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Trust for America’s Health Director Testifies before Congress on Child Obesity Epidemic

Highlights Economic Security Risks of Child Obesity Crisis

Washington, D.C. – Jeffrey Levi, Executive Director of Trust for America’s Health (TFAH), testified before the Senate Committee on Health Education, Labor and Pensions today, urging action to effectively combat childhood obesity. Levi emphasized the serious impact that the epidemic is having on America’s children, economy, and national security. Overall, approximately 23 million children are obese or overweight, and rates of obesity have nearly tripled since 1980.

Levi testified before the Committee, “We have placed kids in a less nutritious environment – it is not just too much food, but too much bad food that kids are eating, and we have not harnessed the opportunities of the school to compensate…. The poor health of Americans of all ages is putting the nation’s economic security in jeopardy, with more than a quarter of U.S. health care costs related to physical inactivity, overweight and obesity. To maintain our economic competitiveness and our general health and well-being, we must improve the health of America’s next generation.”

Levi also outlined how the obesity crisis is impacting economic and national security. Obesity is contributing to increases in health care costs and lowering worker productivity. More than one-fourth of health care costs are related to obesity or physical inactivity.

In addition, the rise in obesity is reducing the number of volunteers for military service who are able to meet height and weight requirements. Each year, between 3,000 and 5,000 service members are forced to leave the military because they are overweight.

TFAH releases a report every year on the national obesity crisis, “F as in Fat: How Obesity Policies are Failing in America,” which includes ranking of states’ obesity rates and a review of federal and state obesity policies. The 2008 version of the report will be available in mid-August. The full text of Levi’s testimony and TFAH’s report “F as in Fat,” including state rankings, is available at http://healthyamericans.org/
TFAH’s Key Recommendations for Combating Obesity

· **Think big.** The federal government should develop and implement a National Strategy to Combat Obesity. This plan should involve every federal government agency, define clear roles and responsibilities for states and localities, and engage private industry and community groups.

· **Make healthy choices easy choices.** Federal, state, and local governments should develop and implement policies that give Americans the tools they need to make it easier to engage in the recommended levels of physical activity and choose healthy foods, ranging from improving food served and increasing opportunities for physical activity in schools to requiring restaurants and food companies to provide better and more readily accessible information about the nutritional content of their products to securing more safe, affordable recreation places for all Americans.

· **Improve your bottom line.** Federal, state, and local governments should work with private employers and insurers to ensure that every working American has access to a workplace wellness program.

· **Escalate research on how to promote healthy choices.** Public health officials have identified a number of strategies to help encourage people to make healthier decisions about nutrition and activity, however, much more research needs to be done about how to effectively promote healthier habits.

Trust for America’s Health is a non–profit, non–partisan organization dedicated to saving lives by protecting the health of every community and working to make disease prevention a national priority.

[www.healthyamericans.org](http://www.healthyamericans.org)