

# THE OPPORTUNITIES FOR FOOD IN HEALTH CARE

How might we leverage the Canadian health care sector's foodservice budget and reputational credibility to improve health outcomes?



With \$4 billion<sup>1</sup> spent annually on foodservice, it's time to harness the purchasing power and influence of the sector to capture the full value of food in care. Reframing challenges as opportunities, here is a **menu of options** to harness the opportunities of food in care for the benefit of patients, organizations, and communities.

Valuing the role of food as fundamental to health and healing can enhance the **PATIENT EXPERIENCE**.

From Challenges...	...to Opportunities
<p><b>\$26B</b></p> <p>Pressure on the health system. Patients with the <b>5 chronic diseases most related to diet</b> and nutrition account for <b>\$26 billion annually</b> in both direct and indirect health expenses.<sup>1</sup></p>	<p></p> <p>Create a nourishing meal experience to enhance patient recovery and to inspire patients and families to pursue healthy diet choices post-discharge.<sup>2</sup></p>
<p></p> <p><b>Low patient satisfaction scores</b> for foodservice.</p>	<p></p> <p>Recognize mealtimes as powerful opportunities to offer comfort for healing. Organizations can show care through food quality and taste, choice, presentation, and timing.</p>
<p></p> <p><b>Malnourished patients stay in hospital 2-3 days longer.</b> A malnourished patient costs \$2,000 more than a nourished patient, totalling \$2B/year.<sup>3</sup></p>	<p></p> <p>Treat food as medicine. Screen for malnutrition. Provide quality meals to support patient recovery and model healthy, affordable eating on a budget to support wellness after discharge.</p>
<p></p> <p><b>Limited selection and culturally-inappropriate menus</b> can result in patient refusal or inability to eat.</p>	<p></p> <p>Serve culturally appropriate menus that meet the needs of the community, and recognize the cultural dimensions of health and healing.</p>

Hospitalization can be a teachable moment for patients who are ready to embrace nutrition as part of the healing process.<sup>4</sup>  
Source: American College of Cardiology

Patients who ranked the food in care highly were 4x more likely to rank their overall hospital experience as excellent.<sup>5</sup>  
Source: Saskatchewan Health Quality Council

Patients who ate less than half their food were at a higher risk for a longer hospital stay.<sup>6</sup>  
Source: Canadian Malnutrition Task Force

"Miichim (traditional food) is part of care. Miichim is an important part of the daily lives of many Anishinaabe people and is an important link between health, culture and identity."<sup>7</sup>  
— Kathy Loon, MenoYaWin Health Centre

Systems thinking can help to capture the full value of food in care to support **ORGANIZATIONAL** results and efficiencies.

