

**To:** The People of the State of New York

**From:** Jenna Garufi

**Subject Line:** Increase Obesity Policies in New York

**Summary of the issue:** Obesity is a significant issue today, defined as a chronic, complex disease characterized by excessive fat deposits that can impair health (World Health Organization). A BMI of 30 or higher is considered obese. Since 1990, adult obesity rates have more than doubled, and adolescent obesity has quadrupled, this emphasizes the severity of addressing this issue. Many policy options have been proposed to address these issues, including a tax on sugar sweetened beverages, front of package labeling, and food service guidelines for federal facilities. According to the CDC, as of 2023, over one in three adults (35%) in 23 states have obesity. Prior, in 2013, no state had obesity rates above 35%. This demonstrates that implementing these policies benefits citizens in many ways. I recommend the Sugar Sweetened Beverage Tax, which adds a tax to sugary drinks like sodas and energy drinks to reduce consumption. Implementing this excise tax on high sugar beverages could lead towards community health benefits.

**Policy Option: Sugar Sweetened Beverage Tax**

**Key Argument One:** The Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Tax is a current policy option addressing obesity. According to the NYS Senate, this is an act to amend the tax law, in relation to imposing an excise tax on sugary drinks; and to amend the public health law, in relation to community health benefits. This policy aims to improve public health while improving the economy through

increased revenue. "A study in the United States estimated a \$0.01/ounce sugary beverage tax could save US\$23 billion in healthcare costs alone over 10 years" (Task Force on Fiscal Policy for Health). This highlights the effect on the economy while also limiting unhealthy drink consumption.

**Advantages:** This tax promotes health, and is also economically beneficial. Section 404 of the bill states that all tax revenue goes to the Community Health Equity Fund, with 50% supporting SNAP incentives and the other half going to the Community Health Benefits Trust. This policy not only addresses health issues but also supports communities by enabling SNAP to improve healthy food access for low income individuals. Since low-income households often have poorer health due to the affordability of processed foods, this policy could help reduce health disparities by income level. This policy provides a simple solution to the obesity issue.

**Disadvantages:** One disadvantage of this bill is its impact on lower income households, as they are more affected by taxes than higher income individuals. "A disproportionate share of the health and economic costs of consuming tobacco, alcohol, and sugary beverages falls on poorer households" (Task Force on Fiscal Policy for Health). This highlights a big downside of the tax.

### **Policy Option: Front Of Package Labels (FOP)**

**Key Argument Two:** Front of package labels help consumers easily identify healthier options. The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) proposed this in 2022 at a landmark White House Conference on Hunger, Nutrition, and Health. These labels complement the required Nutrition Facts label by providing simplified nutrition information. As well as providing additional context to help customers make quick, informed food choices.

**Advantages:** Unhealthy processed foods are widely available, but making healthy options more noticeable can guide consumers towards better choices. "Front-of-package (FOP) labels are an evidence-based policy tool, backed by decades of research showing they can nudge consumers towards healthier foods and drinks while encouraging industry to improve product nutrition" (Front-of-package (FOP) Food Labeling). This simple addition to packages could help steer people away from unhealthy foods and obesity.

**Disadvantages:** Although FOP labels are designed to be simple, they could confuse consumers due to the variety of label types, such as the traffic light label. Many consumers may stick with what they already know and choose the unhealthy option.

### **Policy Option: Food Service Guidelines for Federal Facilities**

**Key Argument Three:** Food Service Guidelines for Federal Facilities are a great way to provide lower income households with access to healthier food options. According to the CDC, the goals are, "Healthier foods and beverages are available and encouraged at federal facilities, environmentally responsible practices are conducted in federal food service venues, and communities are economically supported through local food sourcing.

**Advantages:** Food Service Guidelines for Federal Facilities will make healthier options more accessible to lower income households at places like food pantries. The CDC stated, "The United States government encourages the availability, promotion, and consumption of healthier foods and beverages as a way to support optimal health and prevent nutrition-related chronic diseases, several of which are among the leading causes of death." This highlights how food choices and obesity greatly affect health.

**Disadvantages:** While this is a great option for poorer households, it has its flaws. It may cost these facilities more to acquire healthier options. Additionally, the healthier options may be limited and could run out quickly if the facilities operate on a first come, first serve basis.

**Policy Recommendation:** The Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Tax is my recommendation because it discourages consumers from purchasing unhealthy options while benefiting our economy.

**Justification:** A sugar sweetened beverage tax is more impactful for all communities compared to other policy options. As presented in Table 1, taxing sugar-sweetened beverages could effectively avert deaths due to obesity, with up to 2.2 million deaths potentially averted with a 50% tax (Summan and Laxminarayan, 2018). This policy is especially beneficial for low income households, as the tax revenue can support healthier meals for SNAP recipients. Additionally, compared to front-of-package labeling and Food Service Guidelines, it may be more sustainable from an economic perspective. This solution is the most logical because it steers consumers away from unhealthy options, but if they choose to purchase these drinks, the tax will contribute to all communities.

**Feasibility:** Some may argue that this option is not practical for all citizens due to the tax on their beverages. However, I argue that although these drinks will be taxed, the revenue generated will benefit them in the long run and may encourage healthier choices, such as water. This option is feasible for both economic and social reasons. However, there are still potential challenges, such as gaining support from consumers, as no one wants additional taxes. Despite this, taxation requires minimal effort to implement and is relatively straightforward to enforce.

**Conclusions:** This tax is currently under review to ensure it is as efficient as possible. Compared to other policy options, it provides the most incentives for everyone to choose healthier options. When sugary drinks are taxed, consumers are more likely to choose healthier, untaxed alternatives. This policy is aimed at helping lower income households, who are most at risk of obesity and poor health. Ultimately, the Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Tax presents the best practical and effective solution to fight obesity and improve public health.

## Works Cited:

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## Supplementary tables and figures:

Table 1.

**Table 3: Projected Health and Revenue  
Impact of Tax Increases on Sugary Beverages**

Price increase due to higher tax	Deaths averted (millions)	Years of life gained (millions)	Change in tax revenue (trillions, \$2016 discounted)
20%	0.8	23.7	0.7
30%	1.3	35.0	1.0
40%	1.7	46.5	1.2
50%	2.2	57.8	1.4

Note: Taxes are increased in 2017 sufficiently to raise prices by 20, 30, 40, and 50 percent. The impact of the increases is projected over a 50-year period (2017-2067).

Source: Summan and Laxminarayan 2018