

Prince Edward Island Healthy Eating Strategy

2007-2010

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PEI Active Living Alliance
PEI Tobacco Reduction Alliance (PETRA)
PEI Home Economics Association
Dietitians of Canada
Medical Society of PEI
Island Pediatricians
Association of Nurses of PEI
Breastfeeding Coalition of PEI
Atlantic Superstore
Sobey's Food Warehouse
PEI Teachers' Federation
PEI Home and School Federation
Eastern School District
Western School Board
la Commission de Scolaire de Langue
Française

Family Resource Centres
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l' Association des Femmes Acadienne et
Francophones de l'I-P-E
PEI Department of Agriculture
PEI Department of Communities, Cultural
Affairs and Labour
(Culture, Heritage & Recreation)
PEI Department of Education
PEI Department of Health
PEI Department of Social Services and Seniors
PEI Horticultural Association
PEI Potato Marketing Board
Public Health Agency of Canada
Early Childhood Development Association
PEI School Milk Foundation
UPEI: Children's Health Applied Research
Team (CHART), Department of Family and
Nutritional Sciences

Executive Summary

The Prince Edward Island Healthy Eating Alliance (HEA) is a group of approximately 40 organizations (both government and non-government) and individuals, dedicated to the improvement of eating habits of children and youth on Prince Edward Island.

When the Alliance was formed in 2001, our initial target group was school aged children. We have made considerable progress towards meeting our original goals:

- 1) to increase nutrition education and promote healthy eating to students, parents, teachers
- 2) to increase access to safe and healthy foods in all types of environments where children gather
- 3) to develop, implement and evaluate comprehensive healthy eating policies.

We now have healthy eating policies in all elementary and consolidated schools across the province, and we are working with school districts to develop policies for intermediate and high schools. Healthy eating tips, annual school newsletters and the School Healthy Eating Toolkit have been developed to support school communities in their efforts. We have partnered with school districts, UPEI and community groups such as the Canadian Cancer Society to conduct research on student eating behaviours, foods available at school and factors influencing healthy eating policy development.

The purpose of the 2007-2010 strategy is to guide the work of the Healthy Eating Alliance over the next three years. The goals and strategies that follow were developed as a means to improve the current eating behaviours of our Island children and youth, now with an expanded target group from 0 to 19 years of age. This plan supports the Province's Strategy for Healthy Living which will encourage and support Islanders to address the risk factors that contribute to chronic disease (tobacco use, unhealthy eating and physical inactivity) through prevention efforts. This document includes a description of the environmental context, the HEA vision, mission, goals, objectives, actions completed and a three-year action plan.

The current goals of the HEA build on our original goals: to increase nutrition education and promote healthy eating; to increase access to safe and healthy foods; and to increase understanding of how children and youth are currently eating, their health status, health determinants, and how we can best improve their future eating behaviours by partnering in quality research projects.

The HEA is guided by a Steering Committee, with diverse representation. There are three working groups: Nutrition Education and Promotion, Access to Safe and Healthy Foods and Healthy Eating Policy. In addition, an ad hoc committee on research and surveillance provides expertise to the Alliance as required.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this strategy is to guide the work of the Healthy Eating Alliance over the next three years (2007-2010). The goals and strategies that follow were developed as a means to improve current eating behaviours and reduce obesity among our Island children and youth. This plan supports the PEI Healthy Living Strategy by addressing poor eating habits, one of the major risk factors for chronic disease. This document describes the problem of overweight and obesity in children and the poor eating habits of Island children, and identifies the Alliance's vision, mission, goals, objectives and 3-year action plans for each of its working groups.

2. Rationale and Context

Nutrition is essential for good health and well-being. It is of particular importance for children, who have high nutritional needs for growth and development. Many aspects of child health are directly impacted by nutrition. Poor nutrition in childhood has been documented to have a negative impact on cognitive development and school performance, increases the potential for infection and irritability and results in low energy levels. Children who skip meals, or who do not have adequate dietary intakes, show decreased readiness to learn and cognitive functioning. Speed and accuracy of information retrieval is affected, as is working memory, verbal fluency, attention span, school absenteeism, and behaviour in general.

