



ASSOCIATION OF MATERNAL & CHILD HEALTH PROGRAMS

October 14, 2009

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama:

On behalf of the Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs (AMCHP) we thank you for your leadership and support for wellness and prevention in health reform. We are calling on you to continue to support the National Prevention and Health Promotion Strategy and Prevention and Public Health Fund as critical components of national health reform.

Providing quality affordable health care to all Americans is a necessary and fundamental step to improving health in America. However, the U.S. already spends close to twice as much per capita than the next closest country, yet lags behind many industrialized nations in the two key measures of infant mortality and life expectancy. To truly improve our national health outcomes while driving down health care costs, we need a dramatic investment in proven public health approaches that promote the primary prevention of disease.

We therefore were thrilled when you called for *"a radical shift towards prevention and public health..."* The policies proposed in Titles III and IV of the Senate's HELP Committee bill and Section C of the House bill – especially the creation of the Public Health and Prevention Investment Fund – are critical to making the shift you called for. We urge you to advocate that these critical components be included in any final health reform legislation sent for your signature.

Three current maternal and child health issues illustrate the need to shift from a treatment to a prevention model:

Childhood Obesity: Successful efforts to expand children's health insurance coverage through CHIP and other innovative state initiatives – while necessary – have not made any significant dent in the epidemic of childhood obesity. We now have millions of well-insured but overweight and obese kids whose future chronic diseases will become the major driver of future health care spending unless we invest now to reverse this trend.

Infant Mortality – Despite successful efforts over the past decade to substantially expand early access to prenatal care, the pre-term birth rate has risen dramatically and progress in reducing infant mortality has stalled. Even though Medicaid helps assure that all pregnant women in the U.S. have some insurance coverage (albeit usually too late), we continue to rank 29th in the industrialized world in infant mortality rates. Worse yet, African American babies die at twice the rate of white babies. Making investments in both coverage and public health programs that improve the health of women *before* they become pregnant will help reverse these unacceptable indicators.

Childhood Injuries - Injuries are the leading cause of death for children, and the U.S. spends literally tens of billions of dollars every year to provide health insurance to children – in part to treat injuries. Meanwhile, last year the entire budget of the CDC’s National Center for Injury Prevention and Control was \$142 million. At this level the CDC is able to fund only 30 states for basic injury prevention programs.

Similarly, the Title V MCH Services Block Grant and Preventive Health Service Block Grant- which both support injury prevention efforts - have been cut by over \$90 million over the past seven years. **There are few better illustrations of where our public policy favors treatment over prevention.** Despite this under-investment, state and local injury control programs – along with partners in Safe Kids coalitions and others - have cut the childhood injury death rate almost in half over the past 20 years. This is a public health success story and proves that prevention works.

The proposed Prevention and Public Health Fund is critical to bringing effective programs to scale, reversing the erosion of vital public health programs, and making new investments in the health of all Americans. It is a critical component of national health reform. Health reform offers the opportunity to dramatically realign incentives and invest in prevention. The Public Health and Prevention Fund will assure stable funding to support core public health functions and expand vital preventive services offered through federal, state and local public health agencies and their partners. The Fund represents an investment that offers the potential to save tens of billions in health care spending and hundreds of thousands of lives. For example, cutting the pre-term birth rate in half would save an estimated \$13 billion dollars, would save the lives of thousands of babies, and would itself cover the costs of the proposed fund.

Thank you again for your leadership to include the National Prevention and Health Promotion Strategy and Prevention and Public Health Fund in health reform.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'M Fraser', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Michael Fraser, Ph.D.
Chief Executive Officer