



The Illinois Public Health Institute mobilizes stakeholders, catalyzes partnerships and leads action to promote prevention and improve public health systems in order to maximize health, health equity and quality of life for the people of Illinois.

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Testimony of Elissa Bassler CEO, Illinois Public Health Institute & Executive Director, Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity

My name is Elissa Bassler. I'm the CEO of the Illinois Public Health Institute and Executive Director of the Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity, and I live in Evanston. Thank you for the opportunity to address you today.

Obesity and chronic diseases are a multi-faceted issue demanding a multi-faceted response that promotes healthy eating and active living, through policy and building healthy communities with opportunities for kids, families and adults to be healthy.

We believe that the sweetened beverage tax proposed by President Preckwinkle is a healthy source of revenue and we support it.

While obesity has many causes, there is strong scientific evidence that sugary drink consumption is directly linked to obesity and other related chronic illnesses such as type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Sugary drinks are the largest single source of daily calories for children age 2-18 and the single largest source of added sugars in the American diet. One study found that a child's odds of being obese increases 60% with each added serving of sugary drink he or she consumes per day.

But I want to emphasize that there's no silver bullet to the health and financial costs of chronic disease.

To really reduce chronic disease and improve lives of County residents, we need to not only implement this tax, but also take some of those revenues and invest in real, proven public health interventions that help kids and families get and stay healthy through better nutrition and more physical activity.

That's why we are calling for a meaningful percentage of the revenues to be invested in a multi-pronged strategy to address healthy eating and active living.

The Cook County Department of Public Health has such a program in place right now, the Healthy Hotspot Initiative, which includes:

- Improving the quality of physical education and nutrition in schools in the most at-risk communities
- Increasing availability of healthy foods in low-income communities by helping corner stores (which are often one of the few places to buy food in some neighborhoods) stock healthier, fresh options.
- Building more walkable communities through active transportation plans and policies.
- Helping adults with diabetes and other chronic diseases to manage their health and reduce the need for costlier hospital and doctor's interventions.

The health department is doing a great job, but is only able to scratch the surface of the need to make our neighborhoods, schools and communities places that support health. Investing a portion of the revenues from the sweetened drink tax into a program like the Healthy Hotspot initiative will help prevent disease and improve quality of life for County residents. It will also help the County by reducing the need much costlier ambulatory and hospital health care system interventions.

If the County implements this tax and invests some of the revenues in prevention (say, 5-10%), this tax will be a win-win-win for the County by 1) reducing consumption of harmful sugary drinks; 2) creating healthier cities, neighborhoods and schools in the hardest hit communities; and 3) reducing diseases like diabetes and heart disease, which reduces the costs of the County health care system.