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PUBLIC HEALTH GROUP APPLAUDS NAMING OF NEW CDC DIRECTOR;

Urges Director to Boost Public Health System to Protect Americans from Full Range of Health Threats

Washington, **DC** – A non-profit public health advocacy group applauded the announcement today naming Julie Gerberding director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and called on the new director to make preventing chronic diseases a primary focus of CDC's work in the year ahead.

Trust for America's Health (TFAH), along with several other health groups, has been urging the Bush Administration to act quickly to fill vacant positions in federal offices charged with protecting the public's health with qualified public health experts. (See attached letter from health groups to President Bush concerning the need for qualified public health leaders.)

"Now more than ever, we need capable public health leaders to protect our communities' health," said Dr. Shelley Hearne, executive director of TFAH. "We look forward to working with Dr. Gerberding as our public health system grapples with how to strengthen our defenses to protect us from terrorist threats as well as the ongoing serious concerns of chronic and infectious diseases."

As the premiere public health federal agency, CDC this year has distributed about \$1 billion to help improve state and local public health agencies' bioterrorism preparedness. The new funding is a good start, but additional action is needed. TFAH has noted that this funding and CDC's guidelines on how to spend it do not help the nation prepare for the number one killer of Americans today -- chronic diseases like cancer, asthma and Parkinson's disease.

"While the new director is well positioned to help state and local public health departments improve their capacity to prevent health threats from biological terrorist attacks, we also hope that she will lead the efforts needed to boost our public health system to fight the full range of health threats facing Americans," said Hearne.

"Today, 70 percent of us die from chronic diseases. Investing in the fundamentals of public health, such as disease tracking and exposure monitoring, communications networks, well-equipped laboratories, and more and better-trained professionals will help us better prevent chronic illnesses as well as other diseases," added Hearne.

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The Trust for America's Health is a national non-profit organization whose mission is to protect the health and safety of all communities, especially those most at risk of environmental and other public health threats. For more information, visit www.healthyamericans.org.