

OPINION

Vote yes for San Francisco soda tax

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During the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, 1,500 U.S. soldiers lost a limb in combat. In that same period, more than 1.5 million U.S. residents lost limbs to amputations from Type 2 diabetes.

We have yet to mobilize for a public health war against Type 2 diabetes. But San Francisco is trying to lead the nation in that charge, just as we courageously did when confronting the deadly effects of tobacco and the AIDS crisis.

When I trained at **San Francisco General Hospital** in the early 1990s, half of my admissions were to Ward 5A: gay men with AIDS. They were dying, and there was little we could do. Until we decided to act boldly, using every weapon in the public health toolkit.

But today, in my practice, I see in the place of AIDS patients, young and old patients bearing the ravages of Type 2 diabetes: patients with kidney disease receiving dialysis; awaiting amputations; or recovering from heart attacks and devastating strokes.

“Adult onset” diabetes has now become a pediatric disease. Projections suggest that 40 percent of U.S. children will develop Type 2 diabetes in their lifetime. The science behind this childhood epidemic is clear: Sugary drinks are a major contributor to Type 2 diabetes. Children are innocent victims of an industry that markets cheap toxic substances to them, their families and their communities.

We have a choice to make: Do we fight a public health war to cut consumption of liquid sugar, or do we surrender by fighting diabetes one patient at a time?

Dean Schillinger is a primary care doctor and former chief of diabetes prevention and control for the California Department of Public Health. This piece reflects Schillinger's opinion and not that of his present or former employers.