

July 19, 2012

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

The undersigned health professionals, organizations, and scientists are deeply concerned about the many harms resulting from the excessive consumption of sugary drinks, particularly among young people. Soda and other sugary drinks are the only food or beverage that has been directly linked to obesity, a major contributor to coronary heart disease, stroke, type 2 diabetes, and some cancers and a cause of psychosocial problems. Soda and other sugary drinks also cause dental cavities, the most common childhood disease, and other serious dental problems. Yet, each year, the average American drinks about 40 gallons of sugary drinks, all with little, if any, nutritional benefit. *We urge you to direct the Surgeon General to prepare a Report on the health effects of sugary drinks and to issue a Call to Action to spur national efforts to reduce sugary drink consumption.*

Excessive consumption of sugary drinks has devastating effects on the health of young people. One study found that each extra soft drink consumed per day was associated with a 60 percent increased risk of overweight in children. Research shows that 46 percent of two- and three-year olds consume sugary drinks each day. Alarming, type 2 diabetes, which used to occur primarily in middle-aged and older adults, is now becoming more common among teens, especially those who are low-income and minority. Furthermore, obesity has become a national security issue. Twenty-seven percent of America's youth are ineligible for military service because they are overweight.

Once viewed as an occasional treat, sugary drinks have become a routine, daily beverage for tens of millions of Americans. Soda and other sugary drinks are available for sale almost everywhere. The products are aggressively marketed, especially to young consumers and minorities, in both traditional and digital media, and in event sponsorships. They are promoted as a key to happiness, acceptance, social consciousness, togetherness, and fun. The disproportionate targeting of communities of color helps perpetuate health disparities in the U.S. population.

In its May 2012 report, *Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention*, the Institute of Medicine recommended adopting policies and implementing practices to reduce overconsumption of soda and other sugary drinks. The following groups also support efforts to cut back the use of sugary drinks: the American Heart Association, American Medical Association, American Academy of Pediatrics, National Governors Association, National Association of Local Boards of Health, American Dental Association, American Association of Pediatric Dentistry, and the American Diabetes Association. The 2010 Dietary Guidelines for Americans advises consumers to drink water instead of sugary drinks.

A Surgeon General's Report on the health effects of sugary drinks would evaluate the science on this issue, appraise the health damaging effects, present all the facts and alert health professionals, health officials, federal food assistance program personnel, and consumers to the serious threat. The report could address the specific ingredients of sugary drinks: the biology, pharmacology, and physiological effects of sugars; addictive mechanisms associated with sugar use or other ingredients contained in sugary drinks; epidemiological data on consumption of these products and their health-damaging effects including obesity; trends in consumption for all age groups; and the gender, racial, and ethnic disparities in the effects of sugary drink consumption on health.

The report would pave the way for policy measures at all levels of government and for widespread voluntary actions in the private sector to improve health and reduce health care costs. An accompanying Surgeon General's Call to Action to reduce consumption of sugary drinks could establish goals for federal, state, and local governments including federal food assistance programs, as well as for other public and private entities.

Consumption of sodas and sugary drinks has declined somewhat in recent years, but is still dangerously high. Unless intake of those beverages is substantially reduced, the health, economic, and psychosocial costs of obesity will continue to rise, imposing unsustainable burdens on our country. Now is the time to take effective action. Much as the 1964 *Surgeon General's Report on Smoking and Health* focused national attention on the harms of tobacco use, Americans now need a wake-up call with regard to the impact of sugary drink consumption on the health, economy, and national security of our country.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter. We look forward to receiving your response.

cc: Surgeon General Regina Benjamin

Organizations

Alameda County Public Health Department
American Association for Health Education
American Clinical Board of Nutrition
American Diabetes Association
American Heart Association
American Institute for Cancer Research
American Medical Student Association
American Society of Bariatric Physicians
Association of State & Territorial Health Officials
Association of State & Territorial Public Health Nutrition Directors
Berkeley Media Studies Group
Boston Public Health Commission
California Association of Nutrition & Activity Programs

California Center for Public Health Advocacy
California Convergence
California Food Policy Advocates
California Public Health Association-North Catalyst
Center for Communications, Health & the Environment
Center for Digital Democracy
Center for Food Safety
Center for Science in the Public Interest
Central California Regional Obesity Prevention Program
Central Valley Health Policy Institute, Fresno State
ChangeLab Solutions
Childhood Obesity Prevention Coalition