It has long been recognized that making poor food choices or not having healthy food choices available, combined with inactivity, has been linked to overweight and obesity in children (Johnson & Nicklas, 1999; Booth et al, 2004; Raine, 2004). This link between poor dietary habits and overweight and obesity in children has received increased attention in Canada in recent years (Lau et al, 2007). This is, in part, due to the widely cited study (Tremblay & Willms, 2000) which showed that, in the past 20 years, the number of overweight children (BMI between 85th and 95th percentile) in Canada has doubled; the number of obese children (BMI over 95th percentile) has tripled (Lau et al, 2007). Islanders face particular challenges in the area of obesity in children and adults. Recently released data regarding overweight (22.4%) and obesity (7.8%) rates in PEI children indicate that, while obesity rates are close to the national average, rates of overweight among boys are the highest in the country (Statistics Canada, 2004). It is also a significant concern that 67% of adults in PEI are overweight or obese (BMI >25) (25), second only to Newfoundland (69%). Since overweight children are more likely to become overweight adult (Raine, 2004; Davison & Birch, 2001), and since the behaviours that increase the risk of chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, type II diabetes and cancer begin early in life, it is essential that preventative efforts begin in childhood. Improving childhood nutrition is a key component of such prevention programs.

The first evidence that there were nutritional concerns in PEI children came from the School Health Study in 1999, which examined food consumption of children in grades 4-8 from Charlottetown, PEI and Stratford, Ontario showed that less than half of the students were drinking milk at least twice a day and one-third do not drink milk daily (Evers et al, 2001). Children on PEI ate less vegetables, and more pop, chips, cakes and french fries than children in Ontario. A follow-up survey was conducted in 2001/2002, with over 5000 students in Grades 1 to 12 participating. Results confirmed the earlier findings, and suggested that Island children are not doing well with respect to the quality of their diets with low milk, and fruit and vegetable consumption, and frequent consumption of high-fat snacks (Taylor et al, 2003). Further, breakfast skipping increased with age, increasing from 10% of children in elementary school to 50% in intermediate students and 66% for high school students.

The PEI Healthy Eating Alliance was formed in 2001 in order to respond to these concerns regarding poor eating habits and overweight in our children and youth. The first province wide Healthy Eating Strategy was released in 2002 to provide a framework for action around healthy eating, with an initial focus on school aged children.

3. Progress Towards Goals

We have made considerable progress towards meeting our original goals 1) to increase nutrition education and promote healthy eating to students, parents, teachers 2) to increase access to safe and healthy foods in all types of environments where children gather and 3) to develop, implement and evaluate comprehensive healthy eating policies.

Some of our accomplishments over the past three years include:

- developed healthy eating policies using a consultative approach; all elementary and consolidated schools are now implementing these policies
- secured funding for breakfast and snack programs
- developed the School Healthy Eating Toolkit to support elementary schools in policy implementation
- developed a website, a logo and a mascot
- initiated Healthy Eating Week
- developed annual newsletters for schools and monthly healthy eating tips for schools
- conducted numerous public and school based nutrition presentations.
- partnered with school districts, UPEI and community groups such as the Canadian Cancer Society to conduct research on student eating behaviours, foods available at school and factors influencing healthy eating policy development.

4. Current Issues

While we have had many successes, there is much more to be done in order to improve childhood nutrition and quell the alarming increases in childhood obesity occurring across the country. One key area is the *lack of co-ordinated nutrition intervention programs* for our children and youth, and across the lifespan. Currently on PEI, government and a number of individual organizations and community groups have programs and services that address healthy eating on some level.

