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Canadian civil society organizations are calling on Canada to **commit CAD\$750 million in nutrition specific funding over five years**

The current malnutrition crisis is unprecedented, with disproportionate impacts on those already most marginalized:

- women and girls;
- young children;
- conflict- and crisis-affected populations; and
- those excluded from inequitable and overburdened health systems.

As conflict and climate-related disasters continue to drive malnutrition worldwide, marginalized populations are facing growing threats to their survival and wellbeing. Without the right nutrition at the right time, the brain cannot fully develop, the body cannot grow properly, and the immune system cannot function effectively, causing impaired growth and development in children.

Canada's leadership in tackling the current global malnutrition crisis is timely and important, and with the deadline for the Global Nutrition Targets likely to be extended beyond 2025, a renewed commitment is crucial. Nutrition is a cornerstone of development, and smart investments will combat child mortality and help achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, nutrition remains severely underfunded, with undernutrition costing the global economy over US\$761 billion annually – equivalent to 1% of global income.

Investing in nutrition now will save lives and protect Canada's investments towards long-term development gains. Canadian civil society organizations are calling on Canada to commit CAD\$750 million in nutrition specific funding over five years, at the Paris Nutrition for Growth Summit (N4G) in March 2025.

Over the past 5 years, Canada has invested an average of CAD\$116 million per year in international nutrition-specific projects. Despite increasing nutritional needs amongst the world's most vulnerable populations, Canada's investments have been declining in the past decade, according to the data shared with the OECD. By making these strong financial and policy commitments, Canada could contribute to the prevention of 6.2 million cases of infant mortality and 980,000 stillbirths in the next decade.



The Far-Reaching Impacts of Malnutrition

The Impact Of Malnutrition: Women and Girls

1. Nutritional Inequality

Women and girls eat least and last, and are at the intersection of inequalities of power, salary, access to education and health. Over one billion women & girls suffer from undernutrition, facing severe deficiencies in essential micronutrients.

2. Rising Malnutrition

Between 2020 and 2022, acute malnutrition among pregnant or breastfeeding women, and adolescent girls rose by 25% from 5.5 million to 6.9 million in countries most affected by the global food and nutrition crisis.

3. Increased Risk of Maternal Death

Almost 40% of pregnant women globally experience anemia, which increases the risk of preterm birth and postpartum hemorrhage, the leading cause of maternal death.

Cost of Inaction

More than 586 million adolescent girls and women aged 15-49 suffer from anemia. It is associated with lower productivity, costing the global economy US\$113 billion annually.

The Impact Of Malnutrition: Infants and Young Children

1. Increased Risk of Child Death

In 15 countries hardest hit by multiple crises, including in the Horn of Africa and the Sahel, a child is pushed into severe malnutrition every minute, and nearly half of deaths among children under 5 years of age globally are linked to undernutrition.

2. Severe Wasting

Each year, over 1 million children under 5 die of severe wasting, the most immediate, visible and lethal form of undernutrition, characterized by low weight-for-height.

3. Long-term Impact

Over 146 million children suffer from stunting, or low height-for-age. This condition is mostly irreversible and on average, leads to 1.5 lost school years and 10.8 IQ points lost per child.

Cost of Inaction

By 2030, 6.2% of children under five are projected to suffer from wasting, over double the 3% World Health Assembly (WHA) global target.

Undernutrition in women and girls can have devastating intergenerational consequences. Anemic mothers are more likely to give birth to infants at high risk of becoming wasted, as well as suffering from growth and developmental delays. This is why regions with high levels of maternal undernutrition also see high rates of child undernutrition.



Children in Emergency Contexts

In 2023, conflict was the main driver of acute food insecurity. Between 2020 and 2022, the countries most affected by humanitarian crises saw a 20% increase in children suffering from acute malnutrition. The other common drivers were economic shocks and extreme weather events due to climate change.

Evidence shows that integrating interventions to support responsive caregiving and early learning into nutrition in emergency programs can have a cumulative impact on nutrition and other early childhood development outcomes, with benefits for both the child and the caregiver.

Impeding Progress on Development Goals

When human potential and resources are trapped in the vicious cycle of malnutrition, development goals and improved standards of living will not be realized. **We need a solid foundation of good nutrition for vaccines to work, for children to learn, and for women to thrive.** Investing in nutrition will enable Canada's efforts in gender equality, education, sexual and reproductive health, and economic empowerment to achieve their goals, recognizing the inextricable links between nutrition, education, health, and productivity.

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Nutrition For Growth (N4G) 2025

A Timely Opportunity For Canadian Leadership

Meeting the SDG targets for ending hunger and ensuring access to nutritious food (SDG Target 2.1) and ending all forms of malnutrition (SDG Target 2.2) is estimated to require at least USD\$176 billion by 2030.

