



## Food and Beverage Industry Marketing Practices Aimed at Children: Developing Strategies for Preventing Obesity and Diabetes



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## INTRODUCTION

Childhood overweight and physical inactivity have reached epidemic levels in the United States, taking a terrible toll on health. Skyrocketing obesity rates are a symptom of current community norms shaped by a market-driven economy that promotes overeating and sedentary behavior. Both children and adults are targets of intensive marketing campaigns promoting soda, fast foods, and high-calorie snacks, along with passive leisure-time activities, including TV, movies, and video games. High-calorie foods are more readily available in schools and communities than are healthy eating options, and physical education and - walking, biking, and other exercise opportunities are lacking in many neighborhoods.

## TRENDS IN OVERWEIGHT AND DIABETES

The problem of overweight affects more than 1 in 7 youth ages 6 to 17 (Flegal, et al., 2002; Ogden, et al., 2002). A number of factors contribute to this rising rate of childhood overweight; however, scientists and medical professionals agree that poor diet and lack of physical activity play some of the most important roles in children being overweight (Berkey, et al., 2000; Rowlands, et al., 1999). Sub-optimal levels of physical activity and poor eating patterns are contributing to increasing rates of type 2 diabetes among children – a disease traditionally thought of as an adult medical issue. Moreover, children of certain ethnic backgrounds and lower socio-economic status have higher rates of poor nutrition, physical inactivity, overweight, and diabetes than other children.

Experts agree that attempts to prevent childhood obesity and its health consequences, such as type 2 diabetes, must shift the focus from treating overweight children to addressing health disparities among children of varying socio-economic status, and mitigating the social and environmental factors that contribute to the declining health of children overall. The nation's health care costs for treating diabetes are \$92 billion. Failed efforts to treat childhood obesity through weight reduction and reliance on pharmaceutical or surgical strategies are not only costly, they also place these children at higher risk for ongoing health problems. Focusing on prevention and changing the food and physical activity environment will help make physical

activity and healthy foods more accessible to all children and reduce the growing health care burden.

## **THE ROLE OF ADVERTISING AND MARKETING**

The scientific literature suggests that the high prevalence of overweight and physical inactivity is caused by numerous individual, social, and environmental factors. Studies have linked the epidemic to conditions including, but not limited to, a host of factors:

- Limited access to healthy foods in low-income neighborhoods
- Advertising of junk food to children and their families
- Increased portion sizes
- Increased consumption of fast food and soft drinks
- Availability of soda and junk food on school campuses (including preschools and after-school programs)
- Poor infrastructures for physical activity in schools and communities
- Limited compliance with physical education requirements in many schools
- Lack of funding for nutrition and physical activity programs.

Marketing and advertising play a significant role in setting norms and encouraging behaviors, especially for children. Annually, children view tens of thousands of television commercials and see hundreds of billboard and poster advertisements; the majority of these commercials promote food products. As a result, children view multiple food advertisements every day, with the heaviest food advertising for the least nutritious foods and beverages.

## **STRATEGY MEETING**

Public health professionals working to prevent childhood obesity have questions about the most productive avenues of addressing food and beverage marketing aimed at children. Beyond individual choices, is there a relationship between the way foods and beverages are marketed to children and the rising trends in childhood overweight? Are there particular strategies or approaches that might engage the food and beverage industry in reducing the marketing of

unhealthy foods to children? To discuss this potential relationship and to explore possible points of intervention and strategies for improving children's nutrition environments, The California Endowment hosted a meeting on June 11-12, 2003, on food and beverage marketing aimed at children, to discuss current practices and potential strategies to address them. Participants reviewed specific industry marketing activities that might be contributing to the growing obesity problem, such as the following:

- Advertisements broadcast to children on television, radio stations, and the Internet
- Food and beverage industry marketing strategies aimed at children of color
- Corporate sponsorships and partnerships that link popular children's media icons (professional athletes, cartoon characters, toys, celebrities, etc.) with soft drinks and fast foods
- Exclusive soft drink and fast food contracts with school districts, parks and recreation departments, and other public entities
- Integration of product marketing with educational tools and curricula.

At the end of a day and a half of presentations and discussion, participants concluded that, while more research is needed, there are immediate opportunities to mediate the growing health risks associated with poor eating and physical inactivity. These areas suggest both voluntary and regulatory strategies that focus on strengthening industry accountability, while changing the food and physical activity environment and promoting healthier behaviors.

