

Israel decides to cancel sweetened beverage tax in setback to public health

As members of the World Federation of Public Health Associations Non-Communicable Diseases Prevention & Health Promotion and Policy Working Groups, and other leading scholars of nutrition policy, health sciences, and economics, we would like to convey extreme concern over the Israeli Finance Minister's decision to revoke the sweetened beverage tax as his first act on his first day in office.¹

This decision, taken without consulting the civil service professionals in the ministries of health or finance, or without conducting any other independent expert review, is a grievous blow to public health. It runs counter to clear guidance from international agencies such as WHO² and The World Bank,³ as well as evidence from the Bank of Israel itself, showing that the tax substantially reduced sweetened beverage consumption.⁴

Revoking the tax will undoubtedly harm lives and increase the direct and indirect economic costs to Israel's health system and economy, both in the short term and long term.⁵ More broadly, this act undermines hard won progress made elsewhere around the world. It is a serious setback for evidence-based public health policy and will be celebrated by vested interests who promote their products and disregard the need for policies that uphold the public's health and welfare.

This decision will be seen as prioritising sectorial political interests over incontrovertible scientific evidence and public health best practice. This decision seriously tarnishes Israel's international standing, its medical, scientific, and technological leadership, and reputation as an exemplar of sensible, evidence-based policy.

We support our colleagues in the Israeli health professions and society

at large in calling on the Government of Israel to reconsider and retract this ill-conceived and hasty decision. Instead, let the revenue from the soda tax be used to combat chronic diseases including obesity, as well as promote nutrition security by increasing economic access to healthy diets, narrowing health disparities, improving the health and welfare of all Israeli citizens, and setting an example for world health leadership.

We declare no competing interests.

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- 4 Bank of Israel. A preliminary analysis of trends in the purchase of sugary drinks following the imposition of the tax on them. Nov 17, 2022. <https://www.boi.org.il/%D7%AA%D7%A7%D7%A9%D7%95%D7%A8%D7%AA-%D7%95%D7%A4%D7%A8%D7%A1%D7%95%D7%9E%D7%99%D7%9D/%D7%94%D7%95%D7%93%D7%A2%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%9C%D7%A2%D7%99%D7%AA%D7%95%D7%A0%D7%95%D7%AA/%D7%A0%D7%99%D7%AA%D7%95%D7%97-%D7%A8%D7%90%D7%A9%D7%95%D7%A0%D7%99-%D7%A9%D7%9C-%D7%9E%D7%92%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%9B%D7%99%D7%A9%D7%AA-%D7%9E%D7%A9%D7%A7%D7%90%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%9E%D7%9E%D7%95%D7%AA%D7%A7%D7%99%D7%9D-%D7%91%D7%A2%D7%A7%D7%91%D7%95%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%98%D7%9C%D7%AA-%D7%94%D7%9E%D7%A1-%D7%A2%D7%9C%D7%99%D7%94%D7%9D/> (accessed Jan 9, 2023).
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Published Online
February 1, 2023
[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(23\)00214-3](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(23)00214-3)

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