

**Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota**

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March 10, 2021

Dear Chair Freiberg and members of the House Preventive Health Policy Division,

I am writing in my role as Vice President, Chief Medical Officer with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota in support of HF1307, legislation that would make healthier food and drinks the default options on restaurant kids' meal menus while preserving parental choice.

Sugary drinks, which are often served automatically with kids' meals, are the leading source of added sugars in the American diet. The American Heart Association recommends that children have no more than one 8-ounce sugary drink a week, but the average child today consumes as much as 10 times that amount. Nearly half of Minnesota students reported consuming sugary drinks one or more times per day.

Even more troubling, sugary drink consumption is drastically higher among Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) students and children experiencing economic hardship, who are twice as likely to report having sugary drinks three or more times per day than children not experiencing economic hardship. 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, many of which are directed disproportionately toward the children of communities of color. Extensive research tells us that sugary drink consumption drives health inequities in our communities.

The long-term health and financial consequences of unhealthy eating are devastating. If we do not reduce these trends, 40 percent of children 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 our Minnesota an estimated \$4.7 billion dollars in increased medical care and lost productivity.

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota is deeply committed to improving health in Minnesota communities by promoting healthy choices, driving health care affordability and advancing racial and health equity throughout our state. This legislation would have a powerful and positive impact on the human and financial costs associated with sugary drink consumption and unhealthy eating. Making water and unflavored milk the default beverage options, along with healthier default sides for kids' meals, is a small change that supports families who want to make healthier choices for their children, while providing restaurants, including those that have been impacted by the pandemic, time to settle back into their normal business routines prior to the legislation going into effect.

[bluecrossmn.com](http://bluecrossmn.com)

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Mark Steffen', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Mark Steffen, M.D., M.P.H.  
Vice President, Chief Medical Officer  
Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota