



YMCA of the USA

October 23, 2009

The Honorable Barack H. Obama  
President of the United States  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear President Obama:

On behalf of the 2,686 YMCAs serving nearly 21 million Americans, I am writing to ask for **your support of the prevention provisions in the Affordable Health Choices Act** in the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pension (HELP) and House Tri-Committee bills, and urge the **inclusion of small employer accommodations**, similar to those included in the Senate HELP and Finance health care reform bills.

### **PREVENTION**

Specifically YMCA of the USA supports provisions that create **a national trust fund for prevention, “Creating Healthier Communities” provisions and authorities that expand programs that reduce chronic disease by promoting healthy eating, physical activity and smoking cessation.**

The national trust fund for prevention enables a dedicated stream of funds for a variety of public health interventions. These provisions would lower disease rates, improve quality of life and reduce health care costs for millions of Americans. We know that a strategic investment in evidence-based disease prevention programs in communities can result in a big payoff in a short time.

The **Creating Healthier Communities provision** authorized in the Senate HELP bill would award competitive grants to state and local government agencies and community-based organizations for the implementation, evaluation, and dissemination of proven community preventive health activities in order to reduce chronic disease rates, address health disparities, and develop a stronger evidence-base of effective prevention programming.

The Creating Healthier Communities provision builds off more than a decade of work by the CDC to build healthy communities, reduce disparities and support innovative programs to increase access to nutrition and physical activity. CDC’s Healthy Communities Program enables national organizations such as the YMCA to partner in this work. Over the past six years, CDC’s Healthy Communities Program has funded 180 communities convened by YMCAs and state and local health departments to drive change toward healthier living environments. More than 100 of these community teams were convened by YMCAs.

CDC funded YMCA of the USA to build the Pioneering Healthier Communities (PHC) initiative, which brings the highest level of local leaders together to drive policy and environmental change strategies to increase physical activity and improve nutrition where people live, work, learn and play. Recently YMCA of the USA helped pilot and launch CDC’s ACHIEVE initiative, which is modeled after PHC and engages other national organizations in this work. Successes of the Healthy Communities Program include:

- Restoring physical education (PE) to the school day and requiring physical activity and healthy snacks in child care sites
- Enhancing farmers markets and community gardens in areas lacking grocery stores or with limited access to fresh fruits and vegetables

YMCA of the USA • 101 North Wacker Drive • Chicago, Illinois 60606  
312-977-0031 (main) • 800-872-9622 (toll free) • 312-977-9063 (fax) • [www.ymca.net](http://www.ymca.net)

**YMCA Mission:** To put Christian principles into practice through programs that build healthy spirit, mind and body for all.

- Changing zoning requirements to ensure that new developments include sidewalks
- Building new trails and bike paths
- Implementing safe routes to school and complete street strategies

More than 50 million Americans are living with pre-diabetes, and cost has traditionally been a barrier to offering interventions that can reduce and even reverse the effect of pre-diabetes. Multiple prediction models have now demonstrated that a structured lifestyle intervention to prevent diabetes can be cost saving within 2 to 3 years time if the direct costs of the intervention can be reduced to \$250 - \$300 per year. Therefore, YMCA of the USA also strongly supports provisions in the Senate HELP bill that authorize **the development and promotion of programs targeting a variety of age levels to increase access to nutrition, physical activity and smoking cessation, enhance safety in a community, or address any other chronic disease priority.** An example of such programs is YMCA of the USA's replication of the national **Diabetes Prevention Program** under the guidance and leadership of Indiana University. Demonstration projects in a few YMCAs have shown that a carefully designed group lifestyle intervention can be delivered for less than \$250 per person per year in community settings and can achieve similar weight loss results as the more costly National Diabetes Prevention Program in adults with pre-diabetes.

### **NONPROFIT PARITY**

Finally, a successful health care reform effort must guarantee affordable and accessible care for *all* employees. Nonprofit organizations are a vital and significant part of the American economy. The nonprofit sector constitutes the fourth largest segment of the American workforce and generates approximately 12 percent of the Gross National Product (GNP). Nonprofit employees are working in every congressional district to serve our constituents, solve local problems and deliver government-funded services in diverse fields ranging from workforce development and violence prevention to health and human services. **YMCAs, and nearly all nonprofit organizations, are struggling to provide health insurance coverage for their employees.** These mainly small employers experience the same higher costs and limited options as their for-profit, small business counterparts. While small for-profit and non-profit organizations face similar challenges, none of the current House bills extend reforms and benefits to the nonprofit sector. As written, the tax credit provisions included by the House to address the needs of small, for-profit business would not be available to small nonprofit employers.

For health care reform to be truly comprehensive, it must include nonprofit employers and their employees. **The Senate Finance Committee and Senate Health, Employment, Labor and Pensions Committee have included language that covers both small nonprofit and for-profit employers.** We would like to work with you and the Tri-Committee chairs to ensure that the House health reform bill provides comparable treatment for all small employers.

Sincerely,



Neil Nicoll  
President and CEO  
YMCA of the USA