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27 July 2017

New Zealand Beverage Guidance Panel (NZBGP)  
University of Auckland

Tēnā koe,

**Re: A Sugary Drink Tax for New Zealand**

The New Zealand Nurses Organisation (NZNO) welcomes the opportunity to comment on the Policy Brief: A Sugary Drink Tax for New Zealand, produced by the New Zealand Beverage Guidance Panel. This submission is informed by consultation with members of the NZNO.

NZNO is strongly of the view that a sugary drink tax is an effective strategy to reduce consumption and tackle the shockingly high rates of obesity in our country. Aotearoa New Zealand has the third highest adult obesity rate in the OECD (after the United States and Mexico), and our rates are rising. Almost one in three adult New Zealanders (over 15 years) is obese, and one in ten children. The statistics are worse in Māori and Pacific Island communities, with 4% of Māori obese and 66% of Pacific Islanders obese. Among children 15% of Māori are obese and 30% of Pacific Island children.<sup>1</sup>

In particular, NZNO supports this strategy as progress towards the reduction of health inequalities. Social inequities in health are also about social inequities in diet. NZNO acknowledges that some members maintain a sugary drink tax will impact most heavily on those unable to pay for it. This reflects a view held by some academics (for example, Marewa Glover) that solutions with a single-issue focus (such as the sugary drink tax) punish the poor and Māori without recognising how the social determinants of health (such as poverty) limit people's choices.<sup>2</sup> However, as an organisation as a whole NZNO believes the tax will be effective in reducing inequalities through reducing consumption. While sugary drink consumption is high among youth, it is especially high among Pacific

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<sup>1</sup>Ministry of Health (MoH). Retrieved from <http://www.health.govt.nz/our-work/diseases-and-conditions/obesity> on 27 July 2017.

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.nzdoctor.co.nz/news/2017/july-2017/07/%E2%80%98attacking-people%E2%80%99s-wellbeing-not-the-way-to-help-them-towards-healthier-lifestyles%E2%80%99.aspx>

and Māori.<sup>3</sup> NZNO's commitment to the reduction of health inequalities is outlined in its position statement "Closing the Gap: How can nurses help achieve health access and equity", which states nurses have a personal, professional, practice and political responsibility to ameliorate health inequalities.<sup>4</sup> NZNO emphasizes the crucial role of nurses (especially public health and school nurses) in providing education around alternative healthy options to complement any decision involving taxation.

International evidence from highly regarded publications demonstrates a tax on sugary drinks works. Research out of Berkeley, California (the first US state to pass a significant sugary drinks tax in 2015) published in the *American Journal of Public Health* found that in the four months after the tax took effect, consumption of sugary drinks fell by 21 % in Berkeley.<sup>5</sup> Likewise, findings from Mexico (which passed a sugary drink tax in 2014) published in the *British Medical Journal* show the beneficial impact with sales falling about 17 percent among the poorest households by the end of a year.<sup>6</sup>

NZNO acknowledges calls by many international and national organisations for a tax on sugary drinks. Taxation is among the recommended measures to influence consumption of sugary drinks that have been endorsed by the WHO's Commission on *Ending Child Obesity* (chaired by New Zealand's Sir Peter Gluckman).<sup>7</sup> The New Zealand Heart Foundation, Diabetes New Zealand and the New Zealand Medical Association, all recommend taxing sugary drinks, and recently supported a petition for such a tax. More than 84 percent of GPs responding to a recent New Zealand Doctor poll believe a sugar tax should be introduced in this country.<sup>8</sup>

NZNO also notes an increasing number of countries now have a sugary drink tax in place, and a total of 19 countries now have some taxes on food or beverages, including Mexico which is in a similar league to Aotearoa New Zealand in terms of being at the top of the world rankings for obesity.<sup>9</sup> In March 2016 the UK government announced that a tax on sugary soft drinks would be introduced from 2018 as part of the government's commitment to tackling rising rates of obesity and type 2 diabetes. The levy is estimated to raise around £520 million a year, which will be spent on increasing funding of sport in primary schools.<sup>10</sup> These countries are taking steps for the health of their people, including protecting the health of their children, and NZNO urges the New Zealand government to consider these actions and follow suit. The model of smoking cessation has surely demonstrated that government leadership and regulation is crucial to make change occur. Any

<sup>3</sup>Health Promotion Agency (HPA). In fact. Research facts from the HPA. Consumption of sugary drinks among children and their parents or caregivers. Vol 3, Issue 2, January 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.hpa.org.nz/sites/default/files/In%20Fact%20Consumption%20of%20Sugary%20Drinks.pdf> on 27 July 2017.

<sup>4</sup> NZNO (2011). *Position statement: Closing the gap-how nurses can help achieve health access and equity*.

<sup>5</sup> Falbe, J., Thompson, H., Becker, C., Rojas, N., McCulloch, C. & Madsen, K. (2016). Impact of the Berkeley Excise Tax on Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Consumption. *American Journal of Public Health*, 106 (10) 1865-71.

<sup>6</sup> M Arantxa Colchero, M., Popkin, B., Rivera, J., Ng, S W. (2016). Beverage purchases from stores in Mexico under the excise tax on sugar sweetened beverages: observational study. *British Medical Journal*, 352.

<sup>7</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.who.int/end-childhood-obesity/about/en/> on 27 July 2017.

<sup>8</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.nzdoctor.co.nz/news/2016/april-2016/14/sour-on-obesity,-gps-at-odds-with-coleman-over-introducing-a-sugar-tax.aspx> on 27 July 2017.

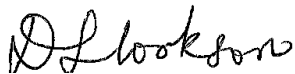
<sup>9</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.euromonitor.com/sin-tax-in-food-and-beverages-strategies-outcomes-and-learning/report> on 27 July 2017.

<sup>10</sup> Retrieved <http://www.diabetes.co.uk/nutrition/2018-uk-sugar-tax.html> on 27 July 2017.

measures to reduce consumption of sugar must be seriously considered in the face of our country's growing public health crisis, but taxation is widely acknowledged as one the simplest and most effective levers to change human behaviour.

In conclusion, we recommend you note that while we acknowledge some nurses are opposed to taxing sugary drinks on the grounds of (immediate) inequity, NZNO is persuaded to support this tax by the weight of evidence, the severity of the health risks, and the contribution of sugar to the obesogenic environment.

Nākū noa, nā



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#### NEW ZEALAND NURSES ORGANISATION (NZNO)

NZNO is the leading professional nursing association and union for nurses in Aotearoa New Zealand. NZNO represents over 47,000 nurses, midwives, students, kaimahi hauora and health workers on professional and employment related matters. NZNO is affiliated to the International Council of Nurses and the New Zealand Council of Trade Unions.

NZNO promotes and advocates for professional excellence in nursing by providing leadership, research and education to inspire and progress the profession of nursing. NZNO represents members on employment and industrial matters and negotiates collective employment agreements.

NZNO embraces te Tiriti o Waitangi and contributes to the improvement of the health status and outcomes of all peoples of Aotearoa New Zealand through influencing health, employment and social policy development enabling quality nursing care provision. NZNO's vision is *Freed to care, Proud to nurse*.