October 10, 2019

Statement issued by William Dietz, MD, PhD, Chair of the Sumner M. Redstone Center for Prevention and Wellness at the Milken Institute School of Public Health at The George Washington University, in response to the introduction of the Healthy Beverage Choices Act of 2019:

I applaud the DC City Council for taking up the important issue of sugary drink overconsumption, and specifically thank Councilmembers Brianne Nadeau, Mary Cheh, Trayon White, Brandon Todd, David Grosso, Charles Allen, Elissa Silverman, Anita Bonds, and Chairman Phil Mendelson for their leadership. I urge the council to quickly take up this critical proposal for the health of all DC residents.

The limited capacity of health systems to address chronic disease emphasizes the need for policy initiatives that make it easier for people to make more healthful choices. Excess consumption of added sugars, especially from sugary drinks, poses a grave threat to the health of children, adolescents and adults in the District of Columbia, disproportionately affecting low-income and minority communities.

Nearly 50% of District residents have diabetes or pre-diabetes, and more residents die each year from complications related to obesity than from AIDS, cancer, and homicides combined. We know from other cities that taxing sugary drinks works. Taxes reduce consumption, increase public awareness about the dangers of sugary drink consumption, and push companies and retailers to make healthier choices more available. As an important added benefit, the legislation also raises revenue that can be invested in community programs, such as the Birth to Three Act, that support disease prevention and health equity.

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The Sumner M. Redstone Global Center for Prevention and Wellness at the George Washington University Milken Institute School of Public Health was established in 2014. The Center is led by Chair and Director, William Dietz, MD, PhD, who served as Director of the Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity and Obesity at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention for nearly 16 years. The work of the Center focuses on strategies to improve nutrition, physical activity, and obesity and other activities to make Washington, DC the healthiest capital in the world by reducing health disparities and inequities. The Center’s location in the only school of public health in the nation’s capital provides a unique opportunity to influence local, national and global policy.