

Sugary Drink Messaging for Policy Change

AUDIENCE
MESSAGING
GUIDE

A Supplemental Resource for Advocates

UPDATED JULY 2021



American
Heart
Association.

American Heart Association.





Introduction

In 2020, Voices for Healthy Kids conducted message research to help inform our policy efforts to decrease sugary drink consumption. The key learnings and insights from this research are summarized in this [messaging guide](#).¹

This resource builds on that messaging guide. It includes additional insights and messages based on American Heart Association science and other sugary drink materials. We organized the information by topics of interest and recognize the messages will need to be adapted for your community, campaign and environment.

WHAT YOU'LL FIND IN THIS DOCUMENT:

- ▶ [Aspirational Messages by Audience](#)
- ▶ [Supporting Messages by Category and Audience](#)

¹ The messaging guide provides advocates, stakeholders and decision-makers with insights, message framing tips and sample messages based on the research and American Heart Association science.

Audience Definitions

This guide is intended to help build support for sugary drink tax campaigns among four specific audience groups: **potential supporters**, **grassroots**, **community and advocacy leaders**, and **decision-makers**.

Potential Supporters

Potential supporters are individuals in your community who have not yet been engaged in local campaign efforts to adopt a sugary drink tax but who could be supportive of this effort. This group will likely require a great deal of education-based messages on sugary drinks and the tax.

Grassroots

Grassroots are existing supporters, volunteers and/or members of your organization/in your community. Already supportive of your mission and policy efforts, these individuals may be part of your action list or consistently engage on issues your organization supports. They are among the community members you want to try to engage early on, encouraging them to attend events and take specific actions to help amplify your messages about a sugary drink tax.

Community and Advocacy Leaders

Community and advocacy leaders include those who may work with you on a sugary drink tax campaign. These leaders may join a coalition or lend their support in other ways, such as serving as a spokesperson, sharing information with their networks or sharing connections to decision-makers and other stakeholders who could be helpful to the campaign. Having their support can help generate further support.

Decision-Makers

Decision-makers are defined as policymakers.

We've included an audience key (right-hand column on the following pages) to help you identify which message may resonate best with which audience.

Aspirational Messages By Audience

Highlighting the health outcomes associated with consuming sugary drinks is unifying message across audiences and the most effective way to demonstrate why we need policies that make it easier to access healthy drinks.

1 START WITH AN ASPIRATIONAL MESSAGE. CHOOSE ONE OF THESE MESSAGES TO START YOUR CONVERSATION.

MESSAGES	AUDIENCE(S)
Every child deserves to grow up healthy, which means promoting healthy drinks like water and plain milk. On average, kids drink more than 30 gallons of sugary drinks per year — enough to fill a bathtub. ² Consuming sugary drinks sets up children for a lifetime of health challenges, including type 2 diabetes, tooth decay and heart disease. ³	<p>Potential Supporters</p> <p>Grassroots</p> <p>Community and Advocacy Leaders</p> <p>Decision-Makers</p>
We need to make healthy drinks more accessible and more available in places where kids and families spend their time. Consuming sugary drinks sets up children for a lifetime of health challenges, including type 2 diabetes, tooth decay and heart disease. ⁴	<p>Potential Supporters</p> <p>Decision-Makers</p>
Our health is one of our most important resources. Sugary drinks are heavily marketed to Black, Latino, Native American, and Alaska Native people and families with low income. These drinks are associated with chronic diseases like type 2 diabetes and heart disease. This helps explain why these diseases disproportionately affect people in the same communities. It's time to make changes that support individual and community resiliency.	<p>Potential Supporters</p> <p>Grassroots</p> <p>Community and Advocacy Leaders</p>
Parents want to do what is best for their children. Healthy drink options should be easily accessible and available in places where kids and families spend their time. But when healthy drinks or foods are not nearby, or when sugary drinks at local stores are less expensive than healthy drinks like water or milk, it makes it harder for parents to make healthy choices for their kids.	<p>Potential Supporters</p> <p>Grassroots</p>

2 THEN, STATE WHAT A SUGARY DRINK TAX CAN DO.

A tax on sugary drinks can improve the health of individuals and families in our community.

3 FINALLY, ADD A SUPPORTING MESSAGE. SUPPORTING MESSAGES CAN BE FOUND ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES.

² Voices for Healthy Kids. Sugary Drink Fast Facts. Updated September 2020. Available at: <https://voicesforhealthykids.org/assets/resources/sugary-drink-fast-facts-9.28.2020.pdf>.

³ Muth ND, Dietz WH, Magge SN, Johnson RK; American Academy of Pediatrics; Section on Obesity; Committee on Nutrition; American Heart Association. Public policies to reduce sugary drink consumption in children and adolescents. *Pediatrics*. 2019; 143(4):e20190282. doi: 10.1542/peds.2019-0282.

