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Low-income families in BC can't afford healthy food

Vancouver, British Columbia – Imagine being \$127 'in debt' after your monthly rent is paid and you've bought groceries for you and your family, leaving no money for other necessities such as clothing, transportation and school supplies. According to the latest *The Cost of Eating in BC* report, this is the situation for a family of four living on income assistance in this province.

The Cost of Eating in BC 2009 by the Dietitians of Canada and the Community Nutritionists Council of BC demonstrates that it is impossible for families or individuals on income assistance or earning a low wage to afford enough healthy food. While shelter and food costs have risen significantly over the past decade, income assistance rates have remained virtually unchanged and minimum wage, once the highest in the country, has remained at \$8.00/hour. For those receiving income assistance or earning minimum wage there simply is not enough money to pay for housing and food, let alone other necessities. Food bank line-ups are at a record high and child poverty rates are worse than any other province. This situation must not be tolerated, not at this time of year, not at any time of year.

More than one in ten British Columbians live in poverty, a factor strongly associated with poor health, chronic disease, and a poor diet. Low-income people generally eat fewer servings of vegetables, fruit and milk products and are less likely to get the nutrients they need for good health. They are more likely to suffer illness and to die earlier than those with higher incomes.

Other provincial governments are taking action to reduce poverty. Both Quebec and Ontario have anti-poverty legislation in place, while Newfoundland/Labrador, Nova Scotia, Manitoba and most recently New Brunswick have adopted poverty reduction plans. Common to them all are actions to increase income assistance rates and minimum wage, support affordable housing initiatives and provide adequate support for families with children.

Dietitians have joined the many voices in this province calling for a BC poverty reduction plan that has vision, targets and timelines and includes:

- Basing income assistance rates on actual costs of shelter, food and other necessities
- Increasing minimum wage
- Supporting social housing and food security initiatives
- Building a quality, affordable child care system
- Measuring success by improvements in the health and social statistics of the most disadvantaged British Columbians.

The full report is available at www.dietitians.ca/bccostofeating

Dietitians of Canada represents almost 6,000 dietitians across Canada and is committed to promoting the health and well-being of consumers through food and nutrition. For trusted information on nutrition and healthy eating and to register to receive DC's regular nutrition updates, visit the Dietitians of Canada website at www.dietitians.ca

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