

Australian public health leaders unite to call for health levy on sugary drinks

February 5 2024



Credit: rethinksugarydrink.org.au

Leading Australian public health organizations are calling for a 20% health levy on sugary drink manufacturers, with new research revealing the policy could reduce Australians' annual sugar intake by 2.6 kilograms per person and raise billions of dollars for health initiatives.

Members of the Rethink Sugary Drink alliance—including the Australian Medical Association (AMA), Cancer Council Australia, the Australian Dental Association, Food for Health Alliance, and Heart Foundation—will launch a new position statement in Canberra today (Feb. 5) urging the government to introduce the 20% health levy on sugary drink manufacturers.

[The statement](#) is backed by new AMA research that found a 20% health levy on [sugary drinks](#) could raise around \$1 billion each year, which could be used to fund crucial obesity prevention and other health initiatives.

AMA President Professor Steve Robson said the research also showed the policy could slash the amount of sugar Australians consume every year by nearly 2.6 kilograms per person, which is approximately 650 teaspoons of sugar.

"This policy really is a no brainer—it would raise vital funds for preventive health and protect Australians' health by decreasing the risk of diseases linked to excess weight like [heart disease](#), type 2 diabetes, stroke, and some cancers," Professor Robson said.

"Our modeling shows that a 20% health levy on sugary drink manufacturers could raise around \$4 billion over four years. These funds

could be invested into crucial health promotion campaigns, reducing pressure on our stretched health system."

"Research also shows there could be 4,400 fewer cases of heart disease, 16,000 fewer cases of type 2 diabetes, and 1,100 fewer strokes over 25 years if government takes this step."

Cancer Council Australia CEO, Professor Tanya Buchanan, explained that sugary drinks are energy dense but provide no nutritional value. Consuming more kilojoules than the body needs can lead to weight gain and obesity, a leading risk factor for 13 types of cancer.

"The Australian Government must put the community first, following in the footsteps of more than 100 countries and jurisdictions that already have a health levy on sugary drinks. Success stories from places like the U.K., South Africa and Mexico combined with a robust evidence base show us this policy can make a real difference to diets and health here in Australia."

"Importantly, we know a health levy encourages manufacturers to reformulate their drink products to contain less sugar, resulting in healthier beverages and better health outcomes.

"With the rate of obesity-related cancers in Australia increasing, we can no longer afford to wait."

Dr. Angie Nilsson, Federal Board Director at Australian Dental Association, added that over time the policy would also improve health equity and dental health in Australia.

"We know that just one 600mL bottle of soft drink can pack a shocking 16 teaspoons of sugar and is highly acidic. Frequently gulping down sugary drinks can increase the risk of issues including tooth decay,

sensitivity and erosion."

"Looking to countries that already have a health levy, like Mexico, it's clear that this policy can have a positive impact on population smiles as well as diets, with the greatest dental health benefits likely to be experienced by Australians from lower socio-economic backgrounds."

Food for Health Alliance's Executive Manager, Jane Martin, said that strong support exists at a community level for a health levy.

"We know Australians want to see change, with our research showing 77% would support a health levy on sugary drinks if the funds raised were reinvested into crucial obesity prevention efforts. Between this support and undeniable health and economic gains, what are we waiting for?"

Heart Foundation's National Manager of Public and Local Affairs, Peter Thomas, said government action to address harmful sugar consumption would benefit Australians' heart health.

"Healthier diets are key to reducing risk of heart disease, Australia's number one killer. With sugary drinks currently the biggest source of sugar in our diets, a 20% health levy on companies who manufacture these products is urgently needed to protect our nation's heart health," he concluded.

More information: AMA's report: www.ama.com.au/articles/sweetened-beverages

Provided by Australian Medical Association

Citation: Australian public health leaders unite to call for health levy on sugary drinks (2024, February 5) retrieved 27 April 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2024-02-australian-health-leaders-levy-sugary.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.