

Front-of-package nutrition labelling policy: urgent canadian health need

[Countries](#), [Canada](#)



In Canada, millions of people are living with diet-related disease, which causes 47, 000 deaths and costs \$26 billion a year, according to a report of 2016. The fact that one in three children are living with overweight or obesity cannot be ignored. Health Canada representatives have indicated that the diet-related chronic diseases are major health problems.

Specifically, diets high in sugars, sodium, and saturated fat, which leads to the diseases like diabetes, obesity, stroke, cancer and other heart related diseases. The incidence of chronic diseases in Canada is a major health concern. Canadian agriculture, Health Canada and other organizations are taking number of initiatives to curb this problem. One of these initiatives includes a front-of-package (FOP) labelling approach aimed at helping Canadians make healthier and more informed food choices, particularly on sugars, sodium and saturated fat.

There are quite a number of FOP labelling like health logos, traffic lights, warning labels in the market. FOP labelling approach will help Canadians make easy choices at crowded grocery stores with numerous products on the shelves. ' High in' FOP labelling was implemented in Chile in 2016. An evaluation post implementation indicated that 92. 9% of consumers recognize the symbols. In addition, 91. 6% of consumers said it influences their purchase in day to day life. They choose product in lesser amount with logos telling warning, don't buy, or purchase less.

This study also determined that after the implementation of new policy, 65% of dairy, 48% of processed meat products and overall 18% of products have been reformulated. A study conducted in brazil proved that Front-of-Package

warning labels are more effective at communicating nutrition information than Traffic-Light labels. It is recommended to present simple and effortless labels at front of the pack and more detailed nutritional information on the back of the package. This will allow consumers to make a quick decision, whilst also providing detailed information if consumers desire to purchase the product. The front-of-pack summary gives a quick snapshot of how a food fits into a consumer's daily diet and complements the nutrition label found on the side panel. But the labels on the back of package are looked upon only by the most motivated shoppers.

We would like to get input on: warnings for foods high in sodium, sugars and/or saturated fat; updates to nutrient content claims and other nutrition-related statements; nutrient levels (thresholds) used to identify if a product is high in sodium, sugars and/or saturated fat; foods containing sweeteners. The current proposals for prominent FOP labelling to identify products high in saturated fat, salt or sugar are sensible. For industry, mandatory FOP labelling could mean to encourage them for the availability of more food products in the marketplace that are lower in these nutrients of concern. This could be done through reformulation, changes in food labels to include the front-of-package symbol. For the health professionals, mandatory FOP labelling with all new labels could help to educate consumers in better selection of food products according to their health and food requirements. FOP will potentially improve the nutritional quality of packaged foods available in the marketplace.

FOP labelling is not new. Manufacturers have been using symbols and nutrition claims—such as ‘excellent source of fibre’ and ‘trans-fat free’—on the front of food packages for many years. FOP labelling has helped manufacturers highlight the positive attributes of food and to market their products. Health Canada wants to ensure that the negative attributes of food products should also be represented on the front of the package. This will provide Canadians make information and transparency about the product. Dr. David Hammond from University of Waterloo cited a study that indicated that 80% of consumers consulted would like to support government policy that would require ‘high in sugars’ symbols on the front of food packages.

Another study conducted on effectiveness of front of packaging also suggest that front-of-pack labelling formats are effective in helping consumers make healthier choices. Participants needed significantly less time to evaluate simpler front-of-pack labelling compared to the more complex labelling format. The NOURISHING framework has also included the ‘nutrition label standards and regulations’ at the top of their list. These kinds of changes are not possible with the help of few organizations. To implement this change, input from all interested Canadians- including all levels of government, non-government organizations, industry members and associated organizations, health professionals, academics and researchers and also from the consumers who are interested in healthy eating is required.

Undoubtedly, the ultimate goal is not to restrict choices but to inform choices. The opposition from some stakeholders could be faced in such

decisions because it's a lot of work for industries and may increase the cost of package but we can't risk our life for saving few bucks in our pocket.