



## HEALTH IN ALL POLICIES: WATER

# Healthy Beverages

Water is essential to life. We use water for drinking, food preparation, bathing, and recreating, and expect this water to be clean and safe. However, when it comes time to choose a beverage, many people turn to sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) over water. This is at the heart of the battle on obesity. Strategies to discourage SSB consumption and encourage more water intake include educational campaigns on SSB risks, limitations on SSB sales, differing placement of SSBs and water in vending machines and restaurants, and taxes on SSBs. This guide will discuss some promising upstream strategies and examples for promoting water as the beverage of choice.

## The Choice: Water vs. Sugar-Sweetened Beverages

Scientists and clinicians consider sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) to be a major contributor to poor nutrition and high obesity rates.<sup>1,2,3</sup> Encouraging individuals to drink more water is one strategy to decrease SSB consumption and improve population health. To entice consumers to buy water instead of sugary drinks, policymakers can create disincentives to purchasing SSBs and provide incentives to purchase drinking water. In many states, some sales of drinking water are already exempt from taxes. Another important obesity prevention strategy is promoting tap water in schools as an alternative to SSBs. However, many schools are struggling to make free drinking water more accessible.

Through the Healthy, Hunger-Free Kids Act of 2010, federal law requires schools participating in federal meal programs such as the National School Lunch Program to make free, fresh drinking water available during mealtimes in school food service areas. A handful of states have the authority to enact broader requirements, as California and Massachusetts have done, requiring schools to provide free drinking water throughout the school day.<sup>4</sup>

### Guides to SSB Reduction Strategies

CDC and other organizations have developed guides that provide background information and suggested strategies to encourage water consumption over SSBs.<sup>5</sup> The Boston Public

Health Commission developed a Healthy Beverage Toolkit that suggests promoting policies that create a healthier beverage environment by changing media, access, point of purchase, pricing, and social support.<sup>6</sup> The toolkit aims to help municipal agencies, healthcare institutions, colleges and universities, community-based organizations, and retail establishments implement policies and practices that encourage healthy lifestyles for their employees, clients, students, and visitors.

In 2011, Boston Mayor Thomas Menino signed an executive order prohibiting the sale of SSBs on city property. The next year, he joined ten Boston hospitals and the American Heart Association to announce the hospitals' progress to reduce SSB consumption through such strategies as color-coding vending machine options with red, green, and yellow tags and launching educational campaigns that encouraged water consumption.<sup>7</sup>

Similarly, nonprofit organization Change Lab Solutions has developed the [Sugar-Sweetened Beverages Playbook](#), which provides 10 strategies that communities and states can use to reduce SSB consumption.<sup>8</sup> These strategies include launching water consumption public awareness campaigns, limiting SSB marketing in schools, and ultimately restricting SSBs in workplaces, schools, and after-school programs and daycare centers. These strategies have been successfully implemented in jurisdictions

that have strong partnerships and collaboration between communities, schools, and decisionmakers, and usually have a champion.

Below are more details on several of these strategies and examples from the Healthy Beverage Toolkit and the Sugar-Sweetened Beverages Playbook.

### **Requiring Water Availability and Limiting SSBs in Workplaces, Schools, and Daycare Centers**

Limiting SSB availability and sale in workplaces, schools, and daycare centers, and requiring the continuous availability of clean, safe water are a few of the strategies that obesity prevention campaigns use to reach their goals. States and local jurisdictions can restrict SSB availability and require water availability in childcare centers that they regulate and license. State and school districts can also establish standards for afterschool programs operating on school grounds. In places where the state or local government has complete discretion over childcare and afterschool funding, the government can require these programs to establish nutritional standards for beverages and increase water consumption among the children they serve as a condition of receiving funding.

*In Georgia, daycare regulations prohibit the placement of soft drink vending machines on grounds that are designated for children's use (but allows them in a separate area for personnel). They also prohibit daycare providers from serving soft drinks to children, except for special occasions and only in addition to required nutritious snacks. The regulations also explicitly require daycare providers to make water available to children at least once between meals and snacks to children under 3 years of age.<sup>9</sup>*

Governments can also limit access to SSBs on public property by exercising their power to buy and sell goods and services as market participants. By adopting healthy purchasing policies, governments can provide healthier beverages to employees and community members and make a positive impact on community health. Monterey County, California,

prohibits all SSB sales in vending machines in most county facilities, and only sells healthy beverages (as determined by science-based standards).<sup>10</sup>

#### *New York State Department of Health*

Since 2011, the New York State Department of Health's Bureau of Community Chronic Disease Prevention (BCCDP) has worked with communities to increase the availability of low-calorie beverages and reduce the availability of sugary drinks in public buildings, nonprofit organizations, schools, and worksites. BCCDP has also helped venues pass policies limiting sugary drinks and change vending practices to make healthier drinks more accessible, such as repositioning the location of drinks in the machine. In addition to the policy and vending changes, BCCDP has offered presentations to community members on the health consequences of frequent SSB consumption. Encouraging hospitals and worksites to adopt food standards that promote healthy food and beverages is a more recent strategy to decrease SSB consumption. The BCCDP adapted the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene's [toolkits](#) for healthy food standards, including recommendations for healthier beverages, and promotes them on the state health agency website.

