Poll: Two Thirds of IL Voters Support Funding Critical Health Programs Through Sugary Drinks Tax

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Poll Finds Nearly Two-Thirds of Illinoisans Support Raising Revenue for Community Prevention and Medicaid through a Sugary Drink Tax

(CHICAGO) A new public opinion poll released today shows that 65 percent of Illinois voters support a proposal to raise $300 million for Medicaid and $300 million for community health programs that prevent heart disease, diabetes and obesity through a penny per ounce tax on sugary drinks. At a time when the Illinois General Assembly and Governor are looking for ways to raise revenue, the poll reinforces that the public is interested in and receptive to this innovative solution to fund critical health programs.

Health advocates support the Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Act, introduced by Sen. Mattie Hunter (SB 1584) and Rep. Robyn Gabel (HB 2667) in the legislature. The bill is estimated to raise more than $600 million a year through a penny per ounce tax on sugary drinks. The HEAL Act invests about half of the revenue in community health programs that improve access to affordable, healthy foods and increase opportunities for physical activity in communities, while the other half will be invested to increase prevention of chronic diseases.
like diabetes and heart disease in Medicaid while preventing cuts to important Medicaid services. The HEAL Act is supported by more than 35 organizations including the American Heart Association (Midwest Affiliate), American Diabetes Association, Illinois Academy of Family Physicians and the American Cancer Society-Cancer Action Network.

"Nearly two-thirds of voters understand that sugary drinks are a health hazard," said Elissa Bassler, Executive Director of the Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity. "Voters strongly believe that the HEAL Act is a great option to help us fund critical health programs - they are willing to pay a small tax as long as the revenues are used to restore Medicaid and invest in the community prevention programs that will reduce disease and save on future healthcare costs."

The poll found that the proposal was popular in every region of the state, including 70 percent support in Chicago, 62 percent support downstate, and 59 percent support in the collar counties of Chicago. People support the proposal for the investments it makes in health. Even with the current budget crisis, the poll found that 50 percent of Illinoisans think we should increase our investment in preventing diseases such as heart disease and diabetes. The poll also found that only 18 percent of voters support Medicaid funding cuts in Illinois.

When asked about specific benefits the proposal could fund, the poll found the public wants to see the money go toward community health programs (70 percent support), including biking and walking trails in communities (72 percent support), health education in schools and communities (80 percent support), and more access to healthy foods at farmers' markets and grocery stores (84 percent support). Illinoisans would also like to see investments to add more coverage for preventive care in Medicaid (76 percent support), and to provide more funding to Medicaid overall (68 percent support). The public strongly supported including accountability measures in the proposal, such as ensuring the funds go to the communities of greatest need (77 percent support) and to improve health in Illinois (81 percent support).

"The timing of this information is ideal," said Ralph Martire, Executive Director of the Center for Tax and Budget Accountability. "As decision makers face tough fiscal decisions, this poll shows support for a revenue proposal that can be considered a win-win for Illinois. The HEAL Act will help prevent Medicaid cuts while also providing important opportunities for economically disadvantaged people to live healthier lives."
The poll was conducted by Anzalone Liszt Grove Research (ALG), a national public opinion research firm, and was commissioned by the Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity.

"We rarely see this level of support for a tax proposal," said Brian Stryker of Anzalone Liszt Grove Research, which conducted the poll of 600 likely voters between May 17 and May 20. "This is a very viable revenue option for legislators to stop Medicaid cuts and fund community health programs."

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The primary goal of the Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity is to ensure that trends in obesity in Illinois are stable in 2015 and moving downward by 2018. The statewide coalition of over 140 organizations works to implement solutions to the obesity epidemic through coordinated and comprehensive policy, systems, and environmental changes.