at dental clinics, childcare centres, and children's mental health agencies. Continued promotion and 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, allowing early intervention to prevent childhood obesity<sup>4</sup>. There is little else available in the way of screening or early intervention for the preschool and toddler age group.

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<sup>1</sup> Randall Simpson J, Keller H, Rysdale L, Beyers J. *Nutrition Screening Tool for Every Preschooler (NutriSTEP™): Validation and test-retest reliability of a parent-administered questionnaire assessing nutrition risk of preschoolers*. Eur J Clin Nutr 2008;62:770-780.

<sup>2</sup> Randall Simpson J, Van Dyke D, Tucker L, Walton K, Beales A, Rysdale L, Jarvis Winhold P, Hussey T, Kane H, Fowler J, VanDorp R, Beyers J, Keller H. *Evaluating NutriSTEP® (Nutrition Screening Tool for Every Preschooler) in Selected Ontario Family* [Abstract]. Chronic Disease Prevention Association of Canada Conference. Ottawa, Ontario February 2012.

<sup>3</sup> Rysdale LA, Witchell EC, Keller HH, Randall Simpson JA, Turfryer MC, McGibbon KA, Beyers JE (2011). *Parent Perceptions of NutriSTEP and Nutrition Risk Screening in a Sample of Ontario Preschool Children*. ICAN: Infant, Child & Adolescent Nutrition.; 3:197.

<sup>4</sup> Dietitians of Canada (Ontario). *Childhood Healthy Weights – Recommendations to the Healthy Kids Panel*. September 2012. Available October 15, 2012 [www.dietitians.ca/lag/Ontario-Government-Advocacy/Files/Submissions-to-ON-Govt/DC-Ontario-Healthy-Kids-Panel-Submission-2012-pdf.aspx](http://www.dietitians.ca/lag/Ontario-Government-Advocacy/Files/Submissions-to-ON-Govt/DC-Ontario-Healthy-Kids-Panel-Submission-2012-pdf.aspx).

Use of NutriSTEP® also provides a mechanism for local and provincial program evaluation, assessment, monitoring and surveillance. For example, the questionnaire can be easily incorporated into existing population health assessment surveys leading to generation of evidence to better inform local and provincial programs and services. A goal for the NutriSTEP® Program is to have a centralized surveillance and monitoring database for NutriSTEP® scores for such purposes.

The Ontario Public Health Standards 2008, under Child Health require that, “The board of health shall facilitate access and support for families to complete screening tools to monitor their child’s health and development, and provide a contact for families to discuss results and arrange follow-up”. The NutriSTEP® questionnaire is listed as a valid and reliable tool to be used in the Child Health Program, ([http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/pubhealth/oph\\_standards/ophs/progstds/pdfs/ophs\\_2008.pdf](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/english/providers/program/pubhealth/oph_standards/ophs/progstds/pdfs/ophs_2008.pdf)) and is included in several of OPHS Guidance Documents, June 2010 (e.g., Child Health, pages 53-4; Healthy Eating, Active Living Healthy Weights, pages 15, 41, 44, 51; School Health, page 42).

As of September 2011, 24 of the 36 public health units across Ontario are either actively utilizing NutriSTEP® in their work or actively planning to integrate NutriSTEP® into their work. Numbers for health units using Toddler NutriSTEP® are uncertain at this point in time, given its recent release. Judging from initial conversations, interest is high, however the cost to implementing Toddler NutriSTEP® is a barrier to implementation (Appendix A). The provincial supports requested in this letter are critical in assisting public health units/departments implement NutriSTEP® across the province.

Funding from Danone Institute of Canada, Canadian Institutes of Health Research, and the Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport, along with in-kind support from many other partners, has facilitated the success of NutriSTEP®. The core NutriSTEP® team of Registered Dietitians including: Dr. Janis Randall Simpson, University of Guelph; Lee Rysdale, Northern Ontario School of Medicine; Joanne Beyers, Sudbury & District Health Unit; and Dr. Heather Keller, University of Waterloo, have worked with many supportive partners. The importance of NutriSTEP® to the health system in Ontario is illustrated by the significance and representativeness of the supportive partners listed in Appendix B. Additionally, NutriSTEP® is a natural fit with several provincial initiatives, as listed in Appendix C.

