

Recommendations on *Modernizing Child Care in Ontario* from the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health

Introduction

The Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH) is a constituent society of the Ontario Public Health Association and is the official voice of public health nutrition professionals in Ontario. OSNPPH represents registered dietitians working in the 36 public health units in Ontario, who together advance optimal nutrition for the health of all Ontarians.

Child care settings, including full day kindergarten programs and before- and after-school programs, are important contributors to children's nutrient intake and development of eating habits.^{1,2} Strategies for prevention of childhood overweight and obesity beginning in the early years may be effective.³ The Day Nurseries Act provides an opportunity to mandate nutrition standards that will support healthy childhood growth and development, as well as provide guidance on eating environments and food skills to lay the foundation for lifelong healthy eating habits. These recommendations will include guidelines around menu planning and food preparation, education of child care providers and those who prepare the food, and modeling of eating behaviours. In areas where child care is integrated into school settings, it will be important to align requirements while meeting the unique needs of younger children.

Main Recommendation

OSNPPH's priority with regard to commenting on *Modernizing Child Care in Ontario* is to update the Day Nurseries Act and to incorporate further guidance on nutrition. The current Nutrition Section of the Day Nurseries Act is based on the 1977 version of Canada's Food Guide and thus is substantially out of date. Children in child care must be provided with a variety of healthy, safe nutritious foods that are consistent with the current Canada's Food Guide. We recommend that separate nutrition guidelines be developed outside the legislation, similar to the Nutrition Guidelines for Student Nutrition Programs and PPM/150. This would allow the guidelines to be updated in a timely manner whenever the Canada's Food Guide is revised and/or as knowledge and best practice changes. For example, Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island have nutrition guidelines for child care centres which can be viewed at:

http://www.gov.ns.ca/coms/families/provider/documents/Manual-Food_and_Nutrition.pdf
and

http://www.gov.pe.ca/photos/original/eecd_healthyiv.pdf

Offer of Expertise

A group of OSNPPH members with expertise in child nutrition and who have provided training and nutrition support for local child care providers and centres are offering to support the MEDU in the development of the Day Nurseries Act nutrition standard and guidelines. Contact with this group can be made through Barb Bartle, Registered Dietitian, Brant County Health Unit at 519 753-4937 extension 349 or Mary Turfryer, Registered Dietitian, York Region Community and Health Services at mary.turfryer@york.ca 905-895-4512 extension 4338.

Specific Recommendations

- The nutrition standard should exceed the current regulation and reflect current knowledge of disease prevention and health promotion.
- The nutrition standard should reflect *Eating Well with Canada's Food Guide (2007)* and the directional statements in the food guide.
- The specific nutrition guidelines should be created in a living document to allow for changes as current nutrition knowledge and practice changes. The nutrition section in the current Day Nurseries Act is based on the 1977 edition of the Canada's Food Guide which outlined the minimum number of servings needed. The current food guide describes the amount and type of food people need to meet nutritional needs while reducing the risk of obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, some cancers and osteoporosis.

Discussion

It is important that all Canadian children are offered healthy foods to support growth and development while attending child care. The Canadian Community Health Survey, 2004 showed the diet of many Canadian children was low in fibre (fibre is found in whole grains, vegetables and fruit, and meat alternatives) and most young children have excessive sodium intakes at levels that increases risk of adverse health effects.⁵

Children attending child care (in centres or private homes) may be consuming two thirds or more of their total daily food intake while in care. It is our responsibility to ensure that the children in care are offered a diet rich in vegetables and fruit, whole grains and low in high-calorie, low-nutrient foods. Foods offered can play a role in developing life long food preferences and attitudes toward food.

Canadian children consume almost one quarter of their calories from foods categorized as "other foods". Other foods are not part of any food group included of Canada's Food Guide and are typically high in fat, added sugar and salt and low in nutrients. It is important that these types of food be restricted or prohibited from use in child care. Twenty-six percent of children aged 2 to 17 years in Canada are overweight or obese.⁶ Diets high in these "other foods" increase the risk of being obese or overweight.

Obesity prevention in children has been identified as a priority in the *Curbing Childhood Obesity: A Federal, Provincial and Territorial Framework for Action to Promote Healthy Weights*. Increasing the availability and accessibility of nutritious foods is one of the three key policy priorities. Ensuring healthy nutritious foods are available when our children are in child care must also be our priority. Children do not have control of the food that is served while in child care; we must be offering healthy choices for our children. The *Ontario Action Plan for Health Care (2012)* also recognizes the need to reduce childhood obesity. Since the success of treating obesity is dismal, prevention must be our priority. An updated nutrition standard can be part of the solution.

