



OPINION EDITORIAL “OP-ED” TEMPLATE

The following template is an example of how to write your own op-ed supporting public health efforts. The template is divided into two sections: the first section provides guidance and notes on the structure when crafting an op-ed while the second section provides an example of op-ed written from the provider’s perspective. The example was originally written as an article in the magazine of a county medical society in coordination with the development of a new county initiative and published by CMA via our website. Op-eds can also be published through local news outlets and other sources. Organizations, such as CMA, may have media contacts that can help you find the appropriate audience for your op-ed. While the example op-ed provided is specific to sugar-sweetened beverage, you can use this format as a general advocacy template and insert your own personal experiences, local data, and initiatives. The most important elements to remember are:

- Present the problem and give it a human touch. Supporting data is important but it will fall flat if you don’t demonstrate what it means for readers. Do you have an experience with one of your patients that you can share? Providers have a powerful voice and can contribute to personalizing advocacy issues for the readers that data alone may not be able to do.
- Offer a solution – what local programs or initiatives are you supporting? What can still be done to help? Be sure to show why these solutions are effective.
- Include a call to action – success is a community effort.

STRUCTURE & GUIDANCE

Heading TITLE
DATE
AUTHOR, TITLE, CREDENTIALS

The Opener The first paragraph of your op-ed should set up the problem. Notice here, the author starts with local data that drives home the message that obesity is a problem in the local community.

The rest of the paragraph demonstrates the different ways that the problem can affect the health of community members, regardless of age, gender and other factors. This puts a human face on the problem – an important part of any op-ed.

The paragraph concludes with a sentence that hints at finding a solution: these problems are largely preventable. This acts as a nice transition to the next paragraph.

The Body The second paragraph of the op-ed should present your solution. Notice the author uses the first few sentences of this paragraph to restate the problem and offer a solution: cutting back on sugar-sweetened beverages. The effectiveness of the solution is then supported by data that proves the link between sugar-sweetened beverages and obesity.

The next two paragraphs provide examples of the specific public health initiatives that the author is supporting – from a county-wide resolution, to efforts in specific neighborhoods that are most impacted. It is important to demonstrate that there are many ways to combat this problem on all levels – from statewide solutions to everyday tips that individuals can use to improve their daily diet.

The Call to Action The concluding paragraph acts as a call to action. It reminds readers that solving the problem will take time, dedication and cooperation. It invites readers to become part of the solution in their communities.

EXAMPLE

Heading Going soda free in Marin to combat obesity
September 26, 2013

By Matthew Willis, MD, MPH • Dr. Willis is the Public Health Officer for Marin County

The Opener Nearly one in three children in Marin, and nearly one in two adults, is overweight or obese. Local health care providers see the impact of obesity every day, across the age spectrum: an 18-month-old whose weight continues to climb above the 95th percentile; a 10-year-old obese boy who is bullied in school and depressed; a 16-year-old girl with hypertension and high cholesterol; an overweight young woman with gestational diabetes; a 50-year-old obese woman with debilitating knee arthritis; a 65-year-old man with congestive heart failure and worsening renal function. These routine presentations are largely preventable.

The Body Obesity is a model condition for partnership between public health and clinical medicine because it is epidemic, preventable and curable. As one important step in combating obesity, public health practitioners in Marin County are taking steps to limit the harmful consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, consumption of these beverages (including soda, sweetened juices, and sports and energy drinks) is a major driver of the obesity epidemic. Over the past decade, per capita intake of calories from sugar-sweetened beverages has increased by nearly 30 percent nationally, partly due to marketing strategies targeted to children and adolescents. For each extra can or glass of sugared beverage consumed per day, the likelihood of a child's becoming obese increases by 60 percent.

This summer, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), supported by a resolution from the Marin County Board of Supervisors, partnered with LIFT-Levantate and the Marin City Community Services District to promote Soda Free Summer. This initiative included education on how to read labels to determine the amount of sugar and how to make healthy refreshing water drinks with the addition of fresh fruit and herbs. The Marin County Nutrition Wellness Program (NWP) hosted trainings and events on how to Rethink Your Drink throughout the summer at a variety of community based organizations and summer programs for youth.

In addition, the NWP worked with community leaders in the Canal District and Marin City to help reduce access to sugar-sweetened beverages in these neighborhoods. Childhood obesity rates are higher in these communities than in other parts of Marin. These high rates increase the risk of diabetes and other strong cardiovascular risk factors, perpetuating the disparities we are already seeing in life expectancy in Marin. The current gap in life expectancy between the wealthiest and poorest neighborhoods in Marin is 17 years.

The Call to Action

The Soda Free Summer is a small but important step toward changing norms around consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages. The solution to the growing burden of obesity must be multifaceted and long-term, and it will require commitments from health care providers, public health advocates, and the communities and individuals they serve. Last year, soda was removed from all vending machines in Marin County HHS buildings. Clinics or hospitals that still sell soda in vending machines are invited to join in the spirit of Soda Free Summer. Removing soda from vending machines demonstrates an understanding of the evidence in combating obesity, and it reminds patients of our role as stewards of their health.