In particular, public awareness can be increased by engaging policymakers and communities, especially parents and children, in a public discourse that questions current norms around the advertising of fast food and soda to children and disadvantaged ethnic communities. Children in particular need to be brought into the dialogue and involved in creating healthier environments. There should be special attention to the availability and marketing of "junk foods" in communities and schools, especially in low-income communities of color, and to the ways those marketing efforts undermine parental authority and shape community norms.

This report presents material excerpted from presentations and papers prepared for the June 2003 convening, and highlights the points of discussion among conference participants about research options and strategies for action.

The authors thank the following presenters for participating in this meeting and providing materials for this report:

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## MARKETING TO CHILDREN

Since the 1980s, the food and beverage industry has made children and adolescents the targets of intense and specialized food marketing and advertising efforts. The proliferation of electronic media, the deregulation of and declining support for public service advertising, and the booming economy of the 1990s all contributed to the transformation of children into a consumer group (Packaged Facts, 2000). In addition, the overabundance of certain foods in the U.S. food supply (such as corn and grains) along with decreased food production costs, allows food producers to increase portion sizes without increasing prices and to spend more money on advertising and marketing (Nestle, 2002). The amount of money spent on marketing to children doubled during the 1990s—it is currently about \$12 billion a year (McNeal, 1998)—as corporations competed for what marketers call “share of mind” (Pollack, 1999) and “cradle-to-grave” brand loyalty (Stabiner, 1993).

Multiple techniques and channels are used to reach youth, beginning when they are toddlers, to build brand identification and influence food product purchases. Unfortunately, foods marketed to children—from highly sweetened cereals to cookies, candy, fast foods, and soda—are predominantly high in calories, sugar, and fat.

Food marketers are interested in children and adolescents as consumers because children spend billions of their own dollars annually, influence how billions more are spent through household food purchases, and are future adult consumers (Kraak, 1998, McNeal, 1998). Children under 12 years of age spend an estimated \$25 billion, and, through their parents, may influence another \$200 billion of spending per year (McNeal 1998, Strassburger, 2001). Adolescents spend an estimated \$140 billion a year on food and beverages.

The stated intent of food and beverage marketers to specifically target children (Eig, 2001), coupled with the astounding frequency and reach of their efforts, has led many of those concerned about children’s health to consider the need for restrictions on advertising aimed at children.

Central to any policy discussion of regulating food advertising to children is an understanding of the nature of children's comprehension of advertising. Numerous studies have documented that young children have little understanding of the persuasive intent of advertising (Strassburger, 2001; Kunkel, 1995; John, 1999). Young children are easily exploited because they do not understand that commercials are designed to sell products and because they do not yet possess the cognitive ability to comprehend or evaluate advertising. Preteens, aged 8 to 10 years, possess the cognitive ability to process advertisements but do not necessarily do so (Strassburger, 2001). Not until early adolescence, at 11 to 12 years, do children think multidimensionally, with abstract, as well as concrete thought. Yet adolescents, like adults, can be persuaded by advertising messages, which play into their vulnerabilities, including concerns related to appearance, self-identity, peers, and sexuality.

### **Are Low-Income Children and Children of Color at Greater Risk?**

Though currently no data link food and beverage marketing to obesity in low-income children of color, we do know that obesity affects Latino and African-American youth disproportionately to their white peers and that food marketers disproportionately target these population groups.

Nationally, estimates for the rate of overweight among children aged 4 to 12 is 10 percentage points higher for African-American and Latino children (22 percent) than for white children (12 percent) (Strauss, et al., 2001). Between the early 1960s and the late 1980s, while the rates of obesity tripled for black girls, they doubled for white girls (Kimm, et al., 2001).

As nationally, there are disparities in childhood overweight among certain ethnic groups in California, African-American and Latino teens are at higher risk of overweight than white teens (Ritchie, et al., 2001). Second- and third-generation Asian-American youth are at greater risk of obesity than first-generation Asian Americans (Ritchie, et al., 2001). Self-reported CALTEENS data show that among youth ages 12-17, overweight is far more prevalent among teens of color: 50% of African Americans, 36 percent of Latinos, 28 percent of Asian and Pacific Islander Americans, and 25 percent of whites were overweight or at risk of overweight (Foerster, 2000).

