

The logo for the Toronto Staff Report features a stylized graphic of a city skyline on the left, followed by the word "TORONTO" in a large, bold, sans-serif font. To the right of "TORONTO" is the text "STAFF REPORT" in a smaller, bold, sans-serif font. A horizontal line is positioned below the text.

TORONTO STAFF REPORT

September 3, 2004

To: Board of Health

From: Dr. Barbara Yaffe, Acting Medical Officer of Health

Subject: Food and Nutrition Issues in the City of Toronto

Purpose:

To provide an overview of critical food and nutrition issues in the City of Toronto as well as Toronto Public Health strategies described in five accompanying Board of Health reports. These reports highlight the need for a comprehensive food and nutrition strategy to guide Toronto Public Health programs and services and call for similar initiatives at the Provincial and Federal levels.

Financial Implications and Impact Statement:

There are no financial implications stemming from this report.

Recommendation:

It is recommended that this report be received for information.

Background:

The Board of Health has received five food and nutrition-related reports that each provide specific information, and in some cases recommendations, to the Board. Together these reports highlight a number of priority food and nutrition issues for Toronto residents and identify key strategies for Toronto Public Health and Provincial and Federal initiatives. This report outlines those issues and proposed strategies for action that emerge from the food and nutrition work of Toronto Public Health (TPH) and its partners.

Comments:

The "Ontario Nutrition and Cancer Prevention Survey - Toronto Results" report highlights findings related to vegetable and fruit consumption, Body Mass Index and physical activity levels. The report shows that 83% of men and 75% of women in Toronto do not meet the

recommended guidelines for vegetable and fruit consumption, healthy body weight and physical activity, as a combined set of key risk factors for chronic disease. The survey results also indicate that 11% of Toronto adults (13.8% of men and 8.1% of women) reported experiencing household food insecurity in that they do not have access to adequate amounts of safe, nutritious and culturally appropriate food to promote health.

The “Cost of the Nutritious Food Basket in Toronto” report provides information for distribution to key city staff, community agencies, institutions and decision makers at all levels of government about the cost of the Nutritious Food Basket in Toronto for 2004. The report shows that the cost of the Food Basket increased 2.29% from the 2003 survey, with a total increase over the last five years of 13.25%. The “Cost of the Nutritious Food Basket” is used for a variety of planning purposes and is especially useful in assessing the adequacy of social assistance rates. The report calls for the Board of Health to support advocacy efforts calling for increased social assistance rates to compensate for increases in the cost of food, shelter, transport and other basic needs.

The “Nutrition Recommendations for Canadians” report outlines proposed changes to Health Canada’s Nutrition Recommendations for Canadians and describes Toronto Public Health’s response. Health Canada’s role is to set national nutrition policy and to provide leadership in the area of dietary guidance. The report calls for Health Canada to develop a comprehensive and user-friendly summary of the American Academy of Sciences’ Dietary Reference Intake reports within the context of Canadian dietary patterns.

The “Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals Call to Action: Creating a Healthy School Nutrition Environment” report calls for the appropriate provincial ministries, along with boards of education and boards of health to take action through collaborative efforts to establish a positive nutrition environment in Ontario schools. The report to the Board of Health discusses a number of key issues related to school nutrition and describes Toronto Public Health activities to promote healthy eating in schools.

The “2004/05 Student Nutrition Program Service Subsidies” report requests the Board of Health to adopt the recommendations of the Student Nutrition Program Steering Committee regarding municipal subsidy allocations to eligible student nutrition programs.

Key Messages:

Good nutrition is a basic determinant of health. It is essential for optimal growth and development throughout the life span and for the prevention of disease. The importance of optimal nutrient intake and physical activity in reducing rates of disease and death from chronic disease has been well established. Health authorities now recognize that monitoring vegetable and fruit intake, Body Mass Index (BMI) and physical activity levels is critically important to more fully understand health and disease and to generate strategies for improving the overall health of the population.

Toronto Public Health has played a leadership role in community action involving nutrition, healthy weight, and physical activity promotion. However, Toronto’s population is still not

measuring up to the standards set out by Health Canada's Healthy Eating Guide and Physical Activity Guide. Toronto Public Health is now able to assess levels of vegetable and fruit consumption, healthy weight status and physical activity among the adult population, three key factors in the prevention of chronic diseases. These findings show that there is a lot of work to be done to ensure Toronto's population can achieve its full health potential.

All levels of government must take responsibility for the nutritional health of the population. At the national level Health Canada takes the lead role in: establishing a nutrition guidance system for the Canadian population that recommends nutrient intake throughout the life span and guidelines for healthy eating; setting policy directions for nutrition programming to address population needs (e.g. Canadian Prenatal Nutrition Program, Healthy Living Strategy); protecting the quality of the food supply and enabling informed consumer choice through Health Protection legislation; and monitoring the nutritional health of the population in collaboration with Statistics Canada.

The Province of Ontario, through the *Health Protection and Promotion Act* and the associated Mandatory Programs and Services Guidelines, mandates local health units to work to reduce premature mortality and morbidity from preventable chronic diseases. The provincial government cost shares local health units to provide nutrition and food safety programs and services that include interventions at the individual, group, institutional, school, workplace and community levels.

Toronto Public Health is the largest health unit in Canada and plays a leadership role in policy development, advocacy and program interventions. This work is recognized by stakeholders as providing critical support in a number of key food and nutrition areas, including the healthy weights strategy, the comprehensive school-based nutrition approach, vegetable and fruit promotion, prenatal nutrition, and outreach to diverse ethno-racial communities through the peer nutrition program. TPH has demonstrated its commitment to work with diverse communities and partners to promote healthy eating and healthy weights, to improve access to sufficient, nutritious, affordable and culturally appropriate foods, and ultimately to promote the overall health of the population.

The City of Toronto has demonstrated its commitment to promoting and supporting the nutritional health of the population through community grants programs, the Food and Hunger Action Committee and support for TPH programs and services.

Conclusions :

An integrated multi-faceted approach involving key stakeholders is required to address food and nutrition issues for Toronto. To accomplish this, TPH is developing a comprehensive food and nutrition strategy that will be based on sound and current evidence and best practices, employ a range of outreach and community development techniques, and support community partners in addressing the breadth and complexity of food and nutrition issues in Toronto.

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