

January 9, 2009

The Honorable President-Elect Barack Obama  
Presidential Transition Team Headquarters  
451 6th Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20001

Dear President-Elect Obama:

**We urge you to take bold and urgent action to reverse the obesity epidemic.** The epidemic of overweight and obesity in children and adults is undermining the nation's health analogous to the way global warming is undermining the planet's health. The increased rates of obesity, almost an inevitability in a society whose wealth disfavors physical activity and whose poverty prevents healthy diets, will negate our nation's investments in health-care and could actually lead to life spans for today's youths that will be shorter than their parents'. Addressing obesity could be one of the most powerful means of improving the health of the nation.

The harms caused by obesity are well-known and considerable: hypertension, heart attacks, strokes, diabetes, cancer, arthritis, and many others. Together those maladies contribute each year to as many as several hundred thousand deaths and tens of billions of dollars in medical and other costs. Obesity also causes serious psychosocial problems, including difficulty making friends, discrimination in the workplace, and depression.

Countless experts—health professionals, government officials, academics, and nonprofit organizations—have offered strategies for combating obesity: a Surgeon General's Call to Action, conferences like the National Summit on Obesity Policy, whole organizations like Shape Up America!, policy prescriptions in the medical literature, and the like. But the government has done little, and obesity rates have continued to spiral upward.

What is lacking is not well-conceived ideas for policies and programs, but a national commitment to wage a comprehensive campaign to prevent and reverse overweight and obesity, a war that should begin in the womb and infancy, extend to schools, then include workplaces, doctors' offices, and the general community. A reflection of the lack of commitment is the lack of funding. The federal government has sponsored many research studies and pilot projects, but has never invested in a serious campaign.

In contrast to this country's inaction, the United Kingdom has prepared a broad strategy to combat obesity and is backing it with substantial funding.<sup>1</sup> That program involves various ministries in the national government, local health agencies, new laws (including barring the marketing of unhealthy foods to children), full use of the bully pulpit, and strategic financial investments. Americans can learn much from that effort.

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<sup>1</sup> Healthy Weight, Healthy Lives: a cross-government strategy for England. 2008.  
[www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH\\_082378](http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_082378).

We urge you to harness your imagination and commitment to health-care reform to turning the tide on obesity. Such an ambitious endeavor should be made a top priority of the Secretaries of Health and Human Services, Agriculture, and Transportation; Surgeon General; and a full-time advisor in the White House. We—and countless others in and out of government—would welcome the opportunity to help you tackle this challenging problem.

Sincerely,

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### **Organizations**

American Alliance for Health, Physical  
Education, Recreation, and Dance

Amerinet, Inc.

American Association of Public Health  
Physicians

Association of Maternal and Child Health  
Programs

American Clinical Board of Nutrition

Association of State and Territorial  
Health Officials

American College Health Association

Association of State & Territorial Public  
Health Nutrition Directors

American College of Preventive Medicine

California Center for Public Health  
Advocacy

American Heart Association

American Institute for Cancer Research

California Food Policy Advocates

American Medical Athletic Association

Campaign to End Obesity

American Medical Women's Association

Center for Science in the Public Interest\*

American Public Health Association

DMAA: The Care Continuum Alliance

American Running Association

The Food Trust

American School Health Association

International Health, Racquet &  
Sportsclub Association

American Society of Bariatric Physicians

League of American Bicyclists	New York State Nutrition Council
Lifestyle Medicine Institute	The Obesity Society
National Action Against Obesity	Partnership for Prevention
National Association of Chronic Disease Directors	Prevention Institute
National Association of Pediatric Nurse Practitioners	Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association
National Association of School Nurses	Produce for Better Health Foundation
National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity	Public Health Advocacy Institute
National Consumers League	Public Health Institute
National Physicians Alliance	Shape Up America!
National Recreation and Park Association	Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association
National WIC Association	Trust for America's Health
New York State Healthy Eating and Physical Activity Alliance	United Fresh Produce Association
	Westchester County Department of Health

\* Please reply via Michael F. Jacobson, Ph.D., Center for Science in the Public Interest, 1875 Connecticut Ave., NW, Washington, DC 20009; mdonahue@cspinet.org.

cc: OMB Director-designate Peter Orszag; Health and Human Services Secretary-designate Sen. Tom Daschle