



February 12, 2013

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### Capitol Hill Forum Inserts Sugary Drinks and Tax Policy into Budget Debate

Health care stakeholders, nutrition advocates and budget experts highlighted the role that sugary drinks play in our nation's rising health care costs and explored proposals to tax those beverages at a Capitol Hill forum today.

**“Whether your priority is lower spending or finding the revenue to preserve federal health programs, there are good reasons to put a sugary drinks tax on the table,”** said John Rother, President and CEO of the National Coalition on Health Care (NCHC). NCHC cosponsored the event with leading nutrition advocacy group, the Center for Science in the Public Interest (CSPI).

Over recent years, researchers, Congressional Budget Office analysts, and the Domenici-Rivlin budget commission have each highlighted the dual benefits of this tax policy change: \$50 to \$160 billion in new revenue as well as potentially lower federal spending on the treatment of chronic disease.<sup>1</sup> According to Dr. Michael Jacobson, Executive Director of CSPI, **“Taxing soda could be an economic windfall for taxpayers, and a health windfall for all.”**

Jacobson spoke as part of an expert panel featuring Dr. Rachel Johnson, Chair of the American Heart Association's Nutrition Committee and the Bickford Professor of Nutrition at the University of Vermont, and Chuck Marr, Director of Federal Tax Policy at the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities. Rother moderated the event.

According to Rother, **“This is a matter of basic responsibility. If sugary drinks are inflating all our health care bills, why shouldn't those responsible help cover that cost?”**

The event participants also emphasized that the cost to the public's health is at least as serious as the budgetary implications. **“The nation's obesity problem is the number one threat to public health today,”** said Johnson. **“Regular calorie soda and other sugary drinks are the largest single source of calories in the diet of Americans, and studies have shown that their consumption is making the obesity epidemic worse.”**

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<sup>1</sup>Health Affairs, CBO, Domenici Rivlin

An NCHC issue brief released at today's forum, "Understanding the Case for Taxing Sugar-Sweetened Beverages," summarized major findings from the academic literature:

1. Sugary drinks account for nearly half the added sugar consumed by Americans.<sup>2</sup>
2. More than any other food type, sugary drinks contribute to increased risk for obesity, diabetes, and other serious health problems in both adults and children.<sup>3</sup>
3. Current state-level sales taxes on beverages have been too small to reduce consumption and reduce obesity.<sup>4</sup> Encouraging healthier behavior through tax policy may require better-designed approaches.

For more information about the event, please visit [www.nchc.org](http://www.nchc.org) and [www.cspinet.org](http://www.cspinet.org). The issue brief may be found at <http://nchc.org/node/1290>.

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<sup>2</sup>U.S. Department of Agriculture. *Dietary Guidelines for Americans 2010*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010.

<sup>3</sup>Friedman, RR and Brownell, KD. *Rudd Report: Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Taxes*. New Haven: Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy & Obesity, 2012.

<sup>4</sup>Andreyeva, T, Chaloupka, FJ and Brownell, KD. Estimating the potential of taxes on sugar-sweetened beverages to reduce consumption and generate revenue. *Preventative Medicine*, 2011, Vol. 52(6), pp. 413-416