



Ontario Society of Nutrition
Professionals in Public Health

La société ontarienne des professionnel(le)s
de la nutrition en santé publique

Lawrence Square
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Toronto, Ontario M6A 3B4

April 7, 2009

Hon. Dalton McGuinty
Premier of Ontario
Room 281, Main Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A1

Andrea Horwath
Leader of the New Democratic Party of Ontario
Room 112, Main Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A5

Robert Runciman
Interim Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party of Ontario
Room 436, Main Legislative Building, Queen's Park
Toronto, Ontario M7A 1A8

Dear Premier, Ms. Horwath and Mr. Runciman,

The Ontario Society of Nutrition Professionals in Public Health (OSNPPH) urges your support of Bill 156, the *Healthy Decisions for Healthy Eating Act, 2009*.

OSNPPH members, registered dietitians representing Ontario's 36 public health units, are experts in population health promotion, with a key focus on disease prevention through the implementation of programs and services that support healthy eating and healthy weights throughout the lifecycle. OSNPPH supports policies at all levels of government which we believe will create environments that promote healthier eating among Ontarians.

More and more Canadians are eating meals away from home and/or purchasing prepared foods to take-away. The average Canadian household spends about 30% of its total food dollar on foodservice ([Dietitians of Canada](#), 2006). During 2004, over 25% of Canadians interviewed reported that the day before, they had consumed food prepared in a fast-food outlet ([Statistics Canada](#), 2004). Requirements of Bill 156 could be helpful in improving population's nutritional status by reducing consumption of unhealthy trans fat and total calories.

While more research is needed on the effectiveness of menu labeling strategies, publishing caloric data at the point of purchase could increase awareness and change consumer purchasing decisions, leading to fewer calories consumed. Even if consumers do not use the information to select healthier menu options in restaurants, legislation on menu labeling could provide an incentive for restaurants to

reformulate their menus and/or reduce portion sizes of menu items, which in turn could have an impact on lowering caloric intake of the population.

While several of the largest chain restaurants may already be providing nutrition information on their menu items, it is usually only available only on corporate web sites or in brochures that may not be easily accessible in the restaurant. To influence consumer decisions about foods selected in restaurants, nutrition information needs to be readily available at point-of-purchase. If restaurants are already providing nutrition information on web sites or in printed brochures, it should be feasible to include calorie content on their menus.

Based on [research](#) conducted in the United States, OSNPPH believes there would be significant public support for restaurant menu labeling in Ontario. There are segments of the population that have a keen interest in nutrition and trends towards healthier eating are increasing. Even consumers who are knowledgeable about nutrition are challenged to estimate caloric values of restaurant menu items. In one study, professional dietitians failed to correctly estimate the calorie content of popular restaurant meals, according to a [report](#) published by the Centre for Science in the Public Interest in the U.S.

The 2004 report, [Healthy Weights, Healthy Lives](#), calls for Health Canada to phase out trans fat from processed food and broaden mandatory nutrition labeling to require large chain restaurants to disclose basic nutrition facts, such as calories, about the foods they serve. OSNPPH urges the province of Ontario to advocate for federal legislation by Health Canada to carry out the recommendations of the [Trans Fat Task Force](#). Comprehensive legislation on restricting trans fat in the Canadian food supply is needed at the federal level for effectiveness and equity; most large chain restaurants operate nationally and as such it would be more practical to enact legislation federally.

In the meantime, legislation that aims to increase consumer awareness of caloric content of menu items in restaurants and the reduction of trans fat to levels recommended by the Trans Fat Task Force passed at municipal and provincial levels will provide a ground-swell of support for federal legislation.

Sincerely,



Michele Hurd, RD
Co-Chair



Barb Bartle, RD
Co-Chair

cc.

France Gélinas, MPP

Margarett Best, Minister of Health Promotion

Connie Uetrecht, Executive Director, Ontario Public Health Association

Linda Stewart, Executive Director, Association of Local Public Health Agencies

Dr. Charles Gardner, Chair, Council of Medical Officers of Health

Roselle Martino, Acting Manager, Chronic Disease Prevention, Ministry of Health Promotion