

# Phnom Penh



**Intervention area:** Healthy food for all

**City action:** Reducing the consumption of sugary drinks through public awareness campaigns and community engagement

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The consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages is a growing problem in Cambodia, particularly in urban areas such as Phnom Penh. In 2013, the WHO Cambodia School-Based Health Survey reported that about 52% of urban teenage students drank at least one carbonated soft drink per day, and that over 60% saw advertisements for carbonated soft drinks or fast food most of the time while watching TV or playing video games. Yet prior to December 2017 there were no regulations or policies to reduce sugar-sweetened beverage consumption in Cambodia, and therefore there was no legal framework to restrict their sale.

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Engaging with an external network – the Partnership for Healthy Cities – provided an opportunity for the Phnom Penh Municipal Health Department to address the issue through non-legislative means. Since they could not directly limit the supply of sugar-sweetened beverages, their goal was to reduce demand by improving public awareness, engaging with stakeholders, and gaining buy-in for the introduction of new policies. With technical support from the Partnership for Healthy Cities, the Municipal Health Department developed a clear set of actions to achieve this goal. They also worked with the National Centre for Health Promotion and the Preventive Medicine Department of the Ministry of Health to ensure that their actions were designed with the potential to scale up and be used at the national level.

The Phnom Penh Municipal Health Department partnered with the National Centre for Health Promotion (NCHP) in Cambodia to conduct a baseline survey on knowledge, attitudes and behaviours related to sugar-sweetened beverage consumption in Phnom Penh. This was helpful in revealing the specific beliefs that needed to be addressed, such as the belief that the drinks should be consumed after physical exercise to help replenish energy. Insights from the survey informed the design of a large-scale communication campaign and also assessed the levels of support for policies to reduce the availability and affordability of sugar-sweetened beverages in Phnom Penh.

The campaign informed Phnom Penh residents about the negative health impacts of consuming the drinks. It used 30-second videos as part of a 2-month television campaign, and a longer video for use in community settings and dissemination workshops. Posters with key messages were displayed on billboards and tuk-tuks throughout the city, and leaflets were designed for use in schools and community settings. Workshops were planned with key community leaders, school principals and other stakeholders to increase engagement and involvement in the campaign in community and school settings, and to engage them in feeding back on various policy options.

Initial indicators of the campaign's impact focused on community engagement and public awareness, measuring the number and variety of educational materials produced; the number and range of participants and stakeholders attending the workshops; and changes in participants' knowledge of the health risks of sugar-sweetened beverages before and after the workshops. In the longer term, the aim is to increase public awareness of the harm of sugar-sweetened beverages on health, and to increase political and public support for new health policies to reduce their consumption. To that end, in 2019 the municipal authorities intend to repeat the survey of knowledge, attitudes and behaviours to assess changes in public awareness and increased support for the introduction of new policies to reduce the accessibility of sugar-sweetened beverages.

By working together, various municipal authorities were able to pool their resources to test communications messages with local stakeholders who understood the target audience, and to take advantage of synergies between the public-facing communications campaign and the policy development work. This ensured that the policies were tailored to public needs and attitudes, and took public opinion into account. The international link with the Partnership for Healthy Cities was also extremely useful in catalysing the work and providing guidance on evidence-based policies and actions, as well as experiences from other cities.

Cross-government collaboration at local and national levels was crucial. The municipal health authorities worked with the School Health Department from the Ministry of Education on the development of awareness-raising resources, which supported reception and uptake of the communications campaign within schools. Support from the Governor and Vice Governor of Phnom Penh City was also critical to the project's progress. The expectation that the policy framework of future options would be presented to the Governor himself at the end of the project gave the work political credibility and demonstrated the Governor's own interest in seeing the work deliver results for the health of the city.