America should strive to be the healthiest nation in the world. Every American should have the opportunity to be as healthy as he or she can be. Every community should be safe from threats to its health. And all individuals and families should have a high level of services that protect, promote, and preserve their health, regardless of who they are or where they live.

To realize these goals, the nation must strengthen America’s public health system in order to: 1) provide people with the information, resources, and environment they need to make healthier choices and live healthier lives, and 2) protect people from health threats beyond their control, such as bioterrorism, natural disasters, infectious disease outbreaks, and environmental hazards. Achieving this vision will require the combined efforts of federal, state, and local governments in partnership with businesses, communities, and citizens.

The Problem and Need for Action
Today, serious gaps exist in the nation's ability to safeguard health, putting our families, communities, states, and nation at risk.

- More than seven years after September 11, 2001, and nearly four years after Hurricane Katrina, major problems remain in our readiness to respond to large-scale health emergencies. The country is still insufficiently prepared to protect people from disease outbreaks, natural disasters, or acts of bioterrorism, leaving Americans unnecessarily vulnerable to these threats.

- Even though America spends more than $2 trillion annually on health care -- more than any other nation in the world -- tens of millions of Americans suffer every day from preventable illnesses and chronic diseases like cancer, diabetes, and Alzheimer’s that rob them of health and quality of life. Racial, ethnic and economic disparities serve to exacerbate the burden of disease. Baby boomers may be the first generation to live less healthy lives than their parents. And, the obesity crisis is putting millions of adults and children at risk for unprecedented levels of major diseases like diabetes and heart disease.

- Poor health is putting the nation’s economic security in jeopardy. The skyrocketing costs of health care threaten to bankrupt American businesses, causing some companies to send jobs to other countries where costs are lower. Helping people to stay healthy and better manage illnesses are the best ways to drive down health care costs. Keeping the American workforce well helps American business remain competitive in the global economy.

America must provide quality, affordable health care to all. But that’s not enough. The government must create strategies to eliminate health disparities and improve the health of all Americans, regardless of race, ethnicity, or socioeconomic status. A strong public health system and public policies focused on prevention of disease and injury must be part of the solution.
Guiding Principles for Prevention

Preventing and combating threats to our health is the primary responsibility of our nation’s public health system. The public health system consists of health agencies at the federal, state, and local levels of government that work in collaboration with health care providers, businesses, and community partners. Achieving a Healthier America requires a national commitment to revitalizing and modernizing the public health system.

1. We believe prevention must drive our nation’s health strategy.
   - Our support for health care has focused for too long on caring for people after they become sick or harmed. Prevention means improving the quality of people’s lives, sparing individuals from needless suffering, and eliminating unnecessary costs from our health system.
   - Fundamentals like investigating epidemics, educating the public about health risks, early screening for disease, and immunization are proven to help prevent and reduce the rates of illness and disease. A greater emphasis on prevention could significantly reduce rates of chronic illness.

2. We believe Americans deserve healthy and safe places to live, work, and play.
   - By supporting policies and programs like promoting healthier schools, smoke-free environments, and improved community design, the government can do more to meet its responsibility to help citizens lead healthier lives.
   - The government must protect air, water, and food; minimize chemical exposures; and provide communities healthier environments.

3. We believe every community should be prepared to meet the threats of infectious disease, terrorism, and natural disasters.
   - A basic role of government is to protect us and our health from threats like bioterrorism and infectious disease outbreaks, and to keep our food supply safe.

4. We believe Americans deserve to know what government is doing to keep them healthy and safe.
   - The federal government role is to assure that all parts of the public health system have sufficient resources and meet basic standards for protecting the public's health. Government at all levels must also be held accountable for the health and safety of the American people. And, the government must show that it is spending public health dollars effectively and in a way that clearly improves the public’s health and safety.
We, the undersigned, are proud to be signatories to this commitment to a healthier America:

Commitments as of October 16, 2008

AARP
Active for Life
AIDS Action Council
Allergy & Asthma Network Mothers of Asthmatics
Alliance for Healthy Homes
America Walks
American Academy of Pediatrics
American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance
American Association for Homecare
American Association of Occupational Health Nurses, Inc.
American Cancer Society-Cancer Action Network
American College of Clinical Pharmacy
American College of Occupational and Environmental Medicine
American College of Preventive Medicine
American Diabetes Association
American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME)
American Heart Association
American Institute for Medical and Biological Engineering
American Lung Association
American Nurses Association
American Osteopathic Association

American Optometric Association
American Pharmacists Association
American Public Health Association
American Red Cross
American School Health Association
American Tai Chi Association
Amputee Coalition of America
Association for Prevention Teaching and Research
Association for Professionals in Infection Control and Epidemiology
Association of Maternal and Child Health Programs
Association of Public Health Laboratories
Association of Schools of Public Health
Association of State and Territorial Directors of Nursing
Association of State and Territorial Health Officials
Association of State and Territorial Public Health Nutrition Directors
Association of Women's Health, Obstetric, and Neonatal Nurses
Autism Society of America
Bauman Family Foundation
Breast Cancer Fund
California Communities Against Toxics
The California Endowment
National Association of Local Boards of Health
National Association of State EMS Officials
National Center for Bicycling & Walking
National Center for Healthy Housing
National Coalition for LGBT Health
National Coalition for Promoting Physical Activity
National Council on Aging
National Disease Clusters Alliance
The National Environmental Health Association
National Hispanic Medical Association
National Network of Public Health Institutes
National Nursing Centers Consortium
National Nursing Network Organization
National Physicians Alliance
National Public Health Information Coalition
National Recreation and Park Association
National Research Center for Women & Families
National Tuberculosis Controllers Association
The National Urban League
National WIC Association
Nemours Health and Prevention Services
The New York Academy of Medicine
New York State Nutrition Council
Partners for a Healthy Nevada
Partnership for Prevention
Physicians for Social Responsibility
The Praxis Project/Path
Prevent Blindness America
Prevention Institute
Preventive Cardiovascular Nurses Association
Public Health Foundation
Research!America
Researchers Against Inactivity-Related Disorders
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation
Safe Routes to School National Partnership
Samuels & Associates
Shaping America’s Health
Society for Adolescent Medicine
Society for Advancement of Violence and Injury Research
Society for Public Health Education
The South Carolina Eat Smart, Move More Coalition
Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association
The Sports Karma Foundation
Trust for America’s Health*
Tulane Center for Applied Environmental Public Health
United States Water Fitness Association
University of Arkansas Fay W. Boozman College of Public Health
Vegetarian Resource Group
Washington Health Foundation
Women’s Sports Foundation
The Healthier America Project is organized by the Trust for America’s Health. Contact Rich Hamburg, rhamburg@tfah.org, or Chrissie Juliano, cjuliano@tfah.org, to sign on.