



**Food Marketing Workgroup
Subcommittee on Target Marketing to Communities of Color
Statement of Principles**

July 2015

Communities of color have been the hardest hit by the current epidemic of diabetes and other nutrition-related diseases.¹ Meanwhile, communities of color are targeted by marketers with foods low in nutrition and high in sugars, salt, and fats that contribute to these diseases and don't offer much if any health benefit ("junk" foods). Similarly, makers of sugary drinks, which contribute to childhood obesity,² also target specific racial and ethnic groups including African Americans, Latinos, Native Americans and Asian-Pacific Islanders.

This statement of principles guides the work of the Target Marketing Subcommittee—a diverse coalition of public health professionals and organizations—part of the [Food Marketing Workgroup](#), a national network dedicated to eliminating harmful food marketing. Our subcommittee is particularly concerned about marketing aimed at those who are most vulnerable to diabetes and other nutrition-related diseases.

This statement describes our concerns with target marketing, discusses its social and historical context, and guides our work as we seek to improve the nutritional quality of foods and beverages marketed to groups that suffer disproportionate rates of nutrition-related diseases, including communities of color and low-income populations.

We are motivated by our core value of good health for all, regardless of income, race or ethnic background. We believe that the aggressive marketing of food and beverage products that are proven harmful is unfair to our most vulnerable communities, especially children, and must change.

How does target marketing impact health?

Target marketing to sell products to specific individuals and communities is a routine business practice. However, many foods and beverages marketed to communities of color

¹ Committee on Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention; Food and Nutrition Board; Institute of Medicine. Accelerating Progress in Obesity Prevention: Solving the Weight of the Nation (2012). Available from <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/13275/accelerating-progress-in-obesity-prevention-solving-the-weight-of-the>. Accessed on March 11, 2015.

² Malik VS, Popkin BM, Bray GA, Despres JP, Willett WC, Hu FB. 2010. Sugar-Sweetened Beverages and Risk of Metabolic Syndrome and Type 2 Diabetes: A Meta-Analysis. *Diabetes Care* 33(11):2477-2483.

are likely to increase disease risk or interfere with management of chronic conditions—especially in the absence of healthier food and beverage options. A comprehensive review by the Institute of Medicine concluded that food marketing affects children’s food preferences, purchase requests, diets and health.³

For example, a 2014 study published in the *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* found that Black communities were among groups most disproportionately exposed to child-directed marketing displays at fast food restaurants.⁴ Children who eat fast food are likely to consume more total calories, saturated fat, sodium, sugar and sugar sweetened beverages and are less likely to meet dietary recommendations for fruits, vegetables and dairy.⁵

How does target marketing work?

Marketing is generally understood as depending on 4 Ps: Product, Price, Place and Promotion. Target marketing of food and beverages to communities of color occurs in all four categories. Companies have designed:

- *products* especially for communities of color;
- *prices* designed to appeal to specific income groups, such as “value menus” targeting low-income communities—price comes into play with target marketing when communities of color are disproportionately represented in poor neighborhoods;
- *places* that are saturated with unhealthy food products and promotions, such as zoning in certain communities that allows concentrations of fast food restaurants or proliferation of outdoor advertising of unhealthy food and sugary beverages⁶; and
- *promotions* that exploit cultural images, symbolism and language to sell products or build brand loyalty.

See our [Pinterest page](#) for examples of each of the 4 Ps.

This target marketing is problematic when the foods and beverages that are marketed using these techniques are unhealthy. Youth of color get what researchers have termed a “double dose” of unhealthy food and sugary beverage marketing because they are exposed to targeted as well as mainstream campaigns, particularly via digital media, which research

³ Institute of Medicine, Committee on Food Marketing and the Diets of Children and Youth, Food and Nutrition Board, et al. *Food Marketing to Children and Youth: Threat or Opportunity?* Washington, D.C.: The National Academies Press, 2006. Institute of Medicine, 2006.

⁴ Ohri-Vachaspati P, Isgor Z, Rimkus L, Powell L, Barker D, Chaloupka F.. Child-Directed Marketing Inside and on the Exterior of Fast Food Restaurants, *American Journal of Preventative Medicine* 2014; 48(1): 22-30.

⁵ See research review from CSPI, available from http://cspinet.org/new/pdf/lit_rev-eating_out_and_obesity.pdf, accessed on May 18, 2015.

