

Sugary Drink Messaging for Policy Change

A Resource for Advocacy Campaigns

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American
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Association.

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Introduction

In 2020, Voices for Healthy Kids conducted message research, including qualitative research and a survey, to help inform our policy efforts to decrease sugary drink consumption. This resource provides advocates, stakeholders and decision-makers with insights, message framing tips and sample messages based on the research and American Heart Association science. We recognize messages will need to be adapted for your community, campaign and environment.

We encourage you to use this resource along with our toolkit and local success stories available on the [Voices for Healthy Kids website](#).

Look for the  in this document to go directly to a suite of graphics - available in English and Spanish. These graphics are visual tools to help you explain a message.

WHAT YOU'LL FIND IN THIS DOCUMENT:

- ▶ [Messaging Insights and Tips](#)
- ▶ [Messages](#)
- ▶ [Words to Use and Words to Avoid](#)

¹ The messaging research consisted of two waves of in-depth qualitative research, in-depth interviews with 21 community leaders and a national survey of 1,600 registered voters with an oversample of 500 Black voters and 500 Latino voters. The research was conducted in the summer and fall of 2020.

Messaging Insights and Tips

The Voices for Healthy Kids research resulted in several insights that can inform your campaign and communications efforts.



Talk about the long-term health outcomes tied to sugary drinks.

The link between sugary drinks and poor health outcomes was most persuasive to make the case to:

- reduce sugary drink consumption
- introduce a sugary drink tax

While some people know that sugary drinks, particularly regular soda, are not good for them, they may not realize the extent of the harmful health outcomes associated with these products. Sugary drinks are a major contributor to the increasing rates of type 2 diabetes, tooth decay and heart disease. These diseases set up children for a lifetime of health challenges, have a disproportionate impact on Black and Latino families and increase the risk of severe illness from COVID-19.^{2,3}



Emphasize the importance of building healthy habits early.

Limiting consumption of sugary drinks when kids are younger sets them up for a lifetime of healthy nutrition habits, which supports healthy communities.

Policies aimed at reducing sugary drink consumption and promoting healthy drinks can support parents who want to make healthier decisions for their kids—especially when “on the go.” This type of message resonated with those who valued personal choice and were concerned about government overreach.



Educate your audience about the different types of sugary drinks.

Most people know soda is unhealthy, but are less aware of the amount of added sugars in other sugary beverages like lemonade, energy drinks, sports drinks and fruit drinks with added sugars. ↓



Give more information to get more support for sugary drink taxes.

The more information survey respondents received, the more supportive they became of a tax on sugary drinks. This was particularly true for Black and Latino survey respondents.



Talk about how the tax dollars can be used in the communities hardest hit by the health impacts of sugary drinks.

Learning that revenue from a sugary drinks tax will be used for community programs can be used to drive support for the tax. This information helps address concerns that the tax is unfair and/or unjustly targeted communities with low income and/or communities of color, a top concern among younger survey respondents (ages 18-29), in particular.



- Black survey respondents were less likely to think of a sports drink — like Gatorade — as a sugary drink.
- In the qualitative research, some participants were surprised by the sugar content in lemonade.

² Voices for Healthy Kids. Sugary Drink Fast Facts. Updated September 2020. Available at: <https://voicesforhealthykids.org/assets/resources/sugary-drink-fast-facts-9.28.2020.pdf>.

³ U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Obesity, Race/ethnicity, and COVID-19. Updated January 2021. Available at: <https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/obesity-and-covid-19.html>.



Highlight how sugary drink taxes have worked in other places.

Showing evidence that “the tax works” is critical to gaining support for a sugary drink tax and countering the idea that “these taxes won’t work.”

Several cities and the Navajo Nation have adopted sugary drink taxes in recent years. Highlight results from these locations to show that sugary drink taxes do help reduce purchases. In both Philadelphia and Seattle, sugary drink purchases have gone down since the tax took effect.^{4,5} Revenue from the tax has been used for its intended purpose, funding health and education programs.⁶



See [page 9](#) for more local success stories about how sugary drink taxes have worked in other places.



