



American Academy of Pediatrics

DEDICATED TO THE HEALTH OF ALL CHILDREN™
AMERICAN ACADEMY OF PEDIATRICS, CALIFORNIA



March 18, 2019

The Honorable Jim Wood
Chair, Assembly Health Committee
State Capitol, Room 6005
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Assemblymember Wood:

On behalf of the more than 44,000 members of the California Medical Association (CMA), 27,000 members of the California Dental Association (CDA) and the American Academy of Pediatrics, California (AAP), we are pleased to co-sponsor AB 765 by Assemblymember Wicks. The bill is one of a package of three proposals that aim to curb the overconsumption of unhealthy sugar-sweetened beverages in California and reduce incidence of obesity, diabetes, tooth decay and heart disease.

AB 765 will help curb the obesity epidemic in California by removing unhealthy beverages from the checkout aisles in a variety of retail outlets and increasing access to healthier beverage options. A report by the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI), *Temptation at Checkout*, found that approximately 90% of all food and beverages available for sale at or near the checkout aisle are unhealthy.

Unhealthy foods dominate our restaurant menus, grocery and retail store checkouts and supermarket displays, undermining our best efforts to maintain a healthy diet for ourselves and families. While most consumers think of marketing as advertisements on tv, online and in magazines, retail product placement plays a key role in how companies market food and beverages. A growing body of evidence has shown that food availability has a strong influence on how many added calories Americans consume; when people are focused on a task, like grocery shopping, they are less aware of subtle marketing tactics that prompt them to make impulse purchases. According to the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, almost 50% of all added sugars in the American diet are in drinks – like soft drinks, fruit drinks (excluding 100% juice), and energy drinks.

As the prevalence of unhealthy foods and beverages at checkout aisles have become the norm in many retail outlets, from grocery stores to hardware stores, the rates of obesity have skyrocketed. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), obesity and severe obesity is roughly triple what it was three decades ago and evident in children as young as 3-5 years old. While our exercise patterns over the last four decades have remained relatively stable, our food environments have changed drastically, and daily caloric intake has increased. People who are obese are more likely to develop type 2 diabetes, coronary heart disease, and certain cancers; resulting in disabilities and high health care costs.

Along with ties to obesity, diabetes and heart disease, there is compelling evidence that sugar consumed in liquid form significantly contributes to the epidemic of tooth decay. Ensuring healthy beverages are offered at checkout stands also goes a long way towards improving the oral health and overall health of children. Dental caries (tooth decay) is the most common chronic childhood disease, experienced by more than two-thirds of California's children. Left untreated, decay may cause chronic pain, infection, failure to thrive and delayed growth, school absenteeism, the inability to concentrate and interference with intellectual tasks. Choosing healthy drinks such as milk and water limits the exposure to cavity-causing sugars.

AB 765 recognizes and responds to the influence that retail product placement has on our diets. According to the CDC, unhealthy beverages are the largest source of added sugars in the diet for U.S. youth. While parents and children can and do resist unhealthy items at checkout, factors such as stress, distraction and fatigue can make people more vulnerable to impulse purchases; this is especially prevalent for parents of young kids who are more likely to pester their parents for unhealthy treats at the checkout aisle.

Several communities and companies have successfully implemented healthy or "family-friendly" checkout projects across the country, such as West-Sacramento based grocer Raley's, who began piloting family friendly checkout lanes in its 114 California locations in 2014. This trend has received positive feedback from customers and store management in California, Denver, Dallas and Minneapolis. A study done in Philadelphia and Wilmington, Delaware showed that when supermarkets placed bottled water at the checkout aisles they boosted sales of bottled water significantly, compared to stores without water at the checkout¹.

AB 765 does not ban these products from retail locations; it is narrowly drafted to have an impact on the largest source of added-calories in our diets – sugar-sweetened beverages – and help reduce temptation of unhealthy impulse purchases. AB 765 is a proactive and modest approach to curbing the obesity epidemic in our state.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of support on AB 765. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact the California Medical Association at (916) 551-2568.

Sincerely,

Morgan Carvajal
Legislative Advocate, California Medical Association

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Senior Policy Analyst, California Dental Association

¹ "Placement and Promotion Strategies to Increase Sales of Healthier Products in Supermarkets in Low-Income, Ethnically Diverse Neighborhoods: A Randomized Controlled Trial." *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 2014.
<https://academic.oup.com/ajcn/article/99/6/1359/4577412>

Kris Calvin, CEO
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cc:

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