

ODPH submission to Ontario Healthy Parks Healthy People consultation survey Nov 22 2019

Response led by HERS workgroup - Tracy McDonough, Claire Bilik with input from

-Body Diversity and Healthy Equity WG

-School Nutrition WG

-Family Health Nutrition Advisory Group

-Food Systems WG

-Food Literacy WG

## Survey: Healthy Parks Healthy People

Share your feedback on how we can improve access to and raise awareness of nature's health benefits. We want to hear from health care providers, environmental organizations, educators, the tourism industry and people who visit our provincial parks about their awareness of the relationship between nature and human health. Your feedback will be used to help improve Ontario Parks' programs, policies and partnerships.

**Closing date: November 25, 2019.**

This survey should take around 10 minutes to complete.

[Before starting this survey, learn more about the link between nature and human health.](#)

### Section 1: Tell us about yourself

Which of the following statements best describes you?

- ☐ member of the general public
- ☐ researcher
- ☐ representative of a park or environmental organization
- ☐ health care provider (for example, doctor, nurse)

X public health stakeholder (for example, public health unit, non-government organization, non-profit health organization)

- ☐ representative from the education sector
- ☐ representative from the tourism sector
- ☐ other/I am not represented on this list

#### Public health stakeholder

We're interested in your ideas on how to better promote the relationship between nature and human health. All questions are optional.

**1. Prior to today, how aware were you of the link between human health and nature?**

- ☐ Very aware

- ☒ Somewhat aware
- ☐ Somewhat unaware
- ☐ Not at all aware
- ☐ Don't know

**2. Are you or your organization currently promoting nature as good for human health?**

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

☒ I'm not sure

**3. How do you know if what you are doing to promote nature and health is successful?**

The Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH) are the independent and official voice of Registered Dietitians working in local public health units. ODPH provides leadership in public health nutrition by promoting and supporting member collaboration to improve the health of Ontario residents through the implementation of the Ontario Public Health Standards.

Dietitians in public health work to improve food environments, build food literacy, improve public understanding about healthy eating, and drive changes that help make it easier for Ontarians to adopt healthy eating behaviours. We accomplish this through partnership-building, collaboration, and capacity-building with stakeholders from various fields and sectors.

While we do not currently have action plans purposefully directed towards promoting nature and health, there are many connections between our work and time in nature (e.g., physical food environments, community gardens, farm visits, food literacy, etc.)

Some measures of success related to this area would be:

- Inclusion of healthy eating criteria and locally-produce foods within food service and vending contracts in park facilities, to increase the availability of healthy, local food and beverage options;
- Food marketing (including product availability, pricing, placement, promotion) that favours healthier foods and beverages;
- Availability of locally-sourced foods;
- Access to free municipal drinking water, where possible;
- Access to community gardens to spend time in nature growing food (associated with improved mental health, increased physical activity, increased social connectedness).

- Opportunities for children to visit farms or interactive exhibits highlighting forest and freshwater foods to learn about where our food comes from and build food literacy and an appreciation for the importance of preserving nature;
- Public amenities to facilitate outdoor food preparation and community gatherings

#### **4. What are the barriers to using nature in health promotion and advocacy?**

Physical environments—where we live, work and play —are an important determinant of health (1). The food environment, more specifically, has a significant influence on individuals' dietary choices and food and beverage intake (2,3).

Although spending time in nature may promote good health and wellbeing, it is unknown if food environments in provincial parks, specifically, also support good health. Recreation settings, such as parks, are important food environments to positively influence the health of people of all ages. However, Canadian research confirms that the majority of foods and beverages served in recreation settings are of low nutritional value. Food environments in parks should reinforce positive messages about getting outside in nature to support health and should further support the healthy eating efforts of visitors who spend time in the natural environment.

