



## Assessing Pros and Cons of Banning Purchase of Sugary Drinks in Illinois' SNAP

Advocates and policymakers in Illinois and across the nation have proposed banning the purchase of sugar-sweetened beverages, such as soda and sports drinks, under the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP, formerly known as Food Stamps) as one way to address the nation's obesity epidemic and improve health. In Illinois, almost 16% of the total population participates in SNAP, and nearly half of those participants are children. After legislation was introduced in the Illinois General Assembly directing the state's Department of Human Services to seek a waiver from the USDA to implement such a ban, the Illinois Public Health Institute conducted a Health Impact Assessment (HIA) to help community leaders, advocates, policymakers, and other stakeholders in Illinois better understand the health benefits and risks of a ban.

### Findings to Date:

While the HIA is not yet complete, initial findings are shared below. The findings derive from a literature review, focus groups with a small sample of Illinois SNAP participants, discussions with SNAP retailers and consultation with stakeholders and experts.



- Reducing consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages has positive health effects.
- Most SNAP participants spend a combination of SNAP and out-of-pocket funds on groceries and their out-of-pocket contribution to groceries exceeds what they spend on sugar-sweetened beverages. This suggests (and the Illinois focus groups and other research conducted on the WIC program support) that SNAP participants would purchase sugar-sweetened beverages with out-of-pocket funds even if SNAP did not cover them.
- Focus group data from the HIA and existing literature indicate a lack of knowledge about the health risks of sugar-sweetened beverages, and more effective education about those risks could be a helpful component of a strategy to reduce their consumption.
- Many SNAP recipients live in neighborhoods with only small convenience stores, and the cost and time of getting to a full-service grocery store can be a barrier to purchasing healthy foods.
- Healthier beverages like low-fat milk cost more than sugar-sweetened beverages, which presents another barrier to making healthier choices.
- Stigma can lead to detrimental mental and physical health effects. There have been strong collaborative efforts between government, retailers and SNAP participants to reduce stigma associated with SNAP through implementation of the electronic benefit transfer (EBT) system. Issues of stigma are a consideration when contemplating changes in SNAP policy.
- Policies to eliminate sugary drinks from SNAP purchases are more likely to reduce sugar-sweetened beverage consumption and improve nutrition if combined with incentives to purchase healthier foods and a strong educational component.

For more on this HIA, contact:

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## New Opportunities to Improve Health

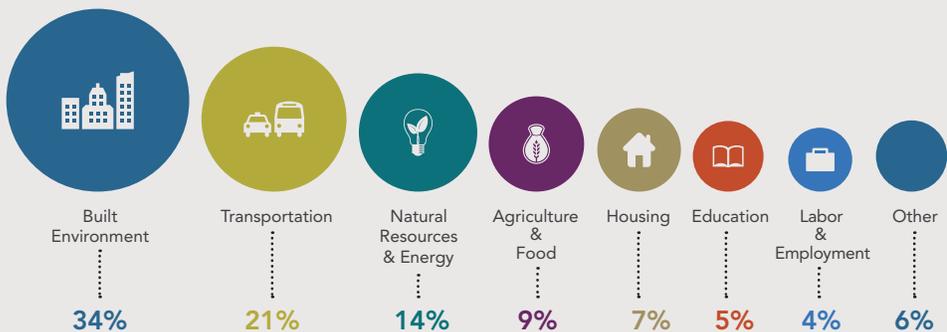
Preventable health problems are crippling the U.S. economy and its workers and their families. Heart disease and diabetes alone now account for more than 700,000 deaths in the U.S. annually and cost the nation more than \$650 billion in medical expenses, disability, missed work, and financial losses associated with premature death. For the first time in U.S. history, data suggest that today's children may live shorter lives than their parents.

Many of the most urgent health problems facing our nation—such as obesity, asthma, diabetes, heart disease, and injuries—are shaped by the conditions in which we live and work. There is a large and untapped opportunity to improve Americans' well-being and address skyrocketing medical costs by bringing health into the decisions that shape the world outside the doctor's office. For example, well-designed and maintained housing can help prevent asthma and serious falls. Transportation projects and land use plans can minimize the risk of traffic injuries and allow people to be more active by including safe routes for pedestrians. And educational policies that lead to academic success can have the unanticipated benefit of reducing the risk of many illnesses and their related medical costs by expanding opportunities for employment and increasing access to better housing and other amenities throughout a person's life.

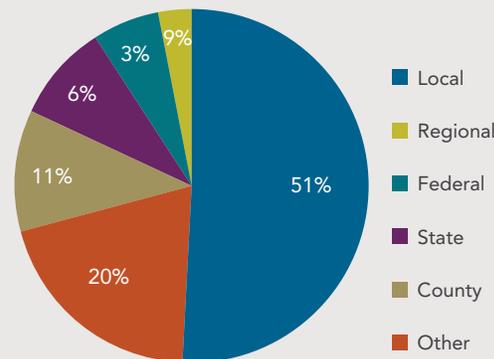
Considering health can help decision-makers leverage opportunities to improve wellness and avoid unintended consequences and associated costs. Health impact assessments, or HIAs, have proved to be an effective way to do that. HIAs bring together scientific data, public health expertise, and community input to inform decisions on proposed laws, regulations, projects, and plans in transportation, energy, education, economic policy, and other sectors.

### HIP-Supported Health Impact Assessments in Action Across the U.S.

In what sectors have HIAs been done?



HIAs are used to inform decisions at what levels?



### Health Impact Project: Advancing Smarter Policies for Healthier Communities

Launched in 2009, the Health Impact Project, a collaboration of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and The Pew Charitable Trusts, is a national initiative designed to bring health into decision-making through the use of HIAs. The project works with government agencies and policymakers to help them implement HIAs; partners with foundations to fund HIAs; provides training and technical assistance; conducts research and policy analysis to support the field; and convenes the National HIA Meeting. The project also partners with foundations to guide and support regional HIA initiatives and collaborates with government agencies and nonprofits around the United States to find practical ways to build health into decisions.

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