Breakfast CLUB of Canada™

A better start for every child.



Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in Advance of the 2025 Federal Budget

August 2nd, 2024

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That the Government of Canada embed the National School Food Program (NSFP) into legislation to secure long-term funding and stability for students.

Recommendation 2: That the Government of Canada leverage Breakfast Club of Canada's unique and proven expertise and allocate $50 million per year, for a total of $200 million over four years, to enhance existing breakfast programs.

Recommendation 3: That the Government of Canada allocate an additional $100 million over four years to support infrastructure and equipment needs in Breakfast Club of Canada's network.

Breakfast Club of Canada

In Canada, food insecurity affects millions of children, hindering their ability to learn and thrive. Access to nutritious food is a fundamental right, not a privilege. Breakfast Club of Canada is dedicated to ensuring that children across the country have an equal chance to succeed by providing access to nutritious breakfasts in a safe and supportive environment.

With nearly 30 years of experience, BCC has become a cornerstone in the fight against school food hunger, supporting over 420,000 students daily across close to 3,200 programs from coast to coast to coast. Our mission is to nurture children's potential and foster healthy communities by making sure no child starts their day on an empty stomach.

Context: Food Should Not be a Privilege

In 2024, the Government of Canada took significant strides toward addressing child food insecurity by announcing the National School Food Program (NSFP) and publishing a National School Food Policy. Despite these advancements, progress has since stalled, while needs continue to grow. It is now urgent for the federal government to act before the 2024–2025 school year begins.

In the months since the NSFP was announced, a common misconception has emerged in both the public and the private sectors: that the previous gaps in terms of school food programming have been resolved. In reality, demand for school breakfast program support has increased, in the past few months, with over 30% more schools seeking assistance from BCC and its partners. This highlights the importance of sustained efforts and strong partnerships to effectively feed children at school.

We acknowledge the federal government's intention to build on existing programs, and we believe the NSFP is a good opportunity to lay a robust foundation for the development of a multisectoral cost-shared model. As mentioned in the BCC 2024 pre-budget submission, the current investment by provincial and municipal governments in school nutrition is estimated at $288 million per year, or $0.49 per student, per day. This does not include the contributions from the private and community sectors. It goes without saying that to reach a total of 5 million students across the country, this amount is decidedly insufficient and underscores the urgency for a comprehensive, long-term strategy.

The federal government's vision for the NSFP is clear: "That all children and youth in Canada have access to nutritious food at school, in an inclusive, non-stigmatizing environment that fosters healthy practices, while strengthening connections with local food systems, the environment and culture." By partnering with school nutrition experts such as BCC, the government can accelerate impacts and deliver on this vision to ensure that no student starts their day hungry. By acting now, the government can show tangible, immediate results, reinforcing its dedication to improving child welfare and education across the country.

While negotiating with provinces and territories, we also ask that the federal government take proactive steps to consolidate its budget commitment and ensure it is embedded in a permanent budget law to not only meet urgent needs but also pave the way for long-term, sustainable improvements in child nutrition and educational outcomes.

Detailed Recommendations

Recommendation 1: That the Government of Canada embed the NSFP into legislation to secure long-term funding and stability for students.

Consistent access to nutritious food is fundamental to a child's health, academic performance and overall well-being. While respecting jurisdictional scope, this legislative action will not only address food insecurity but also promote equitable access to education, laying a strong systemic foundation for future generations. By committing to a long-term, stable funding mechanism, the government can ensure that the benefits of the NSFP are realized nationwide, providing a reliable and continuous support system for students in need.

The "Act respecting early learning and child care in Canada" (C-35) commits the federal government to providing stable, long-term funding for early learning and child care programs. Embedding the National School Food Program (NSFP) into legislation would mirror this Bill commitment by ensuring consistent, predictable funding for school nutrition programs. This would promote equitable access to nutritious food for all students, address food insecurity, and support the health and academic performance of children across Canada.

This funding is not intended to replace the need for provincial and public support. The intent is to leverage current investments in school food programs and support funding gaps. This will enhance the overall effectiveness of existing programs and maximize the impact of previously allocated resources. The NSFP aims to create a synergistic effect, where federal funding complements and strengthens provincial and local initiatives, leading to a more cohesive and comprehensive approach to child nutrition. This collaborative effort will ensure that no child falls through the cracks due to funding shortages or regional disparities, providing a uniform standard of nutritional support across the country. Leveraging these investments will also foster innovation and best practices, as resources can be pooled and knowledge shared to continually improve program outcomes.

