

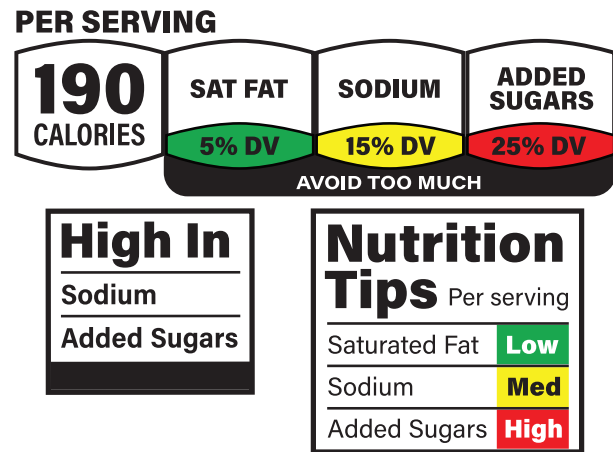
POSITION STATEMENT:

SBM Supports Mandatory Front-of-Package Nutrition Labeling to Promote Healthier Food Purchasing

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SUMMARY STATEMENT

The Society of Behavioral Medicine supports mandatory front-of-package nutrition labeling (FOPNL) policies to improve nutrition literacy and healthier food purchasing behaviors to address diet-related chronic diseases.



Source: U.S. Food and Drug Administration (www.fda.gov)

THE PROBLEM

Following a healthy dietary pattern, defined by the *Dietary Guidelines for Americans* (DGA)¹ as consuming nutrient-dense foods while staying within calorie limits and limiting foods and beverages higher in added sugars, saturated fat or sodium, is associated with lower risk of morbidity and mortality.² Across the lifespan, however, the average diet quality of Americans does not align with the DGA.³ Unhealthy foods that are high in sugar and saturated fat tend to come in packages with labeling and be the most affordable for consumers (i.e., lowest cost per calorie). These foods are widely available, heavily marketed, and designed to be convenient and hyper-palatable.^{4,5} Americans consume 50% more sodium and 40% more saturated fat and added sugars than is recommended by the DGA.^{6,7} The vast number of products to choose from in food retail environments can make it difficult for consumers to quickly and easily compare their health and nutrition information across products and thus make selections that align with their health goals. Furthermore, existing nutrition labels can be confusing, and companies can add potentially misleading information to their packaging, including unregulated terms such as “natural”, “multi-grain”, and “lightly sweetened.”⁸ Studies have shown that even individuals with higher levels of health literacy can be misled by current nutrition labeling, while those with lower health literacy are left more vulnerable.⁹

CURRENT POLICY

Existing nutritional labeling policy in the U.S. relies on the Nutrition Facts label (NFL).¹⁰ Although it provides valuable information, consumers struggle to make accurate

assessments of the healthfulness of foods based solely on the NFL.^{9,11-13} Its location (usually the back of packages) may also hinder consumers’ ability to readily view nutrient information.^{14,15}

There is growing recognition among health experts for mandatory front-of-package nutrition labeling (FOPNL) systems which offer consumers clear, standardized information about the nutritional content of foods/ beverages using interpretive visual aids (e.g., symbols, colors).¹⁶⁻¹⁸ Three meta-analyses provide evidence that FOPNL systems are associated with improvements in consumer behaviors, including increased probability of selecting more healthful products.¹⁹⁻²¹

Over a dozen countries have adopted mandatory FOPNL.²² Chile was among the first to mandate FOP, nutrient-specific warning labels and has observed reductions in purchases of calories from sodium, saturated fat, and sugar.²³ Evaluation studies also show improvements in the nutritional quality of Chile’s food supply.²⁴ Other nations have endorsed voluntary FOPNL systems but do not have mandates for their use, which has resulted in their partial use only, more commonly for healthier options.²⁵⁻²⁷ International organizations promote the use of mandatory FOPNL²⁸⁻³⁰; however, this is not yet standard practice in the U.S.

*Endorsing organizations do not write or have any control over position statement content.
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The U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is exploring FOPNL options, which are part of the White House's National Strategy on Hunger, Nutrition and Health.^{18,31} FOPNL would complement the existing NFL. A March 2023 national survey indicates widespread support for mandatory FOPNL, with 75% of consumers overall, including 83% Democrats, 68% Republicans, 73% Independents, and 80% of parents supporting this mandate.³² The next step in making this public interest a reality is through issuance of FDA regulations or passage of legislation, such as the Transparency, Readability, Understandability, Truth, and Helpfulness (TRUTH) in Labeling Act of 2023 (S.3512/H.R.6766), introduced in December 2023, which would require FOPNL.³³ Specifically, the TRUTH in Labeling Act requires that standardized, interpretive symbols appear on the front of packages to display food content information with a prominent/easily legible design. By passing the TRUTH in Labeling Act, U.S. policy may be strengthened to better align with consumer needs and contribute to improved public health outcomes.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. We urge members of Congress to co-sponsor the TRUTH in Labeling Act of 2023, which updates front-of-package food labeling requirements that would allow consumers to quickly identify foods high in sodium, saturated fat, and added sugar.
2. We urge the FDA to issue regulations that require front-of-page nutrition labeling. These front-of-package labels should be mandatory, nutrient-specific, include calories, and call attention to high levels of nutrients such as added sugars, sodium, and saturated fat.

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ENDORSEMENTS

