

# Los Angeles County Department of Public Health

Nutrition and Physical Activity Program  
Program Fidelity Report - *Rethink Your Drink*  
2019



## Background

The Los Angeles County Department of Public Health's (DPH) Nutrition and Physical Activity Program partners with universities, hospitals, community-based organizations, and school districts to implement CalFresh Healthy Living, known federally as Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program Education (SNAP-Ed) in low-income communities. These partners provide nutrition education and physical activity promotion, as well as implement policy, systems, and environmental change strategies to improve access and availability of healthier foods and facilitate opportunities to engage in physical activity in various settings. Evidence-based nutrition and physical activity curricula are approved for use by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), California Department of Public Health (CDPH), and DPH to improve the effectiveness of nutrition education interventions implemented by all funded partners throughout the county.

The *Rethink Your Drink (RYD)* campaign's primary goals are to educate communities about healthy drink options, identify drinks with added sugar, and make the link between consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages (SSBs) and health risks. The *RYD* campaign provides nutrition education and skills, such as food label interpretation, to help people make healthy beverage choices. The campaign also focuses on encouraging a shift toward healthier beverage options and increasing access to these healthy beverages. The *Rethink Your Drink* Guidance is provided to assist DPH's CalFresh Healthy Living partners, who provide *RYD* nutrition education activities to Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) eligible individuals throughout the County of Los Angeles. Other resources to support the campaign include curricula, lesson plans, and resources for various age groups: early childhood, elementary school-aged children, high school-aged youth, older youth and adults. *RYD* activities are designed to be easily incorporated into adult education classes, school or afterschool programs,

retail or worksite locations, and in community settings such as health fairs, parks, farmers' markets, and food pantries.

Los Angeles County DPH's Nutrition and Physical Activity Program sought to learn more about funded partners' experiences with ensuring SNAP-Ed curriculum fidelity when implementing *Rethink Your Drink* activities and how DPH's Nutrition and Physical Activity Program can support them to improve the delivery of the campaign to various low-income populations.

## Methods

The SNAP-Ed Program Fidelity Project examined to what extent funded partners demonstrated fidelity to SNAP-Ed guidelines when implementing *RYD* activities, as well as challenges and barriers faced when fulfilling this requirement. Data collection methods included in-person observations at each of the funded partners' sites over a span of three months by a Registered Dietitian. The observation tool included questions related to needs assessment, lesson objectives, intervention site, participants, educator(s), content, and lesson materials. Each funded partner received a written report with observation notes and comments from the observer. Subsequently, partners were sent a 14-question survey to complete. The survey included questions related to impact on youth and adult audiences, allowable purchases, *RYD* Guidance and technical assistance, cultural appropriateness, questions outside SNAP-Ed scope, and barriers to implementation. The survey was distributed through Survey Monkey and received a 100% response rate. Responses were aggregated, and common themes were identified.

# Results

## Youth Audiences

Among all respondents, 75% reported that *RYD* messaging was very or moderately impactful for children in their classes. Thirteen percent of respondents reported that it was not impactful, however they also reported not working with children. Most agencies noted greater impact when using visual demonstrations to show the amount of sugar common in SSBs. When describing the importance of using visuals, one agency reported, "the mathematics could be more challenging to explain for younger children; visuals and activities (like the sugar demo) are important to demonstrate the message." One agency also reported the impact on longer-term change noting, "children come back a few weeks later saying they eat less candy and drink more water. May not be right away, but over time they learn." The impact of education on healthy behavior change is gradual, therefore eating less sweets and drinking more water over time demonstrates that the *RYD* program may be effective in impacting healthier choices when implemented with children.

While visual demonstration was reported as a useful strategy to facilitate healthy behaviors, the feedback was not consistent among children. After implementation, it was reported that, "when doing sugar demonstrations, most children mention that it is *not* a lot of sugar. Although it is very visual, more often than not the parents are the ones that find it more helpful." Differences in age influences the frame of reference and the visual impact of seeing the amount of sugar in a sugar-sweetened beverage. Another agency noted, "while adults have the horrified reaction we're looking for when they see how much sugar it is, in teaspoons measured out as in the activity, with kids it really varies. There are always some kids who look at the sugar as it is measured out and say, 'yummy'." Children may not understand the long-term negative health effects of consuming excessive amounts of sugar, especially in the beverage form.

