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President's Budget Presents Dangerous, Costly Setback to Obesity Epidemic, Campaign Warns

(Washington, DC) In the face of staggering costs – both in lives and in billions of taxpayer dollars spent because of the nation's obesity epidemic – the President's budget cuts vital obesity prevention programs by \$4 billion over the next ten years, the Campaign to End Obesity Action Fund warned today.

The President's budget recommends drastic reductions to programs that the White House championed a little more than 18 months ago designed to promote prevention and wellness through "an unprecedented funding commitment to these areas." At that time, the President specifically proposed "the creation of a national prevention and health promotion strategy that incorporates the most effective and achievable methods to improve the health status of Americans and reduce the incidence of preventable illness and disability in the United States."

These programs were largely contained in the Affordable Care Act, which established the Prevention and Public Health Fund in significant part to reverse the obesity epidemic and help the nation secure a healthier future. The Fund – the whose budget the President now proposes to cut by more than 20 percent over the next 10 years – enables work by state and local governmental agencies and community organizations to increase healthy food options in schools, create physical activity programs and promote incentives for workplace wellness.

In a statement, Stephanie Silverman, cofounder of the Campaign to End Obesity Action Fund, said:

"The President must know that there is little good news about obesity -- the epidemic continues, and with it the long term costs to our nation increase. The First Lady has done exemplary work highlighting some of the successes of prevention efforts, but obesity remains one of the country's costliest medical conditions. We respectfully urge the President to reconsider his recommendation, which would undermine vital obesity prevention and reversal initiatives already in place around the country."

"The initiatives supported by the Prevention Fund can help our communities to get on track to a healthy weight and achieve more manageable long-term health care costs. Standing pat will not get us there. If we are serious about reigning in health care costs, we must have strategies to change our nation's current course. No easy fixes exist to balancing our budget, but failing to put all of our muscle behind

tackling the obesity epidemic will only lead to greater illness for patients and greater expenses for taxpayers in the long run. Reducing the Prevention and Public Health Fund is economically backwards.”

Ultimately, slashing obesity prevention programs will not help the U.S. to reduce its deficit, particularly in light of a recent study from the Trust for America’s Health, which finds that if obesity rates were reduced by five percent in the U.S. the country could save \$29.8 billion in five years, \$158.1 billion in 10 years and \$611.7 billion in 20 years in health care costs.

Currently, the annual health costs related to obesity in the U.S. are as high as \$168 billion and obesity drives nearly 17 percent of U.S. medical costs, according to research released by the National Bureau of Economic Research. By 2018 – just six years from now, researchers at Emory University estimate that obesity could account for 21 percent of all health care spending. Employers alone experience a more than \$73 billion loss each year due to losses in productivity, absenteeism and medical costs attributed to obesity, according to researchers at Duke University.

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About the Campaign to End Obesity Action Fund

The Campaign to End Obesity Action Fund is dedicated to federal policy changes that can reverse one of America’s costliest diseases. The Campaign convenes leaders from industry, academia, public health and associations to speak with one voice for measures to reverse the obesity epidemic and promote healthy weight in children and adults.