

## MEDIA RELEASE

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### **Acid, sugar in sugary drinks pose serious threat to teeth Australians urged to choose tap water this Dental Health Week**

Many Australians know that sugary drinks are not a healthy dietary choice, but they may not realise the serious damage they cause to teeth.

In line with the theme of Dental Health Week (7-13 August 2017) - *Oral Health for Busy Lives*, the health and community organisations behind Rethink Sugary Drink are calling on Australians to think of their teeth before reaching for a sugary drink when out and about.

Chair of the Australian Dental Association's Oral Health Committee, Professor David Manton, said sugary drinks contained sugar and acid that weakens tooth enamel and can lead to tooth decay.

"Dental decay is caused by sugars, especially the type found in sugary drinks. These drinks are often acidic as well. Sugary drinks increase the risk of decay and weaken the tooth enamel, so it's best to avoid them," Prof Manton said.

"The best advice is to stick to tap water. Carry a water bottle with you to avoid having to buy energy drinks, soft drinks, sports drinks and other sugary drinks when you're on the go. You'll be doing your bank balance a favour too."

Chair of the Public Health Committee at Cancer Council Australia, Craig Sinclair, said knowing the oral health impacts associated with sugary drinks further highlighted the need for a health levy on these beverages in Australia.

"Australians, and our young people in particular, are drinking huge volumes of sports drinks, energy drinks, soft drinks and frozen drinks on a regular basis – some are downing as much as 1.5 litres a day," Mr Sinclair said.

"While regular consumption is associated with increased energy intake, weight gain and obesity, it also heightens the risk of tooth decay.

"We know through economic modelling that a 20 per cent health levy on sugar-sweetened beverages could reduce consumption in Australia and prevent thousands of cases of type 2 diabetes, heart disease and stroke over 25 years, while generating \$400-\$500m each year.

"This extra revenue could be used for public education campaigns and initiatives to prevent chronic disease, reduce dental caries and address childhood obesity.

"While a health levy is not the only solution for reducing sugary drink consumption, if coupled with a range of strategies it could have a significant impact on the amount Australians are drinking and minimise their impact."

#### **The Rethink Sugary Drink alliance recommends the following actions in addition to a health levy to tackle sugary drink consumption:**

- A public education campaign supported by Australian governments to highlight the health impacts of regular sugary drink consumption
- Restrictions by Australian governments to reduce children's exposure to marketing of sugar-sweetened beverages, including through schools and children's sports, events and activities
- Comprehensive mandatory restrictions by state governments on the sale of sugar-sweetened beverages (and increased availability of free water) in schools, government institutions, children's sports and places frequented by children

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- Development of policies by state and local governments to reduce the availability of sugar-sweetened beverages in workplaces, government institutions, health care settings, sport and recreation facilities and other public places.

## Protect your teeth from sugary drinks with these tips:

- Follow the Australian dietary guidelines: Focus on drinking plenty of tap water (it has no acid, no sugar and no kilojoules), limiting sugary foods and drinks and choosing healthy snacks (e.g. fruits and vegetables).
- Find out how much sugar is in your favourite drink using the nutrition information panel on your drink or on the Rethink Sugary Drink [website](#) – it might surprise you
- Carry a water bottle and fill up at the tap, so you don't have to buy a drink if you're thirsty.
- Be aware of sugar disguised as a 'healthy' ingredient such as honey or rice syrup. It might sound wholesome but these are still sugars and can still cause decay if consumed frequently.
- If you do drink sugary drinks, use a straw so your teeth are less exposed to the sugar and acid.
- Take a drink of water, preferably tap water that has been fluoridated, after a sugary or acidic drink to help rinse out your mouth and dilute the sugars.
- Do not sip a sugary or acidic drink slowly or over a long duration. Doing so exposes your teeth to sugar and acid attacks for longer.

For more information, visit [www.dentalhealthweek.com.au](http://www.dentalhealthweek.com.au)

**About Rethink Sugary Drink:** Rethink Sugary Drink is a partnership between the Apunipima, Australian Dental Association, Australian Dental and Oral Health Therapists' Association, Cancer Council Australia, Dental Health Services Victoria, Dental Hygienists Association of Australia, Diabetes Australia, Healthier Workplace WA, Heart Foundation, Kidney Health Australia, LiveLighter, The Mai Wiru Sugar Challenge Foundation, Nutrition Australia, Obesity Policy Coalition, Stroke Foundation, Parents' Voice, the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) and the YMCA to raise awareness of the amount of sugar in sugar-sweetened beverages and encourage Australians to reduce their consumption. Visit [www.rethinksugarydrink.org.au](http://www.rethinksugarydrink.org.au) for more information.

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