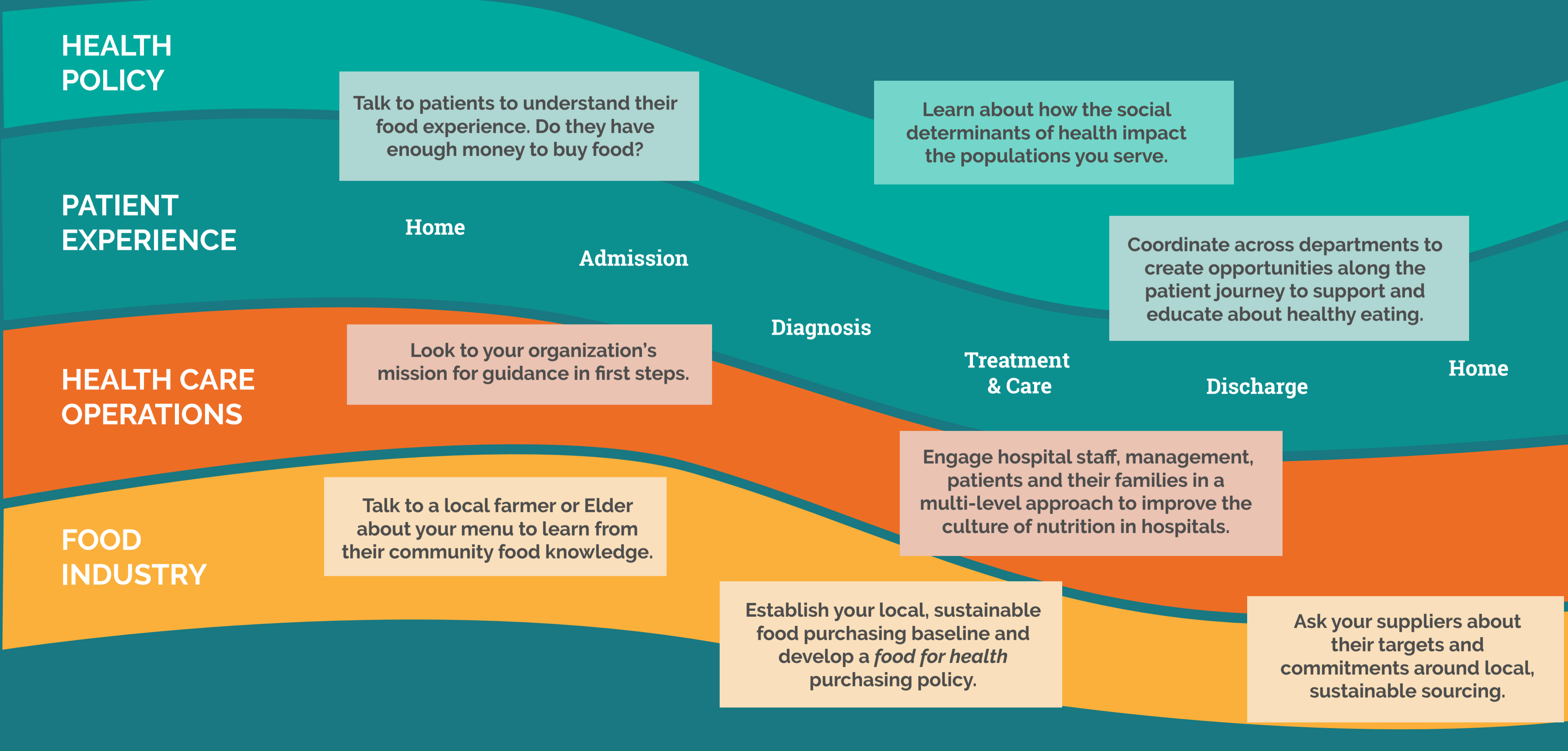
<p></p> <p><b>Tight budgets reinforce a pattern of procuring low-cost, often highly-processed foods</b> from unsustainable food systems. At ~\$8/day<sup>8</sup>, hospital food costs account for less than 0.01%<sup>9</sup> of the average cost of caring for a patient.</p>	<p></p> <p>Take a full lifecycle approach to calculating "best value" foods by evaluating social, environmental, and economic sustainability of choices.</p>	<p>"An urgent case for reforming food and farming systems can be made on the grounds of protecting human health." — International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems</p>
<p></p> <p><b>Patient tray waste can often be as high as 50%</b>, translating into a food waste cost of \$45 million annually for Canadian hospitals.<sup>10</sup></p>	<p></p> <p>Focus on patient choice for healthy and culturally appropriate meals — served at the right time. Waste less food, and invest the savings into better quality food.</p>	<p>"Wasted food cost us \$89,000 a year before we switched to a room service model. Tray waste is now five times lower, our patients are more satisfied, and we're saving thousands of dollars."<sup>11</sup> — Josee Lavioie, Sainte-Justine Hospital</p>
<p></p> <p>Lack of coordination across departments leads to <b>patients missing meals</b>. Meals may be delivered when the patient is asleep, in surgery, or unable to eat.<sup>12</sup></p>	<p></p> <p>Coordinate across departments for positive engagement around mealtime such as minimizing interruptions, and offering assistance to support health and healing.</p>	<p>"Everyone has a role to play in providing quality food to patients."<sup>13</sup> — Dr. Heather Keller, Schlegel Research Chair, Nutrition and Aging at University of Waterloo</p>
<p></p> <p>The availability of fast food options and sugary drinks in hospital cafeterias, retail franchises and vending machines often does not best model healthy eating. Facilities are looking for ways to boost healthy choices.<sup>14</sup></p>	<p></p> <p>Create healthier hospital food environments that improve access to fresh, healthy food that nourish staff and visitors — and that employees are proud to serve.</p>	<p>"What draws us now [to the hospital cafeteria] is the smell of the herbs, spices, baked chicken, and soup made from scratch. I love the salad bar. Actually, it's the best salad bar in town."<sup>15</sup> — Registered nurse, University of Ottawa Heart Institute</p>
<p></p> <p>Total <b>medical costs associated with antimicrobial resistant infections</b> have been estimated at \$1 billion annually in Canada. Resistance is driven by many factors including an overuse of antibiotics in animal agriculture.<sup>16</sup></p>	<p></p> <p>Expand antimicrobial stewardship programs to be more comprehensive by including purchasing of meat raised without the routine use of antibiotics.<sup>17</sup></p>	<p>By balancing hospital menus to favour less and better meat, hospitals can provide health, social, and environmental benefits that are consistent with prevention-based medicine.<sup>18</sup> Source: Health Care Without Harm</p>

Activating leadership around healthy diets and food systems can make healthcare facilities anchors of **COMMUNITY WELL BEING**.

