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March 16, 2009

Alvin Jackson, MD and Cynthia Burnell
Ohio Department of Health
246 North High Street
Columbus, OH 43215

Dear Dr. Jackson and Ms. Burnell:

On behalf of the Obesity Action Coalition and our more than 12,000 members, I congratulate you on your efforts in developing the "Ohio Obesity Prevention Plan" and commend the Governor and the citizens of the State of Ohio for looking at progressive ways to tackle the Obesity epidemic.

As part of the process, you have invited comments so I would like to challenge one of the basic premises of your efforts as I believe it is flawed. In the Plan, you state:

"Focus on prevention. Evidence of effective treatments for reversing obesity in individuals for the long-term is limited, so efforts should be focused on prevention of overweight and obesity."

Frankly, I believe the above statement sets you up for failure. The Plan specifically states that one of the goals is to reduce the obesity rates among Ohioans. Prevention alone may reduce the rate of Ohioans who are at risk of becoming obese therefore slowing the growth of the obesity rate but in itself, it will not reduce the number of Ohioans that are obese. To do that, we need a combination of prevention and treatment as this would both slow the growth rate of those becoming obese and move some of those in the obese category into the normal or overweight categories.

I would also urge some caution with the statement you made regarding the evidence of the effectiveness of obesity treatments. Obesity treatments are difficult as the data suggests but that does not mean they are impossible or should not be attempted. In addition, I think many would argue the data and evidence about the effectiveness of prevention is often just as limited if not more so than the data on treatment. Everyone assumes prevention works but there is a paucity of data on its true long-term effectiveness.

Obviously, we agree that preventing future generations of Americans from becoming obese should be a main goal of any program looking to address the obesity epidemic. However, in doing so, we think it is important not to forget those that are already obese. We need programs and services focused at this group to truly lower obesity rates in the long term. Thinking of this population exactly the same as those in the prevention group (normal and overweight) has been a major flaw in most efforts to date. I believe strongly that the first state that truly combines a comprehensive prevention and treatment program will be the first to stop the growth and then lower their obesity rates.

Thanks again for your good work and we appreciate you considering our comments.

Sincerely,

Joseph Nadglowski, Jr.
President/CEO