



Ontario Society of Nutrition
Professionals in Public Health

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

www.osnp-ph.on.ca

February 14, 2013

The Right Hon. Stephen J. Harper, P.C., M.P.
Prime Minister of Canada
Langevin Building
80 Wellington Street
Ottawa, ON K1A 0A6

**RE: Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health endorsement of Bill C-460,
The Sodium Reduction Strategy for Canada Act**

Dear Prime Minister Harper:

The Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH) is writing to urge the Government of Canada to demonstrate its leadership by implementing a robust and significant strategy to reduce the amount of sodium consumed by Canadians. Bill C-460, The Sodium Reduction Strategy for Canada Act, should be enacted to propel this forward.

OSNPPH is the independent and official voice of Registered Dietitians in public health in Ontario. OSNPPH provides leadership in public health nutrition, promoting and supporting member collaboration to improve the health of the residents of Ontario, consistent with the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care's *Ontario Public Health Standards*.

Commitment to a comprehensive sodium reduction plan would demonstrate the important role the federal government can, and should, play in leading progress in achieving sodium intake targets. We were pleased with the implementation of the Health Canada's Sodium Working Group and its succinct recommendations in the Sodium Reduction Strategy for Canada. However, the disbanding of this Working Group in 2011 raised our concerns about the government's commitment to the targets outlined in the strategy. Federal government commitment to a comprehensive sodium reduction plan provides an opportunity to implement the important role your government can, and should be, playing in informing Canadians of the progress in achieving our nation's sodium intake targets.

The average Canadian consumption of sodium is 3,400 mg/day, well above the recommended level of 1,500 mg/day. High sodium levels in food result primarily when added during food processing and contribute to chronic disease including hypertension, heart disease, stroke, and kidney failure. Furthermore, high sodium levels in food are a major contributor to premature death, disability, and health care costs in Canada (Sodium Working Group, 2010). Bill C-460 cites the World Health Organization in identifying that government-led efforts to reduce sodium levels in foods may be the most cost effective way to prevent disease, rivaling even tobacco control.



OSNPPH commends multiple aspects of Bill C-460:

- Alerts to the dangers that average Canadian sodium intakes are double the levels that would help to prevent cardiovascular and other serious diseases;
- Emphasis on the fact that about three-quarters of sodium is added to the food supply by the food industry, in contrast to the relatively small amounts that are naturally-occurring in foods or added by consumers themselves;
- Prioritization of a population-level approach through addressing levels of sodium in the food supply, to achieve a one-third reduction in average intakes to 2300mg daily (for adults);
- Requirement for food companies to reduce sodium to safe levels, with notification to consumers of non-compliance through health warnings on the product label;
- Protection of children from the marketing of unhealthy foods, including for high-sodium levels;
- Amendments to the *Food and Drug Regulations* to improve information for consumers, including for *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide* and food labels, particularly regarding standardization and meaningfulness of sodium information on nutrition facts tables;
- Monitoring of and public report on food industry progress toward levels of sodium in the food supply, including establishment of sodium levels based on the June 2012 Health Canada guidance document, and annual reporting to the Minister by the Chief Public Health Officer;
- Establishment of an independent Sodium Reduction Advisory Committee; and,
- Addressing of high sodium levels on standardized menus in large chain restaurants.

In addition to the above commendable aspects in Bill C-460, OSNPPH urges consideration of the following:

- It is imperative to require sodium reduction to healthy levels in foods across all categories and available from all sources, including retail, institutional, and food service. This will help to re-normalize low-sodium levels in food products for everyone, including those who are sensitive to premium prices charged for foods with reduced sodium levels, and those who must rely on processed foods (such as from charity food services). It will also help to “level the playing field” to reduce possible greater impacts of the sodium reduction strategy on smaller food companies.
- The sodium reduction strategy must include provision that if voluntary targets are not met through strategic means, regulatory measures will be enacted to bring sodium in the food supply to healthy levels.
- While address of high sodium levels in the food supply is very important, sodium is only one nutrient of public health concern. A comprehensive Food and Nutrition Strategy for Canada is needed to maximize health outcomes for all Canadians.



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As the voice of Registered Dietitians working in public health in Ontario, we strongly advocate to the Government of Canada to express leadership and commitment to promoting health of Canadians by implementing compelling and significant measures to reduce sodium content in foods to acceptable levels. Achieving this goal will ensure health promotion and disease prevention and will demonstrate clearly that the Government of Canada is mindful and concerned about Canadians' health and well-being.

Sincerely,

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CC. The Honourable Leona Aglukkaq, P.C., M.P., Minister of Health
Dr. David Butler-Jones, Chief Public Health Officer, PHAC
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Linda Dietrich, Regional Executive Director, Central and Southern Ontario
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Lynn Roblin, Chair, Ontario Collaborative Group on Healthy Eating and Physical
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Linda Stewart, Executive Director, Association of Local Public Health Agencies
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Siu Mee Cheng, Executive Director, Ontario Public Health Association
Dr. Penny Sutcliffe, Chair, Council of Medical Officers of Health
Bill Jeffrey, Centre for Science in the Public Interest, Canada

References:

Sodium Working Group. (2010). Sodium Reduction Strategy for Canada. Retrieved from <http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/fn-an/nutrition/sodium/related-info-conneze/strateg/reduct-strat-eng.php>



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