⁶ Ohri-Vachaspati P, *op cit*.

shows is consumed by youth of color more frequently than white youth.⁷ Marketers also target youth of color because they are deemed trendsetters, and therefore exploited for what marketers call their “brand ambassador” capabilities. In addition, companies exploit the popularity of celebrities of color as role models by hiring them to promote unhealthy food and sugary drinks.⁸

What is the historical and social context for target marketing in communities of color?

Many food and beverage companies are well-regarded in communities of color. The associated jobs and dollars they bring benefit communities. For example, Coca Cola has a long history of supporting the African American community and PepsiCo was one of the few industry giants that actively employed and promoted African Americans during the Civil Rights era.⁹ Both companies hired and promoted African Americans, contracted with Black-owned companies, placed ads featuring Black people in Black-owned publications, and supported Black charitable organizations at a time in our history when many other industries actively discriminated against African Americans. Both PepsiCo and Coca Cola are still large employers in communities of color and have robust diversity initiatives.

At the same time, companies tout their hiring record in communities of color as part of their promotion strategy. Companies have drawn attention to workers of color to build a sense of identification with consumers and increase brand loyalty by framing their labor practices as a kind of cause marketing.

But all that goodwill is undermined not just by marketing unhealthy products to communities of color but also with questionable labor practices that in some cases are characterized by low wages, lack of acceptable benefits, poor working conditions and other exploitative practices in the U.S. and abroad.

For example, workers in the fast food industry, which aggressively markets unhealthy food and sugary drinks to communities of color, are the lowest paid in the economy with an average hourly wage of \$9.09. What’s more, the pay disparity among fast-food CEOs (among the highest-paid executives in the U.S. with an average compensation of \$26.7

⁷ Grier S. African-American and Hispanic youth vulnerability to target marketing: Implications for understanding the effects of digital marketing. Memo prepared for the second NPLAN/BMSG meeting on digital media and marketing to children, Berkeley, CA. June 2009. Available from:

<http://digitalads.org/documents/Grier%20NPLAN%20BMSG%20memo.pdf>. Accessed March 16, 2015.

⁸ Montgomery KC, Chester J. Interactive food and beverage marketing: Targeting adolescents in the digital age. *Journal of Adolescent Health*, 2009. 45(3 Suppl):S18–29.

⁹ Capparell, Stephanie. *The Real Pepsi Challenge: How One Pioneering Company Broke Color Barriers in 1940s American Business*. Wall Street Journal Books: New York, 2007.

million in 2012) is the most unequal of any industry. These and other unfair practices have fueled a growing national movement demanding wage increases for fast food workers.¹⁰

Further complicating matters, these companies in their marketing have long promoted positive images of people of color—something sorely lacking in other media.

In addition, companies direct corporate social responsibility campaigns and philanthropic support toward organizations of color that are often strapped for resources. Some of these organizations have long-standing philanthropic relationships with food and beverage companies. Many of these same companies also provide important financial support to students of color, such as PepsiCo scholarships for Latino journalism students or Coca-Cola's First Generation Scholarships for U.S. college freshmen who are American Indian or Alaska Native. While helping support organizations that serve communities of color, these donations from food and sugary beverage companies can also contribute to the higher rates of diet-related diseases in communities of color when they use their support to gain customer and brand loyalty for unhealthy products. This situation has resulted in public criticism of organizations and leaders of color for accepting such philanthropic support.

This subcommittee wants to explore how these longstanding relationships can support a dialogue with food and beverage companies to help them improve the nutritional quality of products being marketed to communities of color and low-income communities.

What can we do about target marketing of junk food to communities of color?

Because communities of color are specifically targeted by the sugary beverage and junk food industries, a targeted approach is needed to address the marketing of their unhealthy products, especially to children and youth. We call on food marketers to cease their problematic practices in each of the 4 Ps marketing categories. At the same time, we respect the fact that organizations concerned about the health effects of target marketing also may have longstanding relationships with food and beverage companies. We see this as an opportunity to work together along with community-based leadership actively seeking to advance solutions to nutrition-related death and disease. The Target Marketing Subcommittee is committed to forging a path forward that acknowledges our shared values and our shared responsibility to eliminate target marketing's impact on communities of color and keep all communities safe and healthy.

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¹⁰ Ruetschlin, Catherine. Fast Food Failure: How CEO-to-worker pay disparity undermines the industry and the overall economy. Demos, April 22, 2014. Available from <http://www.demos.org/publication/fast-food-failure-how-ceo-worker-pay-disparity-undermines-industry-and-overall-economy>, accessed on March 11, 2015.