⁴ *Ibid.*

Supporting Messages By Category And Audience

Community Impact

We can build support for a sugary drink tax when we talk about the impact it can have on a community. Taxes can improve health of communities and families as people switch to water and other healthier drinks. Sugary drink tax revenue would support community-identified needs and programs which helps build support for the tax, particularly among those who worry about a tax being unfair and those who need more information.

MESSAGES		AUDIENCE(S)
Community resources	Money from a sugary drink tax can put resources into communities hardest hit by sugary drink-related diseases. Funds could be used to address needs of the community — identified by the community — [INSERT WHAT YOUR COMMUNITY HAS IDENTIFIED AS NEEDS] — like increasing access to healthy foods, putting water bottle filling stations in schools or funding health or education efforts in the community.	Potential Supporters Grassroots Community and Advocacy Leaders
Revenue for community	Revenue from a sugary drink tax can put resources into communities hardest hit by sugary drink-related diseases. Funds could be used to specifically address what's important to the community — like increasing access to healthy foods, putting water stations in schools and funding health programs or expanding education opportunities.	Decision-Makers
Healthy options for kids	Children should have no more than one 8 ounce sugary drink a week, but kids, on average, are consuming that amount every single day. ⁵ Taxes on sugary drinks are a proven way to reduce purchases of these drinks. ⁶ Revenue from sugary drink taxes can be used to support kids' health through investments that improve school food systems, including access to healthy meals and safe and appealing water drinking stations.	Potential Supporters Community and Advocacy Leaders
COVID-19 recovery	Revenue from sugary drink taxes can put resources into communities most impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic. [INSERT INFORMATION ABOUT ECONOMIC AND HEALTH IMPACT OF COVID ON SPECIFIC COMMUNITIES] As we look to recover from the pandemic, funds could be used to specifically address what's important to the community, including access to food and health programs.	Potential Supporters Grassroots Community and Advocacy Leaders

5 Virani SS, Alonso A, Aparicio HJ, Benjamin EJ, Bittencourt MS, Callaway CW, et al. Heart disease and stroke statistics 2021 update: a report from the American Heart Association. *Circulation*. 2021. Jan 27. doi: 10.1161/CIR.0000000000000950.

6 Krieger J, Bleich SN, Scarmo S, Ng SW. Sugar-sweetened beverage reduction policies: progress and promise. *Ann Rev Public Health*. 2020; Nov 30. doi: 10.1146/annurev-publhealth-090419-103005.

Evidence

Several U.S. cities and the Navajo Nation have adopted sugary drink taxes. Evidence from these communities — including information about how sugary drink purchases have gone down — is important to communicate to key audiences and helps counter the “it won’t work” sentiment. Knowing that tax revenue has been used for its intended purpose is also compelling.

MESSAGES		AUDIENCE(S)
Evidence: Multiple cities	We have an opportunity to adopt policies that will change the health of our communities. Cities with a sugary drink tax — like Philadelphia and Seattle — have already seen purchases of these products go down. ^{7,8} They have been able to use nearly all of the associated revenue for its intended purpose, funding critical health and education services. ⁹	Potential Supporters Grassroots Community and Advocacy Leaders Decision-Makers
Evidence: Philadelphia	In roughly the first two years after Philadelphia passed a tax, purchases of sugary drinks declined by nearly 40%. ¹⁰ And, thanks to revenue from the tax, communities are upgrading parks and playgrounds, and 4,000 more kids have had the opportunity for a free pre-K education. ¹¹	Potential Supporters Grassroots Community and Advocacy Leaders
Projected savings: Philadelphia	Researchers project that, over a 10-year period, Philadelphia’s sweetened beverage tax will reduce consumption of sugary drinks enough to prevent nearly 15,000 cases of obesity and also reduce the incidence of heart disease. This will mean the city saves more than \$76 million in health care costs over a decade. ¹²	Decision-Makers
COVID-19 recovery	Revenue from sugary drink taxes can put resources into communities most impacted during the COVID-19 pandemic. [INSERT INFORMATION ABOUT ECONOMIC AND HEALTH IMPACT OF COVID ON SPECIFIC COMMUNITIES] As we look to recover from the pandemic, funds could be used to specifically address what’s important to the community, including access to food and health programs.	Potential Supporters Grassroots Community and Advocacy Leaders

7 Roberto CA, Lawman HG, LeVasseur MT, Mitra N, Peterhans A, Herring B, Bleich SN. Association of a beverage tax on sugar-sweetened and artificially sweetened beverages with changes in beverage prices and sales and chain retailers in a large urban setting. *JAMA*. 2019; 321(18):1799-1820. doi: 10.10001/jama.2019.4249.

