

Boston Area Supermarkets Encourage Customers to Rethink Drinks for Better Health

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At A Glance

As of August 2015, more than 100,000 residents living in Boston, Massachusetts, have better access to information about healthy beverage options. With help from community leaders and the Boston Public Health Commission (BPHC), 19 supermarkets kicked off an educational campaign called “Rethink Your Drink.” Participating stores changed how they promoted and displayed healthier drink options, and partners helped customers understand the health effects of added sugar.



Public Health Challenge

According to the BPHC, nearly half of all Boston residents are overweight or obese. Black and Latino communities in the city have the highest rates of obesity, diabetes, and high blood pressure. Drinking high amounts of added sugar increases the chances of getting many diseases and conditions that require lifelong treatment, such as obesity and type 2 diabetes. For many people, the largest single source of added sugar is

sugar-sweetened drinks, including regular sodas, sports drinks, sweetened tea, coffee drinks, and energy drinks. To help residents get healthier, the BPHC worked to make people more aware of healthier drink options and how to get them. Although progress had been made to improve drink options in some community places, the BPHC saw a need to grow educational efforts where drinks are bought—local supermarkets.

Find Out More

To learn more about how educational campaigns like “Rethink Your Drink” can be used to promote healthier drink options in supermarkets and other community places, visit www.bphc.org/sugarsmarts or www.bphc.org/azucarsabia. CDC’s REACH cooperative agreement supports this project.

This campaign gives our customers easy access to information to help them live healthier lives, and it reflects the growing trend for choosing beverages with less sugar.

- Supermarket Partner

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Approach

With Harvard University, the BPHC used money from CDC's Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health (REACH) program to unite community leaders and local supermarkets. The BPHC asked Boston supermarkets to join a meeting with community leaders about how to grow the "Rethink Your Drink" educational campaign. A total of 19 supermarkets joined with corporate partners, and store managers were asked to find out what in-store activities were already underway to encourage healthier beverage purchases and what changes were possible.

Results

Since August 2015, 19 Boston supermarkets have made changes to promote healthier drink options. Stores use "Rethink Your Drink" traffic light signs to show drinks with more or less sugar and poor or good health effects. The idea helps shoppers think about the beverages they should drink often (green), drink occasionally (yellow), or drink rarely (red). Signs are shown in drink aisles, on drink coolers, in check-out lanes, and in weekly store flyers. Other changes include placing healthier drinks where people walk the most, such as the ends of shopping aisles, in check-out lanes, or as major product displays. Stores also help community events where public health partners teach shoppers about the health effects of drinking beverages with high amounts of sugar and offer healthier options.

What's Next

To help shoppers follow the "Stop. Rethink Your Drink. Go on Green" model, one neighborhood supermarket made permanent signs and changed where drinks were placed in the aisles. The BPHC plans to work with local partners and community leaders to grow the "Rethink Your Drink" educational campaign to hospitals, community health centers, pharmacies, and community groups, including youth-serving organizations.