

# A taste of change in the fight on obesity

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In 2014, Mexican legislation created a one peso per litre (approximately 10%) tax on all sugar sweetened beverage (SSB) sales. The average Mexican consumes 163 L of SSBs per year, the equivalent of 16 kg of pure sugar. Up to 14% of the population has diabetes, and over 70 000 people die each year due to complications of the disease. Action on this heavy burden of disease was overdue.

The [health](#) effects of excess sugar consumption are a growing concern for the entire global community and across all income groups, contributing to the double burden of malnutrition: the co-existence of undernutrition including deficiencies in important vitamins and minerals, alongside or even along with overweight, obesity and nutrition-related noncommunicable diseases. Indeed, this rising and divergent nutrition challenge is of such concern to the international community that the United Nations (UN) General Assembly declared 2016 the beginning of a UN Decade of Action on Nutrition.

Since the introduction of the tax in Mexico, the public health results have begun to roll in. They show the tax has been effective in realising a reduction in sugary drinks sales – with analyses demonstrating a 6% to 12% reduction in the first year. The greatest reductions were seen in those at greatest risk of poor health outcomes; low-income groups. This is an even more remarkable finding given the lower 2-3% decrease in tobacco consumption commonly associated with tobacco taxes of a similar scale.

In short, the tax, albeit a brave move by policy makers, looks set to be an

unparalleled victory in population-level efforts to address obesity. No panacea, but an important and impactful step forward.

To support and celebrate the important work of many to achieve this outcome, NCDFREE and Mexico-based public interest, rights-based coalition the Nutritional Health Alliance have launched their latest global health short film. Aiming to tell the human stories behind the tax, the film documents the multifaceted efforts that have and must be taken to combat obesity, and highlights the success of the Mexican public health community and Government.

A story to rally around, have told and re-told, and champion the world over. In 10 short minutes, the global health film [The Taste of Change](#) weaves together multiple family generations and their struggles with overweight and obesity, and the story of Dr. Simòn Barquera working tirelessly to change Mexico's health for the better, in the face of corporate profit.

A tried and true recipe for a healthier population – and a healthier future.

**More information:** M Arantxa Colchero et al. Beverage purchases from stores in Mexico under the excise tax on sugar sweetened beverages: observational study, *BMJ* (2016). [DOI: 10.1136/bmj.h6704](https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.h6704)

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