Take the opportunity to educate your audience about the beverage industry’s deceptive marketing practices.

Campaigns can bring awareness to beverage companies’ deceptive marketing practices and its harmful impact. Generally, those surveyed did not like the beverage industry’s marketing to kids, but more education is needed to fully convey the extent to which beverage companies target sugary drinks to kids.

Because we need to build more awareness about these marketing efforts, industry marketing targeted at kids is not yet a compelling reason to support a sugary drinks tax. Talk about it, but don’t lead with it as the main reason to support a tax.



Things to Know Before Working with Communities

Be aware of perceived barriers.

ACCESS – Few see lack of availability as the main reason someone may not make healthy food and drink choices.

COSTS – Most people saw cost as the main barrier to choosing healthy food or drinks. In the qualitative research, some Black and Latino participants noted that drinks like soda tended to be cheaper than bottled water or other healthy choices in neighborhood stores and noted that neighborhood stores promoted cheaper drinks like soda over water.

CHOICE – White and Latino survey respondents were more likely to think a person’s health is determined by the decisions they make. Conservatives tended to also focus more on “individual choice.”

Be authentic.

Community members know their communities best. They know what they need and can build a strong case for using new sugary drink tax revenue to meet those needs. Without consistent inclusion and leadership of people most harmed by sugary drinks, advocacy organizations who are not from the community support systemic racism and perpetuate mistrust. Advocacy partners need to listen, amplify and defend those priorities.

4 Roberto CA, Lawman HG, LeVasseur MT, Mitra N, Peterhans A, Herring B, Bleich SN. Association of a beverage tax on sugar-sweetened and artificially sweetened beverages with changes in beverage prices and sales and chain retailers in a large urban setting. *JAMA*. 2019; 321(18):1799-1820. doi: 10.10001/jama.2019.4249.

5 Powell LM, Leider J. The impact of Seattle’s sweetened beverage tax on beverage prices and volume sold. *Econ Hum Biol*. 2020; 37:100856. doi: 10.1016/j.ehb.2020.100856.

6 Healthy Food America. Map and Chart the Movement. Accessed February 2021. Available at: [Map and Chart the Movement - Healthy Food America](#).

Messages

1 START WITH AN ASPIRATIONAL MESSAGE. TIE IN HEALTH IMPACTS.

Every child deserves to grow up healthy, which means promoting healthy drinks like water and plain milk. On average, kids drink more than 30 gallons of sugary drinks per year — enough to fill a bathtub.⁷ Consuming sugary drinks sets up children for a lifetime of health challenges that include type 2 diabetes, tooth decay and heart disease.⁸ ↓

Highlighting the health outcomes associated with consuming sugary drinks is the most effective way to demonstrate why we need to change policy. Talking about the consequences is a unifying message.

We need to make healthy drinks more accessible and more available in places where kids and families spend their time. Consuming sugary drinks sets up children for a lifetime of health challenges that includes type 2 diabetes, tooth decay and heart disease.⁹

Our health is one of our most important resources. People with low income and people of color disproportionately experience higher rates of chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes and heart disease, which are associated with sugary drinks.¹⁰ Health and wellness support individual and community resiliency.

This is a sample message. When using it, name the communities most impacted.

Parents want to do what is best for their children. But when healthy drinks or foods are not nearby, or when sugary drinks at local stores are less expensive than healthy drinks like water or milk, it makes it harder for parents to make healthy choices for their kids.

Money from a sugary drink tax can put resources into communities hardest hit by sugary drink-related diseases. Funds could be used to address what's important to the community like reducing health disparities, increasing access to healthy foods, putting water bottle filling stations in schools or funding health or education efforts in the community. **[INSERT YOUR CITY/STATE SPECIFICS]**

7 Voices for Healthy Kids. Sugary Drink Fast Facts. Updated September 2020. Available at: <https://voicesforhealthykids.org/assets/resources/sugary-drink-fast-facts-9.28.2020.pdf>.

8 Muth ND, Dietz WH, Magge SN, Johnson RK; American Academy of Pediatrics; Section on Obesity; Committee on Nutrition; American Heart Association. Public policies to reduce sugary drink consumption in children and adolescents. *Pediatrics*. 2019; 143(4):e20190282. doi: 10.1542/peds.2019-0282.

9 *Ibid.*

10 Healthy Food America. Inequities in sugary drink-related diseases by race/ethnicity and income. Research Brief. January 2020. Available at: https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/healthyfoodamerica/pages/436/attachments/original/1580248276/Data_on_SSB_Related_Diseases_FINAL_1.26.20.pdf?1580248276.

2 THEN, ADD A SUPPORTING MESSAGE BASED ON YOUR AUDIENCE.

<p>Health</p>	<p>On average, kids drink more than 30 gallons of sugary drinks per year — enough to fill a bathtub.¹¹ Consuming sugary drinks sets up children for a lifetime of health challenges that may include type 2 diabetes, tooth decay and heart disease.¹² These diseases have a devastating impact on the lives of those affected and their families. ↓</p>
<p>Health</p>	<p>Drinking sugary drinks sets up kids for a lifetime of health challenges that may include type 2 diabetes, tooth decay and heart disease.¹³ Taxes on sugary drinks, including fruit drinks with added sugar, sports drinks and soda, are a proven way to reduce purchases of these drinks.¹⁴</p>
<p>Equity</p>	<p>Our health is one of the most important resources. People with low incomes and Black, Latino, Native American and Alaska Native communities [NAME COMMUNITIES AFFECTED IN YOUR AREA] disproportionately experience higher rates of chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes and heart disease, which are associated with sugary drinks, compared to white people.¹⁵ Health and wellness supports individual and community resiliency.</p>

←
Messaging about healthy inequities is more compelling to Black survey respondents, particularly Black dads.

11 Voices for Healthy Kids. Sugary Drink Fast Facts. Updated September 2020. Available at: <https://voicesforhealthykids.org/assets/resources/sugary-drink-fast-facts-9.28.2020.pdf>.

12 Muth ND, Dietz WH, Magge SN, Johnson RK; AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS; SECTION ON OBESITY; COMMITTEE ON NUTRITION; AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION. Public policies to reduce sugary drink consumption in children and adolescents. *Pediatrics*. 2019; 143(4):e20190282. doi: 10.1542/peds.2019-0282.

13 Muth ND, Dietz WH, Magge SN, Johnson RK; AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS; SECTION ON OBESITY; COMMITTEE ON NUTRITION; AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION. Public policies to reduce sugary drink consumption in children and adolescents. *Pediatrics*. 2019; 143(4):e20190282. doi: 10.1542/peds.2019-0282.

14 Krieger J, Bleich SN, Scarmo S, Ng SW. Sugar-sweetened beverage reduction policies: progress and promise. *Ann Rev Public Health*. 2020; Nov 30. doi: 10.1146/annurev-publhealth-090419-103005.

15 Healthy Food America. Inequities in sugary drink-related diseases by race/ethnicity and income. Research Brief. January 2020. Available at: https://d3n8a8pro7vhm.cloudfront.net/healthyfoodamerica/pages/436/attachments/original/1580248276/Data_on_SSB_Related_Diseases_FINAL_1.26.20.pdf?1580248276.

<p>COVID-19</p>	<p>Diseases that sugary drinks contribute to, such as type 2 diabetes, high blood pressure and being at an unhealthy weight, can put people at higher risk for serious cases of COVID-19,¹⁶ making the health risks linked to sugary drinks even greater now.</p>
<p>Health Costs</p>	<p>Sugary drinks are closely linked to chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease. These diseases have a devastating impact on the lives of those affected and their families. They are also expensive to treat and manage, costing the country \$216 billion to treat heart disease alone every year.¹⁷</p>

16 U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Covid-19: People with Certain Medical Conditions. Updated March 2021. Available at: https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/people-with-medical-conditions.html?CDC_AA_refVal=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cdc.gov%2Fcoronavirus%2F2019-ncov%2Fneed-extra-precautions%2Fgroups-at-higher-risk.html.

