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Media release

Dental Association says study shows impact of South Africa's sugary drinks levy

The New Zealand Dental Association (NZDA) says a study published in *The Lancet Planetary Health* strengthens global evidence for levies on sugar sweetened beverages (SSBs).

Researchers found South Africa's 2018 levy on sugary drinks reduced sugar by 51%, leading to a 52% reduction in calories, and a 29% reduction in the volume of beverages purchased per person per day following implementation of the tax.

NZDA sugary drinks spokesperson Dr Rob Beaglehole says this adds to a growing body of evidence from Mexico, the UK, and US cities that sugary drink levies are effective.

"We've got emerging real-world evidence from a number of countries that a levy on sugar sweetened beverages sees a demonstrable reduction in the consumption of sugary drinks in the places where they have been introduced.

This will now put pressure on the New Zealand government to act, as the overall health benefits, including for oral health, urgently need to be addressed."

Dr Beaglehole pointed out that New Zealand risks being left behind on an important global public health policy.

"Although no country is yet at the WHO recommended level of 20% for a levy on these drinks, New Zealand is falling behind by not even starting. So far more than 50 jurisdictions around the World have used their own levies to reduce the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages," said Dr Beaglehole.

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Notes to editors:

Joint research by South African Medical Research Council Centre for Health Economics and Decision Science (PRICELESS-SA) in the School of Public Health at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg (Wits), and the University of the Western Cape, in partnership with the University of North Carolina, USA, published 8 April, 2021 in *The Lancet Planetary Health*.

Media contact:

Michael Colhoun, Senior Communications Advisor
New Zealand Dental Association
T: 09 579 8001 M: 021 0265 4083