

**Report of the  
Toronto Cancer Prevention Coalition  
Dietary Risk Factors Working Group**

**March, 2000**

**Consultant:  
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## **Background**

The Toronto Cancer Prevention Coalition was formed to coordinate a program of primary and secondary prevention activities in the City of Toronto. The Coalition is supported by a grant from the Public Health Branch of the Ontario Ministry of Health and a grant from Central East Region of Cancer Care Ontario, as well as considerable in-kind resources contributed by community partners. In June 1999 working groups devoted to the major cancer prevention issues identified in the *Report of the Ontario Task Force on the Primary Prevention of Cancer* (March, 1995) were formally convened.<sup>1</sup> There are eight working groups, each clustered around a single prevention issue. The Dietary Risk Factors Working Group consists of representatives from government and non-governmental organizations (see attached list of Group members), who have come together to investigate initiatives concerning the primary prevention of cancer by addressing dietary risk factors. Diets containing substantial and varied amounts of vegetables and fruits will prevent 20% or more of all cases of cancer. Between 30% and 40% of all cases of cancer are preventable by feasible and appropriate diets and by physical activity and maintenance of appropriate body weight (WCRF/AICR, 1997).<sup>2</sup>

## **Objective**

To determine the extent and current status of prevention activities in Toronto concerning diet and cancer related to the dietary risk factors recommendations contained in the *Report of the Ontario Task Force on the Primary Prevention of Cancer* (March, 1995).<sup>1</sup>

## **Method**

To accomplish this task, the working group conducted an environmental scan based on the opinions of key informants. The Dietary Risk Factors Working Group:

1. Identified a format to be used for the environmental scan and hired a consultant to assist with the process.
2. Developed a list of key informants in the areas of food, nutrition, diet and cancer (see attached list of key informants).
3. Requested the following information from key informants within two weeks (see attached sample letter):
  - a) activities and resources that address the recommendations (who is doing what?).
  - b) gaps in activities/resources that address the recommendations (what needs to be done?).
  - c) suggested additions, deletions or changes to the recommendations.
  - d) identification of other key informants who could provide information to the scan.
4. Contacted key informants to encourage them to complete the scan. This follow-up resulted in a 78% (57 out of 73) response rate.
5. Determined priorities for policy and action based on critical analysis of information from key informants and input from members of the Dietary Risk Factors Working Group.

## **Limitations to Approach**

The environmental scan is a collection of information and opinions provided by key informants working in many aspects of food, nutrition, diet and cancer prevention in the Toronto area. The sample of key informants is not representative of the entire food and nutrition community, rather it is our best attempt to reach a broad representation.

The attached chart reflects the viewpoints of key informants and does not necessarily represent the views of the Dietary Risk Factors Working Group. In some cases, key informants held conflicting opinions concerning specific recommendations. However, all views are included in this environmental scan. This document therefore reflects the wide range of perceptions and viewpoints and the complexity of the issues.

There is a great deal of information available describing current activities in Toronto that address the dietary risk factors recommendations. However, it is beyond the scope of this environmental scan to include detailed descriptions of all listed initiatives. The attached chart provides a brief overview, with further details available through the reference list provided at the end of the environmental scan document.

## **Results: Six Priority Areas for Policy and Action**

The following priorities for policy and action emerged as themes from the environmental scan and based on the recommendations contained in the *Report of the Ontario Task Force on the Primary Prevention of Cancer* (March, 1995):<sup>1\*</sup>

### **Advocate for Mandatory Nutrition Labelling and Labelling of Genetically Modified Foods**

- Advocate to the federal government to institute mandatory, comprehensive nutrition labelling and mandatory labelling of genetically modified foods.
- Health Canada should play a leadership role in the development and implementation of a comprehensive consumer education strategy on the new nutrition labelling policy.

### **Conduct Regular Canada-wide Nutrition Surveys**

- Baseline data on the nutrition habits of Canadians are required to develop and evaluate nutrition policies and programs. Baseline data should be gathered through:
  - Regular Canada-wide comprehensive nutrition surveys.
  - Regular comprehensive community-based nutrition monitoring.

### **Increase Funding for Research and Evaluation**

- To support the development of nutrition programs and policies, funding for research and evaluation of community-based and population-based food and nutrition programs and policies should be increased.

### **Increase Funding for Multicultural Food and Nutrition Programs**

- Support is required for research on the perceptions of diet and cancer risk among diverse cultural communities.

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\* The order of these priorities does not reflect their significance.

- Support is required to develop, implement and evaluate specific food and nutrition programs and policies designed to address the needs of diverse cultural communities.
- Increase the cultural diversity of health and nutrition professionals to reflect the cultural diversity of the community.

### **Fund the Development and Implementation of a Comprehensive Planning Framework for School Nutrition in Ontario**

- Fund the Comprehensive Planning Framework for School Nutrition in Ontario which includes the following components:<sup>3</sup>
  - a. *Policy for School Nutrition:* Develop a nutrition policy for Ontario schools from Kindergarten to Grade 12.
  - b. *School Curriculum:* Ensure sequential and continuous nutrition education from Kindergarten to Grade 12, using participatory learning methods that are grounded in theory. An educational and motivational strategy for parents should be developed to support the curriculum.
  - c. *Healthful Food Choices and Selection:* School policies and practices could require the establishment of cafeterias in schools, the provision of nutritious snacks at recess and the serving of healthful foods reflecting Canada's Food Guide to Healthy Eating.
  - d. *Professional Development for Staff:* Nutrition training should be included in professional development for both teachers and foodservice staff.
  - e. *Links with Community Programs and Resources:* Community groups and organizations could co-ordinate with schools to conduct community-wide campaigns, raise the profile of healthy lifestyles and reinforce and maintain positive changes.