<p></p> <p>Canada continues to invest substantially more in the care of disease rather than in health promotion and prevention.</p>	<p></p> <p>Provide healthcare leadership around preventative health strategies, like access to a healthy, affordable, low-carbon diet that supports personal and ecosystem health.</p>	<p>Health care has helped turn the tide on critical issues such as smoking. Healthy and sustainable diets could be the next frontier of healthcare leadership.<sup>19</sup></p>
<p></p> <p>Diet-related disease is a major driver of healthcare spending, however 87% of medical students say they lack adequate education in nutrition and are ill-equipped to counsel patients.<sup>20</sup></p>	<p></p> <p>Retool med school curriculum to include nutrition and build food skills that will change how physicians counsel patients. Researchers have found that patients have better food habits when their doctors do.<sup>21</sup></p>	<p>"I'm very interested in helping patients avoid the doctor, and for preventive care a big step is good nutrition."<sup>22</sup> — 1st year medical student, University of Toronto</p>
<p></p> <p><b>Food insecurity negatively impacts health.</b> Researchers have identified that healthcare costs are 12% higher for adults living in severely food insecure households compared with food secure households.<sup>23</sup></p>	<p></p> <p>Increase patient, staff, and community access to fresh, affordable foods like fruits and vegetables by establishing on-site farmers markets, food box programs, and fruit and vegetable prescriptions to encourage healthier diets.<sup>24</sup></p>	<p>92% of Canadians support the idea of doctors prescribing low-cost fruit and vegetables to low-income people vulnerable to diet-related illness as a way to treat and prevent these illnesses.<sup>25</sup> Source: Community Food Centres Canada</p>
<p></p> <p><b>Difficulty sourcing and tracking local food</b> makes it difficult to support regional food producers and processors. Contracted food often zigzags across the globe and has little connection to place for patients and residents.</p>	<p></p> <p>Ask regional and national distributors for greater transparency and reporting on local sustainable food value chains. Use your food purchasing power to help address the social determinants of health.</p>	<p>"Our local vendor far surpassed the national competition in terms of providing value, because they understood our values and innovated their product to meet our needs."<sup>26</sup> — Wendy Smith, healthcare food buyer at MEALSource</p>
<p></p> <p>Patients feel isolated from nature and home in a hospital environment. Untapped potential to use healthcare land and build community partnerships.</p>	<p></p> <p>Grow food on healthcare land through gardens that support physical, cognitive and mental health, build food literacy skills, and engage the community.<sup>27</sup></p>	<p>"Gardens on healthcare land harvest the synergies that grow when you mix outdoor exercise, green space, mental and physical therapy, and fresh food."<sup>28</sup> — Phil Mount, Project SOIL</p>
<p></p> <p>Climate change is "the biggest global health threat of the 21st century" according to The Lancet. Disruptions are multiple and complex from heatwave-induced deaths to vulnerabilities in the food supply.<sup>29</sup></p>	<p></p> <p>Design menus that model sustainable diets by encouraging a shift to low-carbon foods and sourcing that is healthy for people and planet.<sup>30</sup></p>	<p>"For healthy people we need a healthy planet—so it's time to preferentially support low meat diets, ecological and organic agriculture, sustainable local food producers and indigenous food ways."<sup>31</sup> — Dr. Courtney Howard, President of the Canadian Association of Physicians for the Environment</p>
<p></p> <p><b>Staggering Indigenous health disparities</b> and inadequate approaches for addressing the social determinants of Indigenous health. There is a 10-year gap between the life expectancy of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada.<sup>32</sup></p>	<p></p> <p>Take leadership on delivering traditional and country food programs that recognize the role of cultural wellbeing in healing — and use food as a pathway to reconciliation.</p>	<p>"It's rare that a generation is given the opportunity to right a historical wrong — and now is the time to do it."<sup>33</sup> — Dr. Ailka Lafontaine, Indigenous health leader and physician</p>

Improving food in health care is a high value intervention to support patient recovery, reduce health disparities, and build economic and environmental resilience.

THERE ARE OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS MANY LEVELS...  
**WHAT ARE FIRST STEPS?**



SHARE YOUR IDEAS AND FIRST STEPS WITH US  
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Sources: <https://www.nourishhealthcare.ca/nourish-infographic-sources>

