



Northern Health Position on Healthy Eating: Snapshot

Healthy eating contributes to the overall health of individuals, families, and communities. Across the lifespan, it supports optimal growth, development, and vitality, which promotes physical, mental, and social wellbeing. While healthy eating may be considered a modifiable risk factor for chronic diseases, many variables at the individual, community, and societal levels influence what and how people eat.

Healthy Eating: An Integrated Concept

Northern Health defines healthy eating as:

Getting enough, good-for-you and good tasting food to provide energy for everyday living and to support short-term and long-term health and wellness.

Healthy people live in healthy communities. To support this, access to food must be assured and equitable, and food should be produced in sustainable ways, and obtained from relatively local sources. For healthy eating to be possible, Northern residents require equitable access to the individual and collective determinants of healthy eating.

Healthy eating is more complex than individual food choices. Northern Health recognizes that healthy eating includes 6 components: food, nutrition, eating competence, culture and traditions, food systems, and food security.

Northern Health Position on Healthy Eating

Northern Health seeks to optimize health and wellness and improve quality of life by promoting healthy eating among all residents. This will be achieved by working with internal and external partners to support and promote:

- A broad, balanced, inclusive, and responsive definition of healthy eating that is informed by a systems approach.

“An unhealthy diet is less often a matter of personal choice and more often a function of social and economic inequalities.”

Ontario Healthy Communities
Coalition, 2006

- The right of all to achieve healthy eating.
- Physical and social environments, programs, and policies that support healthy eating along the continuum of life.
- Use of a “do no harm” approach to healthy eating to promote eating competence, positive relationships with food and eating, and positive body image; and to discourage the development of disordered eating attitudes and behaviours and the perpetuation of weight stigma and bias.

Northern Health will enable healthy eating by:

- Promoting a comprehensive and equitable approach to healthy eating that considers food, nutrition, eating competence, culture and traditions, food security, and food systems, and how these factors influence healthy eating.
- Supporting internal policies, practices, programs, and initiatives to create supportive environments and services for staff, clients/patients/residents, and communities.
- Collaborating with external partners to support policies, practices, programs, and initiatives that:
 - Enable the development and maintenance of sustainable food systems.
 - Create accessible healthy eating environments where people live, learn, work, and play.

Strategies

Strategies to support healthy eating involve multiple sectors, settings, and actions. Using the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion framework, below are a few examples of strategies included in Northern Health’s Healthy Eating Position Paper:

Build healthy public policy

- Policies to support all people having equitable access to nutritious foods.
- Policies to reduce barriers to breastfeeding by promoting, protecting, and supporting breastfeeding.

Create supportive environments

- Support access to healthy foods in school cafeterias, canteens, vending machines, and meal and snack programs.

Strengthen community action

- Support innovative programs that seek to improve access to local food within healthcare settings.
- Support the development of food security strategies within Northern BC that work to increase equitable access to food for all.

Develop personal skills

- Incorporate eating competence into nutrition education.

Reorient health services

- Support practitioners and health care staff to have culturally safe conversations about food with Indigenous peoples and communities.

For further information, please refer to the complete **Northern Health Position Statement on Healthy Eating** available on the Northern Health web site: https://www.northernhealth.ca/sites/northern_health/files/about-us/position-statements/documents/healthy-eating-full.pdf