Brazil and Sweden are two countries where national food programs have been enshrined in law. Brazil's 1988 Federal Constitution ensures the universal right to free school meals. The 2009 School Feeding Law expanded this to all students enrolled in the basic education system from 6 months of age onward, including special and adult education, with 30% of funds allocated to family-based agriculture. In Sweden, state grants for free school lunches began in 1946, with the 1997 Education Act guaranteeing free meals for all children aged 6 to 16, regardless of family income. The 2011 Swedish School Law requires these meals to be nutritious and cover 30% of children's daily intake of nutrients.

Enshrining the NSFP into law would result in a more resilient and adaptable program capable of addressing evolving challenges in child nutrition and food insecurity. A legislated program would ensure long-term support and facilitate planning and resource allocation, ultimately leading to improved health outcomes and educational achievements among Canadian students.

Recommendation 2: That the Government of Canada leverage Breakfast Club of Canada's unique and proven expertise and allocate $50 million per year, for a total of $200 million over four years, to enhance existing breakfast programs.

Breakfast Club of Canada is requesting a sum of $50 million per year to meet the growing needs in its national network that provides access to nutritious food for 1 million students. This amount will enable BCC to continue collaborating with the provinces and territories, as well as school and community partners, to offset the costs associated with rising food and transportation expenses and the growing number of students who need these programs. The increased investment would allow BCC to expand program capacity, offer a greater variety of menus aligned with Canada's Food Guide and ensure that no student is turned away due to lack of resources.

The proposed annual investment of $50 million would enable BCC to significantly increase its support, effectively doubling its current contribution per child, per day. This additional funding would address current challenges and enable BCC to act swiftly and deliver immediate and tangible results.

As demonstrated with the Emergency Food Security Fund, Breakfast Club of Canada has what it takes to partner with the federal government and meet priority needs across the country in a timely and efficient way. Through past and current partnerships with provincial governments, Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, Nutrition North Canada and members of the Wiche'waymagon agreement, BCC is uniquely positioned to support the government in providing immediate assistance to close to half a million children daily.

Increased funding will not only expand the reach and effectiveness of BCC's programs but also enhance the nutritional value and variety of the meals provided. This will lead to better health outcomes, improved academic performance and a more equitable educational environment for children across Canada. By acting now, the federal government will drive meaningful and measurable improvements in students' well-being and academic success.

Accredited by Imagine Canada for excellence in accountability, transparency and governance, BCC is a strategic and trusted student nutrition partner. As a result of our collaborative approach and the multiple school community partnerships we have built across the country, we contribute to providing access to nutritious food to over 1 million students in all provinces and territories.

Recommendation 3: That the Government of Canada allocate an additional $100 million over four years to support infrastructure and equipment needs in Breakfast Club of Canada's network.

This designated infrastructure funding will enable BCC to enhance existing programs in all provinces and territories, thereby reinforcing school food programs nationwide.

The current NSFP investment does not address the infrastructure needs of existing programs. This funding is crucial because it directly impacts the efficiency and quality of food services provided to students.

Investing in infrastructure will improve the operational capacity of food programs, enhance the quality and safety of food preparation, and enable better service delivery to students. Upgraded facilities and equipment will support the effective implementation of these programs, ensuring that all students receive the healthy meals they need to succeed.

Based on BCC's expertise and knowledge of existing needs within the student nutrition and food security network, the infrastructure priorities are as follows:

- $19 million to upgrade and replace kitchen equipment within the current school network of 3,200 programs
- $53 million to support local food infrastructure within the current network
- $28 million to help meet kitchen equipment needs for new programs in at least 3,000 schools requiring our assistance

The total estimated cost to fulfil these priorities is $100 million. By addressing these infrastructure needs, the government will ensure that BCC can continue to provide high-quality, nutritious meals to over 1 million students, fostering healthier, more productive learning environments across the country.

Provincial and territorial data is available upon request to further support this investment.

Conclusion

Breakfast Club of Canada is poised to partner with the Government of Canada to ensure no child starts their day hungry. By enshrining the NSFP into legislation, harnessing BCC's expertise and addressing critical infrastructure needs, the government can make a powerful and lasting impact on the health and well-being of students and youth across the country. These actions will not only meet immediate needs but also lay the groundwork for a resilient, sustainable National School Food Program.

Our track record of delivering results speaks for itself. With increased funding, BCC will continue to transform student health and boost educational outcomes. We urge the government to act swiftly and decisively to secure a brighter future for our nation's youth. By investing in BCC's school food programs, the government will uphold its commitment to child food security, drive long-term benefits and ensure that every child has the nourishment they need to thrive.

BCC, backed by a network of school nutrition experts, is ready to drive successful, high-quality implementation in every province and territory. Now is the time for action. Together, we can make a real and enduring difference.



Contact

Judith Barry
Co-Founder & Government Relations Director
judith.barry@breakfastclubcanada.org