



Getting the Soda Free Message

The Bay Area Reduces Soda Consumption Following Soda Free Summer Campaign

A report prepared by the Bay Area Nutrition & Physical Activity Collaborative | April 2009

Background

The Bay Area Nutrition & Physical Activity Collaborative (BANPAC) Soda Free Summer (SFS) campaign, conducted during summer 2008, encouraged Bay Area residents to “rethink their drink” and reduce or eliminate drinking sweetened beverages, which are associated with obesity and type 2 diabetes. Building on a successful pilot campaign implemented in Alameda County during the previous summer, BANPAC involved more than 100 organizations in expanding the 2008 campaign to all six San Francisco Bay Area counties: Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, San Francisco, San Mateo, and Santa Clara.

This brief reports on the findings from the evaluation of the 2008 Soda Free Summer campaign, conducted by Samuels & Associates and funded by The California Endowment. The evaluation included a survey of participating community residents living in the six Bay Area counties involved in the campaign as well as interviews with key stakeholders and county leads. These findings offer insights for communities in the San Francisco Bay Area and beyond that would like to implement similar campaigns in their locations.

Campaign Activities

The Soda Free Summer campaign consisted of a variety of activities to reach residents in the six San Francisco Bay Area counties. The centerpiece of the campaign was

an effort to get residents to pledge to be “soda free” for 10 weeks during the summer and to reinforce their decision by keeping a log documenting each day they did not drink soda. Participants were encouraged to take the pledge by signing an actual pledge card which, when returned to BANPAC, entered them in a raffle with various prizes, including a bicycle and a \$100 or \$300 “healthy grocery shopping” spree.

More than 100 organizations in the BANPAC collaborative and their community partners, including school districts, public health departments, community groups, and clinics and hospitals, assisted in these efforts through a variety of outreach channels. Outreach activities included distributing pledge cards and holding workshops and community events in diverse venues, including health fairs, summer camps, recreational events, and community youth organizations.

Many partner organizations were trained to conduct *Be Sugar Savvy* workshops, where their staff and constituents learned how to read food labels, understand the sugar content of popular foods, and reduce sugar consumption. Partner organizations also included Soda Free Summer campaign messages in presentations, exhibits, and organizational activities, where they performed demonstrations illustrating the amount of sugar in popular beverages.

SODA FREE SUMMER CAMPAIGN ACTIVITIES

PLEDGE CARDS

Distribution of pledge cards encouraging residents to make a formal commitment to be soda free and log their progress.

PROMOTIONAL MATERIALS

Distribution of Soda Free Summer brochures, posters, and promotional materials, such as stickers and wristbands.

WORKSHOPS

Be Sugar Savvy workshops to educate participants on sugar content of beverages and encourage healthier choices.

MEDIA

Promotion of the Soda Free Summer message through local media.

ADVOCACY

Engaging political leadership to issue Soda Free Summer proclamations in each county.

Soda Free Summer Works!

Participating organizations reported reaching at least 100,000 Bay Area residents with the soda free summer message. Five thousand residents returned the Soda Free Summer pledge card promising to reduce soda consumption. Between one and three months after being exposed to the campaign, six hundred of those sending in pledge cards participated in a telephone survey (conducted by Field Research Corporation) to investigate the impact of the campaign. The survey asked participants about their recall of the campaign, beverage consumption, and support for policies that promote healthy eating.

CAMPAIGN RECALL AND PERCEIVED VALUE

Survey respondents remembered the Soda Free Summer campaign at rates comparable to the 2007 campaign pilot in Alameda County as well as other, similar interventions. Half (50%) of survey respondents recalled some local effort to combat childhood obesity, and one in ten (10%) respondents recalled the specific campaign without prompting. With prompting, 71% of participants could recall the campaign. Of those recalling the campaign with help, 80% remembered receiving the campaign brochure. These rates are about what one would expect given the relatively low intensity of the intervention.

Of those who remembered receiving the brochure, most (86%) reported reading it; overwhelmingly (72%), they rated it as very useful. More than three-quarters (77%) of those who read the brochure reported that either they or someone in their household made a pledge to “go soda free.” Half (51%) of those taking the pledge said that they used the SFS tracking form to monitor their number of soda-free days. More than half (55%) of the respondents who used the tracking form reported that they were “soda free” for all or almost all the days of the campaign.