Considering these statistics, we should be aware of marketers attempts to target specific ethnic groups, as these strategies might be putting youth of color at even greater risk for overweight and obesity.

### **What Are the Marketing Practices Targeting Children?**

With youth, marketers have tapped into an audience that is particularly vulnerable to the messages and tactics of the food and beverage industry. For many low-income youth, there is little time or money for structured, healthy meals in the presence of an adult. Marketers have capitalized on this situation by using a number of marketing channels to reach children and adolescents. These span television advertising, in-school marketing, product placements in movies and television programs, kids' clubs, the Internet, toys and products with brand logos, and youth-targeted promotions such as cross-selling and tie-ins. The content of the advertising as well as the growing amount of time children spend physically inactive watching TV or playing computer or video games, appear to contribute to the rising rates of childhood obesity and their related health effects.

#### ***Television advertising***

The largest source of media messages about food to children, especially to younger children, is television. Some facts:

- Children view between 20,000 and 40,000 commercials each year (Strassburger, 2001).
- Food is the product advertised in more than half of all ads targeting children (Gamble, 1999, Kotz, 1994, Coon, 2002, Taras, 1995).
- Children view an average of one food ad every five minutes of TV viewing time (Kotz, 1994).
- The heaviest food advertising is targeted to young children (Zollo, 1999).

### ***Television viewing***

Over the past 20 years, research has documented links between television viewing and obesity in children:

- The incidence of obesity is highest among children who watch four or more hours of television a day and lowest among children watching an hour or less a day (Crespo, 2001).
- Preschoolers with TVs in their rooms are more likely to have weight problems than those without TVs (Dennison, 2002).
- Sixty percent of overweight in children age 10 to 15 may be due to excessive television viewing (Gortmaker, 1996).
- Among teenagers, the incidence of obesity increased by 2 percent for every additional hour of television watched (Dietz, 1985).
- For many children, reducing television viewing reduces weight (Robinson, 1999).

### ***In-school marketing***

Commercial activities in U.S. public elementary and secondary schools have expanded during the last decade as a result of marketers' taking advantage of schools' financial vulnerability due to chronic funding shortages, coupled with their wish to increase sales and generate product loyalty (Levine, 1999, Consumers Union, 1995). In-school marketing activities related to food and beverages include:

- *Product sales:* Soft drinks, lunch items, fundraising sales. Many marketers seek exclusive agreements for one or more of these activities.
- *Direct advertising:* Ads in schools and on buses, scoreboards, billboards, and book covers; free samples.
- *Indirect advertising:* Corporate-sponsored curricula, promotion programs, corporate gifts, incentive programs.
- *Market research:* Student surveys, sampling, taste tests.

## **Internet**

Advertisers and marketers have begun to target the rapidly growing number of children using the Internet with a variety of new interactive techniques that can seamlessly integrate advertising and Web site content (Montgomery, 1996, 2001). Almost all of the major companies that advertise and market to children have created their own Web sites, designed as “branded environments” for children (Montgomery, 2000, 2001).

New technologies and software can collect data about the viewing habits and specific interests of children without the knowledge or consent of either the children or their parents. For example, interactive Web sites ask children about their interests, habits and preferences through surveys or quizzes embedded in the games or activities featured on the sites. Marketers can use this information to tailor their marketing messages and to encourage impulse buying of products featured in programming or advertising. Web-based “advergames” are becoming increasingly popular, such as Nickelodeon’s “Jimmy Neutron Gotta Blast,” and Life Savers’ “Candystand.com.”

### **Internet “Advergames” featuring fun with Hostess products**



Interactive television, which allows TV viewers to link directly to a Web site from a television program, allows advertisers to target individual viewers with personalized ads, increasing the likelihood of impulse purchasing (Center for Digital Democracy, 2001). Eventually, broadcasters hope to integrate television programming content, marketing, and data collection.

Advertisers will be able to target children whenever they are watching (whether or not the program is considered a children’s program), and to transmit advertisements for products that are designed to appeal to children – or more specifically, children of a certain gender, age, household income, race, or with certain interests.

### ***Toys and products with brand logos***

Food companies increasingly market branded toys and products to preschoolers and young children to promote brand awareness and preference. The food industry has partnered with toy manufacturers to create toys that advertise food.

**Barbie markets food: Jell-O and McDonald’s partner with Mattel to promote their products and build brand loyalty among young girls and particular ethnic communities.**



From: Story, M. Food and Beverage Advertising and Marketing Directed at Children and Adolescents. June 2003

### ***“Eatertainment”***

This new marketing concept is based on food as entertainment. According to marketing literature, the fact that a food tastes good is no longer sufficient – it has to be fun as well. In fact, today’s food commercials targeting children rarely talk about taste. Instead, they link the product to a desired emotional state (e.g., McDonald’s new campaign slogan, “I’m Lovin’ It!”)

### Playing with your food: Looney Tunes Lollipops

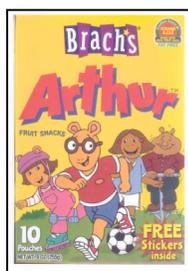


From: Linn, S. What's Up With Food Advertising to Kids. June 2003

### ***Cross Promotions***

Cross promotions among media companies, food sellers, and toy companies advance the corporate goal, as one marketing expert put it, “to establish a situation where kids are exposed to their brand in as many different places as possible throughout the course of the day or the week, or almost anywhere they turn in the course of their daily rituals” (Kjos, 2002). Supermarket shelves are filled with such links, such as *Rugrats* characters on packages of Kraft Macaroni & Cheese. Tie-ins like these are designed to lure children into selecting, or pestering their parents to select, foods associated with favorite movie or TV characters.

### **Product Tie-ins: Arthur and Sponge Bob packaging attracts children and helps sell familiar foods**



From: Linn, S. What's Up With Food Advertising to Kids. June 2003

### ***Food as props and plot points***

Product placements are increasingly incorporated into the sets or even the plots of television programs, movies, video games, and Web sites. This practice is on the increase as marketers for

products of all kinds seek to integrate product advertising directly into program content, thereby confounding viewers' attempts to avoid commercials.

**Coke takes center stage: Judges drink from Coca-Cola glasses prominently placed on American Idol sets**



## **Target Marketing**

Target marketing is based on fundamental marketing principles that are employed by just about all firms across all types of products and toward all types of audience segments. As the nation undergoes dramatic demographic shifts, moving today's ethnic minorities to the majority in many geographic areas, target marketing to ethnic groups will increase. The marketing strategies used by beverage, food, and consumer product manufacturers are based on a thorough understanding of 1) the environmental context in which consumer decisions are made, 2) an insider's perspective of urban youth culture, and 3) a communications style and manner that reflect the audience's worldview. Marketers have demonstrated that within the communities of African-American and Latino urban youth, this approach creates a loyal "super consumer."

Historically, beverage marketers have targeted specific sub-populations, beginning with African-American consumers in the 1940s. For example, in 1946, Pepsi's target marketing team set out to make personal contacts in black communities and cultural institutions. The

sympathetic black press supported Pepsi and benefited from Pepsi advertisements portraying blacks in a positive way. These efforts brought in new African-American customers who bolstered Pepsi's falling sales.

Today, many marketers use specific images that are meaningful to this audience: celebrities such as entertainers, rap singers and athletes; models in fashionable dress; models using specific cultural associations expressed in language and mannerisms; youth representing peer approval; and popular music unique to a specific group of children of color. Other marketing strategies lure young consumers with routine "low" and special discounted prices for over-sized amounts of foods and beverages, such as McDonald's Meal Deals and 7-11's Big Gulp oversized beverages.

Marketers have identified urban, low-income African-American and Latino youth as "superconsumers" of soda, candy, and snack products. Many young people report frequent snacking, unstructured meals, and eating "junk food," such as candy, chips, and soda, for their primary meal. Recent research studying the amount and type of advertising on prime-time television programs oriented to African-American audiences compared to those for general audiences found that far more food commercials appear on shows with large African-American audiences and a larger percentage of these commercials is for unhealthy foods. Thirty-one percent of the food commercials on popular African-American shows were for desserts or sweets and 13 percent were for soda. In contrast, on shows for general audiences in prime time, only 11 percent of ads were for desserts or sweets and 2 percent for soda. African-American prime-time TV programs also showed food items in non-advertising minutes more often than did prime-time TV programs for general audiences.

