

City of Minneapolis Healthier Beverage Initiative

Talking Points - suggested answers for partners

Being prepared for tough questions from employees, visitors, community members, and the media is an important part of getting buy-in and creating sustainability for your organization's efforts to implement a healthier beverage initiative. Below are some frequently asked questions and common concerns that your organization may encounter as you begin your work.

About the Healthier Beverage Initiative

What do you value?

We care that everyone in our community has an equal chance to live a healthy and productive life, free from the illnesses caused by poor nutrition, lack of physical activity, and harmful tobacco products. In addition, we feel that we have a responsibility to work together with other community partners to reverse poor health outcomes and build thriving communities.

What is the Healthier Beverage Initiative?

The Healthier Beverage Initiative is a community-driven initiative that increases the availability of healthier beverages in different places where adults and children spend their time such as school or work, and encourages residents to choose healthier beverages over sugary options. Examples of healthier beverages include water, unsweetened coffee/tea, low-fat or fat-free milk, 100% fruit or vegetable juice (4-8 ounces).

Our organization is working with the Minneapolis Health Department and four other partners to implement the initiative in different communities across Minneapolis.

Additional information (if needed): The Healthier Beverage Initiative has two parts:

1. Conducting awareness raising activities to educate residents about the link between sugary drinks and obesity, and encouraging people to replace consumption of unhealthy beverages with healthier ones; and
2. Pursuing policy and/or practice changes in different settings to increase and promote the availability of healthier beverages and decrease the availability of sugary drinks.

Who are the other community partners implementing the initiative?

1. Hmong American Mutual Assistance Association
2. Indigenous Peoples Task Force
3. Minneapolis American Indian Center
4. St. Mary's Health Clinics
5. Neighborhood Hub

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Why were these organizations selected?

These organizations were selected because the target populations they work with suffer from obesity and related chronic diseases at higher rates.

Additional information (if needed): Almost all Americans consume sugary drinks, but low-income communities and communities of color are more likely to **regularly** consume sugary drinks and are at a higher risk for obesity and other related chronic diseases.

Because of these disparities in sugary drink consumption and related obesity rates, it's important for us to (1) encourage healthier beverage choices using culturally-specific educational strategies; and (2) improve the beverage environment in places where our community spends its time.

What is the goal of the Healthier Beverage Initiative?

The overall goal of the Healthier Beverage Initiative is to encourage individuals to choose healthier beverages over sugary drinks, and increase the availability of healthier beverages in different places where adults and children spend their time.

Additional information (if needed): Specifically, the goals of the initiative are:

- To increase awareness of the health risks associated with consuming too many sugary drinks;
- To increase awareness of the importance of choosing healthier beverages;
- To increase the consumption of healthier beverages and decrease the consumption of sugary drinks; and
- Ultimately, to improve health for **all** Minneapolis residents.

About the Issues

What is the problem?

Higher rates of obesity and obesity-related problems such as Type 2 diabetes and heart disease lead to poorer health outcomes and higher health care costs. For example, over 25% of Minnesota adults are overweight or obese **and** have developed obesity-related chronic diseases such as diabetes.

Additional information (if needed): In Hennepin County, 1 in 5 adults are obese and about one-third (33%) of adults are overweight. Also, obesity affects some groups more than others including older adults and communities of color. Environments that make it difficult to consume healthy foods and be physically active are two of the main causes of obesity.

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Why the focus on sugary drinks?

Sugary drinks are major contributors to poor diet and rising obesity rates. Today, Americans consume about 300 more calories each day and almost half of these ‘extra’ calories come from sugary drinks. Consumption in children and adolescents has been increasing as well, with sugary drinks being the largest source of added sugars in the diet of our youth. Drinking just one additional serving of a sugary drink per day significantly increases the chance that a child will become obese!

Additional information (if needed): See *Sickly Sweet, Why the Focus on Sugary Drinks*¹.

Why not candy, cake, cookies, ice cream, and/or other junk food that has added sugars?

Unlike candy, cake, cookies, and ice cream, which are often eaten as a special treat, sugary drinks are no longer consumed as a special treat. For many people, they are the default beverage every day, making them a large contributor of daily calories to our diet. Because many sugary drinks – like pop – have zero nutritional value, but lots of calories, it makes sense to limit them in our diet.

What are sugary drinks?

Sugary drinks, also known as sugar-sweetened beverages, are any non-alcoholic drinks with **added** sugar. This includes soft drinks (soda or pop), sports and energy drinks, sweetened milks or milk alternatives, fruit drinks, punches, or ades, sweetened tea and coffee drinks, and any other beverages to which sugar has been added. It does not include drinks with **only** naturally occurring sugars, such as whole fruits or natural fruit juices.

What is the difference between added sugars and naturally occurring sugars?

Added sugars include any kind of sugar or sweetener that are **added** to food or beverages during processing or preparation, such as adding sugar to pop during processing or putting sugar in your coffee. Naturally occurring sugars are found **naturally** in foods like fruit (fructose) and milk (lactose).

Additional information (if needed): Specific examples of added sugars include (1) natural sugars such as white sugar, brown sugar, and honey; and (2) other sweeteners that are chemically manufactured such as high fructose corn syrup.

What is the recommended limit for daily added sugars intake?

Generally speaking, children should limit added sugar to 12-16 grams per day, but most are consuming between 48-84 grams of sugar a day! Pre-teen and teens should limit added sugar to 20-32 grams per day, but many teens average up to 136 grams of sugar a day!

¹<http://publichealthlawcenter.org/sites/default/files/resources/MN.healthcare.Sickly%20Sweet%E2%80%94Why%20the%20Focus%20on%20Sugary%20Drinks.pdf>

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Adult women should limit added sugar to 24 grams per day and adult men should limit added sugar to 36 grams per day. However, the average American is consuming about 80 grams of sugar every day. This is **triple** the recommended amount!

Additional information (if needed):

- ~4 grams of added sugar = 1 teaspoon of added sugar
- These recommendations and facts are provided by the American Heart Association

What is the recommended limit for sugary drink consumption?

The American Heart Association recommends no more than 36 ounces (or ~112 grams) **per week** from sugary drinks. Imagine this - one pop alone is between 12-20 ounces and about half of the U.S. population consumes one sugary drink per day, and about a fourth (25%) has more than one. After doing the math, the average American consumes up to 140 ounces per week from sugary drinks alone. That's almost **four times** the recommended limit!

Consumption in children and adolescents has been increasing as well. Did you know that according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, American children between 12-19 years old consume almost a **gallon** of pop (soda) a week?

Additional information (if needed): Frequent consumption is especially concerning among low income people and people of color, who consume sugary drinks more regularly and are at a higher risk for obesity and related chronic diseases.

How much sugar is in some of the most popular sugary drinks?

Time for a reality check! Think about these numbers...

- The average energy drink has about 27 grams of sugar
- A 20 ounce bottle of Gatorade has 34 grams of sugar
- A 20 ounce bottle of Coca Cola has 65 grams of sugar
- A 20 ounce bottle of Tahitian Treat Fruit Punch has 80 grams of sugar

That is a lot of sugar, and just one sugary drink alone can exceed the daily limit for sugar intake. In addition, this does not include sugar you consume through other foods and drinks. You wouldn't eat this much sugar. Why would you drink it?

Does the Healthier Beverage Initiative intend to ban sugary drinks, place a tax on sugary drinks, or regulate the sale of larger portion sizes?

No. The goal of the initiative is to encourage healthier beverage choices and make access to healthier beverages, such as water, easier.

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Additional information (if needed): If opponents insist on claiming this is an issue of freedom of choice, you should shift the debate back to health and the fact that today, residents of Minneapolis are being forced – without choice – to bear the impacts (including costs) of obesity and related chronic diseases.

Shouldn't we educate people about healthy beverage consumption, not force them to behave in a certain way?

Education is certainly an important way to encourage people to change their behaviors, but it is not very effective on its own. Combining education with improvements in the different places where adults and children spend their time (e.g. school, work, faith-based organizations) helps make it easier to choose healthier beverages over sugary options. An example of an environmental improvement is simply making healthier options such as water more available and sugary drinks less available.

Don't sports drinks provide sugars and electrolytes that are important for staying hydrated?

Marketing leads many of us to believe that sports drinks, such as Gatorade and Powerade, are necessary to remain healthy and safe during exercise. The truth is that for most of us, drinking the right amount of water and having a nutritious meal is all you need to replace electrolytes lost during exercise.

Additional information (if needed): Water is needed by every system in your body to function properly and is one of the best beverages you can choose to stay hydrated.

What about 100% fruit juice?

Even though fruit juice has vitamins, they are high in calories from concentrated fruit sugars, so it is best to stick to a small glass (4-8 ounces a day). If you are in the mood for fruit, enjoy a whole piece of fruit, which is lower in sugar and has the added benefit of fiber!

What about diet drinks? Aren't artificial sweeteners helpful for weight control?

Diet drinks don't give you any nutrition and can also have a sweeter taste than regular sugary drinks. The more you consume "sweeter" things, the more your body craves something sweet; research says that regularly consuming diet drinks can potentially lead to weight gain instead of weight loss. Because of this, diet drinks are not the best substitutes for regular sugary drinks and should be consumed in moderation.

Additional information (if needed): If you choose to consume diet drinks, balance them with plain water and a variety of other foods and beverages that are nutritious and low in added sugars. Just because a product is "sugar free" or made with artificial sweeteners doesn't necessarily mean that it's healthy.

