



# October 2012 Call to Action: **CREATING A HEALTHY WORKPLACE NUTRITION ENVIRONMENT** Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health Workplace Nutrition Advisory Group **KEY MESSAGES**

*The Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH) challenges employers, employees, workplace food service operators, food distributors, unions, government and group benefits insurance companies to acknowledge and act on their role in establishing a supportive nutrition environment in workplaces.*

## Canadians are not eating well

- It is alarming that less than 1% of Canadians follow the dietary recommendations in *Canada's Food Guide*, increasing their risk of developing cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, certain types of cancer, obesity and osteoporosis. The poor quality of current dietary intakes is likely due to changes in the food environment, such as increased portion sizes and the widespread availability and promotion of less healthy food choices.

## The current workplace nutrition environment is a concern

- Currently, food and beverages provided in the workplace during meetings, events and celebrations, through retail settings such as vending machines, cafeterias and tuck shops or left in common work areas, offer employees regular access to food and beverages with minimum nutritional value. *Canada's Food Guide* recognizes these foods as "Foods to Limit" because they do not contribute to good health. "Foods to Limit" include foods that are higher in sugar, fat and salt. These foods tend to be highly accessible and prominently displayed in workplace retail settings and in work areas, which can promote consumption.

## Healthy eating makes good business sense

- Healthy eating is associated with lower incidence of nutrition related chronic conditions such as heart disease, stroke, obesity, type 2 diabetes, certain types of cancer and depression. Optimal nutrition is essential for the overall health, vitality and productivity of employees. Promoting healthy eating in the workplace can help to lessen workplace costs related to absenteeism, reduced productivity, increased insurance premiums, medical costs, and prescription drug costs, as well as higher rates of injury, disability and early retirement.

## Workplaces... an ideal setting to promote healthy eating

- Given that most employed Canadian adults spend at least 60% of their waking hours at work and eat at least one meal at their place of employment, the workplace is an ideal setting to promote healthy eating. The foods available and sold to employees have the potential to positively or negatively influence eating behaviours. As such, providing an environment supportive of healthy eating is essential, which includes addressing the nutritional quality of foods offered and sold to employees.

## A Healthy Workplace Nutrition Environment promotes healthy eating in the workplace

- Current workplace efforts to promote healthy eating are focused mostly on changing individual behaviour. This approach assumes that eating behaviours occur in isolation, are under sole control of individuals and occur as a result of rational and thoughtful choice. However, evidence suggests that people are unaware of the many factors (e.g., physiological, psychological, social and environmental) affecting their eating behaviours. Therefore, encouraging healthy eating habits in the workplace requires improvements to the nutritional quality of foods offered and sold in the workplace in addition to current strategies to increase individual knowledge and food skills.

*A Healthy Workplace Nutrition Environment exists when a workplace consistently promotes healthy eating through words AND actions. Education on healthy eating alone is not enough.*

## Commit to the essential elements of a Healthy Workplace Nutrition Environment

The *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy Workplace Nutrition Environment* offers a framework based on nine essential elements, which key stakeholders can use to create, implement and support a comprehensive Healthy Workplace Nutrition Environment. The nine elements essential to creating a Healthy Workplace Nutrition Environment are:

1. Organizational commitment to a positive healthy eating culture
2. Supportive social eating environment
3. Supportive physical eating environment
4. Access to healthy, reasonably priced, culturally appropriate food
5. Nutrition education and social support for employees and their families
6. Credible nutrition education for key decision makers and intermediaries provided by a registered dietitian
7. Access to services from a registered dietitian
8. Safe food practices and accommodation of special dietary needs
9. Nutrition policies that encourage healthy eating

The *Nutrition Standards for Workplaces*® support the implementation of the nine essential elements.

### Nutrition standards... the key to improving the workplace nutrition environment

- The OSNPPH strongly recommends implementation of the *Nutrition Standards for Workplaces*® to assess the food and beverages offered and sold in workplace settings, to ensure they are part of *Canada's Food Guide*, are higher in nutrients such as vitamins, minerals and fibre and contain little or no added fat, sugar or salt. The *Nutrition Standards for Workplaces*® are not intended to apply to what individuals bring to work for individual consumption (i.e., packed lunches).
- Using the *Nutrition Standards for Workplaces*® to increase the number of healthy choices and decrease the number of less healthy choices in the workplace, gives employees a better chance of improving and maintaining good health. This ensures that the healthy choice is the easy choice for employees.

The Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH) is the official organization of Registered Dietitians working in the Ontario public health system. The Workplace Nutrition Advisory Group (WNAG) is a group of OSNPPH members working to create healthier workplace nutrition environments and to promote healthy eating behaviours for employees.

### Everyone plays a role!

- The OSNPPH calls on stakeholders including employers, food service operators, food distributors, union members, group benefits insurance companies and the provincial government to acknowledge that the current nutrition environment in Ontario workplaces is a significant public health issue and work together to create Healthy Workplace Nutrition Environments.
- Public Health assists workplaces in creating a Healthy Workplace Nutrition Environment by providing guidance, strategies, tools and support to workplaces who are implementing any of the essential elements of a Healthy Workplace Nutrition Environment.

#### For more information

The complete document *Call to Action: Creating a Healthy Workplace Nutrition Environment*, including the *Nutrition Standards for Workplaces*®, can be downloaded in PDF format from [www.osnpph.on.ca](http://www.osnpph.on.ca) (click on “Resources”).

To contact the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health, please email OSNPPH at [info@osnpph.on.ca](mailto:info@osnpph.on.ca)

#### Contact your local public health agency:



Ontario Society of Nutrition  
Professionals in Public Health

La société ontarienne des professionnel(le)s  
de la nutrition en santé publique

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*The OSNPPH Workplace Nutrition Advisory  
Group thanks Communication Services of the  
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