

CARICOM Declaration

18th November 2022

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Declaration on Sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) was drafted during a key stakeholder workshop and roundtable hosted jointly by The Bahamas Dental Association and FDI World Dental Federation (FDI).

This Declaration is endorsed by key health organizations and the related actions seek to reduce harm caused by SSBs.

Why is the CARICOM Declaration on SSBs important?

Evidence has emerged linking SSB consumption to a number of health consequences among adults including weight gain, cardiovascular risk factors (e.g., dyslipidemia), insulin resistance and type 2 diabetes, and non-alcoholic fatty liver disease (1).

Studies among children are more limited and have generally focused on weight gain and dental caries, as well as insulin resistance (1).

The association between SSB consumption and weight gain is paramount, given that childhood obesity affects roughly one in six (13 million) children in the U.S., disproportionately impacting children who are low-income and racial and ethnic minorities (2).

SSBs are high in sugar but do not provide other nutrients such as fiber, vitamins, minerals, and other essential nutrients from plant sources. The high consumption of SSBs can lead to dietary imbalances with adverse health consequences, but some drinks may also more directly affect the appetite for more nutritious foods (3).

Sugar taxes could reduce the consumption of sugary beverages, which in turn could improve population health and generate revenues in middle-income and high-income countries. However, there is limited or no evidence in low-income and middle-income countries (LMICs) (4).

Considering that:

- SSBs are a significant source of sugars consumed by children in the CARICOM region (5). The consumption of SSBs in the Caribbean is the highest in the world compared to 21 other world regions (5). These include any beverage that has added sugar such as carbonated or fizzy drinks, energy drinks, sports drinks, fruit drinks and juices, sweetened milk drinks, powdered drinks, cordial and flavoured waters.
- The consumption of sugary drinks is strongly associated with dental caries, weight gain and obesity. Obesity is a leading risk factor for type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and some cancers (6). Obesity rates in the Caribbean are among the highest in the world where 60.1% of adults are overweight or obese. Childhood obesity has increased four-fold over the last ten years to 51.4% (7).
- Dental caries is a significant health problem. Good oral health is not only a vital component of general health but also a basic human right (8). Children with ongoing or untreated dental caries are in significant pain and this affects their ability to learn. It is not uncommon for children as young as 18 months old to have their teeth restored or removed due to decay or infection. The most common treatment for dental caries amongst children in CARICOM is dental extractions due to decay, abscesses, infection or gum disease.



- Consumption of sugary drinks significantly increases the risk of dental caries due to their high sugar content. The sugar in these drinks also increases their energy content without any useful nutrients. Consumption of one can of soft drink per day can result in significant weight gain(9). A 600 ml bottle of soft drink contains approximately 16 teaspoons of sugar and a regular 375 ml can of soft drink contains about 10 teaspoons of sugar. Sugary drinks are cheap, readily available and accessible, and are one of the most widely advertised products.
- Research suggests that a ban on advertising targeted at children is effective in lowering consumption. The World Health Organization (WHO) strongly recommends that the intake of free sugars should be reduced to less than 10 per cent of total energy intake approximately 12 teaspoons per day per child or adult. Further reduction to less than 5 per cent of total energy intake (approximately 6 teaspoons per day per adult), is recommended to help prevent dental caries in particular (10). Beverages like buttermilk, coconut water, and lemon water should be consumed instead of bottled soft drinks and fruit juices which are high in sugar.
- Heads of Government across the Caribbean recognise the urgency of the epidemic of childhood overweight and obesity. In 2016 they 'pledged to address issues such as: banning advertisement of potentially harmful foods which specifically target children; and elevating taxes on foods high in sugar, salt and trans-fats' and in 2017 they 'urged the promotion of Physical Exercise in school-age children' and 'noted with concern that obesity in children represented the greatest threat to the health of future generations.' (11)

The CARICOM Declaration on SSB's use calls National Dental Associations to action in the following key areas:

1. National Dental Associations accept the observation of a global "No Sugar Day" to be held on the 1st of November annually. Identify and partner with other health professionals and relevant organizations to share experiences, plan joint activities and increase impact in advocacy.
2. Facilitate the development of national guidelines and context-specific best-practices for sugar reduction activities based on FDI's resources: <https://www.fdiworldddental.org/sugars-and-dental-caries>
3. Encourage national dental organizations to introduce dietary guidelines to eliminate SSBs in nurseries, day-care centres, schools (including vending machine regulations), colleges, hospitals, workplaces and other institutions and for patients in the dental clinics.
4. Support the urgent need for tighter and enforceable controls on the advertising, promotion and labelling of food and drinks containing free sugars, especially those targeting children and young adults
5. Imposition of a tax of not less than 20% on SSBs and use tax revenue for noncommunicable diseases (NCDs) with a focus on oral diseases prevention and control.
6. Encouragement of "water only" policies for all hospitals and health care facilities
7. Support the implementation of the [WHO Guideline: sugars intake for adults and children](#)

The CARICOM Declaration on SSB's is supported by the following organizations:

The Bahamas Dental Association
Barbados Dental Association
Bermuda Dental Association
Colegio de Cirujanos Dentistas de Costa Rica
Federación Odontológica Colombiana
Jamaica Dental Association
Alliance for a Cavity Free Future





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