Applied to parks, the food environment can consist of:

- retail outlets such as cafeterias, cafes, canteens, park food stores, kiosks (including mobile food kiosks), restaurants and coffee carts
- catering provided for meetings, functions and events (such as community events, launches, celebrations and ceremonies)
- vending machines
- fundraising, prizes and give-aways
- food and drink advertising, promotion and display
- sponsorship by industry
- infrastructure to support healthy eating (e.g, picnic tables, garbage and recycling receptacles, safe drinking water, cooking amenities)
- supportive environments for breastfeeding
- supporting local food suppliers and products
- contracts, leases and tenders
- healthy eating information and education.

The expert research group, INFORMAS (International Network for Food and Obesity / Non-communicable Diseases Research, Monitoring and Action Support), confirmed in a 2017 report that Ontario would benefit from improved food environments, specifically by implementing nutrition standards and procurement policies for public sector settings (4).

In Canada's Dietary Guidelines, Health Canada states that, "to create supportive environments for healthy eating, publicly funded institutions should offer healthier options, limit the availability of highly processed foods and beverages, such as sugary drinks and confectioneries, and limit the promotion of highly processed products" (5).

Food pricing has also been shown to influence food purchasing decisions. Consideration needs to be given to approaches, such as provincial-level food pricing

policies (e.g. taxes and subsidies), that will increase equitable access to healthy foods within the park environments (4).

When increasing the availability and accessibility of healthy foods in our natural environments, we are also working towards changing current socio-cultural influences and eating practices. Eventually, having healthy, accessible food in our natural environments will become a social norm and expectation.

Another barrier to promoting nature in health promotion is that many people do not live sufficiently close to nature/community gardens to participate actively and access the benefits. Most people need to live closer than 50km to engage with nature regularly.

## **References:**

1. Public Health Agency of Canada. What makes Canadians Healthy or Unhealthy? [Internet]. Ottawa (ON): Public Health Agency of Canada; [updated 2013 Jan 15; cited 2019 Oct 15]. Available at: <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/ph-sp/determinants/determinants-eng.php#physenviron>.
2. Glanz K, Sallis J, Saelens B, Frank L. Healthy nutrition environments: concepts and measures. *Am J Health Promot*. 2005 May/Jun; 19(5): 330-333.
3. French SA, Story M, Jeffery RW. Environmental influences on eating and physical activity. *Annu. Rev. Publ. Health* 2001; 22:309-335.
4. Vanderlee L, Goorang S, Karbasy K, Schermel A, L'Abbe M. Creating healthier food environments in Canada: Current policies and priority actions – Ontario report. Toronto; University of Toronto, 2017. Available at: [www.labbelab.utoronto.ca/Food-EPI-Canada-2017](http://www.labbelab.utoronto.ca/Food-EPI-Canada-2017).
5. Health Canada. Canada's dietary guidelines for health professionals and policy makers. Section 2: foods and beverages that undermine healthy eating. Ottawa: Minister of Health, 2019. Available at: <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/guidelines/section-2-foods-and-beverages-that-undermine-healthy-eating/>.

## **5. What tools or resources would make it easier for you to promote nature as good for human health?**

- Documented assessment of food environments in provincial parks demonstrating that the food environments promote health, and if not, a written plan of action to get there.
- Creation and promotion of interactive and engaging opportunities for visitors to provincial parks to learn about our food system, gain awareness about food and healthy eating, and build food literacy. A nice example is the Children's Farm with live farm animals at Bronte Creek Provincial Park; this program could be nicely complemented by food system education and healthy eating messages.

**6. Are there opportunities to incorporate nature into the work you do?**

☒ Yes

☐ No

**7. Who do you believe are the key partners required to make health and nature programs successful?**

- Ontario Dietitians in Public Health - this network can connect you with local RDs to support food systems work e.g. connecting Parks stakeholders with members of Food Policy Councils/Networks
- Ontario Public Health Association

**8. What could parks organizations, such as Ontario Parks, do to position nature as a tool for improving human health?**

Nutrition standards and procurement policies can, if designed appropriately, improve the food environment in provincial parks by increasing healthy, local, less processed foods, and decreasing less healthy and more highly processed foods. In turn, foods and beverages offered in parks may fit into a sustainable eating pattern with lower environmental impacts (1). Procurement of sustainably produced or harvested foods not only supports human health it can also support the health of the planet (2). This will help to maintain the natural environment of provincial parks while promoting positive health and well-being for the public.

