

Renewed calls for sugar, tobacco and alcohol taxes

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Despite their potential, taxes on sugar, tobacco and alcohol are underused by policy makers, Professor Sally Casswell says. Credit: Massey University

A Massey University professor is among an international group drawn from academia and international agencies, including the World Bank,

United Nations (UN) and World Health Organisation (WHO), calling for taxes on sugar, tobacco and alcohol in order to achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals.

The STAX ([sugar](#), tobacco, and [alcohol](#) taxes) is an international cohort of experts, including Professor Sally Casswell from Massey's SHORE and Whāriki Research Centre – New Zealand's only representative in the group.

The group recently published a paper in *The Lancet*, highlighting evidence that raising prices of sugar, tobacco and alcohol has worked in a number of countries.

Professor Casswell says, "New Zealand has done relatively well in tobacco taxation but less so in alcohol and sugar. The current Tax Working Group in New Zealand could pay close attention to STAX."

The group argues there is compelling evidence that raising tobacco prices substantially, via taxation, is the single most effective way to reduce tobacco use and save lives. Similarly, they say alcohol taxation is a cost-effective way to reduce alcohol consumption.

"Both of these are WHO 'best buys', cost effective ways to reduce harm," Professor Casswell says. Evidence on sugar tax is emerging fast as more countries introduce it. After introducing a sugar tax, Mexico reduced sugar-sweetened beverage sales by five per cent in the first year, with an almost 10 per cent further reduction in the second year.

"The consumption of tobacco, alcohol and sugar are risk factors for health and non-communicable diseases that disproportionately affect people with low socioeconomic status and low-income countries, which are least prepared. STAX could help mitigate these risk factors," Professor Casswell says.

Despite their potential, taxes on sugar, [tobacco](#) and alcohol are underused by policy makers, she says. "This reflects opposition from the industries which profit from their sale and also concerns that such taxes impact negatively on disadvantaged people. However, our Lancet paper refers to these taxes as progressive since the health benefits gained are greater for the more disadvantaged," she says.

"While adding tax isn't a silver bullet, the measures are an indispensable policy tool to improve public health, save millions of lives and generate resources to invest in health, nutrition and other UN development priorities."

More information: Robert Marten et al. Sugar, tobacco, and alcohol taxes to achieve the SDGs, *The Lancet* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736\(18\)31219-4](#)

Provided by Massey University

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