

February 4, 2009

The Honorable Tom Harkin  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Labor/HHS  
Room 131 HSOB  
United States Senate

The Honorable Arlen Specter  
Ranking Member  
Subcommittee on Labor/HHS  
Room 156 DSOB  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairmen Harkin & Specter:

We would like to thank you for including strong public health provisions, including critical Healthy Communities funding at CDC, in the Senate versions of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. **As you move to passage of this critical legislation, we respectfully request that you support the highest level of funding possible specifically for the Healthy Communities Program at CDC, and no less than the \$400 million provided in the substitute under consideration. We also strongly urge you to resist any amendments to cut or eliminate funding for healthy communities and public health in general in the package.**

As the four lead national partners with the CDC on their Healthy Communities Program, we are deeply grateful that both your bills allocate funding for evidence-based, community-based, disease prevention efforts, particularly the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) Healthy Communities program. Our YMCAs, state and local park and recreation sites and local and state health departments have facilitated multidisciplinary community coalitions due to our widespread on-the-ground reach to the highest level of leaders. These coalitions can make change a reality for the communities they serve and can continue to ensure they commit their own local investment to this work. National partnerships have and will continue to help CDC work on the ground in communities and gain a deeper understanding of how to advance best practices and policies at the local level.

Again, we urge the highest level of funding possible for the Healthy Communities Program at CDC, and request that you support no less than the \$400 million provided in the substitute amendment under consideration. We were so pleased that the Senate specifically dedicated \$400 million for the Healthy Communities Program. We also encourage the Senate to retain the Senate Committee Report language that directs the Healthy Communities funding to CDC, gives priority to grantees exhibiting multidisciplinary collaboration, reinforces support for changes to the built environment for healthy living and encourages close collaboration between the Secretaries of HHS and Transportation to maximize the impact of the healthy communities program through coordinating funding increases.

Community level interventions show some of the most promising approaches to attacking this national crisis of obesity and chronic disease and can all lead to job creation both through support to coalition members whose work is necessary to make needed change and by the focus of this work. Some likely outcomes include: 1) Restoring physical education (PE), physical activity and recess to the school day and physical activity to afterschool child care 2) Starting or enhancing farmers markets and community gardens in areas lacking grocery stores or with limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables 3) Building new sidewalks, trails and bike paths, and 4) Implementing safe routes to school strategies, such as installing crosswalks, countdown timers at crosswalks, bike lanes, accessible sidewalks, crossing guards and programs such as walking school buses.

During these difficult budget times, there is no greater challenge to the nation's economy than the cost of treating chronic disease and obesity – *most of which are preventable*. This healthy communities work not only recognizes the urgency to focus our communities on preventing these diseases and associated conditions but brings together such a diverse sector of leaders making the reality of “real change” possible.

We thank you for your help and support to ensure this generation of American children outlive their parents and do not suffer from the human and economic costs of chronic disease. Years of research and funding have amassed a wealth of knowledge and proven strategies to increase physical activity and advance healthy eating, but to date that knowledge has not yet reached our communities.

Please ensure the highest level of funding between the House and Senate number for the Healthy Communities program in the final version of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act and resist any amendments to cut these critical funds.

Sincerely,

National Association of Chronic Disease Directors  
National Association of County & City Health Officials  
National Recreation and Park Association  
YMCA of the USA