ChopChop: The Fun Cooking Magazine for Families
 City of El Paso Texas Department of Public Health
 Coalition of National Health Education Organizations
 Community Catalyst, New England Alliance for Children's Health
 Colorado Springs School District 11
 Community Health Councils
 Consumer Federation of America
 Cook Like a Chef!
 Cuyahoga County Board of Health
 Defeat Diabetes Foundation
 Directors of Health Promotion and Education
 Earth Day Network
 Eat Drink Politics
 Eat Drink RI
 EnergyUp!
 Environmental Working Group
 Evolvment
 Food Sleuth, LLC
 Health Care Without Harm
 Health First WI
 Healthy Howard, Inc.
 HealthPartners
 HealthyPlanet
 Howard County Health Department (MD)
 Indiana Rural Health Association
 Institute for a Sustainable Future
 Leaner Healthier Teen Revolution
 LiveWell Colorado
 Marathon Kids
 Maternity Care Coalition
 Minnesota Center for Obesity, Metabolism and Endocrinology
 Muskegon Family YMCA
 My Spa Water
 National Action Against Obesity
 National Association of County and City Health Officials
 National Center for Weight and Wellness
 National Congress of Black Women, Inc.
 National Consumers League
 National Dental Association

National Hispanic Health Foundation
 National Hispanic Medical Association
 National Physician's Alliance
 National WIC Association
 NEA Health Information Network
 Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island
 New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene
 New York State Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Alliance
 Office Furniture Depot
 Ohio Public Health Association
 Oregon Public Health Institute
 Partnership for Prevention
 Pediatric Department at Boston Medical Center
 Philadelphia Department of Public Health
 Prevention Institute
 Public Health Institute
 Rescue Social Change Group
 Rhode Island State Nurses Association
 Santa Clara County Board of Supervisors
 Santa Clara County Department of Public Health
 Shape Up America!
 Southern California Public Health Association
 Tennessee Obesity Taskforce
 The Consortium to Lower Obesity in Chicago Children, a program of the Ann & Robert H. Lurie Children's Hospital of Chicago
 The Earth and Water Wellness Institute
 The Food Trust
 The Horizon Foundation of Howard County, MD
 The Praxis Project
 Trust for America's Health
 Twin Cities Medical Society
 United Way of Merced County
 University of California at Berkeley School of Public Health
 University of Texas School of Public Health
 Upstream Public Health
 Voices for America's Children
 Y Street
 Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity
 Young People's Healthy Heart Program at Mercy Hospital

Individuals

Anne Bailowitz, MD, MPH, National Association of County and City Health Officials

Rear Admiral Susan J. Blumenthal, MD (ret.), Former U.S. Assistant Surgeon General

Andrew A. Bremer, MD, PhD, Department of Pediatrics, Division of Endocrinology, Vanderbilt University School of Medicine

David V. B. Britt, Retired President and CEO, Sesame Workshop

Eldridge Dorsey, DDS, National Dental Association

Fern Gale Estrow, MS, RD, CDN, FGE Food & Nutrition Team

Linda P. Fried, MD, MPH, Senior Vice President, Columbia University Medical Center

J. Michael Gonzalez-Campoy, MD, PhD, FACE, Medical Director and CEO, MNCOME

Judith Hallisey, Culinary/Executive Chef of Menu and Program Development, Cancer Treatment Centers of America

Lou Jones, School Nurse, The Geneva School, Winter Park, FL

Scott Kahan, MD, MPH, Faculty, George Washington University Schools of Medicine and Public Health and the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

Jean Kilbourne, Senior Scholar, Wellesley Centers for Women

Chris Lindley, Prevention Services Division Director, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

Robert H. Lustig, MD, Professor of Clinical Pediatrics, UCSF School of Medicine

Dr. Alan F. Meyers, MD, MPH, Attending Physician, Boston Medical Center, Associate Professor of Pediatrics, Boston University School of Medicine

Susan M. Motika, J.D., Food Policy Coordinator, Colorado Physical Activity and Nutrition Program, Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

Marion Nestle, Paulette Goddard Professor, Department of Nutrition, Food Studies, and Public Health, New York University

Lauren Niemes, M.Ed., R.D., L.D., Executive Director, Nutrition Council

Dr. Daniel Parry, MD, Pediatric Resident, Boston Combined Residency Program, Boston Medical Center, Boston Children's Hospital

Barry M. Popkin, W.R. Kenan, Jr. Distinguished Professor, School of Public Health, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Todd Putman, CEO, Future Pull Group

Jonathan Shenkin, DDS, MPH, Boston University School of Dental Medicine

Mary Story, PhD, RD, Professor, Division of Epidemiology and Community Health, Senior Associate Dean for Academic and Student Affairs, School of Public Health, University of Minnesota

Brian Swann, DDS, MPH

Walter Willett, MD, DrPH, Fredrick John Stare Professor of Epidemiology and Nutrition, Chair, Department of Nutrition, Harvard School of Public Health

Frederick Zimmerman, Chair, Department of Health Services, UCLA

Dr. Barry S. Zuckerman, MD, Chairman, Department of Pediatrics, Boston Medical Center, Joel and Barbara Alpert Professor of Pediatrics, Boston University School of Medicine

*Please reply via Julie Greenstein, Center for Science in the Public Interest, 1220 L St. NW, Suite 300, Washington, DC 20005; jgreenstein@cspinet.org; (202) 777-8331