To determine where positive changes could be made, consult with a Registered Dietitian at a local public health unit.

Resources to support this work include:

- 1) [\*Getting Started with Healthy Eating in Your Recreation Setting\*](#). From the Nutrition Resource Centre at the Ontario Public Health Association, and the Ontario Society for Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (now ODPH)
- 2) [\*Healthy choices: policy guidelines for parks\*](#). From the Victorian Government (Australia).
- 3) Local Sustainable Food Procurement Toolkit for Municipalities and the Broader Public Sector:  
[https://sustainontario.com/greenhouse/custom/uploads/2016/09/Toolkit\\_Final25-11.pdf](https://sustainontario.com/greenhouse/custom/uploads/2016/09/Toolkit_Final25-11.pdf)
- 4) Beyond the Fields: The Value of Forest and Freshwater Foods in Northern Ontario. [https://ontarionature.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/beyond\\_the\\_fields.pdf](https://ontarionature.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/beyond_the_fields.pdf)

Overall, some possible positive changes to the food environment include:

- Making drinking water easily available and free of charge
- Making sure healthy foods are available and widely promoted
- Reducing the amount of highly processed foods or sugary drinks offered
- Remove signage that promotes less healthy food or drinks (e.g. vending machine ads, signage)
- Provide opportunities to learn more about the food system through initiatives such as community gardens and interactive learning centres that provide information on the importance of forest and freshwater foods.

In addition, parks organizations could explore ways they could support visitors to build food literacy and gain knowledge about healthy, sustainable eating patterns. An example of this is the Children's Farm at Bronte Creek Provincial Park, which could be expanded to include more elements of the food system to build food literacy. Other opportunities to create similar exhibits, events etc. that align with the history and geography of the park could be explored.

## References:

1. Health Canada. Canada's dietary guidelines for health professionals and policy makers. Section 1: foundation for healthy eating. Ottawa: Minister of Health, 2019. Available at: <https://food-guide.canada.ca/en/guidelines/section-1-foundation-for-healthy-eating/> .
2. Willet, W., Rockstrom, J., Loken, B., Springmann, M., Lang, T., Vermeulen, S., Garnett, T. et al. (2019). Food in the Anthropocene: the EAT-Lancet commission on healthy diets from sustainable food system. The Lancet Commissions. 393:447-92. Retrieved from <https://www.thelancet.com/action/showPdf?pii=S0140-6736%2818%2931788-4>

## 9. What could Ontario Parks do to work with you and other health advocacy groups to promote the link between health and nature?

Work with Ontario Dietitians in Public Health to:

- 1) Ensure the food environment (vending machines, canteens, food-related marketing) supports healthy and sustainable eating patterns. This may require making or changing food procurement policies, or making changes to food service contracts when appropriate.
- 2) Develop interactive and engaging opportunities for visitors to provincial parks to learn about our food system, gain awareness about food and healthy eating, and build food literacy.
- 3) Develop evidence-based health messaging that is consistent with the ODPH "[Health and Wellbeing Philosophy and Approach to Weight \(Position Statement\)](#)" which would require reframing current messaging related to weight and obesity,

in an effort to reduce weight-related stigma and focus on health-promoting behaviours.

**10. Are you interested in engaging further with Ontario Parks on Healthy Parks Healthy People?**

☒ Yes

☐ No

**11. Do you have any other comments you would like to share with Ontario Parks about our Healthy Parks Healthy People program?**

## Your privacy matters

Your personal information is being collected in order to help us better to support the relationship between nature and human health. Your responses will be reviewed by the Ministry of the Environment, Conservation and Parks. Your feedback may also be used in a summary report about this survey.

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Anne Craig, Senior Marketing Specialist  
300 Water St. Peterborough, Ontario, K9J 3C7  
705-750-8055  
[anne.craig@ontario.ca](mailto:anne.craig@ontario.ca)