## Adult Audiences

One-hundred percent of respondents indicated that *RYD* messaging was very or moderately impactful for adults in their classes. Most respondents reported that adults were unaware of the amount of sugar in beverages and found the visual materials to be very effective with adult audiences. One agency noted, “adults are typically shocked at the amount of sugar in common sugary beverages.” Several respondents reported participants believed that if a product was advertised as “healthy,” the sugar content would be low. However, after participating in a *RYD* class, they had gained the skills to determine this may not be the case. Additionally, the *RYD* lesson provided participants with tools they could immediately apply to calculate the number of grams of sugar in various foods and beverages. Class participants appreciated the direct application of knowledge, seeing healthier alternatives demonstrated during classes and events, and better understood how to reduce their sugar by avoiding sugar-sweetened beverages found in the market. Teaching class participants how to self-identify the sugar content of foods empowered adults to practically apply health knowledge in their everyday lives.



## Lesson Materials

Eighty-three percent of respondents found SNAP-Ed allowable items such as refillable 3-gallon water jugs, water dispensers, and ingredients for flavored water demonstrations/tastings very adequate or somewhat adequate to conduct *RYD* activities. Agencies shared that water dispensers made the infused water presentation “very colorful, attractive and neat,” and allowed them to serve a wide range of participants during *RYD* activities. These items are an essential part of supporting funded partners that deliver *RYD* education through programmatic activities.

“However, participants also reported barriers to the facilitation of *RYD* activities. Twelve percent of respondents found the allowable items to be somewhat or very inadequate. A common challenge reported was that partners were unable to purchase water as part of the *RYD* demonstration. Many *RYD* activities were in large outdoor event spaces like parks, community streets, and community center areas, where accessing water was difficult. Bringing an empty water container may mean having to walk “an unreasonable distance” to fill it up and bring it back to the event or class. Several agencies noted being able to purchase bottled water would improve their ability to easily and safely provide water. Additionally, several agencies suggested reusable water bottles to be included as allowable purchases for the purpose of promotional items. Limitations on the kind of water that is included in the allowable purchases for *RYD* activities inhibits the flexibility of funded partners to meet their programmatic needs.

Several agencies also noted permit restrictions and timing issues as barriers in conducting *RYD* activities. A common barrier cited the requirement to use canopy walls in a public outdoor event. Several agencies noted the challenge of carrying all items when only one staff member is available to attend an event. Another barrier highlighted the need for staff to purchase food item materials out of pocket and wait to be reimbursed, which “may not be feasible for staff”. In other words, staff may need more flexibility for setting up events and additional resources to cover the costs incurred while preparing for events.

## **RYD Guidance**

Seventy-five percent of respondents found the *RYD* Guidance document provided clarity on messaging, displays, and nutrition education to a great or moderate extent. Most agencies found the *RYD* Guidance “succinct and easy to follow,” and “covered everything needed to deliver the subject effectively”. Only eight percent of respondents indicated they had not read this document. Agencies offered recommendations on how the *RYD* Guidance could be improved. A common issue identified was the *RYD* Guidance did not provide clarity on the differences between natural and added sugars, such as the natural sugars found in milk and orange juice. Suggestions also included providing the American Heart Association recommendations on daily limits of sugar intake for men, women and children. Similarly, another agency highlighted a commonly asked question about the amount of sugar found in non-dairy milk alternatives, such as almond milk, soy milk, and oat milk. It was also reported that agencies found the *RYD* Guidance is directed toward young people, and more information is needed for young adults and older adult populations. Overall, the *RYD* Guidance was reported as clear for the intended messages and education, although certain areas distinguishing sugars and broadening audience content could be improved.



## Technical Assistance

Responses varied regarding the need for more technical assistance (TA) from DPH to implement *RYD* in the following areas: knowing your audience, telling a story, attracting attention, engaging the crowd and offering next steps. A reported 76% of respondents felt they needed more TA to some degree. Of those that reported needing more TA, 29% indicated a strong need for more TA at a great or moderate extent. A common issue identified was that elementary students do not learn to divide until the fourth grade, so activities must be modified for classes in the younger grades. Twenty-one percent indicated they do not feel the need for more TA at all. One agency said, "I believe we have a good grasp on the material, but there is always room for improvement, and we welcome new techniques/materials." One funded partner recommended that DPH provide an annual training on best practices for health educators, and another partner requested more assistance on social media promotion. One agency highlighted the need for a "call-to-action" at the end of each lesson, noting that, "to ensure we don't miss on this aspect, [health educators] do it on their own." Agencies also requested a "Frequently Asked Question" worksheet on SSB nutrition facts and for more up-to-date materials.

