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Campaign to End Obesity Applauds Introduction of Sen. Harkin's HELP America Act

*Bill would help curb obesity epidemic through several Campaign priorities:
BMI analysis, physical activity guidelines & workplace wellness programs*

(Washington DC) The Campaign to End Obesity today applauded Senator Tom Harkin, Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, for introducing the HELP America Act, (S. 174). The legislation's initiatives to help curb the obesity epidemic—from steps that will encourage the tracking and screening of body mass index (BMI) among adults and children, to promoting appropriate levels of physical activity, and encouraging a healthy workforce—represent significant steps toward improving the health of all Americans and decreasing long term spending on health care costs.

"The HELP America Act reflects thoughtful and effective policies that can help Americans reach and sustain a healthy weight," said Penny Lee, Executive Director of the Campaign to End Obesity. "As America's health care costs associated with obesity become increasingly unsustainable, these efforts aimed at prevention could not be more timely. In fact, new research suggests that nearly 17 percent of all U.S. medical costs can be attributed to obesity. We commend Sen. Harkin for taking such steps that can begin to reverse this epidemic, and urge his colleagues in the Senate to cosponsor the bill."

Senator Harkin has been a leader in the effort to get America back on track to a healthy weight. His commitment has been seen through such measures as the "Fitness Integrated with Teaching Kids" Act and the "Safe Routes to School" program. Senator Harkin participated in the landmark National Summit on Obesity Policy in 2007, and the Campaign to End Obesity recognized Sen. Harkin at its annual Breakfast With Champions event in 2010.

While more work will need to be done to comprehensively address rising rates of overweight and obesity in the United States, the Campaign is pleased to see a number of provisions in the HELP America Act that it considers key priorities. These include:

- **Body Mass Index Analysis:** The legislation would allow states to develop and implement training programs for medical professionals in taking BMI measurements and discussing such measurements with patients. Additionally, it would provide BMI information to parents and legal guardians. Currently, BMI is not monitored for most participants in federal health programs; that creates a barrier to the needed first step in preventing or reversing obesity—

knowing whether we are at a healthy weight. The Campaign urges Congress to support BMI and body composition screening through all available measures.

- **Physical Activity Guidelines for Americas:** The legislation would provide updated guidelines to all Americans about an appropriate level of physical activity. Obesity is a complex disease, which requires a variety of strategies to address the growing epidemic, including greater physical activity.
- **Tax Credit for Employers for Costs of Implementing Wellness Programs:** The CDC estimates that medical expenses for obese employees are 42 percent higher than for a person with a healthy weight. Many employers identify employee fitness as an economic imperative: to remain competitive, they need healthy, productive workers.
- **Coverage of Preventive Services under Medicaid:** Expanding obesity preventive services, particularly to those populations that are most at-risk for suffering from obesity, is strongly supported by the Campaign. The Campaign would like to see this provision expanded to also include preventive screening for SCHIP recipients and clarified to ensure that counseling for diet and exercise as well as healthy weight and obesity counseling would be covered services.

“In addition to the important provisions contained in the HELP America Act,” Lee continued, “the Campaign will continue to urge Congress for stronger treatment options for obesity. There is more work to be done. From recognizing obesity as a disease that can facilitate needed prevention and treatment options for children and adults, to encouraging Medicaid to also cover BMI screenings for children to facilitating healthy eating and physical activity, we look to the 112th Congress to continue investing in our nation’s health.”

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About the Campaign to End Obesity

The Campaign to End Obesity is dedicated to reversing America’s costliest disease. Ending this epidemic requires change – in individuals, institutions and communities. The Campaign convenes leaders from industry, academia, public health and associations to speak with one voice for federal policies to reverse the obesity epidemic and promote healthy weight in children and adults.