Canada's leadership in nutrition dates back over thirty years, when it set the goal to eliminate micronutrient deficiencies at the 1990 World Summit for Children. As co-chair of the Summit, Canada established the Micronutrient Initiative, now Nutrition International, with the mission of delivering on this pledge. This established Canada as the largest donor to Vitamin A supplementation programs. In 2021, Canada also launched the Nutrition Year of Action with Bangladesh and Japan and was among the leading donors at the Tokyo Nutrition for Growth Summit, further cementing its **legacy as a nutrition champion**.

Today, the Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) outlines clear commitments to fighting malnutrition, especially among women, children and adolescent girls, and is enabled by the 10-year commitment to Global Health and Rights. Maternal, newborn and child health had also been placed at the heart of the Canadian international agenda as early as 2010, when the Canadian presidency of the then-G8 Summit saw the launch of the Muskoka Initiative.

Over the last two decades, **child deaths from malnutrition have significantly decreased, and both Canada's political and financial leadership have contributed to that**. This leadership must continue to meet the ambition of the FIAP and provide strong financial and policy commitments.

In March 2025, France will host the Nutrition for Growth (N4G) Summit, a global event uniting private donors, high-burden and donor countries, and civil society to rally strong political and financial commitments to combat malnutrition. Canada has already demonstrated its ambition by recently pledging, alongside G7 leaders, to support the upcoming N4G Summit. **We want this ambition to be transformed into concrete action.**

As a champion for human rights, member of the Scaling Up Nutrition (SUN) Movement Lead Group and co-chair of the UN SDG Advocates Group, Canada can play a key role in the fight against global malnutrition and hunger.

Canadian Civil Society Organizations are united in our call for Canada to commit CAD\$750 million over 5 years in new nutrition specific funding at the Paris N4G Summit to protect the health rights and dignity of marginalized women and children, including those in humanitarian contexts.

Read on for our recommendations for how Canadian policy and financial commitments in nutrition will catalyze global progress. →

1. Address Malnutrition's Multigenerational Impact With Cost-Effective Interventions

For women and girls to experience increased agency and power in their lives, they must be well nourished. As such, **Canada's approach to improved nutrition for women and girls must focus on responding to the unique needs of these populations, such as anemia**, which continues to impact 37% of pregnant women and 30% of women aged 15-49 years globally, and can hold them back from optimal health, learning, and employment.

Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP) commits to reduce the prevalence of anemia among women and adolescent girls and improve birth outcomes by leveraging its investments to increase the provision of micronutrient supplements. One such prenatal supplement is the Multiple Micronutrient Supplement (MMS) with 15 essential nutrients that significantly improve maternal and infant health.

Scaling up MMS can save over half a million lives, improve birth outcomes for five million babies, and prevent anemia in over 15 million pregnant women by 2030. Research shows MMS offers benefits beyond those of iron and folic acid (IFA) supplements, reducing risks like preterm birth, stillbirth, low birth weight and infant mortality. At less than two cents per daily tablet and just over \$4 per pregnancy, MMS is highly cost-effective, prompting experts to recommend replacing IFA with MMS to enhance prenatal care where adequate resources allow.

Anemic mothers facing undernutrition are also more likely to give birth to infants at high risk of becoming wasted, as well as suffering from growth and developmental delays. By complementing its investments in micronutrient supplementation with increased funding to **prevent, detect and treat child wasting**, Canada can slow the vicious circle of malnutrition.

Canada **should increase investments in cost-effective solutions** to combat anemia in women and girls and prevent child wasting, breaking the cycle of malnutrition across generations.

Prevention, Detection, and Treatment of Child Wasting

Over the past two decades, the world has reduced the proportion of children suffering from undernutrition by one third – or 55 million. This proves that progress is possible. Yet growing poverty and inequality, conflict, and climate change are combining to stall and even subvert progress made in recent years.

Preventing and reducing wasting generally requires that children are born to healthy, well-nourished mothers who receive appropriate **antenatal care**. Urgent and intensified efforts are required to intervene early to protect children from wasting. It is critical that Canada's support for prevention not come at the expense of treatment, and vice versa. Both are significantly underfunded and one cannot be sacrificed for the other. Ensuring early detection and treatment for those who do become wasted will provide them with the best opportunities for survival and development. When prevention fails, treatment for wasting becomes essential, and must be made more readily available and accessible to those who need it.

Canada's Global **Vitamin A** Supplementation Program is one of the most successful public health interventions ever brought to global scale – saving the lives of over seven million children to date. It is critical for Canada to continue supporting this program. Vitamin A is a critical micronutrient for children under the age of five and can reduce the risk of preventable death up to 24% in countries where vitamin A deficiency (VAD) continues to remain a major public health challenge.

Another high-value investment is in programs and initiatives that support the scale-up of **breastfeeding**. Breastfeeding reduces child mortality, protects newborns from infections and provides them with essential nutrients. Breastfeeding also boosts IQ, improves school attendance, and is linked to higher income in adulthood.

