



February 25, 2009

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Education Officer, Social Science and Humanities grades 9-12  
Curriculum and Assessment Policy Branch  
Ministry of Education  
Room 1631B, Mowat Block  
900 Bay Street  
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Dear Ms. Mozzone,

We are writing to you on behalf of the Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance (OCDPA), a collaborate network of over 30 organizations working together to support and advance a comprehensive chronic disease prevention system for Ontario. Our members include representatives from the fields of physical activity, nutrition, mental health, addictions (tobacco and alcohol) and public health / health promotion. Alliance members are diverse in background and include participants from the non-governmental health sector, professional associations, Ontario Health Promotion Resource System, research and academia.

As the collective voice on chronic disease prevention within this province, our members would like to affirm our support of the joint submission, provided by the Dietitians of Canada (DC), the Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH) and the Ontario Collaborative Group on Healthy Eating and Physical Activity (OCGHEPA), and accompanying feedback/suggestions on the revision of the Ontario Curriculum, Social Sciences and Humanities (SSH), January 2009. Together, these groups have worked collectively to address the specific areas of nutrition and healthy eating within the curriculum, and, as unique groups representing nutrition professionals and key non-government organizations working in the province of Ontario, have a vested interest in the Ontario curriculum's proposed nutrition competencies, learning expectations and outcomes for healthy eating and nutrition, for secondary school grades.

The OCDPA supports the enhanced vision statement, as revised within the DC, OSNPPH and OCGHEPA joint submission. This vision statement reflects the importance of building and strengthening 'healthy communities' and acknowledges the place of individuals within a broader, social context. It acknowledges the influence of the socio-environment on individual choice and behaviour, a growing and progressive view taken by public health and health promotion.

We also agree with and support the following recommendations of our fellow colleagues, as they not only have an impact on nutrition and healthy eating, but can support and enhance early prevention of chronic diseases.

**Recommendation #1: At least one Family Studies course with broad, life skills-based content should be compulsory for every student in high school.**

This recommendation supports the policy and practice direction, as addressed within the OCDPA's written submission to the Ministry of Health Promotion to address and prevent childhood obesity in Ontario. The OCDPA submission<sup>i</sup> states,

“The Ministry of Health Promotion should work in conjunction with the Ministry of Education and provincial stakeholders to ensure that revisions and enhancement to the current education curriculum are undertaken to include a life skills component which supports healthy living and to integrate healthy living concepts within the current curriculum subjects. The curriculum should be implemented starting early in elementary school and continued to be offered as a secondary school credit. The credit should be promoted to secondary school students as an important and complimentary academic course that supports independent living and enhance life skills.”

**EVIDENCE:**

- Studies indicate that 26% of young Canadians aged 2 to 17 years are overweight or obese<sup>ii</sup>.
- Poor eating habits, as a result of lack of access to healthy foods, lack of food skills preparation or related to unhealthy food choices in childhood and adolescence are likely to be carried into adulthood and increase the risk of chronic diseases such as cancer, diabetes and cardiovascular disease<sup>iii</sup>.
- Children and youth who eat fruits and vegetables at least five times a day are less likely to be overweight and suffer from chronic health conditions<sup>iv</sup>.

**Recommendation #2: In every course related to food and nutrition (including courses on parenting and living and working with children), hands-on food skill development must be included in the curriculum.**

**AND**

**Recommendation #3: Develop and implement specific expectations in Family Studies courses to build on existing nutrition knowledge, develop an understanding of healthy eating choices and behaviours among students, and to bridge gaps in knowledge and food skills.**

The OCDPA supports the inclusion of hands-on food skill development as preparation for life-skills enhancement and to support healthy eating and nutrition, having a positive effect on chronic disease prevention.

**EVIDENCE:**

- Nutrition-related conditions contribute to spiraling health care costs, lost economic productivity and decreased quality of life<sup>v</sup>.
- Eating a nutritious and balanced diet is one of the best ways to protect and promote good health<sup>vi</sup>.
- There has been a documented rise in density and use of fast food establishments, especially in low income and school neighbourhoods<sup>vii</sup>.
- There is an increasing trend for families, particularly those with single or two parents in the workforce, to rely of prepackaged, processed and convenience foods for meals<sup>viii</sup>.

