

Sugar tax 'would help to curb obesity crisis'

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EXCLUSIVE

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Leading health bodies have called on the Albanese government to place a levy on soft drinks and sugary drinks, in an effort to tackle Australia's obesity crisis.

The Australian Medical Association, Cancer Council, Australian Dental Association, Food for Health Alliance, Diabetes Australia and Heart Foundation are pushing the Rethink Sugary Drink campaign, aiming to institute a 20 per cent health levy on manufacturers.

The alliance says a government-backed tax would encourage companies to reformulate their drinks, and incentivise consumers to lower their intake by an estimated 2.6kg of sugar annually.

"If we pool all the evidence and look at what (it) tells us from around the world, there's now no doubt that (levies) reduce the consumption of sugary drinks. Now we're hoping that that will translate into health benefits," AMA president Steve Robson said.

"A price signal is really important in a cost-of-living crisis.

We really need to rethink whether we're going to buy a big bottle of sugar-laden soft drink.

"I think it's dawning on people just what a huge problem overweight and obesity is."

The levy would be expected to prevent 4400 heart disease cases, 1100 strokes and 16,000 type 2 diabetes diagnoses over 25 years, roughly 1 per cent of the type 2 diabetes cases annually.

Obesity costs the public health system \$4.3bn annually; a levy on sugary drinks could funnel \$967m to \$1bn back into treatments.

"We know young people and people on low incomes will have significant health gains and savings in healthcare expenditure as a result of reducing the amount of sugary drinks that they consume," Food for Health Alliance executive manager Jane Martin said. "A lot of the costs of obesity are paid by the individual in out-of-pocket expenses. So in the longer term, decreases in purchases and consumption of sugary drinks will lead to health gains and savings."

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare has estimated that by 2025, overweight and obesity will be the leading cause of death and health issues if left unaddressed.