

January 30, 2023

Mr. Paul Henry
Council of Ontario Directors of Education, Chair
c/o Laura Elliott, Executive Director
laura@ontariodirectors.ca

Dr. Eileen de Villa
Council of Ontario Medical Officers of Health, Chair
eileen.devilla@toronto.ca

Re: Follow up - Priority and Proactive Steps to Ensure Universal Access to Student Nutrition Programs

Dear Chairs of CODE and COMO

Ontario Dietitians in Public Health (ODPH) would like to take the opportunity to recognize and congratulate CODE-COMOH on its advocacy and progress in supporting and sustaining Student Nutrition Programs (SNP) in our province. The [correspondence](#) with the Premier on January 28, 2021 outlined CODE-COMOH's support of the priority and proactive steps identified as key to ensuring universal access to SNPs. Research tells us that when properly fed, a child can thrive and thus achieve greater developmental, social, and academic success.

The recommendations made through the CODE-COMOH partnership serve to strengthen provincial SNP. While there has been progress including enabling language in Return to School Plans (2021, 2022) and the posting of the Student Nutrition Program – Nutrition Guidelines (2020 version) on the Ministry of Child, Community and Social Services website, four of the six recommendations have not yet been addressed. They include:

1. *Ministry of Health to support a unified approach, by creating a free, online SNP specific Food Handler Training and Certification for SNP volunteers across the province.*
2. *Adequate funding for SNPs from both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services to enable local school programs to have the benefit of paid coordinators and sufficient funds to purchase food.*

3. *Ministry of Education to include specific infrastructure criteria for capital funding that support a healthy school food environment (e.g. adequate kitchen and storage space and equipment including a designated handwashing sink, additional sink(s) for food preparation, refrigerator(s), freezer(s) and dishwasher); bright, non stigmatizing eating area; and external building features such as transportation access for food deliveries and outdoor lighting to facilitate after hours food preparation).*
4. *Government of Ontario to be a willing partner in a National School Food Program to secure the policy and funding instruments to grow SNP in our province.*

Safe food handler certification continues to be an issue for volunteers in schools, with health units approaching requirements differently, and the financial and logistical burden training places on volunteers. A number of [fee-for-service Food Handler Certification programs](#) (some virtual) are approved by the Ministry of Health. While these address logistical barriers and show that virtual training is possible, the cost is prohibitive. Toronto Public Health has created a free, online, SNP-specific food safety training resource. We would like to encourage CODE-COMOH to continue to ask the Ministry of Health (MOH) to collaborate with the Ministry of Children, Community and Social Services (MCCSS) to develop a similar online Food Handler Certification program specifically for Student Nutrition Program coordinators and volunteers in the province.

Adequate funding is also a challenging issue for SNPs. Food costs have increased significantly over the past year and many programs report that they are likely to run out of funding before the end of this school year. Now is the time for additional funding for SNPs so that they can continue to provide nourishing meals and snacks to children and youth until the end of the school year in June. We recommend that CODE-COMOH continue to ask the Government of Ontario to increase their investment in SNPs and support the health and achievement for all our young learners.

ODPH is the independent and official voice of Registered Dietitians working in Ontario's public health system. As members of the College of Dietitians of Ontario, ODPH's Registered Dietitians are credible food and nutrition experts, and are also uniquely educated to promote healthy eating at the population-level. ODPH is also a member of the national and provincial [Coalition for Healthy School Food](#), and supports their [guiding principles](#).

We appreciate your commitment to SNPs in Ontario and look forward to working with you, as well as our active community partners, to address these recommendations for SNPs.

Sincerely,



Elizabeth Smith, RD
Co-Chair School Nutrition Workgroup



Luisa Magalhaes, RD
Co-Chair School Nutrition Workgroup

cc:

Dr. Kieran Moore, Chief Medical Officer of Health, Ontario Ministry of Health
Loretta Ryan, Executive Director, Association of Local Public Health Agencies (aLPHa)