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International Olympic Committee Urged to Terminate Big Soda Sponsorship

Leading global health organizations call for the removal of The Coca-Cola Company as a major sponsor of the Olympic Games

July 17, 2024 (PARIS, FRANCE) — In a landmark appeal, leading global health experts and advocates are calling for the end of Big Soda’s sponsorship of sporting events throughout the world. This move comes amid rising concerns about the negative impacts of sugary beverages on public health and the environment. A new campaign, “[Kick Big Soda Out of Sport](#),” highlights these harms and urges the global community to support this call to action.

Citing escalating rates of obesity, Type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular diseases associated with consumption of sugary beverages, these groups assert that the International Olympic Committee's association with unhealthy products undermines its [commitment](#) to promoting a healthy society through sport.

“Serving as a major sponsor of the Olympics allows companies to blanket venues and events with their logos, reaching an audience of over 3 billion watching at home,” said Trish Cotter, Global Lead of the Food Policy Program at global health organization Vital Strategies. “Alongside growing opposition to soda’s involvement in sport, athletes themselves are beginning to speak up about which companies should be permitted to sponsor sporting events. For example, at Euro 2020 Cristiano Ronaldo made a [strong statement](#) when he pointedly removed two bottles of Coca-Cola that were placed in front of him at a news conference.”

“The link between sugary beverages and chronic and largely preventable diseases such as diabetes, cancer and heart disease is well established,” said Dr. Barry Popkin, W. R. Kenan Jr. Distinguished Professor of nutrition at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Gillings School of Global Public Health. “Allowing Coca-Cola to continue as a key sponsor of the Olympic Games directly contradicts the IOC’s mission and undermines the efforts and achievements of Olympic athletes. The most insidious actions of the beverage industry, however, are their marketing strategies, which disproportionately target children and adolescents. These tactics perpetuate unhealthy consumption patterns, setting young people up for lifetimes of poor dietary habits and health risks.”

The digital campaign can be seen on YouTube, Instagram, Twitter/X, LinkedIn and campaign partner websites, and directs viewers to an [online petition](#). Addressed to the IOC, the petition is gathering signatures to demonstrate the global movement behind ridding sporting events of unhealthy, environmentally dangerous products.

“This campaign is bringing much-needed attention to the ways sugary drink companies use sport to add to their bottom line,” said Nzama Mbalati, Chief Executive Officer of [HEALA, a civil society coalition in South Africa advocating for a more just food system](#). “The audience of the 2024 Olympic Games should be informed about the intent behind the ads they’ll see throughout the telecast.”

As guardians of the Olympic Movement, the IOC is urged to take decisive action: the termination of Coca-Cola's Olympic sponsorship. The campaign also calls for a commitment from the IOC to both reject future sponsorships from corporations that do not align with Olympic values and embrace partnerships with entities genuinely dedicated to promoting health and sustainability.

“This petition underscores the need for the IOC to prioritize the health of people and the sustainability of our planet over commercial interests,” said Alejandro Calvillo, Director of [El Poder del Consumidor, a consumer rights nonprofit in Mexico](#). “By distancing itself from Big Soda, the IOC has an unprecedented opportunity to uphold its reputation as a beacon of integrity, excellence and social responsibility.”

“Kick Big Soda Out of Sport” is the beginning of a movement to remove all sugary beverage sponsorship from sport. The campaign is led by concerned global health organizations and advocates and highlights the harmful effects of sugary drinks on our health and the planet. To join “Kick Big Soda Out of Sport” and add your name to the petition, visit www.kickbigsodaout.org and use the hashtag #KickBigSodaOutofSport on social media.

About Vital Strategies’ work in Food Policy:

Vital Strategies supports the enactment and evaluation of policy efforts that aim to move people toward healthier diets around the world. The program focuses its work in Brazil, Jamaica, Barbados, Colombia and South Africa. Vital Strategies works with civil society organizations and research institutions to promote strong policies supported by the best available evidence, including raising taxes on sugary beverages, introducing front-of-package nutrient labels, limiting children’s exposure to unhealthy food and beverage marketing, and promoting healthy food policies for the public sector. With increased public and political support, our partners advocate for policy changes that reduce consumer demand for unhealthy foods and beverages, improve the food environment and make healthier choices accessible to all. [Find out more](#) and follow us Twitter [@VitalStrat](#).

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