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What are some healthier beverage options?

Healthier beverages include unsweetened coffee/tea, low-fat or fat-free milk (or other unflavored milk alternatives), 100% fruit or vegetable juice in small portions (4-8 ounces), and of course zero-calorie water. Did you know that bottled water is healthy for you, but not the environment? Consider drinking Minneapolis tap water.

Is Minneapolis tap water safe?

The City of Minneapolis is very proud of its drinking water. Not only is water healthy, but Minneapolis tap water is clean, safe, great tasting, economical (less than half a cent a gallon), and better for the environment (less waste from bottled water)!

Being healthy is all about balancing calories in and calories out. Aren't soda and other sugary drinks fine as long as individuals properly manage their calories?

Managing calories consumed in food and beverages and those burned off in physical activity is the key to maintaining a healthy weight. People who drink a lot of soda or other sugary drinks, however, tend to have a hard time finding this balance. These drinks usually contain a lot of “empty” calories, have no nutrients, and do nothing to support health. In addition, liquid calories from sugary drinks won't fill you up like the calories in solid food.

Additional information (if needed): Studies show that people who add calories to their diet through sugary drinks don't decrease the number of calories they consume from other sources; instead, they consume more total calories. For example, if you were to drink just one can of a sugary drink a day and not cut back on calories elsewhere, you could gain up to 5 pounds in a year! Also, imagine this – to burn off the 150 calories from a 12-ounce soda, an adult has to walk very fast for 30 minutes, but very few people do this amount of exercise regularly. As a result, consuming sugary drinks makes it even harder for the average person to maintain a healthy weight.

What are the negative health impacts of frequent sugary drink consumption/What happens to our bodies when we consume so much sugar?

Sugary drinks are making us sick and the result on our bodies is not very sweet. Studies show that frequent consumption of sugary drinks is associated with a higher risk of weight gain, becoming obese, developing other chronic diseases such as Type 2 diabetes and heart disease, and tooth decay. In the same way, drinking one additional serving of a sugary drink every day increases the chance that a child will become obese. Soda has replaced milk in the diets of many children and this also puts them at risk for fragile and broken bones, and other bone diseases like osteoporosis.

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Additional information (if needed):

- The evidence supporting a link between sugary drink consumption and weight gain is strong and continues to grow; for example, research showed that sugary drinks likely accounted for approximately 20% of the weight gained by Americans between 1977 and 2007.
- Frequent sugary drink consumption can also lead to tooth decay because sugary drinks such as soft drinks and sports drinks have acids that erode the surface of your teeth and cause cavities.

What are the health impacts of decreasing sugary drink consumption?

A reduction in sugary drink consumption can lead to significant health benefits and cost savings. Specifically, decreasing sugary drink consumption is associated with weight loss and a decline in related chronic diseases such as diabetes.

Why are we consuming so many sugary drinks?

Many people simply don't know how harmful consuming too many sugary drinks can be. In addition, a person's environment also plays a large role. For example, sugary drinks are everywhere and people have easy access to them at home, school, work, and retail food outlets.

Additional information (if needed):

Other examples include:

- Increased marketing and promotion, especially to children and communities of color
- Lower prices of sugary drinks
- Increased portion sizes – the larger the container, the more people are likely to drink. Did you know that in the 1920s, a coke bottle was only 6.5 ounces? Today, the size of a coke bottle is between 20 ounces and 1 liter.
- More time spent in front of the TV
- Social and cultural norms – “It's just the way things are...”

What role do parents and/or caregivers play?

Parents/caregivers largely influence the drinks children consume through their own sugary drink consumption behavior, and through what they make available to their children. Tips for parents and caregivers to help reduce the amount of sugary drinks their young children consume include:

- Not offering sugary drinks at mealtimes;
- Not letting kids consume sugary drinks whenever they want; and
- Not keeping sugary drinks in the house.

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Additional Resource: Healthier Beverage Guide

Go: Healthy Beverages	Slow: Beverages in Moderation	Whoa: Sugary Beverages
Zero-calorie water	100% fruit or vegetable juice (> 8 oz.)	Regular soft drinks (soda)
Tea/Coffee without added sugar	Artificially sweetened drinks (e.g. diet soda)	Sports and energy drinks
Low-fat (1%) or fat-free milk, plain	Reduced-fat (2%) milk, plain	Fruit drinks, punches, or ades (<100% fruit juice)
100% fruit or vegetable juice (8 oz. or less)	Low-fat (1%) or fat-free milk, flavored	Sweetened tea/coffee (e.g. iced tea)
		Whole milk, plain
		Reduced-fat (2%), whole milk, or milk alternative, flavored
		Other beverages to which sugar is added

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