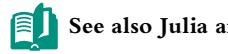


an increasing number of countries throughout the world, the French example needs to move beyond our national borders.

In particular, the French example shows the intense endeavor that any public policy in the field of nutrition may face to succeed, in a time when urgent action is needed to curb the burden of nutrition-related diseases in the world. **AJPH**

*Chantal Julia, MD, PhD  
Serge Hercberg, MD, PhD*

## Public Health Implications of Front-of-Package Labels



See also **Julia and Hercberg, p. 318.**

Julia and Hercberg (p. 318) describe how the food industry follows the tobacco industry's "playbook" in fighting the French government's new front-of-package (FOP) labeling scheme, Nutri-Score. Because FOP labels are supposed to help consumers select healthier alternatives among processed food products, they raise industry and public health concerns. The food industry strongly opposes FOP schemes that might discourage sales of any of its products. But from a public health perspective, heavily processed (ultraprocessed) products are to be avoided, not only because they contain undesirable fats, sugars, and salt, but also because they are deliberately formulated to be habit forming, are relentlessly advertised (often to children), and induce troubling effects on global nutrition.<sup>1</sup> FOP schemes risk giving a health aura to only slightly "better-for-you" ultraprocessed foods.<sup>2</sup>

### CONTRIBUTORS

Both authors contributed equally to this editorial.

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initiative, saying nothing further about it since 2011.

Food industry opposition is evident everywhere FOP systems are proposed or in place, especially in Latin America.<sup>6</sup> Peru, for example, is working on a warning label system similar to the one in Chile.<sup>7</sup> By all reports, industry pressures to defeat or undermine these schemes have been ferocious, so much so that the director general of the World Health Organization, Tedros Ghebreyesus, wrote the president of Peru in December 2017 to support that country's labeling law and express concern about industry pressures to weaken its FOP provisions.

Will Nutri-Score help the public make healthier food choices? It might, although warning labels seem to be the most effective means of discouraging consumption of ultraprocessed food products. To date, the best evidence for how well FOP labels affect food choices is the intensity of food industry opposition. The fights over FOP labels—Nutri-Score

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Source. Chile Ministry of Health.

**FIGURE 1—Chile's Front-of-Package Labels Warn Consumers About Food Products High in Sodium, Calories, Sugar, and Saturated Fat**

or warning labels versus GDAs—must be understood as a proxy

for the conflict between food industry marketing imperatives

## Why Words Matter

On December 15, 2017, the *Washington Post* reported that a set of seven words was allegedly banned in official Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) budget documents for the upcoming fiscal year. CDC Director Brenda Fitzgerald subsequently denied that any words were forbidden within the agency. However, this did little to quell the outcry in response, especially on social media.

Regardless of the validity of the report, the ensuing reaction by the public demonstrates the importance of language. This is even more crucial within a government agency whose mission is to protect a diverse nation from health, safety, and security threats. The terms in question

relate to populations each representing thousands of people. It is impossible to address the needs of a population that cannot be named.

The authors are all members of the *AJPH* Student Think Tank, a group of graduate students from diverse backgrounds across the United States who work on building public health student involvement in the *Journal*. As such, we are still relatively new to the field of public health, and this is our honest response to this controversy as we prepare to serve this field in our careers. In this editorial, we briefly highlight the aforementioned seven words, and describe how, in our eyes, their elimination from federal agency dialogue would

and public health. If nothing else, FOP initiatives—like efforts to pass soda taxes—make it clear that food companies will stop at nothing to defeat public health initiatives likely to reduce sales of unhealthful, but profitable, products. *AJPH*

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disabilities, chronic health conditions, mental health problems, and immigrants—all can be negatively impacted by the organizational infrastructures that limit autonomy of choice.

Excluding these groups by eliminating one of the main words science uses to describe them would only narrow the scope and effectiveness of public health interventions. Extensive research demonstrates the importance of including such groups in considerations of public health.<sup>2</sup> In a field where the focus

## VULNERABLE

The US National Library of Medicine defines vulnerable populations as those whose range of options is limited, or are subjected to coercion in their decision-making.<sup>1</sup> This includes persons with physical

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