- Aggressive fast food marketing and super sized food portions have an influence on the quality, preferences and ultimate food choices of children and youth<sup>ix</sup>.

**Recommendation #4: The Social Science Research Method should be highlighted and incorporated into all Family Studies courses as a separate fundamental concept for Research and Inquiry.**

The goal of education is to foster inquisitive, questioning minds of students today that will become tomorrow’s teachers, practitioners, strategists, planners, decision makers, analysts and advocates. Students must be encouraged and given the opportunities to critically assess information and situations, particularly as it relates to their own behaviours and choices. This should include developing critical thinking skills and knowledge in relation to their own health, including exercises that address how personal choice is influenced by parents, peers and society, and the role society, media and marketing has in shaping personal and societal concepts of health and wellness. With increasing amounts of money targeted to producing messages aimed at youth from the food, alcohol and tobacco industries, and the increasing marketing of health practices and products (particularly within the weight loss, alcohol and ‘beauty’ industries), the need to develop anti-media marketing skills as part of the research and inquiry method has been found to be effective and necessary<sup>x</sup>. Based on success within the tobacco field, supporting critical thinking skills related to nutrition and allowing students to develop counter messaging to the growing amount of social marketing produced by the food industry, makes sense.

**Recommendation #5: Family Studies courses must contain specific references to Health Canada as the number one source of health information.**

The OCDPA supports the use, integration and uptake of academic research, evidence and best practices to inform current government and organizational policies and practices related to chronic disease and health promotion. Canada’s Food Guide is a recognized, gold-standard tool, based on evidence to address and reduce the risk of chronic disease.

**EVIDENCE:**

- A range of evidence helped to shape the revised Food Guide. Nutrient standards and the prevention of chronic disease were key scientific inputs<sup>xi</sup>.
- The food intake pattern recommended in the revised Food Guide is based on current nutritional science. The pattern has been developed to meet nutrient standards (Dietary Reference Intakes) and to be consistent with evidence linking diet to a reduced risk of chronic diseases<sup>xii</sup>.

**Recommendation #6: Standardize kitchen and food safety and food skill building in “overall” and “specific” expectations for all Family Studies courses.**

OCDPA agrees with the need to address and standardize food safety and skill building components, as understanding and practicing safe food handling techniques will reduce the incidence of food-borne illness and supporting healthy eating.

- Due to the increased demand and use of prepackaged, processed foods, food preparation skills, including food safety skills, are being lost<sup>xiii</sup>.

- Health Canada estimates that about two million Canadians suffer from a food-borne illness every year, with approximately 30 of these victims dying from the illness and 2% to 3% of the survivors suffering chronic health problems<sup>xiv</sup>.
- The annual cost of food-borne illness in Canada is estimated to be over \$1 billion (<http://www.canfightbac.org/english/mcentre/mkit/foodborne.shtml>).

**Recommendation #8: Enhance students’ understanding of the connections between food access and availability, the environment, land use and sustainability, production and consumption to overall health and nutrition through cross-curricular connections.**

The OCDPA recognizes the influence of the built environment on individual choices and behaviour, particularly in relation to nutrition. We acknowledge that the built environment has dramatically altered eating habits among Ontario’s population. In addition, this recommendation echoes the policy and practice direction addressed within several of the OCDPA’s statements, including its written submission to the Ministry of Health Promotion to address and prevent childhood obesity in Ontario. The submission states,

“The OCDPA recommends the following policy and program option be considered by the provincial government to support healthy eating in schools as part of its strategy to reduce childhood obesity: working with local food sector sources to enhance food education (field trips, voluntary opportunities, family studies classes) and food selection (sourcing of local food for cafeterias, expansion of tuck shops and snack programs to include local, seasonal items)”

**EVIDENCE:**

- The changing social, physical and health system environments can have a significant impact on nutritional health<sup>xv</sup>.
- Urbanization has created dramatic changes to the built environment, and with it, challenges to food access<sup>xvi</sup>.
- Food is part of the physical environment. The type of food available in grocery stores, workplaces, schools and from the food service sector is a powerful influence on food choices<sup>xvii</sup>.
- According to People, Place, and Health, these changes in the built environment have a great effect on access to the nutrition environment, the roads and bus routes to restaurants, grocery and food stores<sup>xviii</sup>.

