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BETH ISRAEL DEACONESS, BRIGHAM WOMENS, CHILDRENS, DANAFARBER, HARVARD UNIVERSITY, JOSLIN, NEW ENGLAND BAPTIST

Mission Hill youth group asks hospitals to ban sugary drinks

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By Matt Rocheleau, Town Correspondent

A Mission Hill-based youth organization is asking Longwood Medical Area hospitals and medical institutions to commit to removing sugar-sweetened beverages from their campuses.

Youth development nonprofit [Sociedad Latina](#) has partnered with area Latino children and their families for the past four decades and now serves around 3,000 children and adults annually.

The organization has already removed all sugar-sweetened beverages from its events and programming and is asking the Longwood Medical Area to do the same.

In April, the [city banned sugar-sweetened drinks](#) in all city properties and functions.

“Mayor [Thomas M.] Menino took a bold and forward-thinking step,” Alexandra Oliver-Dávila, Sociedad Latina executive director, said in a release. “We ask the health institutions in our community to follow suit and set an example for healthy lifestyles.”

Studies have linked regular consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages to increased risk for developing [obesity and diabetes](#).

The group specifically calls on eight neighboring institutions that it hopes will agree to the pledge -- Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center, Brigham and Women's Hospital, Children's Hospital Boston, Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Harvard Medical School, Harvard School of Public Health, Joslin Diabetes Center, and New England Baptist Hospital.

Recently, Beth Israel Deaconess significantly reduced the number of sugary beverages in its vending machines.

“Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center is constantly examining not only our food and beverage options, but all of the ways that we can best take care of the health needs of our

About White Coat Notes



White Coat Notes covers the latest from the health care industry, hospitals, doctors offices, labs, insurers, and the corridors of government. Chelsea Conaboy previously covered health care for The Philadelphia Inquirer. Write her at cconaboy@boston.com. Follow her on Twitter: [@cconaboy](#).

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patients, their families, and the community,” spokeswoman Jane Matlaw said in a release.

Brigham and Women’s has a task force to explore the issue, but that committee is in its earliest stages, an official said. Both the Brigham and Children’s Hospital have had favorable reactions to the campaign, according to the youth organization.

“Children’s Hospital Boston’s Healthy Hospital Workgroup is analyzing hospital policies designed to improve the health of our patients, their families, and our employees,” spokesman Rob Graham said in an e-mail. “While sugar-sweetened beverages will be the first major task of this effort, the Healthy Hospital Workgroup reviews other relevant and related policies to promote and support a healthy hospital environment.”

The Harvard School of Public Health said it recently received the youth group’s letter and “currently is reviewing its beverage options and is considering adopting the Boston standards.”

The school’s spokeswoman, Marge Dwyer, said the chairman of the school’s nutrition department, Dr. Walter Willett, has provided educational material about the harms of sugary beverages, including a system for rating beverages by traffic-light colors based on the range of their sugary content. The city adopted that rating system for its own use, Dwyer said.

The most-sugary beverages are labeled red, then yellow, and green-rated beverages contain no sugar or artificial sweeteners.

Sociedad Latina’s pledge commits hospitals to removing sugar-sweetened beverages from vending machines, cafes, and cafeterias, the group said.

Joslin Diabetes Center has a simple response to the youth group -- it does not have vending machines, cafes, or cafeterias, a spokesman there said.

“We are very much in sympathy with such efforts to reduce obesity and its related ills, which include type 2 diabetes,” he continued.

Officials at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute, Harvard Medical School, and New England Baptist Hospital were not immediately available to comment.

One day after the city expanded its ban on sugar-sweetened drinks in schools to include all city properties and functions, [Carney Hospital in Dorchester followed that lead](#), banning sweetened beverages on hospital grounds.

“We all know that good health is built around a couple of things,” such as exercising and eating healthy, [Carney president Bill Walczak told the Globe](#) then. “So why do we spend so much effort in providing unhealthy food in our cafeterias, vending machines, and various other institutions? It just doesn’t make sense.”

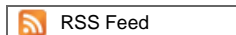
Sociedad Latina has been running a summer awareness campaign since it was piloted two years ago. Last summer, 10 organizations in and around Mission Hill signed on to the campaign to not serve, consume or purchase the sugary beverages, said the youth group’s program director Nicole d’Avis.

“We felt like [asking LMA institutions to sign on to the pledge] was really timely with the mayor’s announcement,” she said in a phone interview. “Soda does not trigger a feeling of being full the way food does ... There’s a lot of beverages out there being marketed as healthy but they are a very easy way to add lots of calories to your diet without even realizing it.”

The program director said she’s hopeful that Longwood Medical institutions will sign on by summer’s end, but she acknowledged, “it’s a very complicated system,” because of existing hospital rules and vendor contracts.

“I think some of the different hospitals are in a different place,” d’Avis said.

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