

20% less sugar Too little, too late



Victorian dentists: Industry pledge is an attempt to avoid the regulation required to make a meaningful impact on health

The Australian Dental Association Victorian Branch (ADAVB) says the new pledge from the Australian Beverages Council to reduce sugar across the industry's product range is really an attempt to avoid the regulation required to make a meaningful impact on health.

The beverage industry pledge is to reduce the total sugar across the aggregated sales volume of all non-alcoholic beverages, including soft drinks, energy drinks, bottled water, juice and fruit drink, iced teas and flavoured milks. This means that companies could potentially meet the pledge by increasing sales of low or no sugar products such as bottled water, rather than making their drinks less sugary.

According to ADAVB President Dr Kevin Morris, this is a step in the right direction, but will do nothing to immediately reduce the amount of sugar in many commonly consumed products. "A can of Coca Cola will still contain 10 teaspoons of sugar, nearly double the daily limit of 6 teaspoons recommended by the World Health Organisation," said Dr Morris. "It appears to be a smokescreen to divert from the threat of regulation that will make a real impact on sugar consumption."

The evidence is clear that too much added sugar contributes to tooth decay, and with 40% of Australian children experiencing tooth decay by 12-14 years of age, more action is required to reduce the amount of sugar we are consuming. "More than 2,600 children are hospitalised for dental treatment each year in Victoria, with nearly 9,500 teeth requiring removal", said Dr Morris.

ADAVB CEO A/Prof Matt Hopcraft has been a strong advocate for sugar reduction, and in particular, for a tax on sugary drinks. "The overseas experience has shown that a tax on sugary drinks works, with the evidence from many countries that consumers are switching their drink choices. The UK model has been even more effective, with manufacturers reformulating products to actually remove sugar from drinks," said A/Prof Hopcraft. "The ongoing advocacy from a wide range of health and consumer groups has been instrumental in forcing the beverage industry on the back foot, and it is disappointing that the Federal Government is not prepared to step up and show some real leadership on this issue."

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