



EUPHA calls for the widespread adoption of sugar taxes in Europe

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EUPHA enthusiastically welcomes the decision by the United Kingdom government to implement a tax on sugar sweetened beverages, adding to the welcome already expressed by our member organisation, the [UK Faculty of Public Health](#). This builds on the solid evidence base that has been accumulating from elsewhere, most notably from Mexico, where the implementation of a 10% tax was associated with a [reduction in consumption](#) of between 6% and 12%. The impact was greatest on low income households, who reduced their purchases by an average of 9% in the following year, and by 17% at the end of the year. The impact was in line with predictions from a model developed by [researchers at the University of Oxford](#).

Predictably, the manufacturers of sugar sweetened beverages have complained, although their arguments do not withstand even superficial scrutiny. Their main argument is that the obesity epidemic is driven by low levels of physical activity rather than overconsumption of the energy dense foods and drinks that they produce. However, this argument now has little credibility following the exposure of [industry funding of groups](#) seeking to make this case. Another argument is that such a tax is regressive, placing a further financial burden on the poor. This would only have any validity if there was no alternative. Obviously there is, in the form of sugar-free beverages. They also suggest that this will drive people towards other products containing high amounts of sugar. However, in Mexico, the shift was primarily to bottled water. Earlier [research from the USA](#) suggesting such an effect cannot be extrapolated to the Mexican or UK situation because the taxes involved were very much lower, as was also the case in France, where the tax also does not differentiate between sugar sweetened and sugar-free beverages.

EUPHA expects that the soft drinks industry will lobby intensively to prevent this idea from being adopted elsewhere, just as they did, successfully, in New York. However, the citizens of the Berkeley, California, successfully withstood intensive activities by the industry, involving the expenditure of at least \$2.4 million, to introduce such a tax.

EUPHA now:

1. calls upon European governments to emulate the approach taken by the government of the United Kingdom, as part of a comprehensive strategy against obesity.
2. encourages the European public health community to learn from those [activists in Berkeley](#) who were so successful in standing up to powerful vested interests.

Martin McKee, President

Natasha Azzopardi Muscat, President Elect



Walter Ricciardi, Past President

Note to editors: The European Public Health Association, or EUPHA in short, is an umbrella organisation for public health associations and institutes in Europe. EUPHA was founded in 1992. EUPHA now has 71 members from 41 countries: • 40 national associations of public health • 18 institutional members • 9 European NGOs • 4 individual members. EUPHA is an international, multidisciplinary, scientific organisation, bringing together around 14,000 public health experts for professional exchange and collaboration throughout Europe. We encourage a multidisciplinary approach to public health. Our vision is of improved health and reduced health inequalities for all Europeans. We seek to support our members to increase the impact of public health in Europe, adding value to the efforts of regions and states, national and international organisations, and individual public health experts.