

# DRINK WELL TEXAS

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Children are told to eat right and exercise, but this standard advice overlooks one of the biggest contributors to obesity:

- Consumption of soda and other sugary drinks by children has skyrocketed in recent years. These **drinks are now the single biggest contributor of sugar in children's diets**, though they don't fill kids up or offer any nutritional value.
- **Nearly 1 in 3 Texas teens have three or more sugary drinks every day**, a 2010 study found.
- **Low-fat milk, bottled water, and 100% juice often cost more** and are less accessible for Texas children than soda.
- Compared to a generation ago, people today take in many more calories: **almost half of these extra calories in the diet come from soda and other sugary drinks**. Curbing their consumption, even a little, is crucial to bringing down an obesity epidemic that costs Texas billions each year.

The Institutes of Medicine, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and public health officials nationwide are all in agreement: a tax on sugary drinks like soda would help reduce obesity, just as the tobacco tax decreased smoking. With obesity wiping out the health gains of the tobacco tax, the Big Soda industry just makes matters worse by targeting kids with multimillion-dollar marketing. Texas businesses and taxpayers pick up the tab, as ever-increasing billions get spent on preventable obesity-related diseases.

There was a time in Texas when sugary drinks were occasional treats, not every-day or every-meal staples. It's time to **put Big Soda back in its place** by bringing the cost of sugary drinks into better alignment with their real cost to Texans and ensuring Texas children can drink healthily in schools and child care environments.

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## SIGN ON WITH DRINK WELL TEXAS

### I support:

- A penny-per-ounce tax on sugary drinks to help curb obesity and offset its costs
- Using sugary drink tax revenue to invest in obesity prevention
- Ensuring Texas students have access to water at lunch time
- Keeping daycares from serving sugary drinks with each snack and meal

Contact Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Title and Organization: \_\_\_\_\_

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Mailing Address: \_\_\_\_\_

City, State & Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

- Sign my organization up as a supporter of DRINK WELL TEXAS
- Sign me up as an individual supporter of DRINK WELL TEXAS

Please Fax To: Lauren Dimitry at Texans Care for Children (512) 473-2173

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## **What kind of sugary drink (also known as sugar-sweetened beverage) is proposed for this tax?**

Drinks to which distributors add extra sugar, corn syrup, or similar sweeteners that add calories. Sodas, sweetened teas, and fruity drinks that are not juice all count.

## **How would the proposed tax work?**

It would be structured as an excise tax, levied per ounce of sugary drink by the distributor (as opposed to a sales tax taken at the register). An excise tax of one penny per ounce shows up immediately in the price of a product, making consumers less likely to demand it; it is also relatively simple for businesses to administer. The tax will specifically be designed to require people buying sugary drinks to be the ones paying it, so this tax will not get passed on to consumers of other products (such as healthier drinks) made by the same company.

## **Why single out sweet drinks with a tax? Why not all junk food?**

Public health experts attribute 43% of the total increase in Americans' daily calorie intake to this one factor: increased consumption of sweetened beverages. No single category of food accounts for more calories in the average child's diet today than sugary drinks. Sweet foods can have a lot of calories but still contribute to a feeling of fullness and some contribute some nutritional value, but sugary drinks lack healthy dietary value and don't make people feel full.

## **What evidence do you have that this tax will work to reduce soda consumption and obesity?**

The Institutes of Medicine, the U.S. Conference of Mayors, the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and public health officials nationwide are all in agreement: a tax on sugary drinks like soda would help reduce the epidemic of obesity. Since demand for most goods is price-sensitive, paying a little more will lead consumers to drink less.

## **How do you know it will help address child obesity in particular?**

Sodas and other sugar-sweetened beverages are disproportionately consumed by children and marketed extensively to children: a child between the ages of 2 and 11 is about twice as likely as an adult to have one or more sugary drinks every day; a teen is roughly three times as likely as an adult. The food and beverage industry spends nearly \$400 million a year marketing sweetened beverages to consumers aged 2-17—much more than they do for any other category of products. A study of thousands of school children in Texas found that many children even thought they were drinking healthy drinks, when consuming sugary drinks, due to marketing's influence. Because research shows that children and teenagers are more sensitive to price than adults since they often have less disposable income, and are more likely not to think through their choices, a tax like this is a responsible and cost-effective way to counter the effects of harmful advertising.

## **Shouldn't we just turn off the TV and exercise more?**

Teenage boys who drink soda get about 330 of these empty calories each day. It would take more than an hour of daily exercise like walking or bicycling to burn that many calories. Realistically, drinking fewer calories has to be part of the solution. Switching to non-sugary drinks like water has reduced obesity rates before, especially in children.

## **Wouldn't people just get the same number of calories another way?**

The public health community is united behind the idea that a tax on sweet drinks would be an effective way to reduce obesity. The USDA has found that a tax on sweetened beverages could result in the loss of unhealthy excess weight, averaging an estimated 3.8 pounds per adult a year and 4.5 pounds per child per year.

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