Increasing indigenous children's access to traditional foods in early childhood programs [1]

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Traditional Indigenous foods are part of a healthy diet. Moreover, traditional foods also have cultural and spiritual value and can contribute to the health of young First Nations and Métis children, many of whom experience food insecurity. Early childhood programs are ideal settings to introduce, explore and share traditional foods. However, in licensed childcare settings, the current food regulatory system effectively excludes the type, frequency and/or where traditional foods can be served.

The purpose of this project was to gain a better understanding of the circumstances that positively and negatively impact the use of high-protein (such as fish, shellfish and game) traditional foods in First Nations' and off-reserve early childhood programs (including group childcare and preschools) for Indigenous children from birth to age six. This collaborative project included stakeholders from diverse backgrounds including environmental health, food security, licensing, Aboriginal Head Start, child and family services, and public health.

This project builds on research conducted in 2012 by the BC Aboriginal Child Care Society and aligns with the work of the provincial Early Years Resource: Healthy Eating and Physical Activity project. Increasing access to healthy, safe food, including traditional food has also been identified as a key priority area of focus for healthy eating at the Ministry of Health. This project also fits into broader efforts by PHSA's Population and Public Health Program and the BC Centre for Disease Control to increase collaboration between food security and food safety sectors at the local, regional and provincial levels.

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