



ALPHA Resolution

2009-01 Support for a Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Tax

Sugar-sweetened beverages with little or no nutrition are staples of today's Alaskan diet. Sugar-sweetened beverages are soft drinks sweetened with sugar, corn syrup, or other caloric sweeteners and include carbonated and un-carbonated drinks, such as sports drinks, energy drinks, and soda pop.

More than for any other category of foods, rigorous scientific studies have shown that consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages is associated with poor diet, increasing rates of obesity, and risk for diabetes. In addition, consumption of sugary beverages can cause tooth decay and dental erosion. Chronic diseases related to poor diet cost the country billions of health care dollars annually and are complex problems which must be addressed through multifaceted strategies. Taxing certain classes of products to reduce consumption has been proposed as one means of improving the nation's nutrition, raising revenue for health programs, and recovering costs caused by consumption of calorie dense, nutrient-poor foods.

Consumption Trends

Since the 1970s, there has been a substantial increase in the per person consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages to an average of 50 gallons per person per year. A 2004 study found that soft drinks are the single largest contributor of calorie intake in the United States¹. U.S. per capita consumption of calories from sugar-sweetened beverages doubled between 1977-2002 across all age groups².

Twenty-two percent of Alaskan high school youth drink one or more sugar-sweetened beverages per day, and American Indian/Alaska Native girls are significantly more likely to do so (35%) than are White girls (11%).³ Consumption of soda and other sugar-sweetened beverages is even common among 2-year-olds—29% of toddlers statewide and 58% in the northern and southwest parts of Alaska consumed some form of sugar-sweetened beverage on any given day.⁴ Nearly one-third (29%) of adults report drinking one or more cans of non-diet soda each day, with 14% of adults drinking 2 or more cans.⁵

Impact on Health

Evidence strongly supports a positive association between the intake of sugar-sweetened beverages and body fat in children.⁶ Systematic reviews of evidence conclude that greater

consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages is associated with increased calorie intake, weight gain, diabetes, and obesity.⁷

Public Support for Tax

Taxes whose revenues are designated to promote the health of key groups (such as children and underserved populations) are most likely to receive public support.⁸ In 2005, 30% of Alaskans supported or strongly supported a junk food tax.⁹ According to a recent Kaiser Family Foundation survey, 53% of Americans support taxes on soda and sugary soft drinks if the revenue generated went toward health care reform.¹⁰

Revenue – Generating Potential

Based on the Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity calculator, if Alaska were to impose a one-cent per ounce tax on all sugar-sweetened beverages (not just regular soft drinks) sold, it would generate \$33.4 million of tax revenue in 2010.¹¹

Impact of Price on Consumption

Based on the best estimates to date of the responsiveness of demand for soft drinks to changes in price¹², a 10% tax could result in an 8% reduction in consumption. The effects may be higher for heavy users of soft drinks¹³. Additionally, experiments show that decreasing the cost of healthy foods relative to that of less-healthy foods is effective in promoting the purchase of healthy items.¹⁴

The Director for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Thomas R. Frieden, stated during his *Weight of the Nation* address that a substantial soda tax would probably be the single most effective means to reduce obesity.¹⁵

As with any public health intervention, the precise effect of a tax cannot be known until it is implemented and studied, but research to date suggests that a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages would have strong positive effects on reducing consumption.¹⁶ In addition, the tax has the potential to generate substantial revenue for obesity prevention and address other external costs resulting from the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages.

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Alaska Public Health Association supports a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska Public Health Association supports the use of the revenue generated from the sugar-sweetened beverage tax to help finance obesity prevention efforts, chronic disease prevention efforts, improve health promotion efforts, and support other health related programs.

AND BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Alaska Public Health Association will promote and advocate for the establishment of a sugar-sweetened beverage tax by engaging board members and other members in low and no-cost advocacy efforts for this purpose such as:

- Circulation of advocacy action requests to membership,
- Circulation of advocacy action requests to partners and other individuals,

- Posting of ALPHA resolutions on the Alaska Public Health Association’s website and/or making this resolution publicly available,
- Participation in email advocacy campaigns,
- Contact with policy makers via phone, letter, email and/or in-person meetings,
- Public testimony in legislative hearings, town hall meetings, and other public forums,
- Contribution of op-ed articles and/or letters to the editor,
- Contributions to radio programs via calling-in or scheduled interviews,
- Distribution of this resolution statement to policy makers and key stakeholders.

Fiscal & Public Health Impact Statement

Fiscal Impact on ALPHA: This action will result in minor costs associated with sending this resolution and accompanying cover letter to political leaders.

Public Health Impact: Successful obesity prevention efforts must be multifaceted. Increasing the price of unhealthy beverages in combination with other prevention strategies will increase the quality of life for Alaskan citizens, decrease the burden of obesity related diseases, and decrease both public and privately paid medical costs.

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- ¹ Block, G. (2004). Foods contributing to energy intake in the US: Data from NHANES III and NHANES 1999-2000. *Journal of Food Consumption and Analysis*, 17, 439-447.
 - ² Duffey, K.J., & Popkin, B.M. (2007). Shifts in patterns and consumption of beverages between 1965 and 2002. *Obesity*, 15, 2739-47.
 - ³ Fenaughty AM, Fink K, Peck D, Utermohle CJ. *Childhood Obesity in Alaska*. Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Public Health, Section of Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion. March 2009.
 - ⁴ Ibid.
 - ⁵ Ibid.
 - ⁶ Ibid.
 - ⁷ Vartanian, L. R., Schwartz, M. B., & Brownell, K. D. (2007). Effects of soft drink consumption on nutrition and health: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *American Journal of Public Health*, 97(4), 667-675.
 - ⁸ Caraher, M., & Cowburn, G. (2007). Taxing food: Implications for public health nutrition. *Public Health Nutrition*, 8(08), 1242-1249; Jacobson, M. & Brownell, K., op. cit.
 - ⁹ Alaska BRFSS, 2005.
 - ¹⁰ The Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, July 2009, Kaiser Health Tracking Poll. <http://www.kff.org/kaiserpolls/upload/7945.pdf>
 - ¹¹ Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity, Revenue Calculator for Soft Drink Taxes, <http://yaleruddcenter.org/sodatax.aspx>
 - ¹² Andreyeva, T., Long, M. W., & Brownell, K. D. (2008). The impact of food prices on consumption: A systematic review of research on price elasticity of demand for food. *American Journal of Public Health*, in press.
 - ¹³ Gustavsen, G. W., & Rickertsen, K. Public policies and the demand for carbonated soft drinks. Working paper prepared for presentation at the XIth Congress of the European Association of Agricultural Economists, Copenhagen, Denmark, August 24-27, 2005.
 - ¹⁴ French, S. A. (2003). Pricing effects on food choices. *Journal of Nutrition*, 133(3), 841S-843.
 - ¹⁵ Frieden TR. Presentation at Weight of the Nation Conference on Obesity Prevention and Control, July 27, 2009. A Public Health Approach to Preventing and Controlling Obesity <http://www.adph.org/ALPHTN/assets/wonfrieden.pdf>
 - ¹⁶ Brownell KD, Frieden TR. Ounces of prevention — the public policy case for taxes on sugared beverages. *N Engl J Med* 2009; 360:1805-8.