**Recommendation #9: Incorporate and recognize cultural and religious diversity into all Family Studies courses, especially through food examples and rituals.**

This recommendation supports OCDPA’s priority to address health disparities and promote a social determinants of health perspective within the curriculum development and delivery

**EVIDENCE:**

- The interrelationship of diet, health, and agriculture culture is a matter of both national and international conditions, particularly in reducing chronic disease<sup>xix</sup>.
- Research suggests that before migration, many immigrants, especially those from non-Western countries, consume a healthy diet, but this negatively changes with migration<sup>xx</sup>.

- Nutritional vulnerability related to poverty is more prevalent within subgroups of the population including aboriginal people, seniors, refugees, high risk pregnant women, single mothers, low birth weight babies and children<sup>xxi</sup>.
- Canada's Food Guide is available in multicultural and translated versions.

**Recommendation #10: The Social Sciences and Humanities Curriculum should be taught within a healthy and supportive school environment.**

The OCDPA encourages the Ministry to advance its position and support curriculum development within the Foundations for a Healthy School Framework. Our position supports government taking an 'all of school' approach to healthy living, which includes teaching and learning within a healthy and supportive school environment. A healthy school environment that provides all members of the school community and the outside community the feeling of belonging nurtures physical and emotional health<sup>xxii</sup>.

**Recommendation #11: The concept of body image when taught in food and nutrition courses should focus on developing a positive body image and how food contributes to healthy growth and development, mental and physical performance, optimal health and illness/disease prevention.**

As a member of the Healthy Weights Workgroup of the Ontario Health Promotion Resource System, the OCDPA acknowledges the need to focus on developing positive body images with healthy life choices, including tobacco-free living, healthy eating, physical activity, etc.

**EVIDENCE:**

- Disordered eating, from anorexia and bulimia to obesity, is on the rise, particularly in young girls' ages 12-17 years<sup>xxiii</sup> and adult women in Ontario and Canada.
- A focus on healthy weight is less stigmatizing and promotes an emphasis on healthy living over body 'ideals' or measurements.
- Obesity and underweight both contribute to an increasing burden of chronic disease in Ontario<sup>xxiv</sup>.

**Recommendation #12: Provide support and ongoing teacher training, including the provision of appropriate resources to all educators involved in implementing food and nutrition related expectations in Family Studies courses.**

A number of members of the OCDPA are in an excellent position to support ongoing teacher training and to address the development and provision of evidence-based resources to support ongoing training within this area. Examples include the Ontario Physical Health and Education Association and Dietitians of Canada. In addition, the Ontario Public Health Association has a number of constituent groups whose work relates to community nutrition. At the local level, regional public health units have the mandate to support promotion and enhancement of school nutrition and physical activity policies and practices within the community.

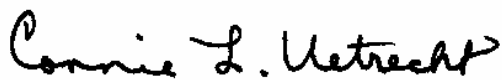
In conclusion, the OCDPA hopes that the Ministry of Education seriously considers the valuable input provided by the collaborative submission of DC, OSNPPH and the OCGHEPA groups, when reviewing the proposed Social Sciences and Humanities curriculum in relation to youth nutrition, health,

development and wellbeing, as the above recommendations are opportunities to address nutrition, prevent chronic disease and promote health in our future generations.

Finally, the OCDPA suggests that schools and Boards of Education across Ontario look at healthy organizational policies that restrict the use of materials or prizes that promote unhealthy behaviours, including alcohol and tobacco products, junk foods, and activities that promote physical inactivity. For example, the sponsorship of events, cash or in-kind donations should be firmly refused as they send mixed messages to students and the community around healthy living and healthy choices for individuals and the population.

Should you have any questions in relation to this submission, please feel free to contact me at 416-367-3313 extension 226, or Shawna Scale, OCDPA Manager at 416-367-3313 extension 251.

Thank you, in advance, for your consideration of this letter and its content.



Connie Uetrecht  
Co-Chair, Ontario Chronic Disease Prevention Alliance  
Executive Director, Ontario Public Health Association

## References

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