Current Nutrition Services in Prince Edward Island

- There are nutritional services offered by community dietitians through the Department of Health. The primary mandate for this province wide service is high risk pregnant women and infant children at high nutritional risk up to 6 weeks postpartum. Community dietitians also address system needs for special diet requests and foster care child and infant growth and feeding assessments. This is in contrast to most other provinces (with the exception of New Brunswick) which have a broader mandate, addressing population groups across the life span as well as food security issues as part of their core mandate. Individual community dietitians have made contributions to the HEA through the Speaker's Bureau, and through membership on our working groups. Their efforts are very much appreciated. However, there is not sufficient time in their normal work day to dedicate to program development, implementation and evaluation in children and youth, or in other population groups. There is only one half-time home care dietitian who provides nutrition services to seniors in the province. This is not adequate, given that the PEI Seniors and Veterans Health Study, conducted in 1996, identified poor eating habits as one of the top three barriers to good health. They also identified a lack of nutritional information. We continue to lack a dedicated co-ordinator position to oversee nutrition services in the province. At present, there are no community dietitians mandated to provide population based nutrition services over the continuum of the life span (birth to death).
- Grocery store dietitians offer educational tours and healthy eating/cooking programs for adults, parents and children, and for some special health conditions such as celiac disease and diabetes. These programs and services tend to attract middle to high income participants, especially those programs which are now on a fee for service basis. These dietitians also respond to information requests, including product information, allergies, but have had to cut back on requests to speak at schools and worksites in order to focus on their key target groups.

- Approximately half of schools across the Island provide some type of breakfast or snack programs at no cost to the children, but these are funded primarily by donations and Breakfast for Learning, a national not for profit organization. Unlike some provinces such as British Columbia and Newfoundland, we do not have sustainable adequate funding for school food programs in PEI; one school district receives funding for program co-ordinators from the Department of Education.
- Family resource centres provide various programs that teach and promote healthy eating to pregnant women and their infants, many of whom are from low income families. There are no programs which specifically target healthy eating from infancy to school age.
- The Department of Education has included nutrition in newly developed provincial health curriculum; curriculum for Grades 1-3 was implemented for the first time in the fall of 2006. It is now being implemented in Grades 7-9. There have been concerns raised regarding American resources selected for Grade One children, which were not subjected to any review by nutrition professionals. The Department is in the process of developing and implementing new health curriculums for other grades.

With an initial focus on school aged children, the PEI Healthy Eating Alliance has worked to establish policies concerning healthy eating in schools, and to provide nutrition education materials for schools. This is a significant accomplishment, but is unlikely, on its own, to achieve changes in eating habits and overweight. According to The Centres for Disease Control (CDC) and other experts, and reviews by Baronowski and others, change in eating habits and overweight are most likely to occur when intervention programs utilize a comprehensive approach; e.g., including behavioural based/skill based curriculum, supportive environments (e.g. school catering, marketing), staff education in nutrition or the involvement of nutrition professionals, involvement of family and community and based on strong partnerships (CDC 1997; Baranowski et al, 2002). The policies we have developed with schools are a significant foundation for successful future population based interventions.

In summary, we have accomplished much, and we have seen significant changes in school food environments. However, we will be most successful in the next three years if we are able to implement co-ordinated, population level programming rather than focusing on small segments of the population. The 2007-2010 PEI Healthy Eating Strategy provides an opportunity for PEI HEA to work with our partners to address these issues.

5. The 2007-2010 Strategy

The PEI Healthy Eating Alliance is committed to working within a comprehensive strategy that is evidence-based. In the early stages of development, we conducted a literature review of best practices in nutrition interventions to promote healthy eating among children and youth. More recently, an environmental scan of better practices in children's health policies and research was completed. We continue to use these findings as a foundation for our action plans. We are now partnering with UPEI and school districts to monitor the impacts of our work. For example, we are one of two provinces in Canada which has collected province wide data on children's eating habits prior to the implementation of new school nutrition policies. This will constitute an important baseline for evaluating the effectiveness of policies on children's eating habits. We have also conducted both qualitative and quantitative research on the foods available at PEI schools, factors influencing policy development and, most recently, adherence to the new school nutrition policies. We are partnering with UPEI in a major longitudinal evaluation of the new healthy eating policies.

The 2007-2010 PEI Healthy Eating Strategy is based on:

- Input from consultations with Alliance members and other stakeholders;
- Current research in PEI and beyond concerning obesity, healthy eating and health determinants;
- Best practices in healthy eating policies, programs and interventions designed to improve healthy eating and reduce overweight in children and youth.

