



# Cultural Wellness Center

Health · Heritage · Harmony

March 9, 2021

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Elder Ahmed Azzahir  
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Elder JoeAnn Rembert  
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RE: Minnesota Healthy Kids' Meal Bill

Dear Chair Freiberg and Members of the House Preventive Health Policy Division:

For 24 years, the mission of the Cultural Wellness Center has been to unleash the power of people to heal themselves and build community.

We have worked six years out of the 24 years in creating awareness and educating Black, Indigenous and People of Color about frequently drinking sugar-sweetened beverages. We share with them the high consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages associated with weight gain/obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, kidney diseases, non-alcoholic liver disease, tooth decay and cavities. These are all conditions that are prevalent within this population and within our targeted area, with the commonality among them, unhealthy eating, and high consumptions of sugar-sweetened beverages, and 75% are parent and child households and eat at minimum 3 meals at a fast food restaurant per week.

Sugary drinks contribute almost half of all added sugar consumed by children, and fruit drinks (fruit-flavored and juice drinks with added sweeteners) are the most common type of sugary drink consumed by young children, including toddlers and preschoolers. Although the American Heart Association recommends that children have no more than one 8-ounce sugary drink a week, the average child consumes as much as 10 times that amount. That adds up to more than 30 gallons of sugary drinks every year—enough to fill a bathtub. The current rates of sugary drink consumption are driven, in part, by the billions of dollars the sugary drink and fast-food industries spend on advertising directed toward children on television, on the internet, in social media and through other venues. The advertising campaigns are directed disproportionately toward the children of communities of color, which is one of the reasons why there are higher rates of sugary drink consumption among those children.

If we do not reduce these trends, 40 percent of children like their parents will develop type 2 diabetes in their lifetime, which makes them twice as likely to develop and die from cardiovascular diseases as adults. Sugary drinks are also a major contributor to other diet-related chronic diseases and tooth decay, which add to our state's healthcare costs. In 2017, diabetes alone cost Minnesota an estimated \$4.7 billion dollars in increased medical care and lost productivity. These expenses are unsustainable.

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The restaurant setting provides a unique opportunity to reduce sugary drink consumption. Making water and unflavored milk the default beverage options, along with healthier default sides for kids' meals, while preserving parental choice, is a small change that would have a powerful and positive impact on consumers' choices. It will promote health by supporting families who want to make healthier choices for their children and brings the additional benefit of supporting our dairy farmers by strengthening market opportunities. Its lengthy, phased-in approach would provide restaurants, including those that have been impacted by the pandemic, the opportunity to update their menus and allow their business to regain a stable footing prior to it going into effect.

Thank you for your attentive ear. If I can provide additional information of support, please contact me at: 651.274.1491 or [roberta@culturalwellnesscenter.org](mailto:roberta@culturalwellnesscenter.org).

Sincerely,

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