

September 21, 2016

Minister of Health  
Alejandro Gaviria

Dear Minister Gaviria:

As leading scholars on the causes of obesity and related diseases such as diabetes, we are writing to state that the science on the role of **Sugar-Sweetened Beverages (SSBs)** is clear; excess sugar consumption is a major cause of obesity and its related diseases. We therefore express our strong support for taxation of SSBs as a critical highly effective measure and part of a broader program to address these issues.

Specifically:

- Excess sugar consumption is a major cause of obesity and its related diseases, as excessive sugar intake causes increased risk of diabetes, liver and kidney damage, heart disease, and some cancers.<sup>1,2</sup>
- Consumption of each additional serving of any sugary drink from zero to one to two and more, leads to higher risks of diseases and death. SSBs are a major cause of increases in caloric intake, weight, and risk of diabetes, hypertension, heart disease, and numerous other health problems.<sup>3-8</sup> Children and adolescents of all ages also have been shown to be negatively affected by consuming SSBs.<sup>9,10</sup>
- The World Health Organization (WHO) and the World Cancer Research Fund have published guidelines that individuals should consume no more than 10% of total calories from added sugar, and preferably less than 5%.<sup>1,2</sup> Limiting sugar consumption below 10% of total calories has become a global goal. The Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), World Cancer Research Fund, US National Academy of Medicine, the Colombian government, and other global leaders recommend major reductions in sugar consumption.<sup>1,2,11-15</sup>
- SSB consumption is also linked with under-nutrition. In many Latin American and African countries, infants consume SSBs as a weaning food, which has adverse effects on increasing undernutrition and stunting.<sup>16,17</sup> Stunted infants have a much greater risk of becoming obese and diabetic.<sup>18-21</sup>
- Sales of SSBs are rising at a faster rate in Colombia than in any other Latin American country.<sup>22</sup>

### **The Solution: Taxing Sugar-Sweetened Beverages**

- SSB taxes are a WIN-WIN for governments because they reduce SSB consumption while increasing government revenue.<sup>23</sup>
- In Colombia, if a SSB tax of 20% is implemented with no/little counter-measures by the beverage industry, sugary drink purchases are expected to be lowered by 23.4% and government revenues are estimates to increase by \$1,350 billion Colombian pesos (\$450 million US) per year in the first 3-5 years on average.<sup>24</sup> This will all be used to improve Colombian health services where the cost to provide medical services for diabetes and other sugary beverage related diseases increased by over 750% just between 2009 and 2012 according to the Ministry of Health.<sup>23,25,26</sup>
- In addition to significantly reducing consumption of unhealthy beverages, SSB taxes also increase consumption of healthier beverages, such as water and milk.<sup>27,28</sup>

- SSB taxes are particularly effective in reducing consumption and improving health among lower income consumers because this group is more responsive to price increases. This is important because lower income people often suffer disproportionately from the ill effects of obesity.<sup>29-33</sup>

### **Taxes Work: The Global Experience**

- Mexico had the world's highest intake of SSBs. After a modest SSB tax of 10%, the country experienced a meaningful price increase and a significant reduction in SSB purchases.<sup>27,34</sup>
- Mexico's SSB tax most significantly reduced consumption among lower-income and high-volume consumers, thus achieving health benefits among the two groups with the greatest health risk.<sup>35</sup> After the tax was in effect for one year, SSB purchases among the poorest third of the population were reduced by 9%.<sup>27</sup> In the second year of the tax, contrary to industry pronouncements, per capita sales and purchases of SSBs declined further above the yearlong decline.
- After the tax, Mexican research showed that consumers were replacing SSBs with healthier beverages like water.<sup>27</sup>
- Even in high income, lower SSB-consuming Berkeley California, USA, the SSB tax had positive impacts on reducing frequency of SSB consumption and increasing water consumption frequency.<sup>36</sup>
- The WHO and other global experts recommend that SSB taxes should be 20% or greater in order to be most impactful.<sup>37-40</sup> Governments in the UK, South Africa, and many other locations are now promoting 20% or higher SSB taxes as an essential strategy for achieving major health benefits.<sup>38,41-44</sup>

It is critical to note that any tax of sugary beverages should include all forms-sodas, energy drinks, waters, sports drinks, powders and concentrates.

### **Signed by:**

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