

Proven ways to reduce consumption of unhealthy food, improve health, increase government revenue, and reduce health care costs

Bottom Line: Four linked, evidence-based policies are a triple win. Linking front-of-package labeling with taxes, bans on marketing, and bans on purchase with public funds or service/sale on public property, can address obesity — and improve health, increase government revenue and reduce health care costs.

- 1 Core policies:** In addition to increasing taxes on sugary beverages, implement effective front-of-package labels that are simple, easy to understand, and discourage unhealthy choices. Nutrient warning labels (usually octagonal or triangular) consistently outperform all other label types. These labels are the most effective at helping consumers identify harmful products, reducing purchases of harmful food foods, and increasing purchases of healthier foods.¹⁻¹² For example, after implementation of Chile's policy (octagonal warning labels), Chileans bought 20% less sugar, 14% less sodium, 10% less saturated fat and 8% fewer total calories overall.¹³ Reduced consumption of excess sodium, sugar, and fat prevents heart attacks and strokes.¹⁴ Effective front-of-package labeling empowers people of all socioeconomic and education levels.¹⁵ Well-implemented front-of-package warning labeling systems backed by a strong Nutrient Profile Model based on WHO dietary intake goals drive manufacturers to reformulate their products¹⁶⁻¹⁸ — and lead to healthier consumer choices, resulting in large reductions in the consumption of unhealthy foods.¹



Synergistic policies to further reduce unhealthy food intake.

- 2 Tax products with warning labels.** Colombia recently introduced a 20% tax on products with one or more nutrient warning labels, generating approximately \$800 million annually.¹⁹ In Mexico, taxes on unhealthy foods generated \$2.07 billion in 2023 and led to a 5.1% reduction in taxed food purchases in the first year of implementation, with low-income groups benefitting the most.²⁰ In Hungary, in the first year after implementation of an unhealthy food tax, 25-35% of prior consumers purchased fewer taxed products.²¹
- 3 Ban marketing and promotion of products with warning labels.** Warning labels can be used to identify products that cannot be marketed or promoted to children. Chile prohibited advertising of products with warning labels on TV (between 6am and 10pm), and on websites, radio and magazines with an audience of greater than 20% children. Chile also banned cartoon characters and other

figures appealing to children on packages of products with warning labels. After implementation of Chile's policy, unhealthy food ads decreased 73% across all programming and 90% across programming appealing to children.²² Although not tied to warning labels, United Kingdom recently announced new marketing restrictions banning TV ads for unhealthy food products before 9pm and banning paid online unhealthy food ads. The new regulations are estimated to remove up to 7.2 billion calories from children's diets per year and help prevent around 20,000 cases of childhood obesity; and the health benefits are estimated at around £2 billion.²³ Analogous tobacco advertising bans substantially reduce current smoking and smoking initiation.²⁴

- 4 Enact healthy public food procurement and service policies.** Government institutions such as schools, hospitals and prisons can ban the sale or service of any product with a warning label. Additional healthy nutrition standards can be established for food preparation and service in public settings. After products with warning labels were banned in Chile's schools, children's consumption of sugars, saturated fat, and sodium in schools decreased by 11.8%, 1.1%, and 10.3 mg/100kcal, respectively.²⁵ England's 2008 requirement for healthy food procurement standards in public primary schools reduced consumption of processed foods high in sodium, fat, and/or sugar by 12%. Following implementation, purchase of fruits, vegetables, and salads in cafeterias increased by 15%.²⁶ Public sector procurement of nutritious foods can strengthen urban-rural supply connections and bolsters local agriculture.²⁷

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