Many beverage and fast-food marketers also engage in "community marketing," in an effort to build relationships within the communities where they do business by giving something back to the community. McDonald's, for example, has worked with A Better Chance Foundation to offer college preparatory school scholarships to black students in underprivileged areas. It has also developed the Black History Makers of the Future program, which highlights 30 African-American children whom McDonald's feels will be among the leaders of tomorrow

in the company's national TV ads. In another example, Kraft/General Foods supports expanded school and summer meal programs in inner cities.

Soft-drink marketers are specifically appealing to a wider and increasingly younger and more diverse market to reflect the country's ethnic and racial composition. Advertising for both Dr Pepper and 7 Up consistently use models and celebrities (such as hip-hop artists) from diverse backgrounds to present their brands as hip, fashionable, and young. 7 Up's current tagline, "Make 7 Up Yours," is a tongue-in-cheek poke at branding that has found success with the young, urban market. Snack, candy, and soda companies compete to win over the trend-setting urban youth audience by "keeping it real" in their messages to this group. Local promotions and sponsoring of community-based events and programs help to seal the marketers' messages and solidify their relationship with the specific ethnic community.

It is these types of target marketing that allow McDonald's, for example, to equate its high-fat burgers and fries with love, caring and family happiness, or allow Mountain Dew or 7-UP to equate sodas with adolescent values of independence and identity. Targeted marketing not only links cultural values and norms with brand name products, it also shapes and changes norms and values. Targeted marketing ultimately influences behavior by equating unhealthy foods and beverages with freedom, independence, belonging, love, and caring.

### **APPROACHES FOR CHANGE**

The meeting participants proposed a number of strategies and approaches to minimize the negative health outcomes associated with commercial marketing and advertising. They also noted that potential strategies and solutions for addressing food and beverage marketing to children need to consider three major issues:

1. In strategies to reduce youth consumption of unhealthy foods, all foods cannot be demonized the way efforts to reduce youth using tobacco or alcohol have portrayed those substances. Unlike tobacco and alcohol, we need food.

2. Communities of color do not necessarily view ethnic-specific marketing as a problem; minority consumers want to see themselves represented in the media, including in advertising.
3. Marketing is only one element in the environment; efforts to address it should be considered in the context of other factors, such as the price of food, its availability, and its attractiveness to consumers.

### **The Role of Research: Directions and Dilemmas**

Two broad research questions remain unanswered:

1. How strong is the link between food and beverage advertising and youth consumption patterns?
2. What actions can we take now to mediate the effect of advertising and marketing of unhealthy foods to children?

Those concerned about the effects of food and beverage advertising and marketing on childhood obesity can learn from what has been documented in studies about alcohol and youth. Over the last 20 years a significant number of studies have attempted to understand to what extent exposure to alcohol advertising and promotion increased the likelihood that children and youth would begin drinking or increase the amount of alcohol they drank before the age of 21. That research points to three important findings:

- Advertising has both immediate and cumulative effects. While immediate effects are relatively easy to demonstrate, long-term exposure is the more likely agent that increases consumption as a consequence of marketing to youth.
- Advertising not only sells specific brands in specific product categories, it also creates general viewpoints, values, and conceptions about how one should behave under a variety of conditions.
- Advertising and promotion efforts operate in the context of numerous interrelated factors that effect behavior on their own and enhance the behaviors promoted through advertising.

The literature on alcohol has combined multiple research methods, including content analysis, experimental design, and econometric studies to create a strong body of evidence indicating that advertising influences underage drinking. These methods may be useful for studying the effects of marketing and advertising of food and beverages to children.

### **Additional Research Questions**

Several questions can be explored while researchers work to elucidate the link between food marketing and advertising and obesity:

- What is the cost of obesity to society?
- What new marketing techniques are being used to reach youth?
- What are the specific marketing activities used to promote unhealthy foods to children in schools and in low-income communities?
- Which populations are most vulnerable to marketing and most affected by it?
- What can be learned from children's menu items and portion sizes?
- What is the public opinion of food and beverage marketing and advertising aimed at children?
- What strategies will address the solutions to obesity rather than the causes of obesity?
- What strategies and actions will the public support?

Establishing a strong causal link between food marketing and obesity may be necessary to inform future programs, policies, and regulations. A greater understanding of the extent to which food marketing actually contributes to obesity would inform strategies for change in order to reverse the trends. However, in all these research endeavors, we can be testing solutions to unhealthy behavior and marketing, rather than focusing solely on the problem.