### **Limiting SSB Marketing and Encouraging Water Consumption**

In 2004, California passed a resolution that included language calling on food and beverage companies, restaurants, retail stores, advertising agencies, sports and entertainment industries, and print, broadcast, and Web-based media operating in California to adhere to voluntary guidelines and standards for responsible food and beverage advertising and marketing aimed at children.<sup>11</sup>

In 2007, Maine passed legislation prohibiting brand-specific food or beverage advertising on school grounds, except for water and product packaging.<sup>12</sup> Further, the school board of Portland, Maine, restricted SSB sales at all

school events, including football games.<sup>1</sup> The [UConn Rudd Center](#) for Food Policy and Obesity maintains a list of links to healthy beverage campaigns across the United States. Many of the communities that created these campaigns offer their materials for free for other communities to use.

### *Orange County, New York*

As part of an obesity prevention grant through the New York State Association of County Health Officials and the New York State Department of Health, Orange County, New York implemented countywide “water campaigns” to encourage residents to consume water over SSBs.<sup>13</sup> Partners involved in the campaigns included city and town offices, their purchasing divisions, city libraries, county park and recreation departments, community coalitions, senior centers, academia, and social service departments.

Campaign leaders placed tabletop posters at the food court of a local mall and administered a vendor survey on the availability of water, placement of water, and water sales also at the mall. After taking the survey, several vendors considered making water more visible to patrons. The campaign also influenced changes in water placement and availability in vending machines and provided community organizations with hygienic, wall-mounted water stations. The campaign provided filtered water stations to the Department of Social Services and public library, and gave refillable water bottles to Little League teams to promote water as the beverage of choice.<sup>14</sup>

To showcase the work of this and other obesity prevention projects, the county developed the website [www.cutyourssugar.org](http://www.cutyourssugar.org) and promoted it to obesity prevention advocates within educational, corporate, and government sectors around the nation. In keeping with a Health in All Policies approach, Orange County noted that a lesson learned from this project was to

use your partner network to get the word out and promote messages.

### *Louisville, Kentucky*

In 1996, Louisville Water, which provides drinking water to more than 850,000 people in the Louisville metropolitan area and surrounding counties, was the first utility in the United States to trademark tap water in an effort to promote its quality, value, and innovation. Louisville Water is regarded as one of the safest water systems in the country, and the city has made it possible to provide its drinking water to organizations and at large community events through the Louisville pure tap program.

Today, the Louisville pure tap campaign provides reusable bottles, cups, pitchers, and a mobile water unit to more than 800 organizations each year to stress the value of a high-quality drinking water supply. On average, the company produces 120 million gallons of Louisville pure tap each day.<sup>15</sup> Louisville Water partners with schools, businesses, and organizations such as Red Cross and the Louisville Dental Society to promote its safe drinking water.<sup>16</sup> Louisville Water has even collaborated with the Louisville Zoo: the zoo maps contain a “W” to mark the fountain locations throughout the venue, and three of the zoo’s water fountains have a special message about water.<sup>17</sup> In addition, Louisville Water and Jefferson County Public Schools worked together to create Louisville pure tap drinking water fill stations with signage promoting water above the fill stations.

### **Taxing SSBs**

Taxes can raise the price of SSBs relative to healthier options and make water more appealing. Sales taxes are applied at the point of purchase, and excise taxes are levied on the manufacturer or distributor and therefore may be built into the retail price. As of Jan. 1, 2014, 34 states and the District of Columbia applied sales taxes to regular, sugar-sweetened soda sold through food stores and 39 states and the

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on Portland’s Wellness Policies, please see Portland Public Schools’ [2012 Overview of District Nutrition Policies](#)

District of Columbia applied sales taxes to regular, sugar-sweetened soda sold through vending machines.<sup>18</sup> SSB taxes can also benefit the community when the tax revenue is earmarked for obesity prevention, oral health, and other public health initiatives. However, sales taxes are not considered as effective at changing behavior as excise taxes, which may further reduce SSB consumption because consumers can see the increased price point at the time of purchase.<sup>19</sup> Many state legislatures and local governments have considered both type of SSB tax proposals.

### *Vermont and Navajo Nation*

In 2013, the Vermont legislature considered an SSB excise tax that would generate revenue for both obesity prevention activities (such as providing incentives for healthy food purchases), as well as for healthcare premiums for uninsured residents.<sup>20</sup> Similarly, in 2014, Navajo Nation President Ben Shelly signed the Healthy Diné Nation Act of 2014, which amends Title 24 of the Navajo Nation Code to mandate

a 2 percent sales tax on "minimal-to-no-nutritional value" items sold within the borders of the nation's largest reservation, including pastries, chips, soda, desserts, fried foods, and SSB.<sup>21</sup> The tribe noted that the revenues generated from the sales tax may be utilized for community wellness projects such as farming, vegetable gardens, greenhouses, farmers markets, clean water, and exercise equipment.

For more information about language that has been used successfully in SSB tax policies, see Change Lab Solutions' [model SSB tax legislation](#) for states that want to impose an excise tax on these beverages and earmark the proceeds for programs to prevent and treat obesity.

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