

Nutrition Services, Population and Public Health

Evidence Review: Executive Summary

Children and Youth

Purpose

This report presents the evidence around effective strategies to engage parents and families to influence nutritional behaviours of their children aged 6-18 years. Findings will be used to: 1) inform program planning in Nutrition Services, Population and Public Health (NS PPH); 2) support alignment of key messages and strategies and; 3) identify collaborative opportunities within and external to AHS.

Parent-Targeted Strategy Evidence

2708 articles from database

searches and citation lists

228 for full text review

36 appraised and synthesized

9 systematic reviews

27 primary research

Methods

- A multi-step, systematic process was used for article search, retrieval, selection, critical appraisal and synthesis.
- Studies were included if they:
 - Outlined a parent-targeted strategy, as a single or multi-component/multi-activity intervention in home, school or community settings
 - Reported on an innovative strategy with applicability to the current Alberta public health nutrition context.

Current State

Recent surveys about the eating behaviours of children & youth show:

- Inadequate intake of vegetables & fruit
- High prevalence of daily sugar sweetened beverage intake
- A decline in food skills of children as fewer families prepare meals “from scratch”.
- A preference by adults aged 18-34 years to obtain nutrition information from social media versus reliable professional sources (potential parent population)

Key Findings

School, Community, and Home-Based Strategies to Engage Parents

- In schools, multi-component, ongoing approaches offered by trained teachers or health experts using developmentally appropriate, behaviour-specific activities and purposeful face-to-face parent engagement are likely to be effective.
- Community based, multi-component strategies may be effective when:
 - Messages and activities align across settings/sectors.
 - Parents and children work together.
- Web-based methods show some promise in the home setting.

Nutrition Messaging

- Children express interest and are able to adopt healthy eating practices. They can also influence their families. Messages created by children show promise.
- Promoting family meals is associated with healthier diets. This provides an opportunity for parents to practice positive parenting and role modeling skills.
- Large media campaigns may increase awareness of health messages. There is little evidence to suggest that they impact behaviour change.

Barriers and Facilitators to Healthy Eating Practices at Home

- Barriers include time, children’s preferences, absence of role modeling practices, social norms, and media influences.
- Tailored information via media and other sources, planning ahead, and having consistent mealtime rules are facilitators to family meals and healthy meal provision.
- Children’s FV consumption is affected by home availability/accessibility and parent role modelling.

Suggested Citation: Alberta Health Services (2020). A review of effective parent-targeted health promotion strategies to promote healthy eating behaviours in school-aged children and youth. Nutrition Services, Population and Public Health. Calgary, Alberta, Canada

Implications for Program Planning and Practice in NS PPH

- Continue to use a comprehensive school health approach when developing parent-targeted strategies.
- Investigate opportunities with before and after school programs and in-home support programs for targeted populations as part of multi-component strategies.
- Use innovative methods to promote topics such as VF intake, family meals and food skills.
- Communicate to parents with purposeful and targeted messages using multiple methods and platforms.
- Implement train the trainer opportunities with partners through conferences, webinars, on-line modules, websites, newsletters and social media forums.
- Consider the feasibility, cost-effectiveness, audience reach, and parent identified barriers and facilitators for all program plans.
- The research around effective parent engagement to promote healthy eating was limited by weak study designs and modest results that measured only short term outcomes.

Summary and Recommendations

Build on existing initiatives and partnerships to:

Implement Strategies Using the AHS Comprehensive School Health (CSH) Approach

- Repackage existing NS manuals, recipes and newsletters using personalization and integrated learning strategies to increase uptake.
- Reinforce promising strategies from school settings, such as taste testing and food skills, by promoting their use in the home using online engagement tools.
- Consider complementary and/or social marketing methods through existing tools and programs such as: [Healthy Parents Healthy Children](#), [Kid Food Nation](#), and [Healthier Together](#), and social marketing through school settings, AHS, Alberta Health, and Health Canada.

Leverage Existing Partnerships and Initiatives

- Investigate 'below-the-line' social marketing opportunities that use multiple methods and the potential to work with established community networks and health champions, including *Ever Active Schools*, *APPLE schools*, before and after school programs, and agencies serving vulnerable populations.
- Consider opportunities with: 1) parent/school advisory councils and the AHS NS *Nutrition Youth Advisory Panel*; 2) *Communities Choose Well* and *Benchmarking Food Environments* projects; 3) workplace wellness initiatives, such as *Alberta Blue Cross*, *Alberta School Employees Benefit Plans* and *AHS Workplace Wellness* and; 4) Primary Care Networks, [Connect Care](#) and [Together4Health](#).

Incorporate a Health Equity Lens

- Consider identified parent barriers to mitigate unintended negative consequences faced by vulnerable groups such as low income families, those living remotely, those with limited access to transportation or technology, new Canadians and Indigenous peoples. It is also essential to address cultural and religious relevancy and family practices and beliefs.

Monitor Drivers, Trends, and Evaluation

- Ensure priorities and programs stay relevant to families by: 1) monitoring the drivers and trends affecting Alberta parents and their families in various settings, as well as national and provincial survey/surveillance data for nutrition and health outcomes; and 2) engaging with families to understand their perspectives.
- Develop and implement a strong evaluation plan with clear and measurable outcomes.

To achieve health outcomes, a combination of all 5 health promotion strategies are needed to influence policy, social norms, systems, and networks while reducing health inequities in the population.