

An aerial photograph of Seattle, Washington, showing the city's skyline, including the Space Needle and the waterfront. The image is partially obscured by a large purple rectangular overlay on the left side, which contains the title and presenter information in white text. The sky is overcast with grey clouds.

# Seattle's Sweetened Beverage Tax Evaluation: Impact of the tax on Norms and Attitudes

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# What is the Seattle Sweetened Beverage Tax norms and attitudes study?

## OBJECTIVE

**Asses how beliefs and attitudes about tax change after living with the tax for almost 2 years, including opinions on:**

- Individual support for the tax
- Perceived health & economic impacts of tax
- Perceived healthfulness of SSBs

**In the 2-year follow-up survey we additionally asked:**

- Did participants perceive that they had changed their beverage consumption after the tax, and if so what was their motivation?
- Were participants exposed to any tax messaging?
- Did participants agree with the tax revenue priorities?

# Who was surveyed as part of this study?

Adults living in **Seattle** as well as adults living in **comparison areas**

**Comparison Areas:** Minneapolis, Minnesota, and three smaller cities in the Washington D.C. metro area to serves as our comparison areas.

- These comparison cities **do not** have sugary drink taxes and
- Are similar to Seattle in demographics, including income, race and ethnicity, education levels, and political leanings.
- Allowed us to identify which changes were related to the tax versus which changes may be more universal.

# NORMS & ATTITUDES SURVEY

## STUDY DESIGN

- Recruited participants by phone and web
- Before the tax was implemented in October-December 2017 (the tax was implemented on January 1, 2018)
- Again, nearly two years after the Sweetened Beverage Tax was implemented (September-November 2019);
- We conducted a repeated cross-sectional survey (meaning we surveyed different people at each time point)
- included approximately 2,800 adults in total
- We purposely included adequate numbers of individuals with higher and lower incomes

# NORMS & ATTITUDES SURVEY

## What did this study measure, or assess?

### Impact of the tax on attitudes and beliefs

Measuring **differences in change over time** for Seattle versus the comparison areas to assess the impact of the Sweetened Beverage Tax on Seattle adult residents':

- (1) attitudes and perceptions about the tax,
- (2) knowledge and attitudes about the healthfulness of sugary beverages, and
- (3) consumption of sugary beverages.

We did this by asking individuals in Seattle and the comparison areas questions on these topics in our baseline survey before the tax, as well as two years after the tax.

# NORMS & ATTITUDES SURVEY

## What did this study measure, or assess?

After tax comparison of perceptions and views

Measuring **difference at one point-in-time, two-years after the tax** in Seattle compared to the comparison areas to assess:

- (1) exposure to positive and negative media about the tax,
- (2) views regarding the use of tax revenue, and
- (3) perceptions about whether the tax is more burdensome for lower income populations.

We did this by asking individuals in Seattle and the comparison areas questions on these topics two years after the tax went into effect (these items were not measured in the baseline (pre-tax) survey).

# NORMS & ATTITUDES SURVEY RESULTS

## KEY FINDINGS OVERVIEW

- Overall support for the tax did not change significantly
- For perceptions of economic impacts and healthfulness of sugary beverages, there were substantial differences by income-level.
  - **Economic impacts:**
    - Lower income Seattle residents did not change how they felt
    - Higher income Seattle felt more negatively about the tax after two years
  - **Health perceptions**
    - Lower income Seattle residents with lower incomes had increasingly negative perceptions of the healthfulness of sugary beverages
    - Higher income Seattle residents had no statistically significant change in their knowledge or beliefs about the health impacts of sugary beverages over the two years.
- Among both higher and lower income Seattle residents, more people endorsed the idea that they would or do cross the Seattle border to shop for sugary beverages.

# Results: Perceived Economic Impacts of the Tax

## Questions for opinions about asked whether:

- Do/do not intend to cross border shop
- Tax will positively/negatively affect **economy**
- Tax will/will not impact **lower income groups** more
- Tax will/will not negatively affect **family finances**
- Tax will/will not result in **job loss**
- Tax will /will not have negative effect on **small business**

## Lower-income:

- **no change** from pre- to post-tax for most economic questions
  - except cross-border shopping (+11 percentage points)

## Higher-income:

- **perceptions became more negative** in Seattle
  - Increases in percent who believed that tax would negatively impact:
    - small businesses (+17 percentage points)
    - family finances (+13 percentage points)
- Similar to the lower income group, increases in percent who said they would or do shop across the border for sweetened beverages (+7.3 percentage points).



# Results: Impacts of the tax on perception of health effects of sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs)

- Healthfulness of Sugary Beverages (SSBs)

- Added sugar leads to serious health problems

- SSBs raise chances of serious health problems

- SSBs raise chances of dental health problems

- SSBs raise chances of diabetes

- SSBs raise chances of heart disease

- SSBs raise chances of obesity

## Lower-income:

Increase in % who think SSB increase risk for disease

Increase in percent who believed that sugary beverages:

- increase risk for diabetes (+7 percentage points)
- for heart disease (+8 percentage points )
- for dental problems (+9 percentage points)
- serious health problems (+14 percentage points)
- and that added sugar raising chances of serious health problems in general (+15 percentage points)

## Higher-income:

- no change in perceived healthfulness

# Results: Impacts of the tax on percent of population that are high consumers of sugary beverages

- Frequency of Sugary Beverage consumption
- During the past 30 days, did you drink **sugary drinks** never or less than 1 time per week, 1 time per week, 2-6 times per week, 1 time per day, or 2 or more times per day?
- Calculated proportion with >1X/day

## Lower-income:

Decreases in the percent of the population consuming >1 sugary beverage a day (-16.9 percentage points).

Higher-income: no change in the percent of the population consuming >1 sugary beverage a day

# NORMS & ATTITUDES SURVEY RESULTS

## Messaging/Media about the tax

- More than 90% of those in Seattle had heard of the Sweetened Beverage Tax.
- Among those who had heard of the tax:
  - **28%** reported hearing or **seeing positive media** related to sugary beverage taxes, and
  - **47%** reported hearing or **seeing negative media** related to the tax.
- Lower income individuals (compared to higher income individuals), saw both more negative *and* more positive media about the tax –
  - **32%** of lower income individuals compared to **22%** of higher income individuals saw, heard, or read something positive about the tax, and
  - **50%** compared to 43% saw, heard or read something negative about the tax

# Did respondents agree with the tax revenue priorities set by the Seattle Community Advisory Board?

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General agreement on priorities.

84% of respondents in Seattle agreed with using sugary beverage tax revenues to improve food access as well as to expand services and support for young children.

## Did respondents perceive the tax to be more burdensome for people with lower incomes?

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- A majority thought that the tax would be more burdensome for people with low-incomes or people of color (76% in Seattle and 73% in the comparison areas).
- About half of individuals surveyed (49% in Seattle and 51% in the comparison areas) perceived that sugary beverage taxes will improve health and well-being and improve access to affordable healthy food for people with low-income and people of color in Seattle. Results were similar by income.

# NORMS & ATTITUDES SURVEY

## SUMMARY

- No change in overall support for the tax
- No change in perceptions about whether the tax will improve the public's health
- Differences by income-level in changes in perceptions of economic impacts and of healthfulness of sugary beverages
  - Generally, people with lower incomes not changing on economic impacts and perceiving sugary beverages to be more unhealthy, and suggestion of decreased consumption
  - People with higher incomes feeling more negatively about economic impacts and not changing their perceptions about the healthfulness of sugary beverages, no change in consumption
- More negative than positive messaging, but people with low incomes saw more of both
- Most agreed with spending revenues on improving food access and services for young children