Sugar Labelling
Policy Position Statement

Key messages: Consumers need information to assist them to select foods low in added sugars as current nutrition information labels do not include the amount of added sugars. Added sugar labelling in Australia is needed to enable consumers to make informed choices consistent with the Australian Dietary Guideline 3 to “Limit intake of food and beverages containing added sugars” and support food supply initiatives to achieve their public health objectives. ‘Free’ or ‘added’ sugars refers to monosaccharides and disaccharides added to food and drinks by the manufacturer, cook or consumer, and sugars naturally present in honey, syrups, fruit juices and their concentrates.

Key policy positions:
1. Nutrition information on all packaged foods should be reformed to:
   - Quantify the amount of added sugar in the mandatory Nutrition Information Panel and
   - Ingredients lists should specify sugar/s and sugars-based ingredients.

2. A comprehensive consumer education campaign should be conducted with the aim of teaching consumers how to read and interpret the food labels changes.

3. The Health Star Rating system algorithm should be updated to include added sugars.

4. Additional interpretive measures should be considered including advisory labels and/or pictorial displays of the amount of sugars, particularly for beverages.

5. Further research is needed to develop the evidence base to inform policy in this area, particularly its implementation and effectiveness and impact on consumer behaviour and improving the food supply.

Audience: Federal, State and Territory Governments, policy makers and the general public.

Responsibility: PHAA Food and Nutrition Special Interest Group

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This position statement should be read in conjunction with the Sugar Labelling background paper, which provides evidence and justifications for the public health policy positions in this position statement.

PHAA affirms the following principles:

1. While overweight and obesity are not solely caused by excessive consumption of added sugars, these conditions place a significant burden on society, in both direct and indirect costs.
2. Food labelling is intended to enable consumers to make informed choices and support public health objectives.

PHAA notes the following evidence:

3. Foods and beverages (hereafter Foods) can contain a combination of added and naturally occurring sugars.
4. Foods high in added sugars may displace more nutritious foods in the diet and can contribute to dental caries, unhealthy weight gain and associated non-communicable diseases (NCDs).
5. To prevent these adverse health outcomes, the Australian Dietary Guidelines (ADGs) and the World Health Organization (WHO) recommend limiting consumption of foods containing added sugars.
6. Health and nutrition surveys in Australia report that over half of the surveyed population are exceeding recommended maximum intakes for added sugars.
7. However, food labels currently make it virtually impossible for consumers to identify the amount of added sugar in a product. In addition, food manufacturers use a multitude of names for added sugars that may be distributed throughout the ingredients list, making it difficult and time-consuming to interpret.
8. Consumer research in relation to understanding of sugar and food labelling suggests:
   - Consumers are confused about how much sugar they are consuming
   - Consumers may not be able to determine whether a given product is high or low in sugar
   - Consumers can be confused about what added sugars are, and what types of sugars should be limited in the diet for good health
9. Beyond food labels, there is limited information available to consumers about the added sugar content of foods.
10. Existing initiatives to address poor diet may help to motivate consumers to limit consumption of foods containing added sugars, but the lack of information about the added sugar content of foods limits consumers’ ability to follow this advice. Implementation of existing initiatives such as the Health Star Rating System and Healthy Food Partnership may also be hampered by lack of information about the added sugar content of foods.

PHAA seeks the following actions:

11. At a minimum, labelling of sugar on Australian foods should be amended to include added sugar information to be quantified in the mandatory Nutrient Information Panel as a component of existing total sugar information. This inclusion could be enhanced with additional contextual information, such as high/medium/low messaging for added sugar to allow consumers to make judgments without requiring product comparisons.

12. Changes should also be made to the statement of ingredients to overtly identify sugars-based ingredients, for example through a bracketed list or use of asterisks or bolding.

13. Additional options including advisory labels or pictorial displays of the amount of sugar in food should also be considered if these enhance consumer interpretation of the food label and are able to operate in alignment with existing schemes. For example, such labels may be appropriate on beverages if shown that the Health Star Rating graphic is not able to adequately inform consumers in this category.

14. Details such as which sugars are considered to be ‘added sugars’, or how a food high in added sugar would be defined are matters to be considered during implementation:

   • PHAA supports an expansive definition of ‘added sugars’, drawing upon that used in the WHO Guideline: Sugars intake for adults and children in 2015, i.e. ‘free sugars’ which include not only monosaccharides and disaccharides, but also sugars naturally present in honey, syrups, fruit juices and fruit juice concentrates. In the US context, where any of these sugars are added during the processing of foods, or are packaged as such (e.g. a bag of sugar), they must be quantified in the NIP as added sugars.

   • PHAA supports establishment of a daily intake reference value for added sugars, or cut-offs for high/medium/low messaging, while noting that determination of these reference points should not unduly delay uptake of quantified added sugar information in the NIP and improvements to the ingredients list.

15. Labelling updates should be accompanied by an adequately funded consumer-education campaign to increase consumer use and understanding of the updated label.
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16. Information about the added sugar content of foods available on improved labels should be utilised in existing initiatives to address poor diet, including incorporation into the Health Star Rating system algorithm, and reformulation targets set by the Healthy Food Partnership.

PHAA resolves to:

1. Advocate for the above steps to be taken based on the principles in this position statement.

ADOPTED 2018

References

Please see Background Paper for full referenced information.