

# What do Millennials think of prevention policy relating to sugary drinks?

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# Background

**Noncommunicable diseases** are significant health issues – nationally and internationally

Key risk factors are **well established**

Growing interest in **policy levers** that governments can utilise to **promote health** and **prevent disease** at a population level

But what's **effective** and what's **popular or acceptable** can be different



# Why 'Millennials'?

**Young adults (18-30 years)** in Australia are experiencing poor health (*ABS NHS 2014-15*)

**Lack of research** on young adults and their attitudes towards prevention and policy levers

Current research is mixed

- **Alcohol regulations** are less supported by younger people (*Tobin et al 2011*)
- Greater support for **initiatives targeting children** (*Morley et al 2012*)
- **Older people more supportive** for more restrictive measures around alcohol, smoking and diet (*Diepeveen et al 2013*)
- Age not a predictor in support for **SSB nudges** (*Petrescu et al 2016*)

# Why sugary drinks?

**Consumption of sugary drinks** associated with poor diet, weight gain and other health issues

**Young adults the highest consumers** after adolescents (*Lei et al, 2016*)

Sugary drinks are **low hanging fruit**  
– Interest in action by governments from a policy perspective



# What types of approaches are being used?

## Individual-centred



- Education
- Information
- Labelling
- Promotions

## Environment-centred



- Policy & regulation
- Optimal defaults
- Nudges
- Price

# Our study

## Survey of a university population in 2016

- Knowledge about health risks of sugary drinks
- Sugary drink consumption (self-reported)
- Views and attitudes about regulatory measures on campus

## Data

- 913 responses received, sample aged 16 – 84 years
- Quantitative - descriptive analysis using SPSS 22.0, focusing on age (young adults 18-30 yrs vs older adults >30 yrs)
- Qualitative data - thematic analysis

## Results – expected

Low level of  
consumption

Knowledge of  
health risks was  
high

High levels of  
support for  
some initiatives

Less support for  
bans on sugary  
drinks

Young adults  
less supportive  
of most  
measures

## Results – unexpected

Over half supported pricing increases

Two thirds supported banning promotions

90% agreed in uni promoting healthier products

Low level of support for diet drinks

Young adults more supportive of only 1 approach



## Main theme #1

**Adults should be free to make their own decisions or choices**

‘The nanny state does not need to extend to the uni campus.’

‘People should make informed decisions but treating them like 5 year olds is ridiculous’

‘people on campus are adults [...] who are capable of making their own decisions.’

## Main theme #2

**Make healthy options more available**

‘Opt for smaller serving sizes of sugary drinks’

‘There should be more incentive to choose healthier options (e.g. price drop)’

‘making water more affordable / accessible’

# Key findings



Young adults less supportive  
of most measures



Individual-centred  
approaches more  
supported



Concerns around  
replacement products

# Policy implications

1. Limiting promotions and marketing of sugary drinks should be a policy priority for settings with young adults
2. Do we need more education on sugary drinks?
3. Acceptability and framing of proposed policies are key
4. Need to be wary of commercial solutions to public health issues – are replacement products the right policy solution?

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## **Corresponding publication:**

Howse et al (2017) 'The university should promote health, but not enforce it' *BMC Public Health* 18:76

<https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12889-017-4626-8>