8 Powell LM, Leider J. The impact of Seattle’s sweetened beverage tax on beverage prices and volume sold. *Econ Hum Biol*. 2020; 37:100856. doi: 10.1016/j.ehb.2020.100856.

9 Healthy Food America. Map and Chart the Movement. Accessed February 2021. Available at: <https://www.healthyfoodamerica.org/map>.

10 Roberto CA, Lawman HG, LeVasseur MT, Mitra N, Peterhans A, Herring B, Bleich SN. Association of a beverage tax on sugar-sweetened and artificially sweetened beverages with changes in beverage prices and sales and chain retailers in a large urban setting. *JAMA*. 2019; 321(18):1799-1820. doi: 10.10001/jama.2019.4249.

11 CBS Philly. Philadelphia Soda Tax Help Send Thousands of Kids to Pre-K in its First 2 Years. March 2019. Available at: <https://philadelphia.cbslocal.com/2019/03/08/philadelphia-soda-tax-helps-send-thousands-of-kids-to-pre-k-in-its-first-2-years/>.

12 Gortmaker SL, Long MW, Ward ZJ, Giles CM, Barrett JL, Resch SC, et al. CHOICES research brief. Sugar-sweetened and diet beverage tax in Philadelphia, PA. June 2016. Available at: [Brief: Cost-Effectiveness of a Sugar-Sweetened and Diet Beverage Excise Tax in Philadelphia, PA - CHOICES Project](#).

Evidence (cont.)

MESSAGES		AUDIENCE(S)
Evidence: Seattle	<p>During its first year, Seattle's sugary drink tax raised nearly \$23 million – significantly more than the projected \$15 million. Revenue from this tax has helped expand access to healthy foods and reduce education and health disparities.¹³ In 2020, the city also used some of the revenue from this tax to provide families hardest hit by the pandemic with grocery vouchers.¹⁴</p>	<p>Grassroots</p> <p>Community and Advocacy Leaders</p> <p>Decision-Makers</p>
Evidence: Boulder	<p>In Boulder, revenue from a sugary drink tax has been used to fund health and nutrition programs for communities who bear the greatest burden of diseases linked to sugary drinks. And, this past year, Boulder directed some revenue from the tax to provide healthy food to individuals and families struggling during the COVID-19 pandemic.</p>	<p>Grassroots</p> <p>Community and Advocacy Leaders</p> <p>Decision-Makers</p>

¹³ Voices for Healthy Kids. Seattle's Sugary Drink Tax Helps Feed Local Families Hit Hardest by COVID-19. Accessed February 2021. Available at: <https://voicesforhealthykids.org/impact/success-stories/seattle-sugary-drink-tax-helps-feed-local-families-hit-hardest-by-covid-19>.

¹⁴ Voices for Healthy Kids. Sugary Drink Tax Investment Helps Seattle Fund COVID-19 Food Assistance Program. Accessed February 2021. Available at: <https://voicesforhealthykids.org/news/sugary-drink-tax-investment-helps-seattle-fund-covid-19-food-assistance-program>.

Health Costs

Policies that decrease sugary drink consumption can lead to healthier communities and families as people switch to healthier drinks. This can mean lower health care costs in the future, as well as a healthier workforce. While these outcomes on their own are unlikely to drive support for a sugary drink tax, they can be paired with both aspirational messages and information about community programs to build a more complete picture of the impact of a sugary drink tax.

MESSAGES		AUDIENCE(S)
Health outcomes and costs	Chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease, which are closely linked to sugary drinks, have a devastating impact on the lives of those affected and their families. They are also expensive to treat and manage. For example, it costs the country \$216 billion to treat heart disease alone every year. ¹⁵	Grassroots Community and Advocacy Leaders Decision-Makers
Reigning in costs	There are serious health risks and health care costs associated with sugary drinks, and people nationwide are concerned about them. Sugary drinks largely contribute to the increasing rates of type 2 diabetes and heart disease among children and adults. ¹⁶ And with our country already spending \$216 billion per year treating heart disease, ¹⁷ we need a way to rein in these costs.	Decision-Makers
Healthier community and workforce	Taxes on sugary drinks can improve the health of individuals and families as people switch to water and other healthier drinks. If [LOCATION] taxes sugary drinks and people still choose to buy them, the revenue raised can then be used to fund needs identified by our community — like health and education programs. Together, this will mean businesses are healthier too, with a healthier workforce, lower health care costs and greater productivity.	Grassroots Community and Advocacy Leaders
Cost of missed work¹⁸	Missed work due to sugary drink-related diseases — like type 2 diabetes, tooth decay and heart disease among children and adults — is estimated to cost the nation tens of billions of dollars each year. ¹⁹	Grassroots Decision-Makers

15 Virani SS, Alonso A, Aparicio HJ, Benjamin EJ, Bittencourt MS, Callaway CW. Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics – 2021 Update: A Report from the American Heart Association. *Circulation*. 2021; 143(8): e254-e743. doi: 10.1161/CIR.0000000000000950.

