



October 6, 2011

Judith Wright  
Deputy Minister of Health Promotion and Sport  
College Park  
18<sup>th</sup> Floor, 777 Bay St.  
Toronto, ON M7A 1S5

Re: Nutrition Resource Centre programs and services are essential supports

Dear Ms. Wright,

The Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH) is the independent and official voice of Registered Dietitians in public health in Ontario. We are writing to encourage the Ministry of Health Promotion and Sport (MHPS) to continue support of the Nutrition Resource Centre (NRC), and to request that OSNPPH be invited to provide input into NRC's strategic planning process.

The NRC has excelled in providing valuable programs and services that are essential for promoting comprehensive healthy eating. Nutrition professionals and their colleagues in health units across Ontario rely on the quality work and support offered by the NRC. Highlights of the many benefits include:

- **Unified, Credible Source.** The NRC contributes vitally to consistency, credibility, and quality in messaging, materials, and programming, which results in enhanced quality assurance, standardization, coordination, sustainability and evaluation. Prior to the existence of NRC, individual health units developed their own programs, educational materials, and services – often “reinventing the wheel”.
- **Increases Local Capacity.** Because of NRC, health units are able to direct more time and expertise to local programming, innovation, knowledge exchange, and policy development. NRC's support to health units increases the capacity of health units to support child care facilities, schools, workplaces, recreation centres, and other community partners.
- **Support to Meet the OPHS.** The NRC has provided streamlined and coordinated assistance for public health programming across the province to meet the Ontario Public Health Standards (OPHS). In 2010, the NRC's<sup>1</sup> mapping document demonstrated how the current NRC programs, services, and resources assist health units in meeting many of the Ontario Public Health Standards. Some significant examples include:
  - the Eat Smart! School program and other tools<sup>2</sup> that support implementation of the Ministry of Education's School Food and Beverage Policy;
  - scientific evidence base for the Colour It Up! program, which was also pilot-tested and evaluated;



- service to priority populations built into the Community Food Advisor (CFA) program, and the quality food literacy services these volunteers are trained to provide in their communities;
- implementation support to the valid and reliable NutriSTEP™ tool<sup>3,4</sup>; and evaluation of the Eat Smart! Workplace and Recreation programs<sup>5</sup>.

OSNPPH understands the need for change. However, if the NRC's hiatus is extended or permanent there will be negative consequences to public health and community nutrition. Already there have been repercussions for example, the Community Food Advisor (CFA) annual conference cancellation. CFAs are trained volunteers. Diminishing their recognition and development opportunities increases the risk of attrition which critically undermines local programs. The CFAs increase health units' capacity to meet public demands. The loss of CFAs will lead to unmet local need. When public health nutrition programs are unable to address this need, we see an increase in services being offered by unqualified persons.

If NRC services were to be substantially altered or discontinued, health units will be required to return to devoting much of their local resources to development and coordination of programs and materials. Negative consequences would include the potential collapse of local programs and services due to insufficient resources and supports, decrease in environmental influence, reduced ability to support community partners, and diminished capacity for programming quality and standardization, innovation, knowledge exchange and policy development.

OSNPPH looks forward to being involved in the strategic planning process to determine how NRC can continue to provide the quality programming and invaluable support that enables health units to better meet their mandated requirements as well as to respond effectively and efficiently to local needs. Please contact us to discuss this further.

Sincerely,

Shannon Edmonstone, MAN, RD  
Co-Chair

Amy MacDonald, MScFN, RD  
Co-Chair

cc: Steve Harlow, Assistant Deputy Minister – Sport, Public Health and Community  
cc: Laura Pisko-Bezruchko, Director – Standards, Programs and Community Development  
cc: Laura Belfie, Manager – Public Health Units and Standards  
cc: Amy Gartner, Program Coordinator  
cc: Victoria Tobin, Program Coordinator  
cc: Cindy Scythes, Program Manager, NRC  
cc: Siu Mee Cheng, Executive Director, OPHA  
cc: Linda Stewart, Executive Director, alPHA



## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Nutrition Resource Centre Programs Mapped to the Ontario Public Health Standards (2010)

[http://www.nutritionrc.ca/programs/pdfs/nrc-mapped-ophs\\_23FE10.pdf](http://www.nutritionrc.ca/programs/pdfs/nrc-mapped-ophs_23FE10.pdf)

<sup>2</sup>Nutrition Resource Centre Handout Materials -Bake it up!, At a Glance Guide to School Food and Beverage Policy, Busy Bodies, Eat Right Be Active, Feeding Your Baby etc. <http://www.nutritionrc.ca/resources/nrc-english.html>

<sup>3</sup>Randall Simpson, J.A., Keller, H.H., Rysdale, L.A. and Beyers, J.E. (2008). Nutrition Screening Tool for Every Preschooler: validation and re-test reliability of a parent-administered questionnaire assessing nutrition risk of preschoolers. *European Journal of Clinical Nutrition*, 62:770-780.

<sup>4</sup>Rysdale LA, Witchell EC, Keller HH, Randall Simpson JA, Turfryer MC, McGibbon KA, Beyers JE. Parent perceptions of NutriSTEP and nutrition risk screening in a sample of Ontario preschool children. *Infant Child and Adolescent Nutrition* (2011 Aug), 3(4):197-204. Abstract: <http://can.sagepub.com/content/3/4/197>

<sup>5</sup>Eat Smart! Recreation Program Evaluation <http://www.eatsmartontario.ca/node/52070>