

# On Israel's cancelation of its sweetened beverage tax

February 7 2023, by Shamim Quadir

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Credit: AI-generated image ([disclaimer](#))

Referring to the cancelation of Israel's sweetened beverage tax, as "a grievous blow to public health," a group of senior health academics have published a letter in the medical journal, *The Lancet*, seeking to overturn the decision.

Approximately 64% of adults in Israel are overweight, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), whose metric for being overweight is a [body mass index](#) (BMI) greater than 25, and [childhood obesity](#) is on the rise. Poor populations are particularly affected and carry the greatest burden of associated chronic disease. The direct and indirect costs of obesity to Israeli society are estimated as 20 billion New Israeli Shekels (NIS) per year, equivalent to £4.8 billion.

"Since its introduction a year ago, the tax has reduced the consumption of sweetened drinks by about 10%," says Professor Aron Troen of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, co-author of the letter and a member of the World Federation of Public Health Associations. "The fact that world health leaders have responded shows what an important issue we're dealing with. Canceling the tax is irresponsible, an act of public health malpractice, and an outrage."

In the letter, the authors state that "revoking the tax will undoubtedly harm lives and increase the direct and indirect economic costs to Israel's health system and economy, both in the short term and long term. More broadly, this act undermines hard won progress made elsewhere around the world. It is a serious setback for evidence-based [public health policy](#) and will be celebrated by vested interests who promote their products and disregard the need for policies that uphold the public's health and welfare. This decision will be seen as prioritizing sectorial political interests over incontrovertible scientific evidence and public health best practice."

Martin Caraher, co-author of the letter and emeritus professor of food and [health policy](#) at the Center for Food Policy, City, University of London, said, "I work with my colleagues in Israel on matters related to food poverty and food taxation. Lessons learned from the implementation and monitoring of the U.K. soda tax have been shared with those colleagues and discussions are underway on how to monitor

its impact in Israel.

"In the U.K., the last PM but one, Liz Truss, threatened to rescind the U.K. soda tax. The current PM's intentions in respect of this are not clear. So the Israeli government's decision to revoke the soda tax, while worrying for public health in Israel, also sends a warning to those in other administrations such as the U.K.

"The worrying aspect of the move in Israel is the fact that despite strong international evidence of the impact of such taxes, these have not been part of the decision-making process. The drive was political expediency and similar to the reasons given by Liz Truss to withdraw the soda tax and some anti-obesity measures—part of a nanny-state approach to public health."

The group concludes the letter by "calling on the government of Israel to reconsider and retract this ill-conceived and hasty decision. Instead, let the revenue from the soda tax be used to combat chronic diseases including obesity, as well as promote nutrition security by increasing economic access to healthy diets, narrowing health disparities, improving the health and welfare of all Israeli citizens, and setting an example for world [health](#) leadership."

"Israel decides to cancel sweetened beverage tax in setback to [public health](#)" is published as a Correspondence in *The Lancet*.

**More information:** Aron M Troen et al, Israel decides to cancel sweetened beverage tax in setback to public health, *The Lancet* (2023). [DOI: 10.1016/S0140-6736\(23\)00214-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(23)00214-3)

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