16 Muth ND, Dietz WH, Magge SN, Johnson RK; AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS; SECTION ON OBESITY; COMMITTEE ON NUTRITION; AMERICAN HEART ASSOCIATION. Public policies to reduce sugary drink consumption in children and adolescents. *Pediatrics*. 2019; 143(4):e20190282. doi: 10.1542/peds.2019-0282.

17 Virani SS, Alonso A, Aparicio HJ, Benjamin EJ, Bittencourt MS, Callaway CW. Heart Disease and Stroke Statistics – 2021 Update: A Report from the American Heart Association. *Circulation*. 2021; 143(8): e254-e743. doi: 10.1161/CIR.0000000000000950.

18 Voices for Healthy Kids. Sugary Drink Fast Facts. Updated September 2020. Available at: <https://voicesforhealthykids.org/assets/resources/sugary-drink-fast-facts-9.28.2020.pdf>.

19 Asay GR, Roy K, Lang JE, Payne RL, Howard DH. Absenteeism and employer costs associated with chronic diseases and health risk factors in the U.S. workforce. *Prev Chronic Dis*. 2016; 13:E141. doi: 10.5888/pcd13.150503.

Beverage Industry Marketing

Campaigns can bring awareness to beverage companies' deceptive marketing practices and their harmful impact. Generally, those surveyed did not like the beverage industry's marketing to kids, but more education is needed to fully convey the extent to which beverage companies target sugary drinks to kids.

MESSAGES		AUDIENCE(S)
Beverage industry marketing	Children and teens are specifically targeted by sugary drink advertising. In fact, companies target kids as young as age 2 with TV ads for sugary drinks. ²⁰ With the majority of kids having at least one sugary drink per day, ²¹ it's clear these aggressive marketing practices are working, setting children up for a lifetime of health challenges that include type 2 diabetes, tooth decay and heart disease.	<p>Potential Supporters</p> <p>Grassroots</p> <p>Community and Advocacy Leaders</p>
Targeting Black and Latino youth	Black and Latino kids see twice as many sugary drink advertisements as their white peers. ²² The sugary drink industry also promotes music and sporting events and sponsorships to resonate with Black and Latino kids, and they spend more on this promotion than any other type of food company. ²³ Taxes on sugary drinks are a proven way to offset the outsized influence these companies have on children.	<p>Potential Supporters</p> <p>Grassroots</p> <p>Community and Advocacy Leaders</p>
Targeted marketing	Every child deserves to grow up healthy, yet the sugary drink industry aggressively targets Black and Latino children with its marketing. ²⁴ This predatory marketing can lead to higher rates of type 2 diabetes, heart disease and other chronic diseases in the Black and Latino communities. Now is the time to adopt policies to ensure a healthy future for our kids.	<p>Potential Supporters</p> <p>Grassroots</p> <p>Community and Advocacy Leaders</p>

20 Fleming-Milici F, Harris JL. Television food advertising viewed by preschoolers, children and adolescents: contributors to differences in exposure for black and white youth in the United States. *Pediatr Obes.* 2018; 13(2):103-110. doi: 10.1111/ijpo.12203.

21 Bleich SN, Vercammen KA, Koma JW, Li Z. Trends in beverage consumption among children and adults, 2003-2014. *Obesity.* 2018; 26:432-441. doi: 10.1002/oby.22056.

22 Harris JL, Fleming-Milici F, Kibwana-Jaff A, Phaneuf L. Sugary Drink FACTS 2020. Sugary drink advertising to youth: Continued barrier to public health progress. June 2020. Available at: http://sugarydrinkfacts.org/resources/Sugary%20Drink%20FACTS%202020/Sugary_Drink_FACTS_Full%20Report_final.pdf.

23 Federal Trade Commission (2012). A review of food marketing to children and adolescents: Follow-up report. Available at: <https://www.ftc.gov/sites/default/files/documents/reports/review-food-marketing-children-and-adolescents-follow-report/121221foodmarketingreport.pdf>.

24 Harris JL, Fleming-Milici F, Kibwana-Jaff A, Phaneuf L. Sugary Drink FACTS 2020. Sugary drink advertising to youth: Continued barrier to public health progress. June 2020. Available at: http://sugarydrinkfacts.org/resources/Sugary%20Drink%20FACTS%202020/Sugary_Drink_FACTS_Full%20Report_final.pdf.