A Healthy Beverage Initiative at UBC

BACKGROUND

As one of the first universities in the world to adopt the Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Colleges and Universities, UBC has made a significant commitment to supporting the health and wellbeing of our community members. As we work toward becoming a wellbeing-promoting institution, UBC has a responsibility and an opportunity to adopt practices that improve the health of the people who live, work, and learn on both of our campuses.

Informed by the Okanagan Charter, the UBC Action Framework for a Nutritionally Sound Campus was developed by the UBC Food and Nutrition Working Group, comprising faculty, staff, and student stakeholders from across both campuses. It set out the following vision:

* A nutritionally sound campus increases intake of safe, healthy and sustainable food, supports development of nutrition skills and knowledge, and promotes health and wellbeing for all members of the UBC community.

One of the goals associated with this vision is to increase tap water consumption at UBC. This goal could be furthered through the adoption of a healthy beverage initiative on our campuses, as well as working with campus partners to increase tap water provisions. A healthy beverage initiative would be a tangible example of our dedication to activating the Charter and would engage our community in a discussion about our collective health and wellbeing.

A HEALTHY BEVERAGE INITIATIVE AT UBC

A healthy beverage initiative is an ambitious way of exemplifying our commitment to wellbeing at UBC. Our students, staff, and faculty work and learn in a demanding, high-performance academic environment; having access to healthy food and beverages on campus, plus the information necessary to make healthy dietary choices, will help our community members thrive. Additionally, our students are in a crucial period of their lives when lifelong habits are formed, and they are particularly susceptible to making food and beverage decisions based on marketing messaging.

Knowing this, and considering the alarming health and economic burden caused by sugar-sweetened beverage consumption, UBC Wellbeing and the Food and Nutrition Working Group is working with students, staff, and faculty to explore how best to promote water consumption and reduce sugar-sweetened beverage consumption at UBC. Sugar-sweetened beverages are defined as pre-packaged beverages that include any form of sugar added during the manufacturing process. These beverages include regular soft drinks, energy drinks such as Red Bull, and fruit drinks with less than 100% fruit juice.

Most sugar-sweetened beverages contribute no nutrients to the diet, while adding excess sugar and calories. Considering that these beverages are likely the single-largest contributor to excess non-nutritional calories, reducing their presence at UBC as part of an overall healthy food environment
strategy is a sensible and impactful initiative that has proven effective on campuses and in institutions worldwide.

**NEXT STEPS**

Implementing a healthy beverage initiative at UBC is a complex undertaking; it must be supported across both campuses and must align with UBC’s approach to embedding and operationalizing wellbeing. We are considering fiscal implications, as well as impacts on operations. However, our commitment to improving the health and wellbeing of our community remains a priority.

UBC Wellbeing has led engagement sessions and is currently surveying staff, faculty, and students on both campuses with the aim of collecting diverse perspectives on how best to engage our community in a healthy beverage initiative. Here is the link to the [UBC-V survey](#) and the [UBC-O survey](#).

For general information about a healthy beverage initiative at UBC, please contact one of the co-leads of the Wellbeing Food and Nutrition Working Group: Melissa Baker (melissa.baker@ubc.ca) or Matt Dolf (matt.dolf@ubc.ca).