### **Ensure Food Security for Low-Income Ontario Residents**

- Access to food is a basic human right; however, food security is a complex and multifactorial issue.<sup>4</sup> To increase food security it is necessary to address the social and economic determinants of health.

### **Conclusions**

This environmental scan reflects key informants' diverse perceptions and viewpoints on complex food and nutrition issues. The priorities that have emerged, however, were supported by a wide range of key informants as key areas impacting the health of Torontonians.

Effective advocacy and adequate funding are critical for the achievement of each of the identified priorities. Addressing the priority areas identified in this document will require broad stakeholder collaboration as well as long term policy and financial commitments (on the part of citizens and governments) which reflect the right of all Torontonians to strive for, achieve and maintain optimal health.

Many current prevention activities were identified in the environmental scan, as well as numerous stakeholders engaged in the area of diet and chronic disease prevention. However, much work remains to be done to address the priority areas that emerged for policy and action. Given the multifactoral nature of cancer etiology, the complexity of the factors involved and the cultural diversity of the Toronto population, the development of a successful primary cancer prevention strategy for Toronto must arise from the collaborative efforts of citizens, communities, universities, industry, non-governmental agencies and government. The collective knowledge, experience and resources of a broad range of stakeholders will bring a richness and diversity of human and other resources to a process that promotes the successful accomplishment of such far-reaching goals.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Report of the Ontario Task Force on the Primary Prevention of Cancer, Recommendations for the Primary Prevention of Cancer, March, 1995.
- <sup>2</sup> World Cancer Research Fund and American Institute for Cancer Research. Food, Nutrition and the Prevention of Cancer: A Global Perspective. Washington, DC: 1997.
- <sup>3</sup> Rhonda Bell, H. Gayle Edwards, Susan Evers, with the assistance of Stephanie Filsinger and Steve Manske, *School Nutrition Initiative Final Report*, June, 1999. Prepared for the Health Promotion Branch, Ontario Ministry of Health.
- <sup>4</sup> Canada's Action Plan For Food Security, A Response to the World Food Summit, 1998.

## **Toronto Cancer Prevention Coalition Dietary Risk Factors Working Group Members**

Charna Gord  
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Marlene Greenberg (Convenor)  
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Wendy Jackson  
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Safia Jowhar  
Somali Family and Child Skill Development Services

Krystyna Lewicki  
Four Villages Community Health Centre

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Food Share Metro Toronto

Sarah Vogelzang  
Toronto Public Health

Pauline Wisdom-Gilliam  
Toronto-Sunnybrook Regional Cancer Centre

## Environmental Scan Tables – Separate Attachment

### Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Ontario Collaborative Group on Diet and Cancer, Terms of Reference and Membership. Available from Cancer Care Ontario.
- <sup>2</sup> Food 2002, Conference Proceedings and other information available from FoodShare Metro Toronto.
- <sup>3</sup> Toronto Food Policy Council Discussion Paper Series. Available from the Toronto Food Policy Council.
- <sup>4</sup> Ontario Public Health Association, *Food Security in Ontario, A Directory of Agencies and Programs involved in food security in Ontario*, A Project of Building Bridges: Food Security and Heart Health, Ontario Public Health Association, March, 1999. Available from Ontario Public Health Association.
- <sup>5</sup> A Comprehensive Community Nutrition Framework, 1998. Available from Four Villages Community Health Centre.
- <sup>6</sup> A Commission on Food and Hunger, information available from Councillor Pam McConnell's office.
- <sup>7</sup> Dawn Palin, Michelle Hooper, Susan Evers. *Best Advice on Effective Nutrition Interventions*. Prepared for Ontario Ministry of Health, Health Promotion Branch, October, 1998.
- <sup>8</sup> Ontario Public Health Association, *Community Stories: Experiences and Observations in Linking Food Security and Heart Health Programming*, Building Bridges, Ontario Public Health Association, March, 1999.
- <sup>9</sup> Children and Youth Action Committee, *Action Plan for The Children's Report Card 1999*. Available from Councillor Olivia Chow's office.
- <sup>10</sup> Heart Health Resource Centre, Ontario Public Health Association. *Heart Health Project Activities, The Ontario Heart Health Program*,

- April 1999 – March 2000, July 1999. Available from Heart Health Resource Centre, Ontario Public Health Association.*
- <sup>11</sup> Information available from Kellogg's Canada, Nutrition Communications department.
  - <sup>12</sup> Heart and Stroke *Healthline Catalogue*. Available from the Heart and Stroke Foundation of Ontario.
  - <sup>13</sup> *Love Your Heart! Final Report of The Toronto Heart Health Nutrition Work Group Strategic and Directional Planning Process*, May, 1999. Available from Toronto Public Health.
  - <sup>14</sup> Education Resources Developed by Ontario Agri-Food Education Inc. and Their Partners. Available from Ontario Agri-Food Education Inc.
  - <sup>15</sup> Rhonda Bell, H. Gayle Edwards, Susan Evers, with the assistance of Stephanie Filsinger and Steve Manske, *School Nutrition Initiative Final Report*, June, 1999. Prepared for the Health Promotion Branch, Ontario Ministry of Health.
  - <sup>16</sup> Heart and Stroke Foundation of Canada Lesson Packages. Available from the Heart and Stroke Foundation.

## **Sample Letters and Stakeholder's List Separate Attachments**