



May 31, 2017

Hon. Chris Ballard
Minister of Housing and Minister Responsible for the Poverty Reduction Strategy
Poverty Reduction Strategy Office
Ferguson Block 6th Floor
77 Wellesley St W
Toronto, ON M7A 2T5

Dear Minister Ballard:

Subject: “Building Ontario’s First Food Security Strategy”

Diabetes Canada has prepared this submission in response to the request for feedback on the proposed Food Security Strategy. We feel strongly that nobody should experience the devastating, long-term consequences of food insecurity in a province as prosperous as Ontario. We applaud the provincial government for taking this first step toward addressing the serious impact that food insecurity has on the health and well-being of far too many households and systems.

Diabetes Canada is the national voice for millions of Canadians living with diabetes and prediabetes and works to prevent the onset and consequences of the disease. We know that food insecurity can increase the risk of developing chronic conditions, like type 2 diabetes. Research shows diabetes is more prevalent in food-insecure homes and that food insecurity can make diabetes more difficult to manage. Diabetes Canada is committed to supporting an expert and evidence-informed plan for healthy food and food systems in Ontario that helps to reduce the burden of chronic disease within the province.

Diabetes Canada is part of the Ontario Collaborative Group on Healthy Eating and Physical Activity. This group initiated the process of creating the Ontario Food and Nutrition Strategy and we continue to support the action plan and framework. Diabetes Canada makes the following recommendations as the government moves forward with the development of Ontario’s first Food Security Strategy:

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1. The higher rates of food insecurity within certain groups, notably recent immigrants to Canada, racialized communities and Indigenous people, are concurrent with an increased risk and prevalence of type 2 diabetes. Regular, ongoing and meaningful engagement is required to ensure that the strategy positively impacts these vulnerable populations. ***As the government proceeds with stakeholder consultations, Diabetes Canada recommends that these target groups play an integral role in the conceptualization, implementation and evaluation of the Food Security Strategy to ensure that it is culturally-sensitive and representative of their needs and reality.***
2. The establishment of strong working relationships between the public and private sectors can reduce inefficiencies in the food procurement and distribution continuum by encouraging innovation and introducing cost-saving measures. ***Diabetes Canada recommends the development of mechanisms to support the emergence and growth of partnerships between the Ontario government, not-for-profit organizations, and industry that will help reduce food insecurity.***
3. Poverty and food insecurity are inextricably linked; however, food insecurity is a multi-sectoral issue. ***Diabetes Canada recommends the Poverty Reduction Strategy Office take a strong leadership role in developing Ontario's Food Security Strategy, while engaging all applicable departments to contribute to its implementation, providing necessary oversight, and reporting annually to the Legislature on shared outcomes.***
4. A staggering number of communities in Ontario are subject to boiled water advisories, many of which have been in effect for years. In several regions, the prohibitively high cost of bottled water constitutes a public health crisis. ***Diabetes Canada recommends the government work to ensure the availability of safe and free drinking water throughout the province at all times.***
5. There is now clear evidence in the scientific literature to link excessive sugar-sweetened beverage consumption, including soft drinks, sports drinks, fruit drinks, lemonade, blended coffee drinks, and iced tea, to an increased risk of type 2 diabetes, potentially gestational diabetes and many other chronic conditions. However, sugar-sweetened beverages are sometimes the only real option available in many communities. ***Diabetes Canada recommends improving the availability equitably-priced, healthy beverages across the province and implementing initiatives to***



decrease calorie-dense, nutrient-poor alternatives. Furthermore, we recommend the Ontario government support and encourage the federal government to commit to tax sugar-sweetened beverages and use the revenues generated toward health promotion initiatives.

6. Food literacy and skills are an essential part of improving food security. An example of an effective program is Food Skills for Families, *a partnership between Diabetes Canada and the Government of British Columbia*. This successful six-session program teaches people how to make healthy meals and snack and beverage choices, and to gain confidence in the kitchen. Since 2008, over 1000 Food Skills for Families programs have been delivered in over 110 communities throughout British Columbia. This program has not yet benefited people in Ontario due to limitations in funding. ***Diabetes Canada recommends the implementation of Food Skills for Families, and similar programs, to reduce food insecurity in Ontario. Furthermore, we recommend embedding food literacy and skills programming in the Ontario school curriculum for children from kindergarten through grade 12.***
7. Governments can improve access to healthy foods and reduce the ever-present access to highly processed foods in government buildings and create guidance for municipal buildings in Ontario. ***Diabetes Canada recommends implementing harmonized policies across public facilities in Ontario to increase the availability of healthy foods and beverages, and reduce the availability of high-calorie, nutrient-poor food, beverages and snacks, and calling on municipalities to do the same.***
8. Healthy eating can help to reduce risk for developing diabetes; it is also an important management strategy for those living with the disease; but is a big challenge for those who are food insecure. ***Diabetes Canada recommends the government support the development of food skills and nutrition education resources in various settings that will meet each individual community's needs and benefit Ontarians across the lifecycle. Furthermore, we recommend government supports to increase healthy eating knowledge and food skills across the province through ongoing marketing and promotion campaigns and continued access to free nutrition information and education about healthy eating.***



Diabetes Canada supports a food security strategy that takes into account the needs and priorities of those in Ontario at high risk for, or living with, diabetes. Healthy food choices are essential to good diabetes management and to help prevent type 2 diabetes. All Ontarians should have access to affordable, sufficient, safe and nutritious food. Diabetes Canada is committed to working with the Ontario government to develop and implement policies and programs, including educational initiatives, to ensure people across the province are food secure.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on Ontario's First Food Security Strategy. If you have questions about any of the comments above, please do not hesitate to be in contact.

Yours sincerely,

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