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July 17, 2009

The Honorable Henry Waxman,  
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2125 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Joe Barton,  
Ranking Member  
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2322A Rayburn HOB  
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Chairman  
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2181 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Howard McKeon,  
Ranking Member  
Education and Labor Committee  
2101 Rayburn HOB  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen and Ranking Members:

We, the undersigned, are members of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) Alumni Society. Each of us is a former state health officer, and we experienced, first hand, the challenge of improving the health of a population within a health system that is largely focused on the provision of health care services after individuals become sick instead of innovative and effective population based state public health programs that prevent costly illness and injury. We applaud our federal elected officials' efforts to transform our nation's health system.

We, along with most in the United States, believe that a reformed health system prioritizes prevention; supports healthy environments and lifestyles; provides, at a minimum, access to preventive and primary health care for every person; eliminates inequities in health status; and protects people and communities from existing and emerging health threats.

We recognize that rising medical costs are unsustainable and that evidence-based high quality medical care is needed to lower our nation's health care costs. We are pleased to see that health promotion, wellness, and prevention are included in many health reform discussions across the country, and we want to express our support for enacting provisions that enhance state health agencies ability to implement population based public health programs.

We believe that, if the ultimate objective of health reform is optimal health for Americans, Congress should invest significantly in both non-clinical and clinical strategies to achieve this objective. The public discourse, thus far, has principally focused on universal coverage, cost containment, and quality improvement of medical care. However, if current obesity prevalence trends continue and if the burden of associated chronic diseases continues to increase, the medical care system gains will be overwhelmed by an insatiable demand for medical care.

In order to create a renewed focus on public health and wellness, we need a **National Prevention and Wellness Strategy** to focus our nation's prevention activities. We also need to invest in our state and local health departments to help achieve progress in meeting our nation's prevention and wellness goals.

To improve the nation's health, we need an expanded and sustainable funding stream to support prevention, wellness, and public health activities. Toward that end, we support the inclusion of a **Prevention and Wellness Trust**. The Trust will help to reorient our system from a reactive, treatment centered approach to a system that focuses on promoting good health and preventing costly illnesses. This Trust is intended to supplement, not supplant existing public health funding. **We support enactment of legislation that creates and maintains a dedicated, stable funding stream for core state and local public health infrastructure.**

We also support the Committee's inclusion of **public health workforce loan repayment and grant programs for states that support entry-level and mid-career workforce development in public health**. These programs will help reduce workforce shortages at state health agencies so that state health agencies can provide universal access to proven public health and community health programs for all Americans.

We, the undersigned, urge enactment of legislation and appropriation of funds in tried, tested, and proven public health and community health policies and programs that will improve health status, prevent avoidable pre-diseases and diseases, and therefore reduce the need for high quality, but still relatively more costly, medical care. We believe that, in the long run, attention to population health is the only way we will attain a high performing health system that promotes health, prevents disease, effectively diagnoses and manages chronic disease, and controls rising health care costs. The people of the United States deserve nothing less.

Sincerely,

The ASTHO Alumni Society

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