

Topic Area: Dietetic Practice and Education

Abstract Title: Opening the book on nutrition literacy: A critical investigation into Canadian dietitians' knowledge, attitudes, and practices
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Objectives: This study describes registered dietitians' (RDs) knowledge, practices, and attitudes (KPAs), barriers, and preferred learning methods with regard to functional (FNL), interactive (INL), and critical (CNL) nutrition literacy.

Methods: An invitation to an online survey was distributed to Canadian RDs by four provincial dietetic registration bodies, three working groups, and Dietitians of Canada. Items included demographics, (dis)agreement statements about nutrition literacy KPAs, barriers, and preferred learning methods. To assess differences in demographics by KPAs, barriers, and preferred learning methods, independent samples t-tests and chi-square analyses were used. All statistical tests were two-sided with significance set at $p < 0.05$.

Results: Of the 437 survey respondents, over 80% believe that FNL, INL, and CNL are important to promote nutrition-related behaviours in Canada. Only 47%, 66%, and 20% implement FNL, INL, and CNL in their practice, respectively. Those most likely to teach INL and CNL include: RDs over 40 years of age ($p < 0.01$), community-based RDs ($p < 0.05$), and RDs whose work involves at least 50% nutrition education ($p < 0.01$). The most common barriers identified by respondents were (1) a lack of credibly trained nutrition professionals to teach nutrition literacy (54%); (2) a lack of access to education resources (53%); and (3) a lack of interest from clients (51%). Over 90% of respondents indicated that they would prefer learning how to teach nutrition literacy through professional practice guidelines, webinars, and online tutorials.

Conclusions: RDs in Canada realize the importance of nutrition literacy and feel responsible for promoting it, yet few do beyond the Functional level. By promoting and enhancing client nutrition literacy at higher levels, RDs could do much to improve the nutritional health of Canadians.

Significance to the field of dietetics: These results present the training needs and barriers with regard to teaching nutrition literacy and may support the development of training resources for RDs and their advocacy for nutrition literacy in general.