The grades are in and Alberta’s food environment is failing the province’s youth

Edmonton, AB - September 28, 2017—Alberta’s 2017 Nutrition Report Card on Food Environments for Children and Youth shows that despite a passing grade of “C”, Alberta’s policies are failing our youth.

“Our children aged 12-17 are the least protected and most vulnerable to environmental influences on their health and nutrition,” says Professor Kim Raine with the School of Public Health.

According to Statistics Canada, rates of overweight and obesity among children aged 2-11 in Canada are on a downward trend, but showing a slight increase amongst 12- to 17-year olds. “When we look at the key indicators that measure Alberta’s food and nutrition environment, youth in this province are not getting the attention that younger children are receiving. This is likely to play out in poorer health status as they transition to young adulthood.”

The third annual report card released by the Centre for Health and Nutrition (CHAN) assesses Alberta’s performance on 36 benchmarks in five key environments. A sampling of grades include:

- Availability of healthy foods in community recreation settings - D
- Food skills education required in junior high - D
- Affordability of a nutritious food basket - F
- Weight bias addressed in school curriculum - D
- Supports are available to assist public sectors to comply with nutrition policies - A

The report card recommends action be taken within these areas to protect vulnerable youth who have the freedom to make their own food choices, but inadequate skills and support to make healthy choices. Among the recommendations:

1. Broaden the reach of the Alberta School Nutrition Program to include grades 7-12.
2. Mandate the adherence to the Alberta Nutritional Guidelines for Children and Youth in all child and youth-oriented settings.
3. Make food skills education a requirement at the junior high level.

As scientific director of CHAN, Raine and her research group also advocate for the implementation of a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages as a cost-deterrent to youth, and the development of a national regulatory system to stop marketing foods and beverages to children under 18.

Raine says the report card is not all bad news. “It’s encouraging to see the investments in kids’ nutritional health over the past decade beginning to show progress,” she says. “But, let’s not forget that as youth become more independent, they may need even more support to navigate their way through a complex food environment. The importance of promoting healthy eating doesn’t end after elementary school.”

Professor Kim Raine is available for interviews by appointment September 28, 29 and October 2 to discuss the report card and its recommendations.

For more information and to schedule an interview, please contact:

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