### **The Role of Regulations and Policies: Communications and Public Health Policy**

Advertising and promotion through new and emerging technologies are outpacing current regulatory mechanisms governing marketing and advertising communications. Many of the current and potential marketing practices digital broadcasters have at their disposal would

violate the Communications Act, the FCC's children's advertising policies and rules and, in some instances, the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). However, existing FCC rules and policies for children's television can be adapted for the digital age. Regulations are already under consideration to separate advertising from content, prohibit links from Web sites to marketers, and prohibit collecting information on children's viewing habits. Moreover, the FCC could reinstate public service advertising that would require broadcasters to include messages on healthy eating and good nutrition during children's programming.

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) is also a source of remedies for the electronic media. It should investigate whether "deceptive" ads are being aired during children's programming and what kinds of ads are being promoted during the three hours a week that broadcasters are required to air educational/informational programs for children.

A number of other federal, state, and local policies can be applied:

- Taxing fast foods and using proceeds for education about healthy eating
- Eliminating advertising of unhealthy foods in schools and within a certain distance from schools
- Establishing media literacy and nutrition curricula
- Monitoring the media
- Litigation
- Funding nutritional messages in television programming and video games.

## **The Role of Communities: Neighborhood Response to Marketing and Advertising**

Communities can play a lead role in assessing and reducing community-level advertising and marketing of unhealthy foods. Important lessons regarding community-based research and advocacy to address marketing of unhealthy products can be borrowed from the alcohol and tobacco control movements. Community-based efforts to decrease excessive advertising and availability of alcohol and tobacco products, particularly in low-income communities, provide a useful case study in how communities can influence marketing practices. A number of lessons from these community efforts can be applied in the case of unhealthy foods:

- Community groups see “target marketing” by advertisers as a challenge to health, equity, and well-being. Efforts focused primarily on individual behavior change and responsibility are less likely to engage community groups.
- Community-based groups can develop sophisticated research techniques to document problems for policymakers.
- Documenting and disseminating best, better, and not-so-great practices through case studies, workshops, and convenings can help improve community-based research and connect groups into a supportive network that can grow into a more coordinated and focused effort.
- Training and technical assistance can play a critical role in helping to improve community-level work.
- Dedicated funding is important to the development and sustainability of neighborhood level efforts to organize around environmental change.
- The land use and planning process (in relation to outdoor advertising and placement of retail outlets and products in neighborhoods) is a powerful tool for health policy formulation because it can help community members take control of their neighborhood environments and bring companies under greater regulation. Key conditions for legal remedies, such as showing intent and racial impact in decision-making, can often be established in the course of land use and planning processes as a matter of public record.

## RECCOMENDATIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

A synthesis of the material presented at the convening and the points made during discussion have led to the development of the recommendations for change listed above. Researchers should simultaneously pursue agendas that both inform potential intervention strategies and examine the link between food marketing and obesity. Advocates can examine current policies including the FCC and FTC regulatory environments in order to pursue policy options and advertising regulations for television and digital media. The public's commitment is needed to accomplish these goals. A wide variety of audiences and actors, such as community groups, advocates, partners and funders have a role in reducing the marketing of unhealthy foods to children. Public debate of the issue is necessary to engage community members and policy makers to support change.

### **Principles and Approaches**

As we consider how to accomplish the broad strategies discussed by meeting participants, a number of principles should guide their development:

- Pursue strategies on parallel paths by creating guidelines for responsible food marketing and at the same time promoting strategies to limit or eliminate food marketing aimed at children too young to understand the intent of advertising.
- Maintain a focus on the environment rather than on problems and behaviors at the individual level. The strategies discussed in this report are not promoting weight loss —they are promoting primary prevention of obesity and diabetes.
- Conduct multiple interventions on multiple fronts using many entry points.
- Bring the issue into public discussion: raise controversial topics in order to begin a dialogue at the broader public and community levels.
- Use culturally sensitive strategies and involve grassroots communities in identifying the problem and solutions.

In addition to guiding principles, the following tactical approaches can inform strategy development as well:

- Start on the local city or county level and work up to state- and federal-level change.
- Use after-school and community-based organizations to help direct intervention strategies.
- Tailor messages to particular audiences and cultures; in particular, work with children in order to communicate messages that “capture the voice of the kids” and help them engage in public debate and civic decision-making.
- Consider strategies employing young people as advocates in peer-to-peer interventions.
- Appeal to teens’ interest in the entertainment industry by considering roles entertainers could have in an outreach, communications, and public relations plans.

