**RE: SUBMISSION ON THE SUGAR SWEETENED BEVERAGES POLICY PAPER FROM THE HEALTHY LIVING ALLIANCE**

**Date:** 26 January 2017

**Introduction**

We make this submission on the proposed Sugary Drinks Tax as an alliance of ten health and social justice organisations with a mission to improve the health of an increasingly obese South Africa, compelled by the constitutional right that says that everyone should have access to (clean drinking) water and sufficient (healthy) food. We believe that improving diet to reduce the burden of non-communicable diseases in South Africa is essential and requires a sustained public health effort that addresses environmental factors and the conditions in which people live and make choices.

**Sugary drinks are bad for health**

South Africa is already ranked the most obese country in sub-Saharan Africa.

Excess sugar consumption is a major cause of obesity and its related diseases, as excessive sugar intake contributes to increased risk of diabetes, liver and kidney damage, heart disease, some cancers and dental caries. The World Health Organisation (WHO) and the World Cancer Research Fund recommend that people should consume no more than 10% of total calories from sugar.

Sugary drinks are a significant source of sugar. Sugary drinks include carbonated and non-carbonated soft drinks, fruit drinks, energy and sports drinks, all sweetened milk and yoghurt drinks, and fruit juices. Many studies show that when we drink sugary drinks we do not eat less, so our total energy intake increases. Children, adolescents and adults are negatively affected by consuming sugary drinks.

Sugary drink consumption is also linked with under-nutrition. In many African countries, including South Africa, babies are given sugary drinks as a weaning food or even as a substitute for infant formula, which increases under-nutrition and stunting. Stunted infants have a much greater risk of becoming obese and diabetic.

**Taxes on sugary drinks work**

Recent evidence from Mexico, and Berkeley, California in the USA show that taxing sugary drinks lowers the consumption of these unhealthy beverages, increase the sales and consumption of healthier alternatives, and do not result in revenue losses for businesses or job losses.

**The sugary drink tax needs to be higher**

The proposed tax level of 0.0229 Rand per gram of sugar is commendable, but a higher level of 0.0344 Rand per gram will better enhance the chances of reaching the goal of slowing down and reversing the rising rates of obesity by 10% from the current obesity prevalence rate of 11% among men and 39% among women, as well as lower the current diabetes prevalence of 9%. We would recommend that this revenue is directed at obesity prevention and health promotion efforts.

**Why tax sugary drinks?**

Sugary drinks taxes are a WIN-WIN-WIN for governments because they increase prices and reduce consumption, incentivise industry to reformulate their products to contain less sugar, and provide additional revenue that can be used for health promotion efforts.

Sugary drinks taxes are particularly effective in reducing consumption and improving health amonglower income consumers, who are more responsive to price increases and suffer disproportionately from the ill effects of obesity.

Sugary drinks taxes will increase public awareness of the harms of sugary drinks and encourage the beverage industry to reformulate their products and market healthier beverages.

**Conclusion**

As the Healthy Living Alliance we have collected 326signatures of people who have pledged their support in favour of the sugary drinks tax and the need for all South Africans to have access to clean drinking water and healthy food. Please find their list of names attached. We believe that this intervention is an essential step and tool towards preventing disease and achieving a healthier nation. As the old adage goes “prevention is better than cure”.

Regards

Tracey Malawana

Healthy Living Alliance