

# Children's Health & Nutrition Initiative

## Summary

*Feed the Kids, Change the World*

### A Proposal to Make Safe and Healthy Food Available to All of Canada's Children

Presented by Olivia Chow, MP

It is time for Canada to show leadership in children's health, with a practical Children's Health and Nutrition Initiative. Good nutrition is vital to the health of children - both under nourishment and obesity carry a heavy cost for families and for society. At a relatively modest cost to the Federal Government, we have the opportunity to institute healthy practices that will greatly reduce the long-term burden of poor childhood nutrition on the health care system and the economy.

As a first step, the Initiative calls for universal nutritious food programs to make breakfasts, snacks or lunches available to any Canadian child under eighteen years of age in whatever venue(s) that communities deem the most appropriate. This would be based on a flexible made-in-Canada community development model, building on the existing knowledge base, programs and infrastructure of local organizations and parent groups.

Programs would be created and managed locally by parents, educators, public health departments and local governments to meet the needs of local children and families. Federal funding will be used to expand pre-existing programs and build efforts in provinces and territories where independent programs aren't in place. The Federal Government will be required to develop national program standards for healthy foods, with an emphasis on nutrition education, cooking and growing skills, and inclusion of locally and sustainably sourced foods. Long-term monitoring and evaluation of standards and implementation will also be critical.

The second component of the Initiative calls for innovative ways to protect children from manipulative marketing messages that encourage poor nutritional habits, relying on the best examples from other jurisdictions. For example, all commercial advertising directed at children under the age of 13 years has been prohibited by the Consumer Protection Act in Quebec since 1980.

#### **Why Do We Need to Act Now?**

Overweight and obesity doubled among 6-17 year olds between 1979 and 2004 and obesity tripled among Canadian teens. Many children's diets are poor and diet-related outcomes such as obesity, Type 2 diabetes, hypertension and high cholesterol are rising among Canada's children. Poor nutrition has been linked to low academic performance, classroom behaviour problems and low self-esteem, as well as long-term health risks. More than seven out of 10 children don't eat the recommended daily minimum of five servings of vegetables and fruit, as recommended by Canada's Food Guide. A quarter of Grade 4 students and almost half of Grade 8 girls don't eat breakfast every day. Health Canada estimates that diet-related cases of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and certain forms of cancer among adults rob the national economy of \$6.6 billion annually due to health care costs and lost productivity.

Canada is one of the few developed countries without a nationally funded child nutrition program. Child nutrition programs already operate in some parts of the country, but not all Canadian children have access to these programs, and the continuation of these efforts is always subject to fundraising and volunteer time. Dramatic changes have been made recently in other jurisdictions. For example, The British government is spending an extra £240m (\$520 million CAN) to subsidize healthy ingredients for children's school meals.

#### **Summary of Cost**

To be successful, the initiative would require a federal government contribution in the order of \$250 million in the first year with incremental increases for the next 5 years.. The funding will initially cover 30% of total meal costs which are estimated to cost \$1 to \$2 per child per day depending on regional food prices, volunteer time, parental contribution, local fundraising, charitable donations and availability of cooking facilities.