### **Strategies and Tactics**

Strategies for engaging, framing, and giving visibility to the issue of food and beverage marketing to children encompass a broad range of actions along the continuum of activities crucial to community organizing for social change – from changing public perceptions and attitudes regarding food and beverage marketing, to shaping government and private-sector policies regulating marketing practices.

#### ***Strategies to shape public opinion:***

- Bring attention to marketing practices aimed at undermining parental authority.
- Identify “best marketing practices” and reward companies that comply.
- Use litigation to foster public awareness of the issue.
- Conduct campaigns to educate and inform the National Conference of State Legislators to increase their awareness of the childhood obesity epidemic and the role marketing plays in promoting unhealthy foods and beverages to children.
- Develop a media advocacy strategy to shame food industry executives into putting their money where their rhetoric is and stop contributing to the childhood obesity epidemic.

### ***Legislative and regulatory policies:***

- Limit access to unhealthy foods and beverages in schools.
- Legislate changes in agricultural subsidies that contribute to larger portion sizes and over-consumption of unhealthy foods.
- Legislate for junk or fast food taxes.
- Establish best practices guidelines for broadcast advertising to children.
- Establish digital marketing regulations that protect children.
- Apply federal human subjects regulations to market research.
- Mandate nutrition labeling of fast foods, including menu boards, in fast food restaurants.

### **Audiences and Stakeholders**

The main audiences and stakeholders who must be engaged for programs to be effective in changing food marketing to children reflect the societal sectors most closely associated with food, marketing, and health:

The **food and beverage industry** could take several actions to address its role in the childhood obesity epidemic. First, food and beverage marketers should take steps to avoid using promotional tactics that attract children to unhealthy eating. The industry should research and adopt a code of ethics for marketing aimed at vulnerable populations, including children. Restaurant owners and food purveyors should label the nutritional content of food on menus. They should also avoid price and large portion specials that encourage overeating.

The **entertainment industry** should alert viewers when paid product placements appear in television programs and movies. When unhealthy food products are placed in programming, television and movie producers could sponsor equal time for healthful products.

**Employers**, for whom obese children will mature into a work force with diabetes and other limitations, should be encouraged to create work environments where employees have access to

healthy foods and physical activity opportunities in an effort to create healthier habits in the employees and their families.

**Insurers**, who will have to pay the costs associated with obesity and diabetes, should be engaged in underwriting programs to change environments as well as societal attitudes and behaviors.

**Parents** are in a unique position to feel the effects of marketing on their children. They should partner with researchers to help them determine how children respond to food and beverage marketing. They should also let their elected representatives know how marketing impacts their ability to provide a healthy diet for their families. In addition, parents can be involved both in the day-to-day monitoring of what their children purchase and eat, and in preparing healthy meals at home.

**Youth and communities** can monitor marketing and promotions of unhealthy foods and work with parents, community groups, and elected officials to determine the proper public response as well as engage in counter-marketing efforts, including protests against marketing practices contributing to their poor health.

**Schools** can adopt policies to refuse to accept sponsorships from soda companies and to disallow food and beverage marketing on campuses. They can mandate and implement adequate physical education and nutrition education programs.

**Policymakers** can sponsor legislation that protects vulnerable populations from excessive or unfair advertising and promotions practices.

**Health professionals** can conduct the research described in this paper to document and elucidate the consequences of food and beverage marketing targeting children. They can engage in community education and act as powerful advocates for community health issues.

**Funders** can support research, community organizing, and advocacy on this issue.

## CONCLUSION

With public attention increasingly focused on the epidemic of obesity in children and food and beverage industry giants such as McDonald's, Kraft, and Coca-Cola publicly vowing to increase the nutritional value of their food or to not market to youth, the climate is right for community, consumer, and public health advocates to move to the forefront of seeking change in this arena. In California and in other states, the first steps have been taken toward changing children's food environments—new statewide and local policies have been adopted to eliminate the sale of sodas and junk food from school campuses. This conference provided a beginning to discuss and understand this issue and ways to address it. A comprehensive approach is needed that involves voluntary actions on the part of industry, regulatory policies on the part of government, and advocacy strategies to bring a stronger voice and more attention to our imperative to arrest childhood obesity.

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