

September 8, 2008

Prevention for a Healthier America Trust for America's Health

To: Interested Parties
From: Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research
Public Opinion Strategies

The following analysis is based on a national research project funded by the Trust for America's Health and conducted by Greenberg Quinlan Rosner Research and Public Opinion Strategies. The project included 8 focus groups conducted in May 2008 among various audiences in four locations, as well as a national survey of 1,026 registered voters conducted June 1 – 8, 2008. The margin of error is +/- 3.1 percentage points at the 95 percent confidence level.

Major diseases and health problems are slowing down the American workforce and crippling the economy. Preventable diseases are driving health care costs through the roof, making health insurance unaffordable for regular families and bankrupting American small businesses. Each year, the United States spends \$2 trillion on health care, an average of more than \$7,000 per person. And as the number of obesity-related diseases such as diabetes and heart disease grows, the problem continues to get worse—this number is expected to double by 2017.

But we can solve this problem. These diseases are preventable—two-thirds of Americans are obese or overweight, while 20 percent do not engage in any kind of physical activity. An investment of just \$10 per person into programs aimed at making communities healthier by increasing physical activity and improving nutrition could save the U.S. more than \$16 billion dollars a year within five years—a return of nearly \$6 for every one dollar spent. It would also have a significant impact on quality of life. These programs could reduce the rates of Type 2 diabetes and high blood pressure by 5 percent within two years, decrease heart and kidney disease and stroke by 5 percent within 5 years, and even reduce some forms of cancer by 2.5 percent within 10 to twenty years.

But good health is not solely the responsibility of the government, and increased funding alone will not solve the problem. Each individual has a role to play, a personal responsibility to make the right choices—and it is the role of government to help make the right choices easy (73 percent responded that a message centered on this notion of personal accountability combined with government assistance is a convincing reason to increase government funding for prevention). Good health requires a public-private partnership, a shared responsibility between the government and the individual.

Investing in keeping Americans healthy—instead of simply treating them when they get sick—is one of the easiest and most important ways to reduce health care costs and get the economy back on track. America’s future—the health of our children and our economy—depends on it.

Key Findings

- Investment in keeping people healthy and preventing disease is viewed as an effective measure for keeping health care costs down.** As the table below shows, 63 percent believe that investing in helping people prevent disease and stay healthy will save money on long-term health care costs, against just 32 percent who believe that this type of investment is not worth the cost.
- Health issues have a real place in the debate.** Though it is unlikely major diseases and health problems like obesity trump the economy as a high priority for Americans, these health issues are certainly very real for many people. As demonstrated by the table below, nearly as many people (44 percent) believe that the U.S. needs to make an immediate investment in health issues as believe that while these health issues are important, the economy is a bigger concern (47 percent).

■ **Table 1:** Statement pairs; percent responding

Investment in Health Issues Seen as Important Priorities

	1st Statement – 2nd Statement
Investing in helping people prevent disease and stay healthier now will save money on health care costs in the long run.	
Investing in helping people prevent disease and stay healthier now will not help, because it will cost too much and too many people will continue to make poor health decisions anyway.	63 – 32
Diseases and major health issues such as childhood obesity are big problems, and we need to invest more money now into preventing them.	
Diseases and major health issues present real problems for the country, but there are too many other priorities, such as education or the economy, that we need to invest in first.	44 – 47
<i>Now let me read you some short statements about health problems and safety issues in the United States. Please tell me which statement comes closer to your own view.</i>	

- Prevention is seen as a top reason to increase government funding for health issues.** As seen in the table below, nearly three-quarters or more of the American public believe that statements centered on prevention are convincing reasons to invest more government funding into health issues.

Table 2: Top reasons to increase government funding for health issues; percent responding

Top Reasons to Increase Health Funding Center on Prevention

	Very Convincing	Total Convincing
America's future depends upon the health of our children, yet our kids are becoming less healthy every day, falling behind the rest of the world, and could be the first generation to live shorter, less healthy lives than their parents. We are failing our children, and it is time to make their health our top priority.	45	74
There is a clear connection between people's living environment and their health--we need to make sure our communities are clean, healthy, and safe. When we invest in improving the health of our communities, we improve the health of the people who live and work there.	43	78
Major diseases and health problems are driving health care costs through the roof and bankrupting American businesses. If we invest now in preventing disease and staying healthy, people will have fewer illnesses and their health care costs will be lower, and families and businesses will have to spend less on health insurance and medical care, which will save us all money in the long run. <i>Please tell me whether this is a very convincing, somewhat convincing, a little convincing or not at all convincing reason to increase government funding for health issues, like researching and preventing major diseases and health problems.</i>	39	73

- Prevention-centric solutions to the problem are seen as useful.** When given a list of 13 potential preventative measures to help combat America's obesity epidemic, at least 60 percent of the public viewed 11 of the measures as useful ideas. The top ideas for combating obesity centered on increasing physical activity and improving nutrition for children in schools. Tax incentives for staying healthy and expanded nutritional labeling in stores and restaurants also scored well.