



The New York Academy of Medicine

At the heart of urban health since 1847

**New York State Senate Standing Committee on Health
Food Policy Hearing on January 22, 2010
Testimony of Ana Garcia, Senior Policy Associate**

The New York Academy of Medicine (NYAM) has been advancing the health of people in cities since 1847. An independent organization, NYAM addresses the health challenges facing the world's urban populations through interdisciplinary approaches to research, education, community engagement, and policy leadership. Our current priorities include creating environments that support healthy aging; strengthening systems that prevent disease and promote the public's health; and working to eliminate health disparities.

NYAM encourages policy approaches to health improvement, including calorie labeling, a trans fat ban, and a sugared-beverage tax for New York State. These policies have been shown to contribute toward making a healthier food environment, one where the healthy choice is an easy choice.

- **Calorie labeling** addresses the fact that most consumers underestimate the caloric content of foods and that half the adults in the United States say nutrition information influences what they purchase.ⁱ Requiring chain restaurants to post the caloric content of menu items allows consumers to make the same kind of informed decisions they can make when purchasing packaged food items. We note that as with packaged foods, it may be helpful to post the recommended daily caloric requirements for an average adult. A recent study showed that this additional information helps curb calorie consumption more than calorie-posting alone.ⁱⁱ We suspect that this may enhance the effectiveness of calorie-labeling for people with less information about good nutrition practices.
- **A ban against the use of trans fat in food production**, as already implemented in Albany and New York City, eliminates a hidden danger that doctors warn patients about but consumers have little control over when they eat out. Trans fat is an unnecessary ingredient

that increases the risk for heart disease. The Institute of Medicine, the USDA, the American Heart Association, and other organizations recommend limiting trans fat intake. We support a trans fat ban to enable people to limit their intake.

- We also strongly support a **sugar-sweetened beverage tax**. While children and adults are on average consuming more than 170 calories per day from sugared beverages,ⁱⁱⁱ no one needs to consume soda any more than they need to consume alcohol or cigarettes. Sugared soda and other sweetened drinks hold no nutritional value and, particularly among children and adolescents, often displace the intake of healthier beverages such as milk.^{iv} Sugared beverages are highly accessible thanks to their presence in every convenience store and supermarket as well as to their low cost. Structural interventions like taxes have worked to reduce the consumption of tobacco, particularly among young people,^v ^{vi} and the evidence indicates that pricing interventions may have some impact on weight outcomes, particularly for children and adolescents, low-income populations and those most at risk for overweight.^{vii} Reducing sugared-beverage consumption may also have positive effects on oral health. At a minimum, the soda tax, like calorie-labeling, will draw attention to the issue of added sugar in our diets. It will also raise much-needed revenue that could support New York's public health system.

As the Senate develops its proposals to enact these policies, NYAM would like to acknowledge that to a large extent, the vehicles through which we are hoping to transform the food environment are our local small businesses. Given the recession and the significant role of bodegas, groceries, restaurants, and bakeries on our local economies, food policy legislation should proceed in consultation with small business owners and should include the training, funding, and technical assistance they may need. For example:

- New York City's calorie-labeling has been supported by a compliance guide for business-owners.
- Both New York City and Albany offer web and print resources and a telephone helpline to help businesses remove trans fat. The New York City health department also helped identify suppliers of trans fat alternatives and monitored for any potential price-gouging in the sale of trans fat alternatives.^{viii}

- As we move toward a sugar-sweetened beverage tax, there should be consultation with small businesses regarding administration of the tax and to help them identify appropriate alternative products to sell.

Healthy individuals are only possible in healthy neighborhoods, and healthy neighborhoods need healthy, viable businesses.

Lastly, NYAM would like to acknowledge that the Governor, in his proposal for a sugar-sweetened beverage tax, indicated that revenue from such a tax should go toward the health care system. This is a logical allocation. NYAM urges that revenue-allocation particularly emphasize investment in public health and community-based health interventions, as these are critical for long-lasting health promotion and disease prevention. NYAM contributed to a report with Trust for America's Health that found that New York State could realize a return of \$7 in health care savings for every \$1 invested in community-based interventions to prevent chronic disease.^{ix}

NYAM applauds the Senate for considering progressive, policy-oriented approaches to improving the health of New Yorkers. The balance of the evidence says policy and environmental changes of this kind raise awareness of the harmfulness of these substances and discourages their consumption. Several New York counties have begun to move in this direction. It is only right that the entire state benefit from these policies and that we help small business and communities make the transition to healthier practices.

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ⁱ Goldstein, Gail. Calorie Labeling in New York City Restaurants: An Approach to Inform Consumers. NYC Department of Health & Mental Hygiene, October 22, 2008. Electronic resource, http://www.cspinet.org/canada/2008conference/presentation/Goldstein_CalorieLabeling.ppt#1

ⁱⁱ Roberto CA, Larsen PD, Agnew H, Baik J, Brownell KD. Evaluating the impact of menu labeling on food choices and intake. *Am J Public Health*. 2010 Feb;100(2):312-8. Epub 2009 Dec 17.

ⁱⁱⁱ Brownell, K.D., Farley, T., Willett, W.C., Popkin, B.M., Chaloupka, F.J., Thompson, J.W., & Ludwig, D.S. (2009). The public health and economic benefits of taxing sugar-sweetened beverages. *New England Journal of Medicine*. www.nejm.org September 16, 2009 (10.1056/NEJMp0905723).(accessed September 25, 2009).

^{iv} McKinney, S and Thompson, J. Beverages in School. American Dietetic Association, December 2005. Electronic document, http://www.eatright.org/cps/rde/xchg/ada/hs.xsl/career_8575_ENU_HTML.htm, accessed Jan 12, 2009.

^v Frieden, Thomas et al. Adult Tobacco Use Levels After Intensive Tobacco Control Measures: New York City, 2002–2003. *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol 95, No. 6, 1016-1023. June 2005.

^{vi} Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids. Raising Cigarette Taxes Reduces Smoking, Especially Among Kids. Electronic article, <http://www.tobaccofreekids.org/research/factsheets/pdf/0146.pdf>, accessed January 12, 2009.

^{vii} [Powell LM, Chaloupka FJ](#). Food prices and obesity: evidence and policy implications for taxes and subsidies. [Milbank Q](#). 2009 Mar;87(1):229-57.

^{viii} Angell SY, Silver LD, Goldstein GP, et al. Cholesterol control beyond the clinic: New York City's trans fat restriction. *Ann Intern Med* 2009; 151:129-134.

^{ix} Levi, J., Segal, L. M., & Juliano, C. (2008). *Prevention for a healthier America: Investments in disease prevention yield significant savings, stronger communities*. Issue report (Trust for America's Health). Washington, D.C.: Trust for America's Health.