In order to support the work of health units working to improve the health of Ontarians and reduce the incidence of childhood obesity, we are requesting continued provincial support for NutriSTEP®, as outlined above.

We look forward to your timely response to this letter.

Sincerely,



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CC:

Laura Belfie, Manager, Public Health Units and Standards, Health Promotion Division, MOHLTC  
Joanne Beyers, Sudbury & District Health Unit  
Hon. Laurel Broten, Minister of Education  
Siu Mee Cheng, Executive Director, OPHA  
Laura Danilko, HKPR District Health Unit, Co-Chair Family Health Nutrition Advisory Group, OSNPPH  
Linda Dietrich, Regional Executive Director, Dietitians of Canada  
Jim Grieve, Assistant Deputy Minister, Early Learning Division, MEDU  
Anne-Marie Holt, President, Ontario Association of Epidemiologists in Ontario (APHEO)  
Hon. Eric Hoskins, Minister of Children and Youth Services  
Dr. Heather Keller, Department of Kinesiology, University of Waterloo  
Susan Makin, President, Board of Directors, OPHA  
Dr. Heather Manson, Director, Health Promotion, Chronic Disease and Injury Prevention, PHO  
Julie Mathien, Director, Early Learning and Child Development, MCYS  
Hon Deborah Matthews, Minister of Health, MHLTC  
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Melody Roberts, Manager, Health Promotion Capacity Building, PHO  
Lee Rysdale, Northern Ontario School of Medicine  
Linda Stewart, Executive Director, Association of Local Public Health Agencies (alPHA)  
Dr. Penny Sutcliffe, Chair, Council of Medical Officers of Health (COMOH)  
Stacey Weber, Manager of Early Years Program, MCYS  
Leslie Whittington-Carter, Ontario Government Relations Coordinator, Dietitians of Canada  
Dr. Robin Williams, Chief Medical Officer of Health

## Appendix A – Costs associated with NutriSTEP®

### **Current Licensing Fees**

A license is required for each NutriSTEP® screening tool (i.e. Preschooler and Toddler) to allow a health unit to print copies of the screening questionnaire. No license is required for printing of the educational resources (How to Build a Healthy Toddler and How to Build a Healthy Preschooler).

<b>Quantity to be Printed</b>	<b>Cost</b>
Up to 1000	\$150
1001-5000	\$500
5001-10,000	\$800

### **Printing Costs**

Preschooler NutriSTEP® and the accompanying educational resource (How to Build a Healthy Preschooler) are available free of charge from Service Ontario. This is not the case for Toddler NutriSTEP®. The remaining quantity of Preschooler NutriSTEP® and How to Build a Healthy Preschooler are estimated to last 1-3 years. Once supply has been exhausted, printing costs would be the same as for the Toddler resources outlined below. Printing costs are reduced substantially as quantities are increased.

#### **Toddler NutriSTEP® questionnaire**

\$.21 - \$.58 per copy depending on the printing company and the number of copies printed

#### **Educational Resource - How to Build a Healthy Toddler**

\$.25 - \$.72 per copy depending on the printing company and the number of copies printed

#### **Set of materials (i.e. screening questionnaire and educational resource)**

\$.46 - \$1.30 per care giver for printing

## Appendix B – Organizations Supportive of NutriSTEP®

- Public health units/departments across Ontario
- Dietitians of Canada - actively endorses and promotes NutriSTEP®
- Ontario College of Family Physicians - promotes NutriSTEP® in their child nutrition workshops
- Best Start Resource Centre funded by the Government of Ontario - includes information about NutriSTEP® in their resources and web site
- The Ontario Agency for Health Protection and Promotion - provided letters of support for an E-screen grant proposal
- Hospital for Sick Children - has included NutriSTEP® in their TargetKids five-year study led by primary health care physicians
- Ontario Association of Epidemiologists in Ontario (APHEO) - wrote letter to MCYS to encourage serious consideration to add NutriSTEP® to the suite of tools available in the ISCIS reporting environment
- Alberta Health Services - piloted NutriSTEP® implementation in an urban and rural Community Health Centre in conjunction with preschool immunization
- New Brunswick Public Health – uses NutriSTEP® in preschool screening clinics for 3 ½ year olds under its Early Childhood Initiatives program
- Other provincial and international organizations including those in British Columbia and the United States implement NutriSTEP®
- Dairy Farmers of Canada - developed tools and training for Early Childhood Educators that integrate information about NutriSTEP®

## Appendix C – Alignment of NutriSTEP® with Provincial Initiatives

NutriSTEP® is a natural fit with several provincial initiatives:

### Reduction of Childhood obesity

- **Curbing Childhood Obesity: A Federal, Provincial and Territorial Framework for Action to Promote Healthy Weights** ([www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/framework-cadre/pdf/ccofw-eng.pdf](http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/hp-ps/hl-mvs/framework-cadre/pdf/ccofw-eng.pdf)), and the McGuinty government's **Action Plan for Health Care** ([http://health.gov.on.ca/en/ms/ecfa/healthy\\_change/docs/rep\\_healthychange](http://health.gov.on.ca/en/ms/ecfa/healthy_change/docs/rep_healthychange)) goal to reduce childhood obesity by 20 per cent over five years and **Healthy Kid's Panel** ([www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/obesity/default.aspx](http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/public/programs/obesity/default.aspx)). Although it is recognized that the causes of obesity are complex and cannot be fixed by simplistic solutions, NutriSTEP® can be used as an important step in reducing childhood overweight and obesity in Ontario. Having NutriSTEP® surveillance data built into the province's child health surveillance system, such as within ISCIS, would allow local health units/departments to target specific behaviour factors related to childhood obesity in the early years. It is very timely to advance NutriSTEP® on the childhood obesity agenda for the province as a cost-effective prevention and promotion strategy in healthy child development.

### Early Years Policy Framework

- **With Our Best Futures in Mind** ([www.aecce.ca/files/user\\_files/Full\\_Day\\_Report.pdf](http://www.aecce.ca/files/user_files/Full_Day_Report.pdf)), Ontario's Early Years Policy Framework Report to the Premier by Charles E. Pascal, includes nutrition, nutrition counseling, early intervention and intervention resources, parent and family support programs in Best Start Child and Family Resource Centres. The Toddler NutriSTEP® and Preschooler NutriSTEP® are a natural fit with the *Enhanced 18-Month Well Baby Visit*. While nutrition is recognized as a key factor in preconception, prenatal and early child development, it has yet to receive the recognition and/or funding that is seen throughout the early years arena in this province. MOH and/or MCYS and MEDU invest in physician billing for 18 month screens, HBHC home visits with nurses, preschool speech and language, one-one assessments, vision, hearing and dental screening, ECEs in the classroom, yet parent administered toddler and preschool nutrition screens which are valid and reliable with evaluations indicating changes in parent nutrition knowledge and behaviour receive no funds in this province. Other provinces view nutrition differently and the uptake of early years nutrition screening is universal.

### High-quality, early learning and child care system

- The proposed action plan outlined in the Ministry of Education Discussion Paper, **Modernizing Child Care in Ontario** ([www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/Modernizing\\_Child\\_Care.pdf](http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/childcare/Modernizing_Child_Care.pdf)), identifies quality child care programs as a key area of action over the next three years. The government will be developing mandatory provincial program guidelines that could emphasize the importance of physical activity and health and wellness and develop tools, resources and training for child care operators. NutriSTEP® would fit well with these plans as child care providers could complete NutriSTEP® questionnaires with parents to identify toddlers and preschoolers at nutritional risk and refer to community services as appropriate.