Navajo Nation Levies America's First-Ever Junk Food Tax

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Next month, Native Americans who live in the Navajo Nation and are concerned about obesity, diabetes and poor nutritional health among the reservation's nearly 300,000 residents will get some legislative help to combat the health issues, Mother Jones reports.

The law is called the Healthy Dine Nation Act of 2014 and will put a 2 percent tax on food sold within the reservation's borders considered junk foods. These foods with minimal-to-no-nutritional value include soda, chips, fried foods and cookies.

Navajo Nation president, Ben Shelly, signed the historic tax into law this November. The legislation follows on the heels of another bill introduced in the Nation in spring 2014 that eliminated a 5 percent sales tax on fresh fruits and vegetables.

Today, nearly one-third of Navajo residents are considered diabetic or pre-diabetic and more than 50 percent in certain age groups are obese. The USDA identified nearly every part of the Navajo Nation as a "food desert. " This means that processed fares are far more prevalent than fresh foods in the only 10 full-service grocery stores serving an area that covers a 27,000-square-mile area in parts of three states.

According to tribal lawmakers, the $1 million a year that the junk food tax is expected to bring in for the reservation will then be used to fund wellness projects across the region, such as building community gardens, greenhouses, food processing and storage facilities and farmers markets.

For more information on how food deserts affect U.S. communities of color today, click here.

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