

Vermont
Medical
Society



VTAFP

Vermont Chapter

INCORPORATED IN VERMONT

American Academy of Pediatrics
DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN



**Universal
School Meals
& the SSB tax**
- a *Win Win* for
Vermont Kids
Health!

Please Support S.100 – the Universal School Meals Bill With a Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Tax as the Funding Source

On behalf of the over 2,600 clinician members of the Vermont Medical Society (VMS), the American Academy of Pediatrics Vermont Chapter (AAPVT) and the Vermont Academy of Family Physicians we thank the House Education Committee for taking up S.100, legislation that is foundational for the health of Vermont kids and for considering an excise tax on sugar-sweetened beverages as a complimentary funding source.

Universal School Meals: Let's Level the Playing Field for Vermont Kids

All Vermont children deserve a nutritious breakfast and lunch in order to focus on learning throughout the school day, and to be successful in the classroom and beyond. Vermont pediatrician [Dr. Barb Frankowski testified](#) that **food insecurity** can have life-long health consequences such as malnutrition, obesity, poor oral health and diabetes. Research also shows that not having regular access to food can directly impact students' mental health, with increased risks of cognitive problems, anxiety, behavioral problems, depression and suicide ideation.ⁱ We all know if you are hungry and worried about where your next meal is coming from it is difficult to concentrate and focus on anything else. You will be anxious, irritable, and have a harder time controlling your emotions.

COVID-19 exposed the food insecurity that many Vermont families live with and we were also shown how the federal support that allowed schools to support family's nutritional needs over the last two years made a huge impact. Schools were able to support more vulnerable, food insecure children. Families were able to focus their limited resources on other bills that contribute to the overall well-being of their children, such as rent, heating and transportation.

Participation in school meal programs has been shown to improve a child's overall health and well-being, academic achievement and school attendance, as well as reduce socio-economic disparities in education and health. Universal access to free breakfast and lunch will benefit every Vermont family's overall health and short and long-term financial stability.

How a Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Tax is Healthier for Vermont Families and Benefits the State

Vermont's medical community has long supported the health benefits an excise tax on sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB) could have on the health of our growing children. Our organizations believe the proposal to direct revenue from this tax to provide equitable access to healthy food would be a win-win for Vermont families.

Similarly to food insecurity, frequently drinking sugar-sweetened beverages is associated with weight gain/obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, kidney diseases, non-alcoholic liver disease, tooth decay and cavities, and gout.ⁱⁱ According to the Centers for Disease Control, sugary beverages account for nearly half the added sugar in the American diet, which has resulted in nearly 40 percent of American adults being obese and adds **\$147 billion** to the nation's annual spending on healthcare. In fact, consumption of sugar sweetened beverages has increased 500% in the past fifty years and is now the single largest category of caloric intake in children, with kids and adolescents consuming, on average, 300 calories from sugary drinks per day and roughly 30 gallons of SSBs per year.ⁱⁱⁱ

In 2015, the Vermont Medical Society adopted a resolution on "[Reducing Consumption of Sweetened Drinks to Improve the Health of Vermonters](#)," in which we estimated Vermont's annual obesity-related medical costs at \$163 million in Medicaid expenses alone. Pediatricians in Vermont have seen the explosion of Type 2 diabetes over the last few decades, which is a result of the staggering increase in childhood obesity.

As of July 2021, seven U.S. cities and more than 40 nations have adopted sugary drink taxes. After one year of implementing a SSB tax, the City of Berkeley, CA, saw sales of sugary drinks decline by 10% while sales of water increased 15%. Three years later, consumption of sugary drinks dropped 52% and water increased by 25%. Philadelphia, PA implemented a 1.5 cent/oz tax, which resulted in a 42% decline in sales of the taxed beverages.

Our physician and physician assistant members maintain that SSB taxation is a sensible strategy to keep health care costs affordable and when the revenue is directed to subsidize healthy foods this tax will help improve Vermont communities where obesity is most prevalent and help inspire lifestyle changes that improve health and mental health for our students over their lifetime.

Thank you for your consideration.

Please email Jill Sudhoff-Guerin with any questions jsudhoffguerin@vtmd.org

ⁱ <https://www.healthaffairs.org/doi/10.1377/hlthaff.2015.0645>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/data-statistics/sugar-sweetened-beverages-intake.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://publications.aap.org/aapnews/news/14112>