Soda Free Summer Brochure, Pledge Card, and Tracking Form



RESPONSE TO SFS MATERIALS

86% read the SFS brochure.

72% who read SFS brochure rated it useful.

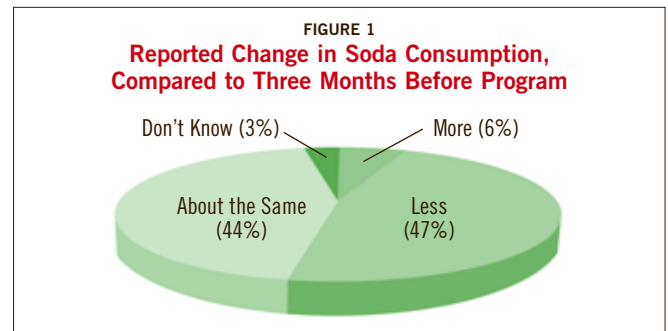
77% who read SFS brochure reported someone in their household pledged to go soda free.

51% who pledged to go soda free used the tracking form to log soda free days.

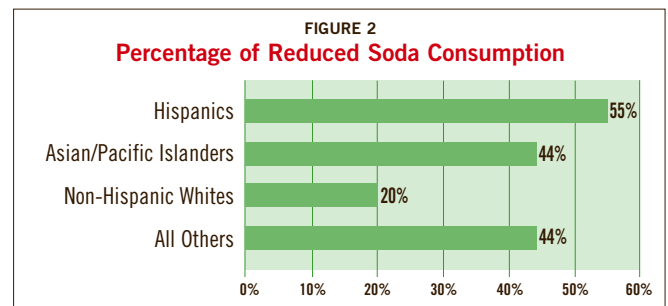
55% who used tracking form were soda free most of the days during the intervention.

CHANGES IN HEALTH AND BEVERAGE CONSUMPTION

Two-thirds of all survey respondents reported making a behavior change toward better health during the Soda Free Summer campaign period. Specifically, 15% of survey respondents brought up decreasing sweetened beverage consumption on their own; when asked directly, nearly half (47%) reported that they were drinking less soda and sports drinks since being exposed to the campaign (Figure 1).

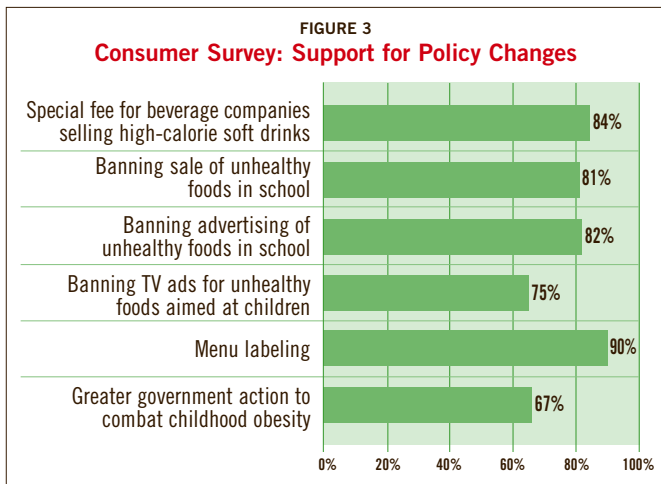


Hispanic Bay Area residents comprised the largest group reached by the campaign. In the follow-up, they were also more likely than respondents of other ethnic backgrounds to report having changed their behavior around soda consumption: 55% of Hispanic respondents reported they had decreased their soda intake “in the past three months” compared with 44% of Asian/Pacific Islanders, 20% of non-Hispanic whites, and 44% of all others (Figure 2).



SUPPORT FOR POLICY CHANGES

The survey was also used as an opportunity to gauge support for policy changes that would make it easier for Bay Area residents to have access to healthy foods. The survey found that such support was both broad and strong (Figure 3). Regarding sweetened beverages, 84% reported they would approve imposing a special fee on beverage companies that sell high-calorie soft drinks. In other questions, 81% declared they would support laws banning the sale of unhealthy food items in schools, and 82% would back laws banning the advertising of such items in schools. There was also extensive support for banning TV ads for unhealthy products obviously aimed at children (75%) as well as for adding labels with calorie amounts to menus at fast-food and chain restaurants (90%). The majority (67%) also want government at all levels to do more to combat childhood obesity.



