

“Water UP!” Program Increases Access to Water in Maryland

The Avance Center

At A Glance

Five businesses serving Latinos in Langley Park, Maryland, installed new water stations and began a promotional campaign to educate more than 14,000 Latinos about the benefits of choosing water over sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs). Obesity, a major risk factor for type 2 diabetes and heart disease, affected 1 in 4 Latinos in Maryland in 2015. In the summer of 2016, the Avance Center at George Washington University partnered with businesses to launch the “Water UP!” program and educate Latinos about water’s benefits.



Public Health Challenge

Among Latino adults in Maryland, 30% say they drink at least one sugar-sweetened beverage (SSB) a day, and 1 in 4 have obesity, according to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s (CDC) 2013 and 2015 Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System. SSBs are one of the top sources of added sugars in the American diet, according to CDC. Regularly drinking SSBs like regular soda, sports

drinks, and flavored fruit juice drinks, can contribute to obesity and chronic diseases such as type 2 diabetes and heart disease. A community assessment of grocery stores, businesses, and restaurants in Langley Park found widespread promotion of SSBs specifically targeting Latino consumers. Water bottles for purchase were often hard to find.

Find Out More

Community businesses and organizations can educate the public about drinking water instead of SSBs. Community leaders can increase the availability of free tap water. Learn more about “Water UP!” and SSBs by visiting www.waterup.org and <https://www.cdc.gov/nutrition/data-statistics/sugar-sweetened-beverages-intake.html>. This project is supported by CDC’s Racial and Ethnic Approaches to Community Health cooperative agreement.

I was happy to include a “Water UP!” station at my business. I removed the soda machine from my salon to encourage drinking water instead. I even learned to drink water and eat healthy. I used to wear a size 14. Now I am a size 2.
- Rosibel Arbaiza

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Approach

“Water UP!” encourages replacing SSBs with drinking water which can reduce calorie intake. The program helps reduce barriers to water intake by providing drinking water stations where people live, work, and play. It also encourages businesses to be advocates for good health and make water more available to customers. “Water UP!” staff fill the water station dispensers with tap water and paper cups. Next to the stations are posters and brochures in English and Spanish to educate readers, especially those with low literacy, about the health risks of drinking SSBs, the benefits of drinking water, and ways to increase daily water intake.

Results

Five local businesses agreed to participate in the program—two restaurants, a beauty salon, a food vendor kiosk, and a travel agency—by installing water stations and educational materials on site. Ads in bus stations, on social media, and in Spanish language radio and newspapers spread the message throughout the community. Business owners report that the water stations are popular, and many discuss the health benefits of water with customers. One owner credits “Water UP!” with her own weight loss and changes to her diet.

What's Next

Partnerships with community organizations and local businesses are crucial to the success of “Water UP!” and to increasing brand recognition in the community. The program aims to build new partnerships with local businesses, increase messages about the health benefits of water, and empower existing business partners to clean and refill their own stations, which will free up staff to expand the program. Next steps include partnering with five or more local restaurants to offer healthy “Water UP!” combo meals, which would include water instead of SSBs.