



**THE NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR ASSOCIATION OF
SPEECH-LANGUAGE PATHOLOGISTS AND AUDIOLOGISTS**

P.O. Box 21212, ST. JOHN'S, NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR A1A 5B2

August 16, 2017

Dr. John Haggie
Minister of Health and Community Services
Government of Newfoundland and Labrador
P.O. Box 8700
1st Floor, West Block
Confederation Building
100 Prince Philip Drive
St. John's, NL A1B 4J6

Dear Honorable Minister,

Re: International Dysphagia Diet Standardization Initiative (IDDSI)

On behalf of The Newfoundland and Labrador Association of Speech-Language Pathologists and Audiologists (NLASLPA), I am writing today to bring your attention to the International Dysphagia Diet Standardization Initiative (IDDSI). IDDSI is a global initiative that has developed standardized terminology and definitions for texture-modified foods and thickened beverages for people with dysphagia (swallowing disorder). NLASLPA asks the Newfoundland and Labrador government to work with health-care facilities in its jurisdiction to facilitate the universal adoption of the IDDSI framework.

Speech-language pathologists play a critical role in dysphagia assessment and management and are leaders in dysphagia research endeavours in Canada. As the professional association representing speech-language pathologists in Newfoundland and Labrador, NLASLPA supports the IDDSI framework, roll-out and implementation in Newfoundland and Labrador and across Canada and considers IDDSI instrumental to improving patient safety and interprofessional communication in dysphagia care.

People with dysphagia have a difficulty or inability to swallow. This disorder can develop at any age, but is more common in older individuals. The prevalence of dysphagia may be as high as 25% of elderly people living independently, 30% of hospitalized patients and 68% of residents in long-term care settings. Many serious health conditions are known to be associated with dysphagia, including neurological disorders (for example, stroke, dementia, Parkinson's disease

and traumatic brain injury), head and neck cancer and developmental disorders. Dysphagia can lead to an increased risk of choking, asphyxiation, pneumonia, malnutrition, dehydration and overall decreased quality of life. It is imperative that effective treatments are available to people with swallowing problems to reduce the significant mortality, morbidity and costs of care associated with the disorder.

Texture modified foods and thickened liquids have become a cornerstone for speech-language pathology dysphagia management, preventing many negative health consequences. Yet health-care facilities and manufacturers use a variety of scales for these modified products, leading to potential errors when patients and/or health-care providers move to a new facility and causing confusion when people with dysphagia must purchase or prepare dysphagia products. IDDSI's standardized terminology and definitions mitigate the risk of error and adverse events.

Implementation of the IDDSI framework, which takes approximately 2-3 years, is already underway in a small number of health regions and institutions in Canada. The Canadian Dysphagia Industry Group (a coalition of food service and health-care provision companies that supply dysphagia products) has also committed to fully transitioning their dysphagia products to the new IDDSI diet standards by January 1, 2019.

NLASLPA requests that the Newfoundland and Labrador government work with health-care facilities in its jurisdiction to facilitate the universal adoption of the IDDSI framework, consistent with the provincial responsibility to plan and implement public health initiatives, as put forth by the *Canada Health Act*. Adoption of the IDDSI framework in health-care settings in Newfoundland and Labrador will require health professionals and organizations to incorporate standards and terminology, adopt new dysphagia products and conduct training. This process may require administrative support and funding to be successful, as health-care facilities may need to create a 'currency converter' to match their current texture scale to IDDSI's, update their diet order and food service systems and teach staff new procedures.

Although universal adoption of the IDDSI framework will require an initial investment of time and funds, we believe there will be significant patient care benefits on a local, national and international scale, allowing for improved safety and quality of care and the furthering of dysphagia research. Internationally, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand are currently implementing the IDDSI framework and the United Kingdom is expected to soon follow. NLASLPA encourages Newfoundland and Labrador, along with the federal government and other provinces and territories of Canada to join the movement and support implementation of IDDSI.

I trust you will join the rapidly growing national and international movement in support of IDDSI and help facilitate implementation of the IDDSI framework. Given that texture modified foods and thickened liquids are imperative to preventing poor health outcomes in adults and children with dysphagia, we believe that use of the IDDSI framework within Newfoundland and Labrador's health-care facilities will promote patient safety and facilitate delivery of better treatment outcomes.

Yours sincerely,

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