



**Memorandum in Support
S. 1074 (Harkin)
Health Lifestyles and Prevention America Act**

The Children's Health Fund (CHF) supports S.1074, the Healthy Lifestyles and Prevention America Act ("HeLP America Act"), as introduced by Senator Tom Harkin (IA). The legislation is a comprehensive health promotion and wellness bill that aims to prevent childhood obesity with a variety of approaches, encouraging schools to foster healthy habits, developing healthy communities through planning grants, empowering individuals through nutritional labels, and focusing on preventative medicine to improve individuals' health. The Children's Health Fund applauds this multi-tiered effort to improve the overall health of children and families.

The Children's Health Fund, recognizing this rapid rise in overweight and obesity in children served by the New York Children's Health Project and other projects located in medically underserved areas throughout the country, created the Starting Right Initiative. The Starting Right Initiative is an innovative model of care that identifies children and adolescents at risk of overweight and serious associated health problems including Type 2 Diabetes Mellitus (T2DM) and cardiovascular disease. In addition to establishing appropriate child-specific identification, screening and referral protocols, Starting Right has begun to expand intervention efforts that integrate health education materials, a family-focused weight management program, one-on-one nutrition counseling, mental health services, and pre-natal and early childhood care into the clinical model of care.

Children form most of their habits early in life. The HeLP America Act focuses on several school based initiatives to foster healthy eating. Only one in five young people eat the recommended 5 daily servings of fruits and vegetables. By strengthening the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program, schools will be better able to provide healthy and attractive snack options to kids. Competitive foods, foods sold in competition with school meals, would be restricted in all public schools by the legislation

The Act establishes Healthy School Nutrition Environment Incentive Grants to assist schools who wish to implement healthy school nutrition standards. Fresh fruit and vegetables are often expensive, with school budgets stretched to the limit, grants would enable schools to fund healthy cafeteria food and lessen the dependence on vending machine contracts.

The HeLP America Act requires the Secretary of Transportation to develop enhanced standards for the design of roads and intersection controls to improve pedestrian and bicycle safety as well as provide for incentives to increase safety. Healthy living designs encourage walking and the use of parks in both urban and rural areas. In urban areas, access to safe parks is often scarce in communities with high poverty rates. In rural areas many children and families are dependent on cars to travel long distances to school and work, walking is not feasible.

The HeLP America Act would require nutritional labeling of food items in restaurants. A consumer would know exactly how many calories, fat grams, and sodium certain food items contain. This enables consumers to take an active responsibility for their health and track caloric and fat intake.

The bill would also establish a federal grant program under a separate line item appropriation to support preventive medicine residency training. The need for medical practitioners, especially nutritionists and family practitioners, is acute in communities across the country, especially areas designated as health practitioner shortage areas and medically underserved areas by the Health Resources Services Administration. Preventive medicine includes routine care that addresses the onset of overweight and obesity, instead of waiting until co-morbidities, such as diabetes and heart disease present themselves in children.

The bill also addresses mental health needs of communities by creating grants to integrate mental health systems and schools, conducting a national assessment of mental health needs and providing reimbursement for mental health services under Medicaid. Mental health needs are dire throughout the United States, with a lack of service providers and lack of access for poor and low income children and families, those who are most likely to need such services. The Children's Health Fund strongly supports efforts to shore up the mental health care system of delivery.

Drawing on our experience with Starting Right, CHF supports initiatives to address structural and societal weaknesses that foster unhealthy lifestyles in children. The Healthy Lifestyles and Prevention Act addresses key components of a child's life, schools, communities, and physical and mental health care, as a means to help children lead healthier lives. CHF encourages Congress to enact the Healthy Lifestyles and Prevention America Act.

The Children's Health Fund, through its work with hospitals and health centers throughout the country, has provided comprehensive pediatric care to more than 300,000 medically underserved children since its inception in 1987. By providing a medical home to thousands of children through 17 programs in 13 states and the District of Columbia, CHF recognizes the importance of public health insurance programs to ensure continuity of care, the continuation of a child's access to a medical home.