Leaders and Campaign Implementers Pleased with Results

To provide a context for the resident survey and to describe how the campaign was implemented in the six Bay Area counties, interviews were conducted with 21 stakeholders and six representatives of the BANPAC collaborative's Leadership Council. Stakeholders interviewed included policy makers, staff from health care facilities and clinics, school district personnel, after-school program staff, and representatives from a variety of community-based organizations throughout the participating counties. All stakeholders were directly involved with implementing the campaign within their organization and/or with the population they served. County leaders were BANPAC Leadership Council representatives and local public health department staff charged with overseeing campaign implementation in their county.



TOOLS AND MESSAGES WIDELY USED AND CONSIDERED EFFECTIVE

Respondents reported that they used the campaign and its materials to educate staff within a wide array of organizations as well as reaching a diverse group of at least 100,000 Bay Area residents. The county leads reported that they conducted *Be Sugar Savvy* workshops with participating organizations and trained them to spread the campaign message, along with distributing the campaign materials at health fairs and other community events.

County leads worked with a wide variety of organizations, including clinics and hospitals, schools, park and recreation programs, child care providers, YMCA staff, WIC staff, boys and girls clubs, parenting groups, and summer camps. County leads found the most valuable partner organizations to be those that had a solid infrastructure to disseminate the campaign information, including systems in place to reach a particular constituency widely.

All stakeholders regarded the campaign as effective in communicating the importance of reducing sweetened beverage consumption and becoming more conscious of overall sugar intake. County leads attributed the campaign's success in part to the tools it provided, including pledge cards, posters, brochures, and demonstration materials. County leads found the posters and demonstration materials illustrating the amount of sugar in soda to be the most requested by community partner organizations. Stakeholders and county leads indicated the *Be Sugar Savvy* workshops were very useful as a training tool for service providers.

Half of the stakeholders reported that the Soda Free Summer campaign had an impact on their organizational policies regarding soda and unhealthy snacks, varying from establishing formal healthy meeting guidelines prohibiting soda and unhealthy snacks to informal efforts to reduce the presence of unhealthy foods around the workplace. Half also indicated they would support local or state policies limiting availability of soda and other unhealthy foods in their community. A number of stakeholders felt their organizations would help advocate for such changes through holding informational meetings, getting people to speak at hearings, or starting

letter-writing campaigns. Almost all those surveyed responded enthusiastically to participating in a Soda Free Summer campaign next year.



SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

To build on what they saw as the success of the Soda Free Summer campaign, stakeholders and county leads suggested improving future implementation by doing more work with schools and starting the program earlier in the year to get more partner organizations on board and have greater effect. They also recommend holding more *Be Sugar Savvy* workshops, including more workshops for the general public, as these met with great success among participants. One trainer commented about the *Be Sugar Savvy* workshops that it was gratifying “having people reach the ah-ha! moment and then make the pledge for a Soda Free Summer in a group.”

Many respondents also mentioned the importance of integrating the campaign into existing programs in order to maximize staff time, increase the campaign’s visibility, and enhance the campaign’s ability to reach as many individuals as possible.

Although the campaign was designed to reach a variety of groups, several stakeholders proposed that specific materials be developed that would be more effective with preschool-aged children, adolescents, and seniors. Many respondents also recommended changing the slogan slightly to encourage behavior change all year long instead of only in the summer.

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Conclusions

The Soda Free Summer campaign was successful in engaging a variety of organizations and residents across the San Francisco Bay Area, with the outcome that many people made healthier beverage choices and many organizations improved their onsite practices regarding beverages. Residents responded positively to the campaign materials and messages, and organizations involved enthusiastically supported continuation and expansion of the campaign. In addition to these successes, the Soda Free Summer campaign has helped build support for policy change to create healthier food environments.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO ENHANCE THE SFS CAMPAIGN

Begin the campaign earlier in the year in order to reach more organizations and individuals.

Increase the intensity and reach of the campaign by training partner organizations and assuring that they have adequate amounts of SFS materials to distribute to their constituencies/clients.

Conduct more *Be Sugar Savvy* workshops for the general public.

Develop materials specifically targeting preschool children, adolescents, and seniors, who are at high risk for inadequate nutritional intake.

Address year-round behavior change to continue the momentum built by Soda Free Summer.

For more information on conducting a Soda Free Summer Campaign, contact BANPAC: www.banpac.org.

For more information about this evaluation, contact Samuels & Associates: www.samuelsandassociates.com.

