

Briefing Note for the British Columbia Minister of Health

PURPOSE

To provide the BC Minister of Health with options to improve BC Celiac Disease patients' access to labwork for identifying nutrient deficiencies.

BACKGROUND

Celiac disease (CD) is an autoimmune disease in which gluten triggers the immune system to damage the absorptive surface of the small intestine; leading to gastrointestinal & generalized symptoms, impaired nutrient absorption, and long-term health complications including osteoporosis, infertility, and neurological problems¹. Gluten is a protein found in wheat, barley, oats, rye, and foods containing these ingredients¹. Strict adherence to a gluten-free diet (GFD) is the only treatment for CD¹. A GFD can be low in certain nutrients, and deficiencies have been identified in patients who have followed a long-term gluten-free diet (LTGFD) for longer than two years². Despite avoiding the nutrient deficiencies (ND) and associated harms resulting from CD, patients face a risk for the same from the sole treatment.

CURRENT STATUS

In BC, the following professions have authority under Part 2 of the Laboratory Services Regulation to request labwork: doctors, surgeons, dentists, dental surgeons, podiatrists, podiatric surgeons, midwives, and nurse practitioners³. Registered dietitians (RDs) hold a significant role in the delivery of the diet-focussed treatment for CD, and possess the specialized expertise to facilitate correction of ND; but do not have authority order labwork to screen for the same. This incongruity leaves patients vulnerable to missing out on timely appropriate screening for ND; delaying treatment and increasing risk of subsequent complications.

OPTIONS

- 1: Maintain current authorizations in ordering labwork.
- 2: Amend Part 2 of the Laboratory Services Regulation to include RDs.
- 3: Increase the range of labwork options for private-pay services to include nutrient markers.

KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- In current practice, RDs and patients need to advocate to an authorized practitioner to obtain the labwork. A survey of Ontario RDs quantifies the economic impact of such delays at \$1885 - \$3770 cost per year for each dietitian affected⁴.
- If granted authorization, RDs may injudiciously order labwork, increasing the workload burden on laboratories and increasing the cost to the province of MSP-covered services. Physicians may also object to the decreased need for their involvement in patient care.
- For privatization, those who are of lower socio-economic status face barriers to access, further marginalizing those who are at higher risk for poorer health outcomes⁵. Additionally, privatization contradicts the current NDP majority government's platform⁶.

RECOMMENDATION

Option 2 is recommended as it equitably increases access to ND screening; with the conditions of a year-long trial to ensure RDs' judicious use of ordering authority and mandatory copying of reports to the patient's primary provider.

Appendix I: Audience

The target audience for my briefing note is the BC Minister of Health, the Honourable Adrian Dix. I chose this audience because the Laboratory Services Regulation falls within the Minister of Health's jurisdiction, and he possesses the ability to authorize amendments to it.

Appendix II: References

1. Canadian Celiac Association. Celiac Disease [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 November 2]. Available from: <https://www.celiac.ca/gluten-related-disorders/celiac-disease/>
2. Rondanelli M, et al. Micronutrients Dietary Supplementation Advices for Celiac Patients on Long-Term Gluten-Free Diet with Good Compliance: A Review. *Medicina* 2019; 55:337.
3. Queen's Printer. Laboratory Services Regulation [Internet]. Victoria, British Columbia. 2020 September 20 [cited 2020 November 2]. Available from: https://www.bclaws.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/52_2015#part2
4. Dietitians of Canada. The Dietitian Workforce in Ontario Primary Health Care Survey Report. Toronto, ON: Dietitians of Canada. 2015 September.
5. Mikkonen J, & Raphael D. Social Determinants of Health The Canadian Facts. Toronto: York University School of Health Policy and Management. 2010.
6. BC NDP. WORKING FOR YOU John Horgan's Commitments to BC [Internet]. 2020 [cited 2020 November 2]. Available from: https://www.bcndp.ca/BCNDP_Platform_2020_FINAL.pdf