It is during the early years that care providers develop a feeding relationship with children that can be either positive or negative. The feeding relationship involves

interactions that take place between a caregiver and a child as they engage in selecting, eating and regulating the amount of food eaten. An appropriate feeding relationship helps the child develop positive attitudes about self and the world and helps the child to learn to discriminate feeding cues and respond appropriately.⁷ It is important that children learn to regulate the amount of food eaten from a young age. Although obesity prevention is complex, developing a positive feeding relationship early in life can reduce the risk of overweight and obesity.

Our recommendations are based on our nutrition expertise; therefore we have limited comments to relevant questions only.

1) Operating Funding Formula

- a. Funding for healthy snacks and meals.
- b. Funding to provide training on meal planning and healthy eating for child care staff/providers.
- c. Funding for a Registered Dietitian to develop provincial nutrition guidelines and supporting tools and to assist with implementation and evaluation.
- d. Funding to be based on the health status and indicators of the community.

2) Capital Funding Priorities

- a. Funding for kitchen retrofits to ensure proper space and equipment is available to prepare meals and snacks and for storage of food.

3) Quality Programs

- a. Update the nutrition standard
 - Nutrition standard of the Day Nurseries Act needs to be revised to reflect the recommendations of the current Canada's Food Guide.
 - Nutrition Guidelines should be developed to accompany the Nutrition standard. These should be outside of the Day Nurseries Act so they can be revised as nutrition knowledge and practice changes.
- b. Support staff training and professional development
 - Menu planning training module for child care cooks should be developed. The module could be available on line to allow child care cooks, in home child care providers and catering personnel an opportunity to participate in training when it is convenient for them. The training module should be created by a registered dietitian. For example, an on-line training program has been developed by the Dairy Farmers of Canada and can be viewed at <http://www.goodbeginnings.ca/>
 - Mandatory training focusing on the nutrition guidelines and menu planning for child care cooks. Training would need to be completed biannually.

- Mandatory nutrition training for all staff which would include healthy eating, culturally diverse foods, what is normal eating and growth for young children and the feeding relationship.
- c. Menus must be reviewed annually to ensure that the nutrition standard is met. The review should be completed by a registered dietitian or person trained by a registered dietitian.
- d. A bank of approved recipes be created and made available on-line for use in child care.
- e. Foods should be offered to the children which reflect cultural and religious appropriate choices.
- f. Appropriate substitutions must be available for children with food allergies and intolerances. This will be done in consultation with the child's parents/caregivers. If further information about food allergies and/or intolerances is required the staff should be encouraged to discuss with registered dietitians at local health units or at EatRight Ontario (www.eatrightontario.ca).
- g. Education for the children about healthy eating should be incorporated into curriculum using Canadian resources when available (e.g., grow a tomato plant or a small garden for children to experience food from field to table). Nutrition education will positively influence attitudes, skills and eating habits.
- h. Care providers should be present at mealtimes and eat meals with the children, role modelling healthy eating behaviours. Young children's eating habits can be positively influenced by people that are important in their lives.
- i. NutriSTEP^{®4} (www.NutriSTEP.ca), along with Nipissing District Developmental Screen tools, to be completed with parents/caregivers at a minimum annually and kept in child's record. The NutriSTEP[®] screening tools are validated, parent-administered questionnaires designed to identify toddlers and preschoolers at nutritional risk. Parents/caregivers should be referred to community services as appropriate.

4) Modernized Legislative and Regulatory Framework

- a. The nutrition standard needs to be updated to optimize the health of children in child care.
- b. To reduce duplication, align the nutrition standard of the Day Nurseries Act with the nutrition standards with Ministry of Children and Youth Services School Nutrition Program Nutrition Guidelines and the Ministry of Education PPM/150 Nutrition Guidelines recognizing that the nutritional needs of very young children are different from older children. For example, Canadian Community Health Survey data showed that 47% of children aged one to three years eat a diet lower in fat than recommended for that age group.⁵ Low fat or fat free milk and alternatives are not recommended for very young children; these products are appropriate for

older children. Furthermore, elementary and secondary students have the option of bringing their own snacks and lunches or purchasing foods on/off site. However, children in child care may be consuming two thirds or more of their total daily food intake while in care. The nutrition guidelines need to clearly list foods that can be offered every day, sometimes, rarely or never. For example, rarely foods (one serving allowed per month) may include foods for a monthly birthday celebrations.

5) Support for Accountability and Capacity-building

- a. Post the inspection reports on-line for greater transparency. All providers to post certificate of compliance in an area accessible to parents/caregivers.
- b. Link additional funding to participation and high performance in quality child care programs committed to improving quality of care, e.g., *Raising the Bar*, (example of Nutrition Policy and Procedures for Raising the Bar in York Region is attached).
- c. Menu plans to be kept for a year and be available on-line.
- d. Menus to be reviewed annually. Clear guidelines to be established to eliminate inconsistency or incompetency in evaluation of menus.
- e. Meeting the nutrition standard of the Day Nurseries Act should be linked to license renewal.
- f. An evaluation plan to be developed to monitor progress and success indicators.

References

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