The Healthy Eating Alliance has been successful in bringing a broad group of interested individuals and groups together to work on this initiative in the true sense of a partnership (see Appendix A for Terms of Reference). The Alliance is guided by a **partnership agreement** that defines how its members work together towards common goals. The agreement reads as follows:

The PEI Healthy Eating Alliance is a collaborative partnership to address the challenges of healthy eating among children and youth. The partnership will serve to coordinate existing activities, identify research opportunities, reduce duplication, maximize the use of resources, and measure effectiveness of healthy eating initiatives. The strategy will be sustained through the collective efforts of the partners in the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the actions.

The Alliance has identified the following guiding principles to assist in decision-making and planning:

- a) Build on the work that has already been initiated by individuals, government departments and organizations, and strengthen partnerships that improve the nutritional health of Islanders.
- b) Build support, increase capacity and obtain commitment for a comprehensive strategy for healthy eating for children and youth within the members' own organizations.

The Alliance receives funding from the Province of Prince Edward Island (Department of Health); we also receive in-kind contributions from the Department of Education.

6. Structure

The current structure of the PEI Healthy Eating Alliance continues to evolve. The current structure allows for clarity in communication and decision-making.

- 1. Steering Committee** A committee of individuals from various sectors who provide coordination and guidance to the Healthy Eating Alliance and its working groups.
- 2. Working Groups -**
 - Nutrition Education and Promotion
 - Access to Safe and Healthy Foods
 - Healthy Eating Policy
- 3. Research and Evaluation Committee** An ad hoc committee which provides expertise to the Alliance as required and oversees the design and implementation of an evaluation framework.

We are examining ways to work more collaboratively and effectively with the PEI Active Living Alliance (ALA) and the PEI Tobacco Reduction Alliance (PETRA) through structural changes. The Steering Committee hopes to collaborate and share resources in the areas of administration and support, promotion and education, communication, policy development and implementation and research.

Vision: Optimal nutritional health for Island children and youth.

Mission: The PEI Healthy Eating Alliance is a multi-sectoral organization committed to working collaboratively to encourage Island children and youth to enjoy, understand and benefit from healthy eating. The Alliance will cultivate and foster an environment that promotes and supports healthy eating behaviours.

Goals:

- 1) To increase nutrition education and promote healthy eating to students, parents, teachers and all those who have an impact on how children eat.
- 2) To increase access to safe and healthy foods in all types of environments where children gather.
- 3) To develop, implement and evaluate comprehensive healthy eating policies aimed at improving the nutritional health in children and youth; a secondary target is families and the broader community.
- 4) To partner on research initiatives which increase our understanding of how children and youth are currently eating, factors influencing eating habits and how we can best improve their future eating behaviours

Strategies: The HEA will employ the following strategies to achieve these goals:

- 1) Promote and Support Healthy Eating
- 2) Build Capacity and Knowledge
- 3) Strengthen Community Action
- 4) Build Healthy Public Policy
- 5) Support the Development of Health Promoting Environments
- 6) Conduct Research and Evaluation
- 7) Assist in Knowledge Exchange

The following tables describe the Action Plans that the Working Groups have developed and plan to implement over the next three years.

Goal#1: To increase nutrition education and promote healthy eating to students, parents, teachers and all those who have an impact on how children eat.

OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	ACTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increase the number of Island children and youth whose eating habits are consistent with Canada’s Food Guide ● Increase public awareness of the benefits of healthy eating and the health risks associated with poor eating habits. ● Increase the number of Island children and youth who are within a healthy weight range for their age and height. ● Increase the number of home, school and community environments in which healthy eating is promoted and supported through policies and programs offered. ● Increase school and community access to healthy eating resources 	<p><i>Promote and Support Healthy Eating and Healthy Body Weights Assist in Knowledge Exchange</i></p>	Partnering with UPEI researchers in the development/implementation/ evaluation of <i>Eating Between the Lines</i> early literacy/nutrition program
		Continue annual Healthy Eating Week
		Work with PEI Dietitians to raise profile of Nutrition Month
		Partner with Healthy Eating Policy Working Group to continue newsletters for parents, healthy eating tips for schools
		Maintain and support an active Speaker’s Bureau
		Deliver presentations to parents, Home & School, and other interested groups through the Speaker’s Bureau
		Partner with Active Living Alliance, Heart & Stroke Foundation, Canadian Cancer Society, the Department of Health, and others on promotional activities and resources, e.g the <i>Fun First</i> Program
		Enhance and maintain the website for the HEA
		Partner with the Active Living Alliance, Tobacco Reduction Alliance (PETRA), Heart & Stroke Foundation, Canadian Cancer Society and the PEI Healthy Living Strategy in developing and securing funding for a social marketing campaign pertaining to healthy living.
Partner with media and other organizations to promote healthy eating		

OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	ACTIONS
	<i>Build Capacity and Knowledge</i>	Work with the Department of Education and community partners to promote the further development and enhancement of a current, relevant nutrition education curriculum and enhance the resources available to teachers to support their nutrition education activities.
		Support the professional development for teachers and early childhood educators when possible
		Develop accurate and appropriate healthy eating resources to supplement current nutrition education curriculum at the preschool and school age level
		Maintain a current inventory of existing nutrition activities and programs in PEI.
	<i>Strengthen Community Action</i>	Work with businesses, workplaces, Community and Family Resource Centres, recreational facilities and government to promote healthy eating. Partner with Active Living Alliance on community health initiatives.

Goal #2: To increase access to safe and healthy foods in all types of environments where children gather.

OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	ACTION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Establish policies designed to support healthy eating for all children in settings where children gather ● Increase the number of food service operations serving children where healthy food choices are readily accessible and affordable ● Ensure that every student is well nourished before and during the school day to enhance learning and health ● Decrease the number of Island children who experience food insecurity 	<p><i>Build Healthy Public Policy</i></p>	<p>Using a consultative approach, support the development, implementation and evaluation of healthy eating policies and programs in all places where children gather – including day cares and kindergartens, intermediate and high schools, and recreation centres.</p>
	<p><i>Support the Development of Health Promoting Environments</i></p>	<p>Advocate for the establishment of a publicly-funded sustainable provincial school breakfast/snack program</p> <p>Continue to maintain formal membership in Breakfast for Learning, serving as the PEI adjudicating body for grants to school nutrition programs, the coordinating committee for PEI programs, and monitor of PEI program standards</p>
	<p><i>Strengthen Community Action</i></p>	<p>Partner with the PEI Livable Income Working Group, an advocacy group by a) requesting HEA representation on the group and b) forming a subgroup which will focus on food insecurity issues. Actions may include but are not limited to those recommended by attendees at the Canada Prenatal Nutrition Program Food Security Workshop held in Charlottetown, February 2005: increasing awareness of the problem of food insecurity in PEI and assessing nutrition resource needs of clients in cooperation with food banks and UPEI Department of Family & Nutritional Sciences.</p>

Goal #3. To develop, implement and evaluate comprehensive healthy eating policies aimed at improving the nutritional health in children and youth.

OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	ACTIONS	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Support the implementation of healthy eating policies in elementary and consolidated schools ● Develop healthy eating policies for intermediate and high schools using a consultative approach ● Develop healthy eating policies for pre-school and kindergarten environments ● Participate in the evaluation of healthy eating policies ● Increase awareness nationally of PEI's work in the area of policy development and evaluation. 	<p><i>Build Healthy Public Policy</i></p>	Provide up to date and practical nutrition related resources for schools through the School Healthy Eating Toolkit	
		<p><i>Support the Development of Health Promoting Environments</i></p>	Seek and secure sustainable funding for expansion of the Healthy Eating Policy Project
			Partner with UPEI and other researchers in designing and implementing a comprehensive policy evaluation strategy
	<p><i>Build Capacity and Knowledge Assist in Knowledge Transfer</i></p>	Continue to develop and enhance resources the key target group of children and youth; also develop resources for schools, parents, dietitians and community groups which explain and support healthy eating policies	
		Seek funding and support to hold regular networking meetings for schools	
		Partner with the Nutrition Working Group of the National Joint Consortium for School Health	
		Present findings of policy development/implementation to national health and education conferences	
	<p><i>Strengthen Community Action</i></p>	Partner with the Departments of Education, Health, Social Services and Seniors, school districts and School Health Co-ordinator in the development and implementation of healthy eating policies for pre-school, kindergarten	
		Partner with PEI Home and School Federation and PEI Teacher's Federation in the development and implementation of healthy eating policies	

