

A photograph of a university campus at sunset. In the foreground, a large, circular sign with the words "THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA" is partially submerged in a pond. The sign and the surrounding campus buildings and trees are reflected in the water. The sky is a mix of orange and blue, indicating the time is either dawn or dusk.

A Healthy Beverage Initiative: University of British Columbia Campus Engagement

Executive Summary

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Executive Summary

UBC Wellbeing is a collaborative effort to make the University a better place to live, work, and learn through a systems-wide approach to health promotion, wellbeing, and sustainability across our campuses. UBC Wellbeing is guided by the *Okanagan Charter: An International Charter for Health Promoting Colleges and Universities (1)*, a shared call to action for partners, leaders, and community members to make UBC a leading wellbeing-promoting university.

Considering the alarming health and economic burden caused by sugar sweetened beverage consumption, one of the goals of UBC Wellbeing is to increase tap water consumption and decrease sugary beverage consumption among UBC Community members. This goal can be furthered through the adoption of a Healthy Beverage Initiative (HBI) on our campuses, as well as working with campus partners to further tap water provisions.

The objective of the UBC Sustainability Scholar's project was to, alongside the UBC Wellbeing team, engage the UBC community of staff, students and faculty in developing an evidence-informed strategy to promote water consumption and reduce consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages (SSB's) on campus to be rolled out in the summer of 2018. Feedback from the UBC community was achieved through an online survey and a series of engagement meetings.

Key Engagement Results

Overall, 644 UBC community members responded to the survey: 43% undergraduate students, 26% graduate students, 23% staff, 5% faculty, and 1% postdoctoral fellows. Engagement sessions were conducted with a group of faculty and staff, the AMS, the Thunderbird Athletic Council and Common Energy.

When considering what influences the UBC community's consumption of SSBs, taste and flavor was the major contributor cited, followed by modifiable environmental factors of availability, convenience and lack of tap water availability. Twenty-percent (20%) of SSB consumers indicated in the survey that they choose SSBs because no tap water is available. In both the survey and engagement groups, the UBC community is concerned about the availability and quality of water fountains or water bottle refill stations on campus, which is a barrier to consuming healthier beverages and reducing SSB consumption.

Most feedback from the survey and engagement groups involved environmental factors as change facilitators to SSB consumption, including increased availability of healthy beverages, the removal of discounts on SSBs, replacing SSBs with water products, placing healthier beverages at eye level and UBC phasing out SSBs. Artificial sweeteners were not widely accepted as a healthy alternative to SSBs.

Students, staff and faculty view UBC as having a responsibility in the promotion of their health and wellbeing. The UBC community approves of UBC working with food and beverage vendors to increase the access to and promotion of healthy beverages. It is not fully clear, however, to what extent the UBC community is in support of the phasing out of select SSB's despite some evidence of acceptability from feedback in the survey and engagement sessions.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Based on UBC student, staff and faculty consultation on the beverage environment at UBC and a proposed HBI, the following recommendations to move forward can be made:

- Investigate availability and quality of current water refilling/drinking stations with a plan to correct deficiencies in a timely manner, as access to water stations was cited as influencer of consumption of healthier beverages and reduces consumption of SSBs.
- Move forward with a strategy to promote access to and acceptability of non-artificially sweetened healthy alternatives to bottled water (ex. sparkling water), including working with food vendors to promote and sell these alternatives, provide samples for people to become more familiar with these products and potentially placing them at eye level for convenient selection.
- Consider the phasing out of SSBs from the UBC campus after recommendation 1 and 2 are in place, as availability and convenient access to these products contributes to consumption of SSBs, especially with limited access to tap water.

In adopting these actions and committing to an HBI, UBC can show leadership and commitment to supporting the health and wellbeing of our community members in a meaningful way, and create an environment conducive to sustainable health.

References

1. The Okanagan Charter | wellbeing.ubc.ca [Internet]. [cited 2018 Apr 2]. Available from: <https://wellbeing.ubc.ca/okanagan-charter.html>