From 2015-2016, Alabama Cooperative Extension (ACES) at Auburn University initiated a SNAP-Ed social marketing billboard campaign and rebranded its nutrition education program as Live Well Alabama. Altarum has conducted a variety of multi-year social marketing campaign evaluations for ACES. Ten virtual focus groups were recently conducted to learn about beverage consumption among the priority population in Alabama. Thematic analysis revealed that focus group participants regularly drink sugary beverages compared to other options, such as water, and have difficulty changing consumption patterns. Family is a substantial motivator and influencer for beverage selection and consumption. Water safety was an issue for several participants. The majority of participants are interested in receiving more nutritional information about specific beverages, long-term impacts of consuming sugary drinks, and benefits of consuming healthier beverages, such as water. Beverage consumption patterns are a topic of high interest among SNAP-eligible Alabamians. Findings from this focus group evaluation will help to advise future iterations of ACES' social marketing campaign around beverage consumption.

**Background**

In 2015, ACES launched a social marketing billboard campaign to reach a larger segment of the SNAP-eligible audience. Since 2017, ACES has contracted with Altarum to conduct formative and outcome evaluations of its social marketing campaign. Based on evaluation findings, ACES has expanded campaign delivery channels beyond billboards and updated messaging and imagery.

**Objective**

To examine attitudes and behaviors related to beverage consumption among SNAP-eligible Alabama adults to inform future campaign messages.

**Methods**

In 2022, Altarum conducted ten virtual focus groups with 32 participants recruited by Alabama SNAP-Ed educators and administrators. Focus group discussions examined attitudes and behaviors related to beverage consumption and the kinds of communication, messages, and images that would influence SNAP-eligible Alabamians to change beverage consumption behaviors. Focus group audio recordings were transcribed and analyzed using qualitative analysis software.

**Results**

**Focus Group Participant Demographics**

- 100% had children in the household
- 97% were female
- 87% participated in assistance programs
- 78% were black or African American
- 77% were aged 18-49 years old

**Beverage Consumption Patterns**

- 75% of participants reported drinking sugary drinks on a regular basis, and 44% felt they drink too many sugary drinks.
- 63% of participants were interested in drinking more water per day and 53% were interested in drinking less sugary drinks.
- 34% of participants live in an or near an area where water safety is a concern.

**Influences on Beverage Consumption**

- Participants reported the cost of beverages as the main influencer impacting their purchasing decisions.
- Accessibility and availability of certain beverages was noted by participants as a key factor in beverage selection.
- Many participants felt accountability partners such as family members or coworkers could motivate and encourage them to modify their beverage consumption behaviors.

**Information Sources on Beverages**

- Participants were not actively seeking health information on individual beverage products on a regular basis, but nearly all participants would be interested in learning more about beverages.
- Participants frequently use their phones to search for health and nutrition information online.
- Participants were most interested in learning more about long-term individual health impacts and the health impact on their children when consuming specific beverages.

**Quotes from Focus Group Participants**

- “I need to be healthier for myself and my family, but I want us to be healthy as a family. It’s hard to tell them and not do it myself.”
- “Cost is the biggest factor. I am on a limited income and want to make ends meet.”
- “Family as a whole [is a major influence]. Sometimes, if you’re with family or visiting or at an occasion with them, water is not available, all they have is a sugary drink.”
- “When you’re trying to [change behavior] by yourself, it’d be hard. You need someone else that would help motivate you to do it.”
- “I just feel like I’m addicted [to sugary drinks] and can’t stop.”

**Conclusion**

- The majority of focus group participants were interested in consuming fewer sugary beverages and more water.
- Focus group participants are heavily influenced by family, which is a primary motivator for beverage selection and consumption.
- Access to and clean water is a major concern for several focus group participants.
- Focus group participants are more likely to be influenced by a social marketing campaign that includes messaging with direct and factual health information.

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