



27 May, 2016

International Council of Beverages Associations' Response to the WHO Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity (“ECHO”) Report

Today the International Council of Beverages Associations released the following statement in response to the approval of the Final Report of the WHO Commission on Ending Childhood Obesity:

“ICBA supports WHO’s efforts to address childhood obesity, and we appreciate that the ECHO Report recognizes the importance of a comprehensive approach involving all aspects of civil society. We agree that all calories count, including those calories from beverages, and accordingly we recognize that we have a role to play in being part of the solution. However, we strongly disagree with the Commission’s recommendation to tax beverages, as this type of taxation is an unproven idea that has not been demonstrated to improve public health. The recommendation risks misleading the public into wrongly believing that taxes on one dietary item will change the behaviors that can lead to obesity, when the evidence to date does not support this. It is disheartening that the effort to address the complex issue of childhood obesity is hijacked by a tax proposal that won't make a difference.”

“A 2014 Report by the European Commission found that taxes targeting certain foods and beverages in four EU countries failed to have any discernible effect on public health. In Denmark, a tax on saturated fats was such a dismal economic failure with no discernible impact on health that it was quickly abolished by Parliament after only one year. In Mexico, data from two studies found that the 2014 beverage tax led to a per capita reduction of fewer than 6 calories in an average daily diet of 3,024 calories. The tax failed to lower body-mass index or show measureable improvement in the health of an average Mexican, and in fact, did not sustain lower consumption levels despite claims to the contrary. Taxation is not the answer to the very serious health challenge of childhood obesity.”

“As producers of a wide variety of non-alcoholic beverages, ICBA believes that all of our products can be part of a healthy lifestyle. To that end, the global non-alcoholic beverage industry has been working with government, industry, the healthcare community, and consumers

around the world to be part of the solution, and to promote healthy, balanced, and active lifestyles. ICBA and our members have, for example:

- Developed and made available more beverage options with fewer calories, including more reduced, low- and no-calorie product offerings.
- Reformulated existing beverages to significantly reduce calories.
- Further developed smaller portion size options.
- Supported the removal of soft drinks from primary schools.
- Developed and successfully implemented the 2008 ICBA Guidelines on Marketing to Children, which were updated and expanded in 2015.
- Developed ICBA Guidelines on Nutrition Labeling to aid the global non-alcoholic beverage industry in providing meaningful and understandable fact-based nutrition information.
- Created the 2013 ICBA Guidelines for the Composition, Labelling, and Responsible Marketing of Energy Drinks to help ensure such products are not marketed to children.
- Supported physical activity and nutrition programs, and research and partnerships that advance nutrition science.”

“Such widespread, voluntary industry actions have reduced caloric availability and help shape consumer choice much more so than discriminatory beverage taxes. Consider the almost 80 calorie per person per day calorie reduction from the U.S. Healthy Weight Commitment Foundation as opposed to fewer than 6 calories per person per day from the Mexican beverage tax. Industry action also avoids the negative economic consequences of a discriminatory beverage tax: job losses, foregone economic growth and regressive taxes on the poor. ICBA welcomes the opportunity to work with stakeholders on productive solutions to the obesity challenge, and we are committed to being part of the solution.”

###

The International Council of Beverages Associations (ICBA) is an international nongovernmental organization established in 1995 that represents the interests of the worldwide non-alcoholic beverage industry. The members of ICBA include national and regional beverage associations, as well as international beverage companies that operate in more than 200 countries and territories and produce, distribute, and sell a variety of non-alcoholic sparkling and still beverages, including soft drinks, sports drinks, energy drinks, bottled waters, flavored and/or enhanced waters, ready-to-drink teas and coffees, 100% fruit or vegetable juices, nectars and juice drinks, and dairy-based beverages. For media inquiries please contact ICBA’s media line at +1 (202) 463-6739 or icba@icba-net.org.