



EVERYDAY HEALTH SURVEY:

Sugar-sweetened beverages

Contents

1.0 Executive Summary	3
2.0 Project Overview.....	4
3.0 Findings.....	5
3.1 Consumption.....	5
3.2 Awareness of health effects.....	5
3.3 Support for proposed regulations.....	5
4.0 Recommendations.....	10
6.0 References.....	11



1.0 Executive Summary

Cancer Council Queensland and Heart Foundation's latest Everyday Health Survey explored community perceptions of sugar-sweetened beverages and proposed regulations to reduce consumption.

Currently in Queensland, 64% of Queensland adults and 26% of Queensland children are overweight or obese¹. Although several factors influence obesity rates, research suggests that consumption of sugar sweetened beverages plays a significant role². In Australia, sugar-sweetened beverages hold the largest volume share of 'water-based beverage sales'^{3,4}. High body mass can increase the risk of many chronic diseases, including heart disease and some cancers. It is imperative that action is taken to reduce consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages in Queensland.

To this end, survey findings show that overall 63% to 93% of the community support proposed regulations to reduce sugar-sweetened beverage consumption. In particular, 63% supported introducing a 20% health levy on sugar-sweetened beverages, 87% supported removing sugar-sweetened beverages from children's settings, 77% supported a government funded consumer education campaign and 81% supported removing sugar-sweetened beverages from government health facilities.

These results demonstrate that there is strong community support for regulations to reduce consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages and reduce the harmful health effects of consumption.

2.0 Project Overview

Cancer Council Queensland and the Heart Foundation are committed to reducing the risk of cancer and heart disease and helping the community live happy, healthy lives.

The Everyday Health Survey: Sugar-sweetened beverages aimed to identify consumption habits of sugar-sweetened beverages, determine community awareness of the health impacts of consumption, and assess support for proposed regulations to reduce consumption.

This survey was the fifth in a series of surveys designed to give Queenslanders a voice and engage them in conversation about the health issues that affect all members of the community. The mixed methods survey, delivered via SurveyMonkey®, was launched in July 2018 and was open for seven weeks. Recruitment was conducted via media releases, social media, website, and existing communication channels.

Respondents

The survey attracted 1261 completed responses. The respondents can be described as:

- Female (82%)
- Living in Brisbane (52%)
- 30 years and older (67%)
- Tertiary educated (81%)
- Employed full time (47%)
- Speak English as a primary language (96%)
- Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or Australian South Sea Islander (2%)



3.0 Findings



For the purposes of this survey, sugar-sweetened beverages include all non-alcoholic water-based beverages with added sugar, such as; non-diet soft drinks, energy drinks, fruit drinks, sports drinks, flavoured water and cordial. This does not include 100% fruit juice, flavoured milk, or sugared tea/coffee.

3.1 Consumption

Over three-quarters (76%) of respondents reported having consumed a sugar-sweetened beverage in the three months prior to the survey, most commonly on a weekly basis (21%). The main reasons for consumption were taste (19%), as a treat (15%) and as an alcoholic mixer (12%). The most common place to purchase sugar-sweetened beverages was from a supermarket (26%), a restaurant or café (19%) or a fast food outlet (18%). Consumption rates were highest in Rockhampton (79%) and lowest on the Sunshine Coast (66%). Almost half (44%) of respondents consumed a 'diet' or 'no sugar' beverage in the three months prior to the survey.

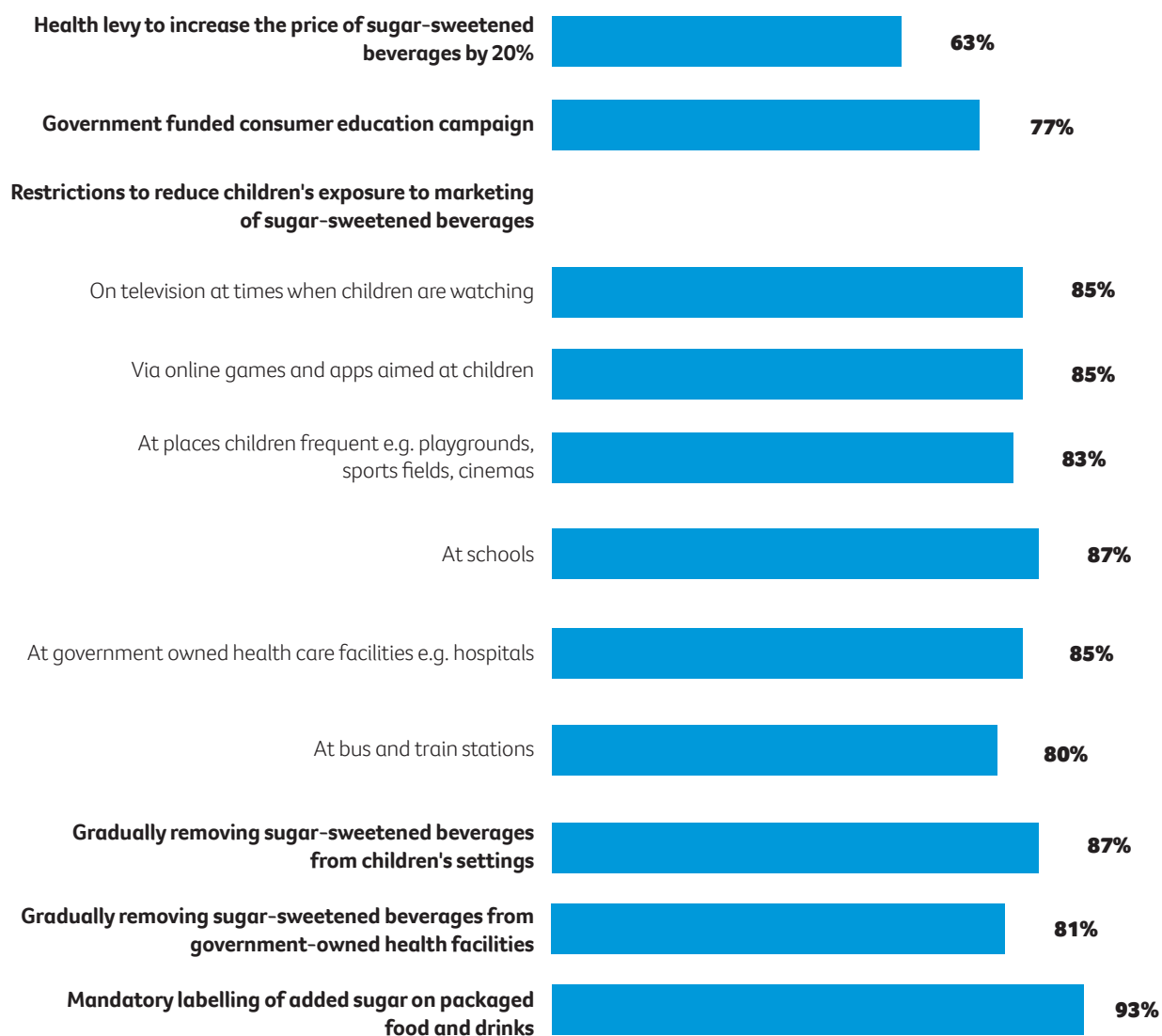
3.2 Awareness of health effects

Respondents were aware of the health effects of excess sugar consumption. 85% of respondents believe it is very likely that consuming too much sugar increases the risk of overweight and obesity. Consequently, 87% of respondents think it is very likely that being overweight or obese is a risk factor for heart disease. However only 53% believe it is very likely that overweight and obesity is a risk factor for cancer, despite the fact that 3900 cancer cases in Australia every year are attributable to an unhealthy weight⁵. Almost all (98%) of respondents were actively trying to reduce their sugar consumption, most commonly by reducing the amount of junk food and drinks consumed (18%), by preparing food from scratch (15%) and by not adding sugar to tea or coffee (13%).

3.3 Support for proposed regulations

The Queensland community was asked to share their perspectives on a range of regulations to reduce sugar-sweetened beverage consumption that have not yet been implemented. Results show that community support for the suggested regulations ranged from 63% to 93%. Proposed measures that attracted both the highest level of support and the lowest level of opposition were restrictions on marketing of unhealthy food and drinks to children at schools, removing sugar-sweetened beverages from all children's settings, and mandatory labelling of added sugar on packaged food and drinks.

Graph 1: Level of support for proposed regulations to reduce sugar-sweetened beverage consumption in Queensland



Health levy to increase the price of sugar-sweetened beverages by 20%

The World Health Organisation (WHO) recommends governments consider taxes or subsidies to reduce the consumption of less healthy foods and promote healthier options⁶. It suggests there is reasonable evidence that appropriately designed taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages would result in reduction in consumption, especially if the retail price was increased by 20% or more⁷. The survey revealed strong community support for this control measure, with 63% of respondents in favour of this measure. The majority (62%) of respondents would like to see revenue raised from a levy used to subsidise the cost of healthy food.

Government funded consumer education campaign

The amount of sugar in sugar-sweetened beverages, or the potentially serious health consequences of sugar-sweetened beverage consumption may not be well understood in the community. Therefore, consumer education is key to reducing consumption. Over three-quarters (77%) of respondents are in favour of a consumer education campaign, supported by government. Respondents would like to receive this information via television (20%), social media (20%), billboards and posters (12%) and radio (12%).

Restrictions to reduce children's exposure to marketing of sugar-sweetened beverages

40% of total daily energy intake for Queensland children aged 4-13 years is derived from discretionary food items and over half of children had consumed a sugar-sweetened beverage in the previous 24 hours in 2011-12¹. Reducing children's exposure to marketing of sugar-sweetened beverages is paramount.

