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October 14, 2009

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to urge you to continue to make prevention one of your core principles as health reform moves through the legislative process. With a greater emphasis on prevention, a reformed health care system could better address the underlying causes of poor health and more effectively use our nation's health care resources.

Earlier this year, you took strong action that will reduce tobacco use, especially among young people, by signing into law the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, which gave the FDA regulatory authority over tobacco products. Health reform presents another opportunity to help tobacco users to quit and prevent young people from beginning a lifelong struggle with nicotine addiction.

Preventing tobacco use will save lives and reduce disease and will lower health care costs over the long run. Each year, tobacco use is responsible for more than 400,000 deaths and nearly \$100 billion in health care costs. About one in five deaths from coronary heart disease, nearly one in three deaths from cancer, and almost 9 in 10 deaths from lung cancer are attributable to smoking.

To reduce the devastating toll that tobacco takes on our families and the nation, health reform should: (1) require private and public health insurance to cover recommended tobacco cessation services, and (2) invest in community-based prevention.

Require private and public health insurance coverage of tobacco cessation services.

Tobacco users should have access to the tools that will improve their chances of quitting. The U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) and the Public Health Service recommend coverage of FDA-approved medications (both prescription and over-the-counter) and counseling sessions. Use of these services has been shown to increase the proportion of smokers who attempt to quit and quit successfully. Private health insurance and state Medicaid programs should be required to cover USPSTF-recommended tobacco cessation services and impose no cost-sharing requirements for using them.

Invest in community-based prevention. State-based, community-based, and school-based tobacco prevention programs and national mass media campaigns have successfully reduced tobacco use. According to best practice guidelines developed by the CDC, state tobacco control programs should include: public education efforts to prevent kids from starting to smoke and encourage people to quit; community-based programs that target populations most impacted by tobacco use where they live, work, play and worship; and cessation programs to help tobacco users quit such as providing access to counseling (e.g., quitlines) and FDA-approved medications. While state tobacco prevention programs and well done national mass media campaigns work, they have been chronically underfunded. In fiscal year 2009, no state committed the level of resources that the CDC recommended for tobacco prevention. Health reform legislation should include a new source of mandatory funding for evidence-based prevention programs with a proven track record of impact, such as tobacco control.

Health reform presents an important opportunity to create a health care system that values prevention of disease as much as treatment of disease. There are enormous health gains to be had from reducing tobacco use. Clinical- and community-based efforts have proven to be effective at reducing tobacco use and should be included in health reform legislation. We appreciate your support for prevention and your leadership in making prevention a key element of health reform.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Matthew L. Myers". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Matthew L. Myers
President