



March 7, 2022

The Right Hon. Justin Trudeau, P.C., M.P.
Office of the Prime Minister of Canada
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

The Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos, P.C., M.P.
Minister of Health
House of Commons
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0A6

Subject: Urgent request for immediate action on healthy eating initiatives - Front-of-Package nutrition labelling and Stop Marketing to Kids

Dear Prime Minister Trudeau and Minister Duclos,

On behalf of the Canadian Paediatric Society (CPS), Canada's national association of paediatric health experts, I am writing to ask for immediate action on the federal government's long-standing commitments to support healthy eating initiatives, namely, finalizing front-of-package nutrition labelling regulations and restricting the marketing of food high in sugar, saturated fats and sodium to children.

Taking action to improve nutrition remains a priority for the CPS, with the COVID-19 pandemic only underscoring the urgent need for federal government policy to support healthy choices and a healthy population. Indeed, diet is a major factor in many of the non-communicable diseases that put people at higher risk for serious COVID-19 related medical complications – including hypertension, heart disease, stroke, cancer, obesity and type 2 diabetes.

Child and youth overweight and obesity are major health issues in Canada. In 2015, 31% of Canadian 5-17 year-olds were overweight (19%) or obese (12%).¹ Obese children and youth have a higher lifetime risk for developing type 2 diabetes mellitus, dyslipidemia, hypertension and coronary heart disease. While there are multiple interacting factors behind rising obesity rates, the increased consumption of calorie-dense, nutrient-poor foods is a major contributor.²

Moving forward on federal commitments to finalize front-of-package nutrition labelling regulations and restricting the marketing of food to kids will help Canadians make informed choices about what they are consuming, while also protecting children and youth. Each year, the Canadian food and beverage industry spends \$1.1 billion on marketing mostly unhealthy foods to children.³ As much as 90% of food and beverages marketed to kids on TV or online are high in sugar, saturated fat, or salt.⁴

Mandatory, front-of-package nutrition labelling is a policy tool that can provide the whole population with simple, accurate, and reliable nutrition information to help make healthier food choices. The Nutrition Facts Table is a credible source of nutrition information on food products, but the information is often presented in a way that is difficult to quickly or easily understand.⁵ Front-of-package labelling will complement existing labelling measures and provide families with simplified, easily visible information to help them make healthier and more informed nutritional choices.

Children deserve to be protected from unhealthy marketing and harmful industry tactics that negatively influence their food preferences, and families deserve to be able to be informed about their food purchases through mandatory, easy-to-understand labelling. These two policy interventions are popular with the public, cost-effective, and comparatively simple and affordable to implement. They can also directly improve the health and well-being of Canadian families. As such, we urge you to move forward with implementing the commitments made in the 2021 Liberal Election platform and the December 2021 health ministerial mandate letter to finalize front-of-package nutrition labelling and support restrictions on the marketing of food and beverages to children.

Thank you,

Dr. Ruth Grimes, MD
CPS President

Cc:

Mona Fortier, PC, MP, President, Treasury Board
Tina Green, Assistant Secretary, Regulatory Affairs, Treasury Board
Dr Stephen Lucas, Deputy Minister, Health Canada
Pam Aung Thin, Associate Assistant Deputy Minister, Health Canada
Rebecca Caldwell, Senior Policy Advisor, Prime Minister's Office
Jean-Sebastien Bock, Director of Policy, Office of the Minister of Health

¹ Statistics Canada. Table 13-10-0795-01. Measured children and youth body mass index (BMI) (WHO classification), by age group and sex, Canada and provinces, Canadian Community Health Survey – Nutrition (n.d.) (formerly CANSIM - 105–2024). <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1310079501> (Accessed April 3, 2019).

² Critch, J., Canadian Paediatric Society, Nutrition and Gastroenterology Committee. School nutrition: Support for healthy food and beverage choices in schools. *Paediatr Child Health* 2020 25(1):33-38.

³ [Internal Letter]. Industry Response to Health Canada's Request for Input into a "Cost-Benefit Analysis Survey for Restricting Marketing of Unhealthy Food and Beverages to Children in Canada." Published online 2018

⁴ Heart & Stroke Foundation. News release: The food and beverage industry is marketing our children and youth to death. Published 2017. Accessed March 4, 2022. <https://www.heartandstroke.ca/what-we-do/media-centre/news-releases/the-food-and-beverage-industry-is-marketing--our-children-and-youth-to-death#:~:text=As%20much%20as%2090%25%20of,and%20beverage%20ads%20per%20hour>

⁵ Vanderlee L, Goodman S, Sae Yang W, Hammond D. Consumer understanding of calorie amounts and serving size: Implications for nutritional labelling. *Can J Public Health*. 2012;103(5):327-331.; Reyes M, Smith Taillie L, Popkin B, Kanter R, Vandevijvere S, Corvalán C. Changes in the amount of nutrient of packaged foods and beverages after the initial implementation of the Chilean law of food labelling and advertising: a nonexperimental

prospective study. Wareham NJ, ed. PLoS Med. 2020;17(7):e1003220. doi:10.1371/journal.pmed.1003220
Vanderlee L, White CM, Bordes I, Hobin EP, Hammond D. The efficacy of sugar labeling formats: Implications for labeling policy: Efficacy of Sugar Labeling Formats. Obesity. 2015;23(12):2406- 2413. doi:10.1002/oby.21316