FIZZ: a new advocacy group to Fight Sugar in Soft-drinks

Sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs), most of which are sugar-sweetened soft/pop/soda/fizzy-drinks (SSSs) have been identified as the leading single food item contributing to the global epidemic of unhealthy weight gain.\(^1\)

A large evidence base demonstrates significant, positive associations between high intakes of SSBs and poor health outcomes which include: overweight and obesity, type II diabetes, gout, CHD, CVD and its risk factors, and dental caries.\(^2\)\(^-\)\(^7\) The consistency of these associations found in observational studies—along with supporting randomised trial evidence of weight loss following replacement of SSBs with low-calorie alternatives—strongly suggest that these associations are causal, so justifying action to protect health.\(^8\)

Conversely, some studies report either no adverse effects or even benefits from SSBs intake.\(^9\) The majority, however, have been either commissioned, or supported directly, by the industries that produce SSBs, or both. This debate sounds familiar, resembling the early arguments between Big-Tobacco and Public Health.

We believe that many parallels link SSBs and tobacco, and strong public health action is required to reduce intake of sugary drinks and raise their profile as a major cause of poor health. It is also clear that industry will strongly oppose any action which will affect their bottom line.

In New Zealand the organised fight against smoking was initially led by ASH (Action on Smoking for Health), an advocacy group established in 1982 by researchers and concerned health professionals.\(^10\) The important activities of ASH, to this day, continue, given the huge resources and political power of the multinational tobacco industry to block tobacco control efforts.

Similarly, for SSBs, the European NGO Corporate Europe Observatory claims that the food and drink industry invested more than 1 billion Euros in a successful lobby campaign to block an EU-wide traffic light labelling scheme.\(^11\)

While we strongly support the anti-obesity advocacy groups already established in New Zealand,\(^12\) we plan to establish a group focussed on SSSs alone, called FIZZ (FIghting Sugar in Soft-drinks—but pronounced FIZZ).

We believe that such a campaign is necessary to effectively challenge the activities of the food and drinks industry to increase sales of SSSs. We will use ASH as our model and campaign for an end-game for SSSs.

Twenty years ago a smoke-free New Zealand was a pipe dream, while today it is an increasing reality with strong political support that is leading an end-game scenario becoming accepted. SSSs, like tobacco are both harmful to health and unnecessary to sustain life—and for most of human history they didn’t exist.

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References: