The food and beverage industry spends an estimated $10 billion in marketing annually, $2 billion of which directly targets children and youth.\(^1,2\) Nearly all new food and beverages advertised to young people are of little nutritional value and can lead to poor eating choices and health over time.\(^3,4\)

In response to the need for change as well as threats of broad government intervention, major U.S. food companies teamed with the Council of Better Business Bureaus in 2006 to launch the Children’s Food and Beverage Advertising Initiative (CFBAI), a voluntary, self-regulatory program to strengthen nutrition standards for food and beverage products advertised to children.\(^5\) Still, industry self-regulation has been shown to have limited impact on significantly reducing young people’s exposure to marketing of nutrient-poor food and drinks. For example, a recent study found industry self-regulation to be less effective in Spanish-language children's programming than English-language channels.\(^6\) Moreover, these existing self-regulation initiatives primarily focus on addressing food marketing to children under 12 years old, and do not focus on teens.\(^7,8,9\)

Zeroing-In on Sugary Beverage Advertising to Youth

Inadequate regulation standards have allowed marketers, especially from beverage companies, to gain significant ground with the teenage population. Carbonated beverage corporations, compared with fast food restaurants and cereal companies, report higher expenditures marketing to teens.\(^10\) Sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs), which include carbonated soft drinks as well as fruit punches and energy and sport drinks, have become the largest source of added sugars in the diet of U.S. youth and have been linked to obesity, dental decay, Type 2 diabetes and other chronic diseases.\(^11,12,13\)

Particularly, marketing of sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) to minority young people has expanded in recent years. SSBs, in fact, have become the largest source of added sugars in the diet of U.S. youth.\(^9\) Compared to all racial and ethnic groups, African-American and Latino youth were exposed to more sugary beverage advertisements and other unhealthy food products than white youth.\(^10,11,12\) In recent years, teens have experienced increased advertising exposure to a variety of SSBs [Figure 1].

Moreover, beverage marketers are increasingly turning to social media and other creative new media channels as effective ways of connecting with teens [Figure 2]. These new marketing strategies, coupled with the emphasis on promoting high-calorie, low-nutrient products, effect teens’ overall consumption and brand preferences and can negatively shape the diet, weight, and overall health of youth.\(^14,15,16,17\)

*Nielsen's gross rating points (GRPs) are used to show youth (12-17 years) exposure to ads. GRPs is the advertising industry standard for measuring the total audience delivered by a brand’s media schedule, expressed as a percentage of the population that is exposed to each commercial over a specified period of time across all types of TV programming.

**Analysis based on percentage of soda websites and energy drink websites utilizing interactive techniques to engage users. Eleven soda websites and four energy drink websites visited most often by children and adolescents were analyzed.
Why Focus on Minority Youth?

African-American and Latino teens are exposed to more sugary beverage advertisements than White youth [Figure 3]. Such minority youth are also twice as likely to drink more than 500 calories a day of SSBs versus White youth—considered “heavy consumption.” While promotion of unhealthy sugary beverages is an important issue for adolescents in general, it is imperative that advocates give attention to the key factors that can exacerbate the impact of such marketing on minority youth:

1. **Population outlook.** Demographic trends point to a rising minority youth population. Young minorities represent the majority child population in 10 states and 35 large metropolitan areas, including Chicago, whose largest child minority group is Latino.

2. **Health disparities.** One in five children is considered obese in Illinois—the fourth worst rate in the U.S. While recent trends have pointed to lower rates of childhood obesity across several states and cities, very few areas have experienced major declines specifically among low-income, racial and ethnic minority children and youth. Obesity rates remain higher for African-Americans (21%) and Latinos (23%) ages 12-19 years old than white adolescents (14%), indicating a long way to go to bridging the health disparity gap.

3. **Spending Power.** Teens have significant buying power—both spending their own money and influencing what their family members buy. On average, ethnic minority youth spend more on goods and products than their non-minority teen counterparts. Total estimated weekly spending among African-American teens ($100) and Hispanic teens ($107), is higher compared to spending among White teens ($95). Unhealthy foods and beverages, including—candy, soda, and salty snacks—were among the top four most frequent items teens bought with their own money.

4. **Digital Media Usage.** Latino and African-American teens are shown to be heavy users of digital media. In a recent study assessing TV, computer, and cellphone usage among young people, minority youth were shown to consume an estimated 4.5 hours more media than White youth.

![Figure 3: Black and White Youth Advertising Exposure* to SSBs: 2010](image)


*Note: Nielsen’s gross rating points (GRPs) are used to show youth (12-17 years) exposure to ads. GRPs is the advertising industry standard for measuring the total audience delivered by a brand’s media schedule, expressed as a percentage of the population that is exposed to each commercial over a specified period of time across all types of TV programming.
Future Trends

If trends in marketing through new technologies and social media continue, there will be increased opportunities for food and beverage companies to market SSBs and other unhealthy products to teens as a whole, and more specifically, youth of color. Given these dynamic changes in digital media, there is no better time to act than now.

Despite industry pledges to curb marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages, such advertising to young people continues to be dominated by products of poor nutritional value. Communities and decision-makers at every level need to build broader awareness that industry self-regulation efforts, especially in light of new digital media strategies, have largely failed to protect youth from exposure to unhealthy food marketing. Innovative advocacy efforts and strong government leadership on advertising restrictions to youth are critical to make progress in this arena.

One of the immediate goals in the Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity’s (IAPO) State Obesity Action Roadmap focuses on educating and advocating for the reduction of SSBs through community mobilization. Together, this collaborative statewide advocacy group is working to achieve this short-term goal and aims to, in the long-term, restrict unhealthy marketing to children and youth. To collectively engage in efforts against advertising of SSBs and other unhealthy foods, especially to minority youth, advocates can follow a three-tiered strategy that fights against harmful food and drink marketing targeted to minority young people, as outlined below.
BUILD KNOWLEDGE by fostering strong partnerships to tackle unhealthy food marketing with youth advocacy groups, parent groups, researchers, and community-based organizations.

- Join IAPO network and sign-up for action alerts.
- Build understanding on the prevalence and risks of unhealthy food and beverage advertising towards youth through the Yale Rudd Center for Food Policy and Obesity's research and their interactive Youtube videos.
- Share and identify best practices and tools for addressing problems and developing potential solutions.
- Continue information gathering and develop public education materials by way of fact sheets and handouts to local community members, families, churches, neighborhood nonprofits, businesses, etc.

ELEVATE THE CONVERSATION by sparking important dialogue among the broader public, diverse media channels, and policymakers.

- Plan a roundtable discussion with policymakers and other key stakeholders.
- Develop and propose policies to limit how unhealthy food and beverages are marketed and advertised, specifically targeted to the adolescent age group.
- These policy proposals can range from more robust advertising industry self-regulation and government restrictions and other interventions that reduce daily exposure to unhealthy food and beverages in minority, low-income neighborhoods. The Rudd Center has developed potential policy solutions to serve as a guide.

TAKE ACTION by galvanizing all advocates involved to take innovative actions toward addressing unhealthy food and beverage marketing to minority youth.

- Engage and partner with organizations focused on counter-marketing efforts with youth to build empowerment.
- Shifting Health by Influencing Food Trends (SHIFT) National Campaign: A model youth advocacy campaign spearheaded by the African American Collaborative Obesity Research Network at University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. SHIFT focuses on pushing back on the heavy marketing of unhealthy foods and beverages directed to teens, particularly black teens, through research, advocacy tools, and community action.
- The Berkeley Media Studies Group created a toolkit with other examples, ideas, and planning materials for how local communities and organizations can start getting activated and get involved in the action.
- Utilize social media and communication advocacy systems to bring together health and nutrition advocacy groups, schools, and other youth-based organizations and networks.
- One of SHIFT’s key initiatives involves an interactive social media campaign that includes website and online tools that engage teams of youth in counter-marketing advocacy.
- Become a member of IAPO by endorsing the State Obesity Action Roadmap and take action by signing-up for IAPO newsletters to receive information and alerts.

The Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity (IAPO) is a statewide coalition comprised of a broad range of stakeholders working for a state-level response to the obesity epidemic. The IAPO works to shape and advance solutions to reverse dangerous obesity trends. IAPO supporters believe that Illinois must respond to the obesity epidemic by developing coordinated policy, systems, and environmental changes with investment on the scale of the problem. The Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity was launched and is coordinated by the Illinois Public Health Institute (IPHI).

To learn more about IAPO, visit www.preventobesityil.org.
Citations


Citations cont.