17 Virani SS, Alonso A, Aparicio HJ, Benjamin EJ, Bittencourt MS, Callaway CW. Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics – 2021 Update: A Report from the American Heart Association. *Circulation*. 2021; 143(8): e254-e743. doi: 10.1161/CIR.0000000000000950.

Sugary Drink Taxes

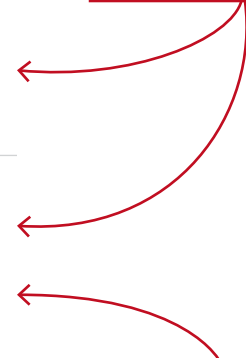
1 START WITH AN ASPIRATIONAL MESSAGE.

Every child deserves to grow up healthy, which means promoting healthy drinks like water and plain milk. ↓

2 THEN, ADD A SUPPORTING MESSAGE BASED ON YOUR AUDIENCE.

<p>Community Impact</p>	<p>Money from a sugary drink tax can put resources into communities hardest hit by sugary drink-related diseases. Funds could be used to address needs of the community — identified by the community — [INSERT WHAT YOUR COMMUNITY HAS IDENTIFIED AS NEEDS] — like increasing access to healthy foods, putting water bottle filling stations in schools or funding health or education efforts in the community. ↓</p>
<p>Evidence</p>	<p>We have an opportunity to adopt policies that will change the health of our communities. Taxes on sugary drinks are a proven way to reduce purchases of these drinks.¹⁸ Cities with a sugary drink tax — like Philadelphia and Seattle — have already seen the number of purchases decrease.^{19,20} They have been able to use nearly all of the associated revenue for its intended purpose, funding critical health and education services.</p>
<p>Evidence</p>	<p>In several U.S. cities and the Navajo Nation that have sugary drink taxes, research shows sugary drink purchases have decreased, and the tax revenue has been used to support community programs like pre-K, health improvement programs and job training.²¹</p>

People who can be persuaded need to understand how a sugary drink tax could support communities impacted by the health outcomes associated with sugary drinks, as well as see examples of how the tax worked in other places.



The evidence of sugary drink taxes in other locations tested well and resonated with white women ages 65 and older, in particular.

18 Powell LM, Leider J. The impact of Seattle's sweetened beverage tax on beverage prices and volume sold. *Econ Hum Biol.* 2020; 37:100856. doi: 10.1016/j.ehb.2020.100856.

19 Krieger J, Bleich SN, Scarmo S, Ng SW. Sugar-sweetened beverage reduction policies: progress and promise. *Ann Rev Public Health.* 2020; Nov 30. doi: 10.1146/annurev-publhealth-090419-103005.

20 *Ibid.*

21 Roberto CA, Lawman HG, LeVasseur MT, Mitra N, Peterhans A, Herring B, Bleich SN. Association of a beverage tax on sugar-sweetened and artificially sweetened beverages with changes in beverage prices and sales and chain retailers in a large urban setting. *JAMA.* 2019; 321(18):1799-1820. doi: 10.1001/jama.2019.4249.

<p>Purchasing</p>	<p>Sugary drink taxes have been shown to reduce purchases and may even drive companies to make healthier products.²² Drinking fewer sugary drinks can positively impact the health of our community, including reducing rates of chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes, tooth decay and heart disease.²³</p>
<p>Purchasing</p>	<p>A sugary drink tax is a “choice tax,” meaning that no one is required to pay it. If you choose not to purchase the product, you do not pay the tax.</p>

In the qualitative research, the phrase “choice tax” resonated well with independent and conservative-leaning men concerned about government overreach.

Where and How Sugary Drink Taxes Are Working in the U.S.