Goal #4: To partner on research initiatives which increase our understanding of eating behaviours of children and youth, children’s health status, health determinants and how we can improve children’s eating behaviours and their overall health

OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES	ACTIONS
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Monitor information available on food services and policies in Island school and pre-school environments. ● Monitor data available on eating behaviours, nutrient intake and weight status of Island children and youth. ● Increase the number of policy decisions influencing healthy eating which are evidenced-based. ● Increase the number of population based evidenced- based nutrition interventions for children and youth. 	<p><i>Support Research and Evaluation</i></p>	<p>Partner with UPEI, other researchers, community partners and organizations in identifying research questions, securing funding and implementing relevant research initiatives, including population based nutrition interventions</p>
		<p>Partner with the Department of Health (provincial epidemiologist) and UPEI in accessing and interpreting dietary and weight status information from the PEI sample of the Canada Community Health Survey</p>
		<p>Partner with UPEI in implementing the CIHR funded Elementary School Policy Evaluation</p>
		<p>Work with Healthy Living Strategy Steering Committee and other relevant partners in developing and implementing a comprehensive evaluation framework for HEA which is complementary to the Provincial Healthy Living Strategy evaluation.</p>
		<p>Assist other working groups in designing and evaluating healthy eating interventions</p>
		<p>Maintain a library of current research articles and documents</p>
		<p>Participate in relevant research networks (e.g. CANSPANN)</p>
		<p><i>Assist in Knowledge Transfer</i></p>
<p>Publish PEI research (e.g. eating behaviour surveys, policy evaluation data) in national and international publications</p>		

Prince Edward Island Healthy Eating Alliance

Terms of Reference

Purpose

To develop, implement and evaluate a Comprehensive Healthy Eating Strategy to improve the eating habits of children and youth on PEI.

Rationale

This Alliance has been formed as a follow up to the work that began in May of 2001 at the Achieving Healthy Weights in Children Workshop. That workshop focused on activity, nutrition and healthy lifestyles and on the long-term effects of obesity on health including the increased risk for chronic disease.

The key target group of the Alliance will be children and youth (0-19 years); a secondary target is families and the wider community, for the following reasons:

- infancy, pre-school and school years are habit-forming years and a key time to establish eating patterns;
- the wider community, and the resources it offers has a great impact on the health and rearing of our children;
- children spend a great amount of their time in pre-school and school settings;
- pre-schools and schools are ideal environments for early intervention and health teaching;
- pre-schools and schools are a great source of influence in children's lives.

Guiding Principles

- a) To build on the work that has already been initiated by individuals, government departments and organizations, and to strengthen partnerships whose purpose it is to improve the nutritional health of Islanders.
- b) To build support, increase capacity and obtain commitment for a comprehensive strategy for healthy eating for children and youth within the members' own organizations/government departments.

Scope of Work

- a) To develop a measurement and evaluation component for the Healthy Eating Strategy.
- b) To establish multi-sectoral sub-committees as necessary for specific tasks and recruit new partners as deemed appropriate by the sub-committees.

Deliverables

- a) A comprehensive, evidence-based healthy eating strategy including vision, values, principles, and goals. This will include an agreement of commitment to an action plan by partners.
- b) A work plan with evaluation indicators to measure, where feasible, outcomes of implementation, including process and impact measures. It is expected that communication and research planning will be included in this document.
- c) Partner in research designed to evaluate healthy eating behaviours and determinants; programs and policies.
- d) A progress report provided annually to the Ministers of Education, Health and Social Services and Seniors.

Meetings

Meeting times, agendas, and frequency will be determined by the various working groups and the Steering Committee. It is anticipated that the Steering Committee will meet a minimum of three times per year.

The work of the Steering Committee will be co-chaired by representatives from both the health and education sectors.

Decisions will be made by consensus if at all possible. If the committee is unable to reach consensus, a decision will be made by voting.

Written summaries of the meetings will be maintained and circulated to committee members.

Accountability

Individual members are accountable to their respective organizations for communication and follow-up of commitments related to the implementation of the strategy.

The Alliance is accountable to the Ministers of Health, Social Services and Seniors and Education through the Deputy Ministers.

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