



President Barack Obama

The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

October 14, 2009

Dear President Obama:

As health care reform legislation moves forward, on behalf of CommonHealth ACTION, we write to encourage you to continue to advocate for the inclusion of provisions that support community prevention, improve health equity and provide funding for public health services. Investments in prevention are critical to successful, comprehensive health care reform.

CommonHealth ACTION works to build community and organizational capacity to address the social determinants of health equity, which supports equal opportunities for optimal health for all. Overall, social and economic disparities have increased dramatically in the last 25 years, and correlate with increasing health disparities and shorter life expectancy rates. The US is now ranked 40th in life expectancy, falling significantly behind many industrialized nations. Access to health care services, a key indicator of population equity, remains unequal. Health reform has the opportunity to improve the health status of Americans across the country by not only increasing access to health care, but also by prioritizing prevention in medical services and supporting community health promotion activities. Organizations that promote and support community health, public health institutes and appropriately resourced local public health departments are well positioned to execute community wellness strategies that support healthy lifestyles and preventive care, reducing costs associated with expensive medical treatments, thus improving quality of life.

A comprehensive health framework that emphasizes prevention and wellness can significantly alleviate the social and financial costs associated with sickness and health care by keeping people from getting sick and injured *in the first place*. Community prevention enables the health care system to run more effectively by reducing the burden on emergency departments, clinical services and in-patient care. While the cost of prevention is low, the payoff can be significant. According to a recent study commissioned by Trust for America's Health, if we spent just \$10 per person on community-based prevention, we could realize a savings of more than \$16B annually in avoidable health care costs in the first five years.

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Catalyst for health

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Both the Senate HELP Committee's *Affordable Health Choices Act* and the House Tri-Committee's *America's Affordable Health Choices Act* establish a Prevention and Public Health Fund to ensure a reliable source of payment for public health activities just as health insurance provides payment for medical care. Both bills would establish Community Transformation Grants to help fund community prevention programs that work to reduce racial and ethnic health disparities. Both the HELP Committee and Senate Finance Committee bills require the federal government to collect health data by race and ethnicity, which will provide good baseline data in our efforts to reduce health disparities. Finally, the HELP Committee bill and the House Tri-Committee bill call for the creation of a National Prevention and Wellness Strategy, which signals a high-level inter-agency commitment to supporting communities that foster health and equity.

We urge you to continue to communicate your support for these meaningful prevention strategies and stand ready to assist you in making health care reform a reality. Thank you for your service to America.

Sincerely yours in health,



Vincent Lafronza, Ed.D.
Principal



Natalie Burke
Principal