



Federal budget promise to negotiate a national school food program is a major stride for children and public health

March 19, 2019 (ISTANBUL/OTTAWA): Bill Jeffery, LLB, Executive Director of the Centre for Health Science and Law (CHSL),* made the following statement about the 2019 federal budget:

"Finance Minister Morneau's budget promise (at p. 165 of the Budget Plan) to negotiate the launch of a national school food program is great news for children and public health. It could also become a little boost for working and stay-at-home moms who still prepare the lion's share of bagged school lunches.

Precious few initiatives offer better potential for improving health and academic outcomes than school food programs, and none can also help protect the environment with the right food procurement criteria. Provincial governments of all political stripes have recognized such benefits for years by investing modest amounts of public funds, but national governments in every other G-7 country and even plenty of middle-income countries run robust programs that feed all or nearly all students. Low-income countries often do so with financial aid from the Canadian government.

Making a national program of the patchwork of the often anemically funded existing programs could help create a great new pillar of the just society, like public school education and Medicare, both of which would also perform better if children were fed better at school. Well-nourished children are bound to become healthier and more productive adults. Federal infrastructure cash specifically earmarked in this budget might also help industrious principals retrofit school cafeterias and kitchens that have, over the years, often come to serve as junk food vendors designed to top-up school coffers rather than as models of health education.

But, both levels of government will have to pony-up nearly \$2 per school-day for Canada's 5 million student to make this happen, a pittance compared to money already spent on health, education, and pharmaceutical drugs. And governments should be mindful of the firewalls that Health Canada installed to keep the self-serving \$100 billion food industry at bay during the reforms to Canada's Food Guide and the media's accounts of the lengths to which self-serving food companies went to circumvent them.

I look forward to helping the federal, provincial and territorial governments create a solid national program that will best improve children's health and the environment and best use public funds."

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About CHSL: The Centre for Health Science and Law is the publisher of [Food for Life Report](#), the April issue (#6) of which will put a spotlight children's nutrition. (Issue #5 is in press and will soon to be delivered to thousands of Canadian subscribers.) CHSL accepts no funding from industry or government and [Food for Life Report](#) carries no advertising. For nearly two decades, Bill Jeffery has been advocating a national, universal school food program with conflict of interest safeguards, along with numerous other Canadian NGOs. The Centre is also a founding member of the [Coalition for Healthy School Food](#), a network of 49 non-profit groups from every province and the North that seeks financial investment by the federal and other governments in a cost-shared Universal Healthy School Food Program to serve a daily healthy meal or snack to students.

Contact Information: Bill is presently returning to Ottawa from southern Africa where CHSL is consulting for UNICEF. He will be available for phone (613-800-1194, then 613-565-2140) or Skype (CHSLBillJeffery) interviews Wednesday morning and in person in Ottawa from Friday until the conclusion of the budget debates in Parliament. During the same period, Senate [Motion M-358](#) calling for a national child nutrition program—which was introduced last June by retired Senator and former Mayor of Toronto, the Hon. Art Eggleton, and is now sponsored by incoming [independent Senator Ms. Marty Deacon](#)—is expected to be debated and voted on in Senate.