

Office of Nutrition Policy and Promotion
Laboratory Centre for Disease Control (LCDC) Building # 6
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Re: History of Canada's Food Guide from 1942-2007

History of Canada's Food Guide - 1942-2007. Health Canada. (2007, February 5). Retrieved March 3, 2023, from <https://www.canada.ca/en/health-canada/services/canada-food-guide/about/history-food-guide.html>

[Ontario Dietitians in Public Health](#) (ODPH) is the independent and official voice of Registered Dietitians working in Ontario's Public Health System. Members advocate for system approaches that do no harm while promoting health equity across all populations based on the Social, Ecological, and Commercial Determinants of Health. We work collaboratively to support and strengthen food literacy and food sovereignty and we recognize the political and social implications related to these topics. Food sovereignty is fundamental as it connects people to land, culture, language, identity, and well-being. One of the guiding principles of ODPH focuses on Indigenous engagement. ODPH has a collective role to play in learning, understanding, and redressing the ongoing colonialism and standing in allyship with Indigenous peoples. We acknowledge that to develop meaningful relationships we need to understand the impact colonization and dispossession has and continues to have on Indigenous peoples and ourselves.

After consultation with Indigenous Knowledge Keepers and review of literature to learn about residential school survivors' stories, we have gained perspective with respect to their lived experience. We are not speaking for our partners; we are learning from them and reflecting on our practice and the resources we use as a result. ODPH would like to bring forward concerns we have with how the history of Canada's Food Guide currently is represented on the Health Canada [website](#).

The [website](#) states, "Little is recorded about the process used to develop the earliest food guides for Canada;" (retrieved March 2023) however, there are documented research studies, reports, and stories of lived experience regarding some of the egregious practices that were used to develop this national resource. These include starvation experiments at residential schools ([Mosby, 2013](#)) and purposeful withholding of nutrients for human deficiency experimentation ([Mosby & Galloway, 2017](#)). This disturbing history has been called out recently in an interim report by the Independent Special Interlocutor ([Sacred Responsibility: Searching for the Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, 2023](#)) which includes 26 Calls for Truth and Justice from the Tseshah First Nation. Call 19 on page 131 urges: "Revisit the medical and nutritional experiments done on the children of AIRS [Alberni Indian Residential School] and across Canada, as uncovered by researcher Dr. Ian Mosby. Fully fund research, investigation/inquiry and other work as required to bring justice to this issue which has completely fallen off the government's radar." As a result of this human maltreatment, the food guide, food access, and food itself have been, and continue to

be, weaponized against Indigenous Peoples. In addition to the long-term impacts of malnutrition Indigenous Peoples endured, they also were robbed of their connection to their land, culture, and language.

This serious omission is an example of how structural racism is upheld by establishing and maintaining a narrative that is a false historical account of the injustices the government perpetuated against Indigenous Peoples. Many dietitians, in the spirit of reconciliation as set out in the 94 Calls to Action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (2015), are unlearning the colonial telling of the history of Indigenous Peoples, especially as it relates to food sovereignty, health, and well being.

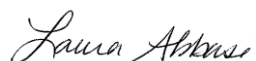
The third principle of reconciliation states that it "is a process of healing of relationships that requires public truth sharing" (What We've Learned, [TRC](#)). Until this truth telling occurs, the food guide section of Health Canada's [website](#) will continue to perpetuate the colonial narrative, uphold and reinforce colonialism, and in turn, cause ongoing harm to Indigenous Peoples. Canadians need to know this historical truth to deepen their understanding of why extreme health inequities exist today between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples, and why Indigenous Peoples are faced with increased rates of food insecurity, racism, and poor health outcomes due to colonization.

Health Canada is a leader in the provision of accurate and reliable information to all Canadians. As such, Health Canada needs to provide an accurate history of the food guide on the website and commit to meaningfully engaging in truth and reconciliation efforts. We know there still is much to learn, but this appalling history must be recognized appropriately before we can move forward together.

Health Canada also needs to demonstrate how they have joined other health professionals on this learning and unlearning journey. There are many resources to provide a more accurate and reconciliation-focused historical account of Canada's Food Guide (e.g., [Up Ghost River](#), [Clearing the Plains](#), [Nourish](#), [Food Is Our Medicine course](#), [Indigenous Nutrition Knowledge Information Network from Dietitians of Canada](#), [The Survivors Speak](#), [scientific articles from Dr. Ian Mosby](#)). We encourage Health Canada leadership and staff to engage in this important process and reflect their learnings in accurate information provided on government websites.

As more health professionals continue to learn about Canada's true history, we expect Health Canada will receive more correspondence. We are eager to hear from Health Canada and the actions planned to address this historical omission in the spirit of reconciliation, decolonization, and well-being for all Canadians.

With respect,



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With contributions from Deyowidron't Teri Morrow, RD Cayuga Nation and Joseph LeBlanc, PhD, Indigenous Knowledge Keepers.