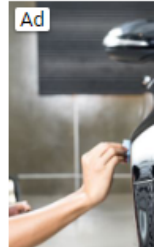


A soda tax is not going to solve the obesity problem — The Galen Centre

Published 4 weeks ago on 27 August 2018

AUGUST 27 — The Galen Centre for Health and Social Policy welcomes the ongoing discussion to reduce sugar consumption as a means of encouraging health living, but sounds caution on implementation of a soda tax.

Commenting on this development, Chief Executive Azrul Mohd Khalib said, “Studies and the experience from countries which have already implemented this measure such as Chile, Mexico and the United Kingdom have indicated that a soda tax would have both short-term and long-term effects.”



Coativo® Pre Nano Ceramic

“Short-term, young consumers (between 13 and 30 years) across different socioeconomic backgrounds would very likely reduce their sugar consumption by up to 80 per cent compared to the average consumer, turning to beverages which are less-sweet. Older individuals and those who already have high-sugar diets are unlikely to change habits as they already have strong preferences for sugar and are relatively insensitive to price increases. In the long term, the situation will normalise and consumers may very well end up buying the same amount of soda drinks but paying more.”

“The effectiveness of a soda tax on actually reducing obesity is therefore mixed. The tax succeeds in achieving large reductions in sugar among one specific group, but does very little for the larger group. If they switch to or increase consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages such as *teh tarik* or *kopi susu*, then the gains are potentially lost.”

“As those in lower income households spend a significant proportion of their income on soda as a source of cheap energy and treats, they will be affected. With healthy food and drink options still expensive and less affordable, they might be forced to spend more rather than cut back. Businesses, particularly small ones such as coffee and sundry shops, will be negatively affected in the short term but will probably adjust and recover later on after the increased cost is normalised.”

“To increase its effectiveness, we propose that the tax be applied to manufacturers and not at the point of retail, which is similar to how it is done in the UK. Drinks with more than a certain gram of sugar per 100ml should face a specified tax rate per litre. This would have the intended result of manufacturers taking the initiative and being incentivised to reduce the sugar content in their products to avoid being taxed.”

“The revenue collected could go towards the funding of health programmes designed to deal with non-communicable diseases, specifically diabetes and risk factors such as obesity. Earmarking this revenue would help address the shortfall in funding for prevention programmes.”

"A tax by itself is not going to solve the obesity problem. Soda drinks are not the only contributor to obesity. The government must invest in health literacy and NCD prevention programmes which aim to educate and create awareness of healthy choices and influence behaviour."

*** This is the personal opinion of the writer or publication and does not necessarily represent the views of *Malay Mail*.**

<https://www.malaymail.com/s/1666537/a-soda-tax-is-not-going-to-solve-the-obesity-problem-the-galen-centre>