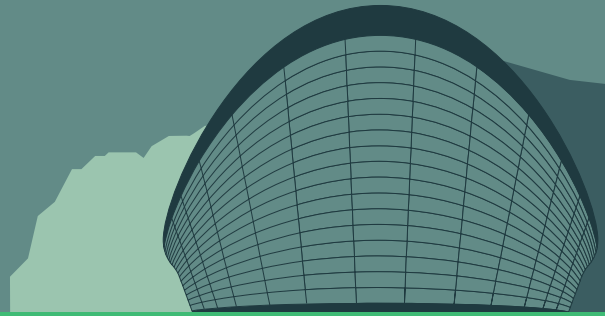


Cape Town



Intervention area: Healthy food for all

City action: City-wide activities to reduce the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages

Noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) are a growing issue in South Africa, and diabetes is a particular concern. In 2016 the national diabetes prevalence rate was 7.7% for men and 11.8% for women, with diabetes being the third leading cause of premature mortality in the Western Cape in 2015.^{i, ii} Consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages is a risk factor for the development of obesity and subsequently Type 2 diabetes, which can contribute to other health problems such as heart disease.

In late 2017, national interest in sugar reduction was high. A national tax on sugar-sweetened beverages – the Health Promotion Levy or Sugar Sweetened Beverage tax – was approved by the Government of South Africa in December 2017, to be implemented from the 1 April 2018.ⁱⁱⁱ The Department of Health had made reducing sugar-sweetened beverages a theme for the 2017 National Nutrition Week, and there had been a broader campaign warning people about the risks of consuming sugar-sweetened beverages. The Mayor of Cape Town, Patricia de Lille, and City Health Director Dr Waarisa Fareed, wanted their city to lead on reducing sugar consumption. One of the ways they decided to pursue this was through a city-wide healthy living campaign to increase public awareness on the importance of a healthy diet, including the health risks associated with sugar-sweetened beverages.

The campaign's first step was to run a baseline survey in the local community to understand opinions and knowledge about healthy behaviours. The survey revealed low public awareness of

the links between sugar-sweetened beverage consumption and developing diabetes or other NCDs, and gave city leaders the evidence to justify a focus on education through mass media campaigns.

In July 2018 a campaign was launched across Cape Town that aimed to strengthen public awareness about the link between sugar-sweetened beverages, obesity and diabetes. The campaign focused on building public understanding that weight gain from these drinks also presented health threats for diseases such as diabetes. In addition, it focused on addressing messages that had been heard from the community in the baseline survey, such as the idea that sugar-sweetened beverages were always a good thing because they “gave you energy”, and that being overweight did not affect your risk of diabetes. Billboards, community newspapers, social media and advertisements in transport hubs were all used, with messages warning against the dangers of sugar-sweetened beverages and the importance of a healthy diet. The campaign included stories from local community members whose health had been negatively affected by their sugar intake, to demonstrate the real risk that excessive sugar consumption represented to people’s health.

The campaign’s launch was timed to build on implementation of the national sugar tax on 1 April 2018. The media buzz generated by the national tax provided a good lead-up for the campaign, which city authorities also linked to efforts to save water during the city’s water crisis in early 2018. By building on messaging about the importance of water during the drought – “Let’s value water” – the public health authorities reinforced their own message that drinking water was better than sugar-sweetened beverages.

The Mayor and city health authorities made additional efforts to promote the message using their own internal policies. They removed sugar-sweetened beverages from view at point-of-sale in all buildings controlled by municipal authorities and removed vending machines providing the drinks from the Civic Centre, the main government building. They also worked with vendors to reduce the number of these drinks available to staff and visitors in municipal buildings. Coherence between public messaging against sugar-sweetened beverages and their own actions which led by example, made it clear that the consumption of these drinks was actively discouraged. At the end of July, free screening for diabetes was also offered at the Civic Centre and at municipal health facilities for members of the public.

Local political support was key to seeing all these activities progress. The Mayor and City Health Director were both strong champions of the efforts to reduce sugar consumption, which made it easier for ideas to become actions. The Mayor herself hosted a healthy lunch in August and ran a live streaming video of the event, during which she spoke about the importance of healthy eating and discussed its implications with medical professionals. This high-level political support gave the work impetus to move away from a strategic debate on whether sugar reduction should be promoted, and towards concrete actions designed to improve the diets of city residents and protect their health.

ⁱ WHO Diabetes Country Profiles 2016. Geneva: World Health Organization, 2016

(https://www.who.int/diabetes/country-profiles/zaf_en.pdf, accessed 17 September 2019)

ⁱⁱ Health Impact Assessment Unit, Western Cape Provincial Dept of Health; compiled by Juliet Evans and Erna Morden. Internal publication, 2018

ⁱⁱⁱ Health Promotion Levy on Sugary Beverages [web page]. Government of South Africa [no date].

([https://www.sars.gov.za/ClientSegments/Customs-](https://www.sars.gov.za/ClientSegments/Customs-Excise/Excise/Pages/Health%20Promotion%20Levy%20on%20Sugary%20Beverages.aspx)

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