Evidence backs a sugar tax

Australia’s peak public health body has welcomed comments by the 2020 Australian of the Year, Dr James Muecke, that for population health to improve more needs to be done to cut high levels of sugar consumption, including imposing a tax on sugar-added drinks.

Dr Muecke is a South Australian eye surgeon who has treated adults who have become blind as a result of complications associated with diabetes.

“Naturally concerned to prevent diabetes in the first place, Dr Muecke wants Australia to adopt a tax on sugar-added drinks,” said Public Health Association of Australian (PHAA) CEO, Terry Slevin.

“It is something that PHAA has urged for years, as part of a raft of measures to control non-communicable diseases including diabetes and obesity.”

“Decision makers may argue that making sugar-added drinks more expensive will add to household budgets, but that is exactly what governments have done with tobacco over the years as it became clear that cigarettes kill.”

“The logic of increasing the price of cigarettes has worked in Australia, phenomenally well, and it can for sugar.”

“Taxing sugary drinks can help reduce consumption of sugars, just as taxing tobacco helps to reduce tobacco use,” Mr Slevin said.

“The costs associated with not acting are far greater than not.”

“Over-consumption of sugar is a major contributor to obesity, diabetes and tooth decay.”

“The fundamental cause of the rise in diabetes and obesity is not a sudden loss of willpower by Australians but has more to do with the market being flooded with sugar-added foods and drinks.”

On average a single can of a sugary drink contains the equivalent of around 10 teaspoons of sugar.

“Over 30 years Australians consumers have been exposed to more energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods,” Mr Slevin said.

“The policy response requires multiple strategies and interventions. A levy on sugar-added drinks should be among them, as its been shown to make a difference in countries where it has been adopted.”

Obesity rates in Australia are among the highest in the world, with nearly a third of children and adolescents age 5-17 years overweight or obese.

One in twenty Australians have diabetes.

*Evidence in Mexico and Britain shows that implementing a tax on sugary drinks has led to reduced consumption of these products.*

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