

AMA backs tax on soda to fight obesity

Top doctors group says revenue could be used for education effort

Reuters, June 20, 2012

America's largest physician organization recommended on Wednesday that taxes levied on sugar-sweetened sodas be used to fight the country's growing [obesity](#) crisis.

But the policy statement adopted by the [American Medical Association's](#) House of Delegates meeting in Chicago fell short of outright support for taxing sugar-sweetened beverages to control use of these products. Two recommendations to support such taxes put before the group's policy-making body in prior meetings failed to pass.

"While there is no silver bullet that will alone reverse the meteoric rise of obesity, there are many things we can do to fight this epidemic and improve the health of our nation," AMA board member Dr. Alexander Ding said in a statement.

The physician's group pointed to several studies showing that intake of sugar-sweetened beverages is strongly and consistency linked with increased body weight and a number of health conditions like [type 2 diabetes](#).

According to the AMA, sugar-sweetened drinks make up nearly half of Americans' added sugar intake, and cutting consumption of these beverages is a simple way to reduce intake of sugar and empty calories.

The AMA said the policy recognizes that obesity is caused by many factors, but taxing drinks with added sweeteners is one way to help pay for education campaigns and other obesity-related programs.

Increasing taxes on sweetened beverages to a penny per ounce would reduce obesity rates by 5 percent and cut medical costs by \$17 billion within a decade, the AMA Council on Science and Public Health said in its report.

Even more benefit could come if the proceeds of these taxes were used to support obesity education efforts, the group said.

The American Beverage Association, an industry group, fought back, saying in a statement that "funding anti-obesity programs through discriminatory taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages is misguided."

The group has been aggressive in fighting efforts to tax sugar-sweetened beverages, but municipalities continue to press the point.

Voters in Richmond, Calif., this November will consider a ballot proposal to add a penny per ounce tax on sugar-sweetened beverages, with proceeds aimed at offering more bike lanes, increasing after-school sports programs and developing nutritional education campaigns.

In [New York City](#), efforts to curb the sale of supersize servings of sugary drinks in restaurants and public venues have been met with heated opposition.

The proposed ban caps the sale of most sugar-sweetened beverages to 16 ounces or half a liter and carries a \$200 fine for vendors that do not comply.

The industry has launched a wave of ads in response to New York's plan, which [Mayor Michael Bloomberg](#) announced in late May.

[Coca-Cola Co.](#) and [McDonald's Corp.](#) along with beverage industry groups have said consumers should be able to make their own drink choices, and that sodas are not to blame for the nation's soaring obesity rates.