San Francisco’s Legacy of Leadership in Decreasing Consumption of Sugar-Sweetened Beverages

The Role of Local Health Departments in Chronic Disease Prevention

Local health departments (LHDs) play an important role in developing healthy communities. LHDs serve as the authorities on public health, providing decision-makers from all sectors with strategic guidance on local health data and science-proven interventions.

The Big Cities Chronic Disease Community of Practice

Formed in 2007, the Big Cities Chronic Disease Community of Practice (BC-COP) comprises local health officials or senior-level chronic disease programmatic staff from LHDs representing the largest cities and metropolitan areas in the United States. The goals of the BC-COP are to identify common priorities related to healthy eating and active living, discuss evidence-based policy, system, and environment strategies, and share lessons learned during implementation. Peer sharing and support takes place through in-person meetings, webinars, phone calls, and resource sharing. The BC-COP guides the production of resources that are helpful to members and other communities seeking similar change. For example, Chronic-Disease Management: The Role of Local Health Departments in Reducing Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Consumption, a NACCHO issue brief published in August 2012, provided a background on the issue, specific evidence-based strategies LHDs might adopt or promote, and examples from the field.

Challenge

Sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) are leading sources of added sugars in the American diet and are associated with weight gain/obesity, type 2 diabetes, heart disease, kidney diseases, non-alcoholic liver disease, tooth decay and cavities, and gout. Reducing or limiting consumption of SSBs can help individuals maintain health. In 2006, the Mayor of San Francisco issued a challenge to San Francisco residents in response to growing levels of chronic disease, especially in low-income communities and communities of color. The movement that formed as a result of the challenge, Shape Up San Francisco, expanded from previous education-based health improvement efforts emphasizing equal or greater focus on policy, systems, and environmental change to create a city where healthy opportunities and choices became the norm.

Overview

To decrease consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, Shape Up San Francisco supported the creation of a number of policy, systems, and environmental changes aimed at making healthy choices the easiest choices for all people living in San Francisco. A coalition led by the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) successfully achieved its vision by putting in place numerous organizational, administrative, and city policies and shifting the culture and norms of the community.
TIMELINE OF SSB POLICY, SYSTEMS, AND ENVIRONMENTAL CHANGES IN SAN FRANCISCO

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
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| 2008 | • SFDPH implements healthy food policy  
• Mayor calls for nexus study to assess feasibility of local sugary drink legislation |
| 2009 | • SFDPH releases nexus study examining feasibility of SSB legislation in San Francisco  
• Local organizations implement soda-free policies, including the Boys and Girls Club, Junior Giants, and Sunday Streets |
| 2010 | • Mayor signs executive directives for healthy and sustainable foods and healthy vending  
• Health meals ordinance passes  
• Organizations implement soda-free policies, including San Francisco Recreation and Parks, Bay Area SCORES, and Kai Ming Head Start |
| 2011 | • Shape Up San Francisco provides technical assistance to youth-serving organizations to develop healthy beverage policies |
| 2013 | • Senator introduces a bill to establish a statewide soda tax  
• San Francisco Public Utilities Commission convenes Water Hearing  
• Mayor urges Congress to ban use of food stamps to buy sugary drinks  
• Organizations implement soda-free policies, including the YMCA of San Francisco, Bayview Hunters Point Foundation, and Children's Council of San Francisco  
• San Francisco Board of Supervisors unanimously passes resolution to support state soda tax |
| 2014 | • 56% of San Francisco voters support a tax on sugary drink distributors  
• Berkeley becomes first city in the United States to pass a voter-approved soda tax |
| 2015 | • San Francisco policymakers approve policies to (1) eliminate the use of public space for sugary drink ads (rescinded due to first amendment issues); (2) eliminate the use of public dollars for sugary drink purchase; and (3) require warning labels on sugary drinks (pending court decision).  
• San Francisco General Hospital and University of California San Francisco hospital campuses became sugary drink-free  
• SFDPH director issues directive that sugary drinks are not allowed to be served at any event led by SFDPH or on SFDPH property, or to be paid for with health department funding |
| 2016 | • San Francisco defends sugary drinks warning label policy in court  
• San Francisco policymakers approve policy to ban sugary drinks from and cap diet drinks at 25% for vending machines on any city property |

Solution

Shape Up San Francisco consists of the Coalition, a multidisciplinary, public-private partnership staffed by SFDPH, and the Initiative, an array of projects led and staffed by SFDPH. The Coalition’s mission is to convene partners for greater collective impact to create equitable and sustainable environments, systems, and policies that promote healthy eating and active living in the places where people live, work, learn, and play. Shape Up San Francisco addressed community health issues by engaging with community partners to assess need; gathering and analyzing data; developing and implementing action plans; and identifying solutions to achieve community-level outcomes.

In 2008, Shape Up San Francisco turned its attention to SSBs by launching the “Soda-Free Summer” campaign, which was the beginning of its broader Rethink Your Drink initiative.

In addition to staffing the Coalition and leading and staffing numerous Initiative projects, SFDPH focused its efforts on educating the community about the risks of SSB consumption and evidence-based strategies for reducing the risk of obesity and chronic disease through trainings and awareness campaigns. This approach built a strong cohort of individual and organizational champions for change, who could then lead advocacy efforts. SFDPH staff also provided technical support for drafting and implementing SSB policies.
Results

After 10 years of work, Shape Up San Francisco has had an impressive impact. In addition to creating healthier environments for all San Franciscans, Shape Up San Francisco has challenged and supported norm changes around SSBs across a wide range of public and private settings, from local service providers and institutions to state policy and beyond. The region’s community health improvement plan metrics include a measure about SSB consumption, marking it as a priority. A selection of the SFDPH’s numerous accomplishments are provided in the table above.

Because the City of San Francisco is a leader in the national movement on SSB policy change, SFDPH is focused on implementing and enforcing existing policies, especially through public procurement policies.

Cross-Sectoral Awareness

Core to its success is Shape Up San Francisco’s leadership and shared vision for the health of the community. The Coalition members and SFDPH staff consistently engage existing and new partners, either to expand existing projects or to fill gaps where new efforts and energy are needed. Most recently, the Coalition sought to educate retailers about healthy store conversions, which increase shelf space for healthy foods and decrease shelf space for SSBs. SFDPH’s Health Officer and Health Director strongly support the staff involved in the effort. SFDPH works hard to maintain its role as a neutral, data-driven convener by framing its work as making the healthy choice the easy choice for all.

INFLUENCE OF THE BIG CITIES CHRONIC DISEASE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

The Big Cities Chronic Disease Community of Practice provided SFDPH with the opportunity to learn from national organizations and to network with other LHDs, which helped it develop and refine strategies for Shape Up San Francisco.
References


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