2. Adopt a Gender-Transformative Approach to Ensure That Nutrition Becomes and Remains an Accessible Right For All

Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy affirms that for women and girls to enjoy their right to good nutrition they must have the power to make strategic life decisions, access and control resources, and be supported by both informal and formal structures. The policy also notes that improved nutrition is essential for women and girls to experience increased agency and power over resources. Thus, **Canada's approach to nutrition must address their unique needs to ensure they are well-nourished and empowered.**

Canada should **prioritize gender equality in nutrition strategies** by addressing barriers that limit women's and girls' access to resources and decision-making power.



In low- and middle-income countries, barriers such as **economic disadvantage, harmful gender norms, child marriage, and unequal access to education**, combined with inadequate policies and underfunded programs limit access to nutrition services for adolescent girls and women. Canada should focus on addressing these issues. This entails supporting local advocates, especially women and girls, to actively engage in identifying and addressing barriers in their socio-cultural, economic and political environments that limit their decision-making power and resource control.

To effectively address malnutrition, **Canada must support women and girls across all relevant sectors, including education, WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene), economic inclusion, social protection, and climate adaptation.** By ensuring adolescent girls have access to essential information and nutritious foods, Canada can help them succeed in school and prepare for a healthy adult life. To reach this, the Government of Canada must maintain strong leadership at the intersection of gender equality and nutrition, making gender equality the central component of its multi-sectoral nutrition strategies.



3. Commit to Strengthening Health Systems

As recommended by the [Global Action Plan on Child Wasting](#), nutrition assistance must complement efforts to strengthen national health, and social protection systems. Alongside its 2021 N4G financial pledge, Canada [committed](#) to integrate nutrition with other essential services.

Alongside nutrition programs, immunization is one of the most cost-effective approaches to support child survival. Malnutrition and infectious diseases [drive each other](#) as lack of nutrition makes children more vulnerable to diseases and vice versa. Children with the greatest risk of malnutrition are often the same children who are under-immunized. Essential nutrition services alongside immunization programs should be part of the standard package of available healthcare services, universally available to all.

To this end, Canada's continued support of countries' efforts to **strengthen health workforce capacity**, particularly of community health workers, is critical to deliver essential and quality nutrition care and services. Canada must support countries' efforts to integrate the delivery of essential nutrition supplies within the health system; strengthen information systems to collect, analyze and use data on nutrition; and regularly monitor and evaluate nutrition services to address inequities in delivery, coverage, and access.

Canada should **contribute towards strengthening health systems** by integrating essential nutrition services with immunization programs and expanding the capacity of community health workers.

4. Ensure Access to Nutritious Food For Children Living in Emergencies

Crises are multiplying, but not all receive the same attention from donors and the media, and some are exacerbated precisely because they are neglected. That's especially true for protracted crises, like Syria and Yemen. By supporting the funding of Humanitarian Response Plans, Canada can ensure that children living in crises have **access to nutritious food while preventing famine months in advance**.

The distinction between development and humanitarian programming is blurring. Emergency responses often extend beyond the traditional period and development efforts increasingly aid recovery and crisis preparedness. Various forms of malnutrition, including wasting, micronutrient deficiencies, and stunting, are also causing long-term health impacts, especially for children.

468 million children around the world are either living in or fleeing from conflict zones. For them, access to early childhood development services is a matter of life and death. **Early childhood development programs** offer an integrated whole-of-child approach that supports the health, education and well-being of children in the critical early years of development.

To tackle both immediate needs and root causes of malnutrition, **Canada needs to adopt a holistic approach** that allows for flexible, unearmarked and predictable responses to address malnutrition and food insecurity in emergency settings. To do this effectively, Canada must ensure funding for integrated nutrition delivered through early childhood development programs in emergencies. These programs need to be inclusive and led by local and refugee actors supporting children and caregivers affected by the crisis. By ensuring that all food security interventions are nutrition-smart, Canada can deliver nexus programming that responds to short-term needs while building long-term resilience.



Canada should **provide flexible, unearmarked funding** to ensure children in crisis zones receive nutritious food and integrated support through early childhood development programs.

A close-up photograph of a woman wearing a grey headscarf looking down at a young child. The child is smiling broadly, showing their teeth, and is wearing a green shawl with gold and red embroidery over a pink garment. The background is slightly blurred, showing a blue wall and some greenery.

The Time For Action is Now

Nutrition is undeniably one of the most cost-effective investments for a healthy world with cross-cutting impacts on economic and social development. **Every dollar invested in the fight against undernutrition can generate a return of USD\$23** because it has the potential to build human capital and drive global economic development and prosperity.

With just five years left to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, Canada has the opportunity to make a bold statement of global leadership. **By committing CAD\$750 million in nutrition-specific funding over five years at N4G 2025 and prioritizing the needs of marginalized women and children, Canada can reaffirm its position as a global nutrition champion.** This commitment will enhance the impact of Canada development efforts, driving progress towards the World Health Assembly nutrition targets and putting us back on track to meet the SDG 2: Zero Hunger.

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