With the current TA provided to funded partners, 79% reported either being very satisfied or satisfied with the resources and/or technical assistance they received from DPH to help implement *RYD* activities. Several respondents noted a variety of resources their agency found most useful to help implement *RYD*. Some of these resources include the webinar and online resources, Potter the Otter books and stickers, *RYD* spin wheel, lesson handouts, and recipe cards. A few respondents made several suggestions for additional resources to help implement *RYD* activities, particularly for children and youth. One suggestion included providing more resources for children and youth or facilitating a *RYD* campaign during the summer. In addition, several respondents indicated a need for more TA to help with *RYD* implementation.



One common issue identified is TA for trends related to SSBs, so participants have the most up-to-date information. Currently, the provided resources and TA for RYD from DPH mainly meets satisfactory expectations from funded partners, however responses show that increasing resources and TA that DPH provides to all funded partners would help improve implementation and programmatic delivery.



## Cultural and Linguistic Appropriateness

Survey results indicated over 71% of respondents found the *RYD* materials culturally and linguistically appropriate to a great or moderate extent. Respondents reported the English and Spanish materials as easy to understand for Latino, African American and Caucasian populations, but several respondents noted these materials were not tailored for Asian American audiences. Another challenge identified by one respondent was that the *RYD* materials were not easy to understand for the preschool age group, and their agency had to purchase other supplies, such as stickers, to assist in communicating the *RYD* messages. Deficiencies in cultural and linguistic appropriateness for young children and Asian ethnic groups may be reflected in the 10% of respondents who felt the materials were appropriate to a small extent.



### Questions Beyond SNAP-Ed Scope

Sixty-two percent of respondents indicated feeling very or somewhat prepared to address questions related to diabetes and other disease-specific questions beyond the scope of SNAP-Ed. The agencies recognized health educators were not experts in the field of medicine and nutrition, so they established internal protocols to encourage the health educators to refer their disease-specific questions to a doctor or registered dietitian. Common questions the health educators received pertained to sugar substitutes, recommended amount of daily sugar intake, sports drinks, alkaline water, vegan protein alternatives, gluten, and disease-specific diet recommendations. Several agencies reported that when health educators did not know the answer to these types of questions they noted the participants' personal information and followed up with a response after speaking to an expert. Other agencies indicated encouraging their class participants to access online resources to obtain additional nutrition information. Coaching on how to handle disease-specific questions would be beneficial to health educators.



### Rethink Your Drink Toolkit

To improve accessibility of *RYD* messaging and education for the community at large, the Nutrition and Physical Activity Program is considering the development of an *RYD* toolkit that could be used to scale up *RYD* messaging throughout SNAP-Ed eligible communities in Los Angeles County for partners who do not receive SNAP-Ed funding. All respondents felt sugar cubes would be a helpful additional component to an *RYD* toolkit. Other common components noted were Nutrition Facts Label cards for various beverages, empty bottles of sugary beverages (without identifying labels), spin wheels with signs and quizzes, tablecloths, and banners. Additional suggestions from agencies included *RYD* campaign promotional materials, BPA-free water bottles to promote water intake, water intake tracking logs, recipe cards and cookbooks, games and activities for kids, *RYD* lesson summary with key components, and social media marketing materials. One agency noted often gathering *RYD* information from several resources, including CDPH, DPH, and the CalFresh Healthy Living website to form a toolkit with all the resources. Participants felt there was room to expand the *RYD* campaign for current funded partners as well as all community partners within Los Angeles County that are interested in promoting nutrition education.



## Barriers in Implementation

Understanding the varying degrees of challenges and barriers educators face when implementing *RYD* activities elucidates where DPH can focus efforts to support funded partners. Among respondents, 52% reported slightly more than anticipated or just as anticipated challenges or barriers in *RYD* activity implementation. Some of these challenges included difficulty setting up the tent cover-ups with limited staff, ambivalence to water sampling due to taste preferences, and lack of structured lesson plans and *RYD* resources. In addition to concerns about water access at events, concerns about the safety of community tap water arose, where agencies faced a lack of guidance to safe drinking water in certain neighborhoods, noting a challenge when “the public questions where you obtain water and if it’s safe to drink due to water safety issues in their neighborhoods.” One agency noted *RYD* participants frequently inquired about a take-home item at community events, such as a BPA-free reusable water bottle, a wristband with a message, Potter the Otter books, or a recipe book with healthier beverages. The range of challenges varied by agencies, however the partners experiencing barriers noted common issues related to a lack of resources or staffing.



