

OPEN LETTER

June 11, 2017

The Honourable Lawrence MacAulay, PC, MP
Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food
House of Commons
Ottawa, ON, Canada K1A 0A6

Subject: Federal Government Healthy Eating Strategy

Dear Minister,

We urge you to support your cabinet colleague the Honourable Jane Philpott, minister of health and her department in their efforts to improve the diet of Canadians through the federal government's *Healthy Eating Strategy*. This strategy includes the revision of Canada's Food Guide, restrictions on unhealthy food and beverage marketing to children and robust Front-of-Package (FOP) nutrition labelling.

As health organizations and professional associations concerned about the millions of Canadians living with diet-related disease we feel your support is critically important. The *Healthy Eating Strategy* is also consistent with the work your department is undertaking to develop *A Food Policy for Canada*. We applaud you for this.

WHY IS THE HEALTHY EATING STRATEGY IMPORTANT?

- The cost of diet-related disease in Canada was \$26 billion in 2015.
- Consumption of highly processed food has been associated with a higher risk of overweight and obesity.
- Purchases of ready-to-consume, highly processed foods have doubled in Canada over the past several decades, from 30 to 60% of the family food budget.
- The majority of adult Canadians (60%) do not eat the recommended amounts of vegetables and fruit.
- Children are bombarded on TV and online with marketing for unhealthy foods and beverages.

WHAT WILL THIS STRATEGY ACCOMPLISH?

- Stimulate healthier reformulation and innovation by Canadian food/beverage companies.
- Encourage consumers to eat whole real foods, such as vegetables, fruit, pulses and low fat dairy products – foods produced by hard-working Canadian farmers.
- Reduce the incidence of diet-related disease/illness in Canada.
- Provide greater savings to the healthcare system and the economy.

In particular, FOP nutrition labelling is important to ensure Canadians can quickly read information about the composition of food products, so that they can make healthier choices more easily. A mandatory FOP labelling system is consistent with global health recommendations to decrease the prevalence of diet-related chronic diseases. Canada's food regulations exist for the protection of consumers and to ensure labels are not misleading. However, current regulations only allow for voluntary claims on food packages about nutrient content.

The proposed mandatory FOP system would ensure transparency, requiring food products with high levels of sodium, sugar and/or saturated fat to display that information in a quick and easy-to-find format. We believe the use of a simple, highly visible FOP symbol will be more effective at drawing consumer attention than replicating the information from the Nutrition Facts table on the front of pack (as has been proposed by some food manufacturers).

Minister, we urge you to support your colleague the Honourable Jane Philpott and her department to improve the diet and health of Canadians through the Healthy Eating Strategy. This is consistent with your work to promote *A Food Policy for Canada*. This is also an opportunity to promote a healthy and sustainable food system in Canada, encourage food manufacturers to innovate/develop healthier products and to support hard-working Canadian farmers.

Sincerely,

Lynne Hudson
CEO
Canadian Cancer Society

Dr. Larry Levin
President
Canadian Dental Association

Dr. Granger Avery
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Craig Larsen
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Corinne Voyer
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