

# Increasing Access to Indigenous Food in Early Childhood Settings

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# Introduction

“the Head Start program is on the land, harvesting stinging nettles...

After talking about the importance of giving thanks, she [staff] then sprinkles tobacco near the site where they will harvest...Salmon, halibut crusted with crab, pickled sea asparagus, herring roe on kelp, smoked black cod and potatoes are nestled together on the small counter...”

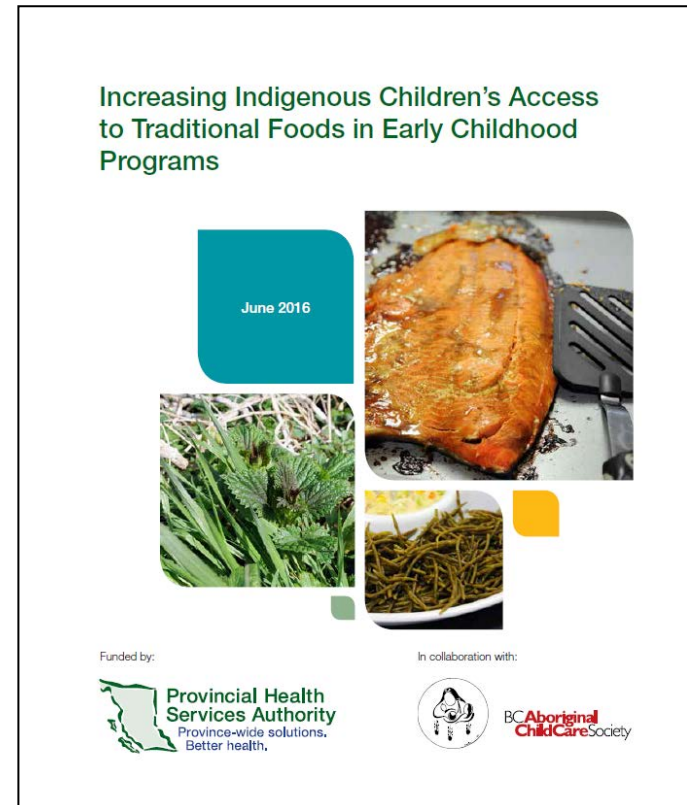


# Our project

The **purpose** of this project was to explore the circumstances that affect the access and use of traditional foods in early childhood programs for Indigenous children from birth to age six. The focus was on the food safety regulations.

# Overview

- Impetus for the project
- Methods
- Findings
- Recommendations
- Next steps



# Impetus: benefits of traditional food

- An important part of identity and transmitting cultural and spiritual teachings
- Environmental
- Available - especially in remote areas
- Nutritious
- Perfect time to expose children to new foods
- Aligns with priorities



# Methods

- Environmental scan of early childhood settings, schools and hospitals in Canada
- Review of the evidence on food safety
- Key informant interviews with EHOs, LOs & ECEs (15 people)
- Case studies (4 communities)



# Findings

- Support: recognition of the importance of traditional foods and a commitment to working towards solutions
- Major barrier - the requirement to purchase wild game/fish/seafood from pre-approved sources (“bar code food”) because of the provincial Food Premises Regulations.

# Findings – Environmental health officers (EHOs)

“There needs to be respect for people who are gathering traditional foods. And it is being done, that knowledge is still there...” - FNHA EHO



- FNHA EHOs had more flexibility to exercise discretion around traditional foods.
- RHA EHOs did not feel they had this flexibility.



# Findings – Early childhood educators (ECEs)

“We want children to see, feel, smell, taste and hear their culture and language.”

– Early childhood educator



- Ability to serve traditional foods varies
- Finding workarounds

# Recommendations

## Major

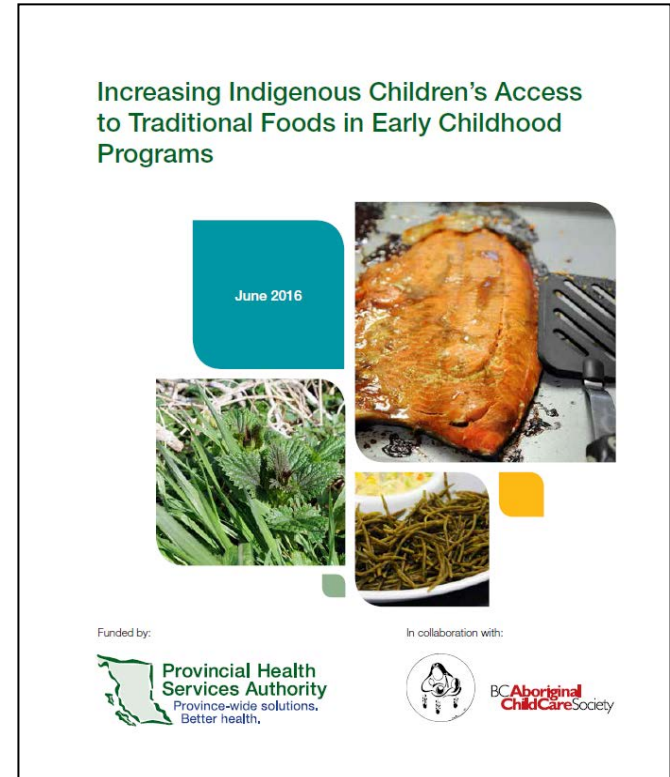
- Develop new food safety guidelines/standards
- Funding for kitchens
- Expanding the new guidelines to other facilities

## Supportive

- Establish a province-wide working group
- Increase cultural competence in health authority staff
- Training for First Nations (food safety, safe processing)

# Next steps

Interest and support to move forward with both the guidelines and Indigenous cultural competence training.



# Conclusion

“Indigenous children in BC have a moral and legal right to the traditional foods that nourish their bodies and spirits. These rights include consuming traditional foods, as well as learning from Elders and other knowledge keepers to harvest, prepare, give thanks and share the foods that are integral to their cultural heritage.”

- Quote from the report

# Thank You & Questions



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