

Why We Support a Tax on Sugary Beverages

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Recently, I had the opportunity to travel to Montpelier and **advocate for a tax on sugary drinks**. You might wonder why a physician would get involved in a tax debate? It's simple. It's because **sugary drinks are a significant health concern for Vermonters**.

Obesity and diabetes are major health issues for Vermonters and our country. **Sugary drinks are linked to both conditions**. The future of health care is partnering with and engaging our patients to keep them as healthy as possible. We know that the long-term health of our patients is influenced more by their actions and choices during daily life, versus what happens when they're in our exam rooms. Patients who make good choices in terms of smoking, exercise and diet will live longer and healthier lives and consume less health care resources. **That is how you drive down health care costs**.

Public policies can be powerful tools to aide in these efforts. Policies, such as taxes, can help our patients make better, healthier choices. Cigarette taxes have proven this. As the cigarette tax has increased, smoking rates have dropped. Would any of us consider turning the clock back on that and go back to the days when nearly 40 percent of us were smoking \$2 packs of cigarettes? If a 1-liter soda costs more than a pint of milk or water, more people will make the healthier choice. **Why does that matter? Because sugary drinks are a major factor in obesity**. Researchers estimate that sugar-added drinks account for at least one-fifth of the weight gained by the U.S. population between 1977 and 2007.

Consumption of sugary drinks is the single largest category of caloric intake for U.S. children, surpassing milk in the late 1990s. Think about that for a second. Sugary drinks account for more calories than fruits, vegetables, dairy products and healthy protein sources. Increasing the cost of sodas and energy drinks will help people make better choices. They will likely consume healthier, cheaper alternatives.

To be clear, there is nothing wrong with an occasional soda. It should be a treat. Like having an ice cream cone. Today, many people do not think of a soda like a treat. **Most people trying to eat a healthy diet would not have six ice cream cones a day but may not think twice about drinking a six pack of soda**. That could be more than 1,000 empty calories with no nutritional benefits.

I grew up in a small town in Vermont and my parents owned a general store. I spent many hours of my life stocking coolers with sodas, milk, water and so on. I witnessed Vermonters making choices about what to buy every day. They were smart with their money. Making sugary drinks more expensive will help them be even smarter with their money and their health.

What's more, the money raised from a sugary beverages tax can be used to help teach Vermonters and their children how to eat healthier, and actually make more nutritious foods more easily available. For example, we could direct funds to expand the impact of food access programs like [Vermont Farm to Family](#), [NOFA Vermont's Farm Share](#) program, [Green Mountain Farm to School](#), and [Vermont FEED](#) – not to mention new programs. Revenue could also be used to offset the increased costs incurred from obesity. I firmly believe this tax is the right thing for our patients and our state.

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