- ▶ In [Philadelphia](#), funding from their sugary drink tax has been used to support thousands of pre-K slots, more than a dozen community schools and improvements to parks and recreation centers. The city focuses funding in areas lacking child care options and communities with greater numbers of families with low incomes.
- ▶ In [Seattle](#), a community-driven campaign directed tax revenues where the community sees its greatest needs, including to help feed families who are food insecure during COVID-19.
- ▶ [San Francisco](#) has used the tax revenue to improve school food, health and recreation programs for families and children who have low incomes and to create Peace Parks to increase recreation options for teens and young adults who live in neighborhoods impacted by crime.
- ▶ In 2014, the [Navajo Nation](#) passed the Healthy Diné Nation Act in an effort to address health concerns impacting the Diné community. It is the first such policy in the world serving as an example of tribal sovereignty to support community wellness. The Act places a 2% tax on calorie-dense food and drinks with little-to-no nutritional value and waives a 6% tax on healthy foods like fruits and vegetables. The Act has funded more than 1,300 community-selected wellness projects across the Navajo Nation, including community fitness classes, greenhouses, youth clubs, clean water initiatives, Navajo language and culture classes and more.

22 Krieger J, Bleich SN, Scarmo S, Ng SW. Sugar-sweetened beverage reduction policies: progress and promise. *Ann Rev Public Health*. 2020; Nov 30. doi: 10.1146/annurev-publhealth-090419-103005.

23 Muth ND, Dietz WH, Magge SN, Johnson RK; AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS; SECTION ON OBESITY; COMMITTEE ON NUTRITION; AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION. Public policies to reduce sugary drink consumption in children and adolescents. *Pediatrics*. 2019; 143(4):e20190282. doi: 10.1542/peds.2019-0282.

Words to Use and Words to Avoid

USE THIS LANGUAGE	INSTEAD OF THIS LANGUAGE	BECAUSE...
<p>Sugary drinks like sports drinks, lemonade, fruit drinks with added sugar, energy drinks and soda; drinks with added sugar</p>	<p>Soda, sugar-sweetened beverages or SSBs</p>	<p>Most know soda is unhealthy, but may not be aware of the high added sugars content in other popular beverages.</p>
<p>Healthy drink alternatives, including water, plain milk and 100% juice with no added sugars</p>	<p>Healthy drink alternatives</p>	<p>We need to name and be clear what we mean is a healthy drink versus what is a sugary drink.</p>
<p>Helping children grow up at a healthy weight</p>	<p>Preventing childhood obesity</p>	<p>We recommend focusing on promoting healthy habits and also on other chronic conditions, like type 2 diabetes and heart disease.</p>
<p>Chronic conditions like type 2 diabetes and heart disease</p>	<p>Chronic conditions like obesity</p>	<p>We recommend focusing on promoting healthy habits and also on other chronic conditions, like type 2 diabetes and heart disease.</p>
<p>Beverage industry/ companies or Big Soda</p>	<p>Individual beverage brands</p>	<p>People tend to have positive associations with their favorite brands so we want to connect marketing practices to beverage companies as a whole rather than singling out individual beverage companies or brands.</p>

USE THIS LANGUAGE	INSTEAD OF THIS LANGUAGE	BECAUSE...
<p>Chronic disease associated with sugary drinks disproportionately impact people with low income and people of color. A sugary tax could put money into community programs [INSERT EXAMPLES OF LOCAL ISSUES TAX COULD ADDRESS]</p>	<p>Financial burden of the tax, regressive tax, unfair tax, unjust tax</p>	<p>Individuals don't use the word "regressive." We should focus on the health outcomes associated with sugary drinks and shift conversation to where the dollars can go — particularly into communities hardest hit by the health impacts of sugary drinks.</p> <p>This is also where you can highlight the beverage industry's marketing to communities of color and kids and the impact that has on health.</p>
<p>Improving the health of our communities</p>	<p>Encouraging individual behavioral change</p>	<p>We should focus on changing systems and communities overall, rather than changing individual behavior, which may perpetuate perceptions about this issue just being a matter of personal choice.</p>
<p>Public officials want to support important programs like clean drinking water in schools, walking trails and bike paths, and universal pre-K</p>	<p>Public officials want to help reduce consumption of unhealthy beverages/ change behaviors</p>	<p>Emphasizing how the revenue can be used may help limit concerns about government overreach or restrictions on personal choice.</p>