

January 16, 2009

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

Dear President-Elect Obama:

Your commitment to reforming our nation's health system and ensuring that prevention has a central priority brings hope to those who believe we can improve America's health. Overhauling our health system will require Congressional cooperation, but you will have the authority to take prompt administrative actions to make the nation healthier and, in these pressing economic times, improve the value we get from the programs we steward.

Partnership for Prevention has identified several actions you can take early in your presidency to send a strong message about your commitment to prevention while laying the groundwork for making prevention the leading edge of your health reform efforts. We recommend you consider taking the following steps:

- **Direct federally sponsored health insurance programs (e.g., Medicare, Department of Defense, Veterans Affairs, and the private sector health insurance offerings included in the Federal Employees Health Benefits Program) to provide coverage for, and encourage use of, those clinical preventive services recommended by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force and the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices.**

A recent study by Partnership for Prevention found that many highly cost-effective services are currently delivered to less than 50% of the target population. Covering important preventive services for the millions of enrollees in federally sponsored health insurance programs would represent an important step in addressing the risk factors and diseases that drive health care costs. In addition, it would encourage greater coverage of preventive services in private sector health plans since private plans often follow the federal government's example.

- **Direct federal agencies to take the basic steps to ensure their buildings and installations are healthy worksites and to offer comprehensive worksite health promotion programs.**

Through an executive order, you can expand efforts to make sure federal facilities not only protect occupants and visitors from health hazards, but also are environments that promote and enable healthy lifestyles. The order should direct federal agencies to ensure that their worksites: are tobacco-free, encourage employee fitness, provide healthful food choices in cafeterias and vending machines, and offer annual onsite influenza vaccinations. *Healthy People 2010* describes the elements of a comprehensive worksite health promotion program. Taking these steps would establish a health promotion model for the private sector to emulate.

(more)

- **Designate the Secretary of HHS as the governmental lead for mobilizing the work of the various federal agencies responsible for programs key to achieving the nation's *Healthy People* goals and objectives. Direct the Surgeon General to submit an annual "Spotlight on the Nation's Health" report to the Secretary of HHS and the President focusing on 10-15 key indicators of the health status of Americans.**

In a national effort involving public and private participants at the federal, state, and local levels, the *Healthy People* process has established measurable and achievable high priority objectives for the prevention of disease and promotion of health among Americans. Most of these targets can be accomplished by more efficient direction and focus, without additional resources. But doing so will require committed determination and leadership of the sort that falls naturally to the Secretary of Health and Human Services, the Surgeon General, and the partners they can engage across government. All that is needed is the mandate and the visible public commitment, including a commitment to a strengthened state and local public health delivery system charged with "creating conditions for people to be healthy", a mission which personal preventive services alone cannot achieve."

- **Create an inter-departmental National Obesity Council to develop a comprehensive and coordinated national strategy for combating the obesity epidemic.**

Most federal agencies have programs and mandates that directly affect Americans' levels of physical activity and good nutrition. These agencies include, but are not limited to, HHS, USDA, Education, Interior, FTC, and FCC. Yet there is currently no coordinated federal, much less national, plan for addressing the far-reaching and costly public health problem of obesity. Partnership urges you to create an inter-departmental council to develop a national obesity prevention plan. The council would be comprised of the heads of all federal agencies that have programs or policies that can influence obesity as well as representatives from key private sector leaders. The council would assess the impact of each agency's programs and policies on physical activity, nutrition, and obesity, and would recommend new programs and policies needed to carry out the national plan.

- **Submit the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control to the Senate for ratification.**

The World Health Organization's Framework Convention on Tobacco Control outlines a comprehensive approach for countries to prevent and reduce tobacco use. It is one of the most widely embraced of all United Nations treaties, but the United States has not yet ratified it. It is anticipated that adoption and implementation of the treaty's key elements will significantly strengthen the nation's tobacco control efforts.

* * * * *

Partnership for Prevention is a membership organization comprised of businesses, nonprofit organizations, and state and local government agencies that seek to advance policies and practices that prevent disease and improve health. We seek to increase the priority that the nation places on prevention.

Partnership has developed a package of legislative recommendations that aim to strengthen the role of prevention in national health reform efforts. This includes expanding the delivery both of clinical preventive services and of population-based preventive services and policies.

(more)

The bold actions outlined above will send a strong message that your Administration is committed to preventing disease and promoting health. We hope you will act on these recommendations soon, and we look forward to working with you as you seek to bring about fundamental reforms to our nation's health system.

Sincerely,



Corinne G. Husten, MD, MPH
Interim President
Partnership for Prevention



Jonathan E. Fielding, MD, MPH, MBA
Board Chairman
Partnership for Prevention