



Bexar County Commissioners Court

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Feb. 26, 2015

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Community coalition formed to educate public about sugar consumption

Bexar County Judge Nelson Wolff and community leaders announced Thursday they are forming a coalition to create and implement an education campaign to encourage residents to drink fewer sugar-sweetened beverages. The coalition includes government, school district, business, medical and nonprofit representatives.

While several initiatives in recent years have helped San Antonio residents adopt healthier lifestyles, the city remains one of the most overweight cities in the nation with approximately 29 percent of the population considered obese. Across the nation, the rise in obesity parallels the increased consumption of sugar — the average American consumes 80 pounds of added sugar per year — and much of that is consumed through sugar-sweetened beverages.

Excessive consumption of sugary beverages has become a major area of concern for public health officials as medical evidence points to a link between these beverages and obesity and diabetes. Sugar-sweetened drinks make up the single largest source of caloric intake in children.

“I don’t want to get into regulating what people consume, that is not the intent of this campaign,” Judge Wolff said. “But I think it’s important to help people better understand what they are putting in their bodies so they can make healthier decisions.”

Commissioners Court unanimously passed a resolution supporting such a campaign at its Feb. 17 meeting. Just days after the resolution was passed, the federal Dietary Guidelines Advisory Committee released its report for the next edition of the guidelines, and, for the first time, included strict limits on sugar consumption.

“Why focus on sugary drinks? Well, for one thing, they are responsible for almost half the added sugar in our diets,” said Dr. Bryan Alsip, executive vice president and chief medical officer at University Health System. “And it’s pretty easy to replace them with water and not be thirsty.”

The Health Collaborative, a local organization created to improve the health status of the community, included its 2014 Community Health Improvement Plan the objective of decreasing

consumption of sugar sweetened beverages in the diets of children, adolescents and adults and increasing the daily consumption of fruits and vegetables. The coalition's campaign will support this objective.

"The Health Collaborative proudly supports the Commissioners Court resolution and we remain committed to serving the community need by providing free family exercise classes," said Elizabeth Lutz, executive director of The Health Collaborative. "We have seen firsthand the positive effects that a healthy diet has on families. Through this strengthened community collaboration our families are being given a chance to make a positive lifestyle change."

The coalition will begin meeting in the coming weeks to develop and implement the campaign.

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