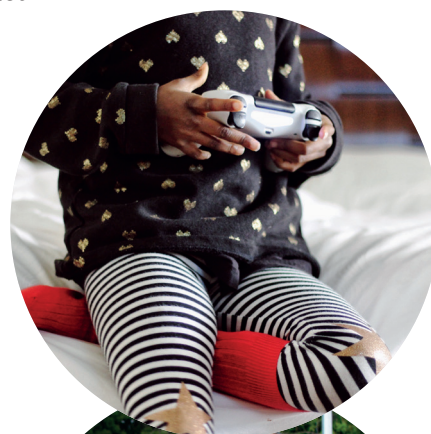


On television, at times when children are watching

On average, an Australian child will see around three advertisements for food during prime-time television and 44% of food advertisements will be for unhealthy food⁸. Existing regulatory codes only apply when children make up more than 35% of the entire audience. Given the small proportion of children in the general population (less than 20% of the Australian population is aged 0-14⁹), in practice, this test is rarely met⁸. A large number of survey respondents (85%) are in support of measures to restrict marketing of sugar-sweetened beverages to children on television at times when children are watching.

Via online games and apps aimed at children

Apps are incredibly popular with children. A 2013 study found that 69% of children aged 4-14 had used an app in the preceding 18 months and it is likely this figure has increased since then¹⁰. However, whether the codes apply to apps marketing unhealthy food is unclear. The survey results confirm community support for restricting marketing to children via online games and apps, with 85% showing support.



At places children frequent e.g. sporting fields, cinemas

The food industry codes are largely voluntary and have a very narrow scope, meaning a significant amount of marketing to children is not covered at all. Unhealthy food and drink companies commonly target children through sport. As well as brands forming part of the competition's name and the brand or logo being displayed on equipment and uniforms, prominent signage at weekly sporting events is common⁸. Australian research has shown that the majority (63%) of food sponsors of children's sport did not meet the criteria as being healthy¹¹. Encouragingly, 83% respondents are in support of marketing restrictions at places children frequent, such as sporting fields.



At schools

Discretionary food items, including sugar-sweetened beverages account for more than 40% of the total daily energy intake for school-aged children¹². Schools play an important role in teaching children and young people the skills to develop healthy habits in a health promoting environment. 87% of respondents support restrictions to limit children's exposure to promotion of sugar-sweetened beverages at school.

At bus and train stations

A recent audit of the Sydney metropolitan train network found that over one-quarter (27.6%) of advertisements were promoting food or beverages. The majority (84.3%) were for unhealthy products, with sugar-sweetened beverages ranking among the most frequently advertised products¹³. Children and teenagers are frequent users of public transport, and it is therefore encouraging that over three quarters (80%) of respondents are in favour of restrictions to reduce children's exposure at bus and train stations.

Since the survey was launched, the Queensland Government has approved a new policy banning the advertising of unhealthy food and drinks on Government-owned advertising spaces, including public transport facilities. The policy will come into effect as advertising contracts and leases come up for renewal.

Gradually removing sugar-sweetened beverages from children's settings

Availability of sugar-sweetened beverages in schools can shape overall rates of consumption¹⁴. With over one quarter (26%) of Queensland children overweight or obese¹, it is vital that school environments as well as other children's settings be free from promotion of, and access to, sugar-sweetened beverages. The survey findings revealed that 87% of respondents support the removal of sugar-sweetened beverages from children's settings.

Gradually removing sugar-sweetened beverages in government-owned health facilities

By promoting healthier choices, health services can become a role model for the broader community. Over three-quarters (81%) of respondents supported the removal of sugar-sweetened beverages from government-owned health facilities. Since the survey was launched, the Council of Australian Governments Health Council announced a plan to limit sugary drinks in government owned hospitals and health care facilities.

Mandatory labelling of added sugar on packaged food and drinks

On average, Australians consume around 15 teaspoons of added sugar per day, with teenage boys averaging about 23 teaspoons per day. Just over half of added sugar in the diet was consumed from sugar-sweetened beverages¹⁵. For optimal health, the World Health Organisation recommends no more than 5% of energy comes from added sugar per day – for the average adult, this is about 6 teaspoons of added sugar¹⁶. Displaying the amount of added sugar on a product could help people to understand how much they are consuming and may assist them to reduce consumption. Almost all respondents (93%) supported mandatory labelling of added sugar on packaged food and drink. Since the survey was launched, the Federal Government has initiated a public consultation in added sugar labelling in Australia with submissions currently being analysed by the Food Regulation Standing Committee.

4.0 Recommendations

These findings highlight the level of community support for restrictions to reduce the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages. Cancer Council Queensland and the Heart Foundation propose the following recommendations, recognising this is not an exhaustive list.

- Introduce a targeted health levy added to sugar-sweetened beverages to increase the price by 20% relative to healthier options to influence purchasing habits and encourage healthier diets (federal government).
- A consumer education campaign, supported by the Queensland government, to highlight the impacts of sugar-sweetened beverage consumption and encourage people to reduce their levels of consumption (state government).
- Phasing out of sugar sweetened beverages from:
 - Schools and children’s settings (state government)
 - Government owned health facilities (state government)
- Restrictions by government to reduce children’s exposure to marketing of sugar-sweetened beverages including;
 - On television at times when children are watching (federal government)
 - Via online video games and apps (federal government)
 - At places children frequent e.g. sporting fields (state government)
 - At bus and train stations (state government)

Cancer Council Queensland and the Heart Foundation will continue to engage with the community and all levels of government to improve the health and wellbeing of Queenslanders.



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