## Sugar-Sweetened Beverage Tax

Studies show sugary drink consumption is the single largest contributor to the obesity epidemic. Health advocates believe a tax on sugar-sweetened beverages, modeled after tobacco taxes, could be successful in reducing the consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages, while generating revenue to support health promotion programs. Seventy-one percent of respondents believed such a tax would contribute to a reduction in the consumption of sugary beverages to a great or moderate extent.

Several agencies reported revenue generated from a tax on sugar-sweetened drinks could be used to fund nutrition education programs to increase awareness of SSB and the importance of water consumption in low-income communities. One agency reported, "A tax on sugary beverages would make people re-think their drink and their wallets. People would think twice about purchasing a sugary beverage if it was more expensive." However, a few agencies noted some individuals would continue to purchase sugar-sweetened drinks even if a tax was implemented. Another common concern identified was that without continued education on the negative impact of sugar sweetened beverages, consumers may not understand why the tax is being implemented. Overall, respondents reported a SSB tax would create a deterrent for individuals to consume sugary beverages while encouraging water consumption, and partnering agencies elucidated possible challenges may still exist even with legislative change.



## Discussion

Survey results highlighted several opportunities for DPH's Nutrition and Physical Activity Program to support and scale implementation of *RYD* activities in Los Angeles County. One recommendation for the Nutrition and Physical Activity Program is to expand training and technical assistance to funded partners to implement *RYD* curricula. The Nutrition and Physical Activity Program can assess needs of funded partners and can increase the number of training opportunities, provide information pertaining to curricula, and highlight tips for lesson delivery. The Nutrition & Physical Activity Program can also establish workgroups consisting of health educators to exchange best practices on complementary education resources and strategies that are well received by CalFresh Healthy Living participants. In addition, the program can develop a FAQ resource for health educators to address questions beyond the scope of SNAP-Ed materials. This resource can ensure uniformity of messaging and ensure evidence-based information is being provided by health educators. Since lack of time was a reported limitation across most agencies, this resource could reduce the extra time and other resources individual agencies spend on creating or obtaining supplemental materials.

The Nutrition and Physical Activity Program can help ensure nutrition education materials and resources reach a variety of cultures and age groups. For example, games, activities designed for children, stickers and books with characters such as Potter the Otter can be integrated into *RYD* activities with young children and youth. The Nutrition and Physical Activity Program can also explore funding opportunities to provide *RYD* materials in more than the two currently available languages (English and Spanish). The translated materials should take into consideration the cultures represented in the audience and include more drink options common within the represented cultures to make the educational experience more appropriate and relevant. To address this gap, the Nutrition and Physical Activity Program can encourage agencies to ask their participants to bring bottles of drinks generally consumed in their cultural communities. By working with the community to enhance the existing curriculum, health educators can adapt the *RYD* materials to the population being served. Additionally, DPH

can explore cultural nuances, such as creating a formal definition of what constitutes a “drink”; in some Asian American populations a soup may often be considered a drink. Cognizance and inclusivity of cultural appropriateness of beverages will help reach the diverse backgrounds of Los Angeles County communities and increase responsiveness to the *RYD* materials. These best practices should be standardized to ensure the messages communicated to participants across the all funded agencies are consistent and evidence-based.

To support statewide policy efforts, the Nutrition and Physical Activity Program can play an important role in providing education and information to community members, elected officials, and other essential stakeholders on the health impacts of consuming sugar sweetened beverages. In addition, the Nutrition and Physical Activity Program can establish a countywide multi-sector collaborative with the goal of reducing consumption of SSB, increasing awareness of healthier alternatives to SSB and encouraging water consumption. To scale *RYD* messages throughout Los Angeles County, the program can develop a *Rethink Your Drink* toolkit for organizations serving low-income communities but do not receive SNAP-Ed funding. Additionally, to address concern for tap water safety in local communities, the Nutrition and Physical Activity Program can distribute water safety handouts and water safety campaigns to educate participants on how to access safe drinking water in their communities.

The ability of funded partners to implement and deliver *RYD* programming and activities as intended by DPH's Nutrition and Physical Activity Program and CalFresh Healthy Living is effective, despite several limitations. Community work can pose a variety of challenges, however, by identifying and addressing the challenges and barriers faced by funded agencies, DPH's Nutrition and Physical Activity Program can improve curriculum fidelity and community impact of the *RYD* program activities by expanding programmatic support, training, and technical assistance throughout Los Angeles County.



rethink  
YOUR DRINK

# Cranberry & Lime Fizz

Refresco Burbujeante de  
Arándano & Lima



Ingredients:

- 100% Cranberry Juice
- Seltzer Water
- Lime

Ingredientes:

- Jugo 100% Natural  
de Arándanos
- Agua Mineral
- Limones



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