

States need to assume greater role in regulating dietary supplements

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A new Temple study has concluded that state governments need to increase their regulation of dietary supplements. Credit: Joseph V. Labolito

Dietary supplements, which are marketed to adults and adolescents for weight loss and muscle building, usually do not deliver promised results and can actually cause severe health issues, including death. But because of lax federal oversight of these supplements, state governments need to increase their regulation of these products to protect consumers.

That's the finding of a new study, "The Dangerous Mix of Adolescents and Dietary Weight Loss and Muscle Building: Legal Strategies for State

Action," published online Sept. 23, in the *Journal of Public Health Management and Practice*.

"The market for dietary supplements in the United States has grown to a \$32 billion a year industry, with more than half of adults reporting regular use," noted the study, which was conducted by researchers from Temple University, Harvard University, University of Rhode Island and the Boston Children's Hospital. "However, these products are not recommended by physicians, and most are not effective to accomplish the promised results. Rather, many of these products are adulterated, mislabeled, or have unclear dosing recommendations."

The federal government has a regulatory regime for these dietary supplements under the Dietary Supplement Health and Education Act that is very lax and really does not function to protect consumers or warn them of the true hazards of taking these products, said Jennifer Pomeranz, assistant professor of [public health](#) and a member of the Temple's Center for Obesity Research and Education, who is the study's lead author. "Most of the literature on the subject talks about giving the FDA more authority to address these dietary supplements."

Pomeranz, whose research focuses on public health law and policy, said the researchers decided to take a different approach and examine the resources available to state governments to address the dangers posed by these dietary supplements and protect consumers, particularly adolescents, from using them. She noted that it is the first study to focus on the need for state intervention in protecting consumers against these products.

"State attorneys general have the authority to protect consumers in their states and they need to begin imposing that authority on the marketing efforts of these dangerous dietary supplements, especially as it relates to their use by adolescents," Pomeranz said.

Other recommendations outlined by the researchers that could be enacted by state governments for regulating [dietary supplements](#) include conducting laboratory testing, generating safety warnings and educational materials, instituting minimum age purchase limits, enacting taxes and banning particularly dangerous products. They also suggest that manufacturers, pharmacies and retailers should engage in self-regulation of these products to protect their customers.

"Experts are right, the FDA does need more authority and needs to more vigorously exert their existing authority in regulating these dangerous supplements," said Pomeranz. "But in the meantime, states need to use their existing authority to step in and fill that void."

Provided by Temple University

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