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**Press Release -- Office of Senator Tom Harkin (D-Iowa)**

**HARKIN PUSHES COMPREHENSIVE WELLNESS  
INITIATIVE TO FIGHT CHRONIC DISEASE, OBESITY**

**Senator Tom Harkin**

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WASHINGTON—U.S. Senator Tom Harkin today unveiled major legislation to reduce health care costs by giving Americans access to better preventive care and consumer information to promote healthier lifestyles.

“Promoting healthy lifestyles and preventing chronic disease will not be accomplished quickly or simply. Achieving these goals will require a comprehensive approach that, rather than focusing on sickness, encourages healthy lifestyles and integrates healthy choices into individual’s daily lives,” Harkin said. “The HeLP America Act of 2004 provides all sectors - child care centers, schools, workplaces, and communities -with the tools they need to reach the goal of making America a healthier place.”

Chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes are the leading causes of death and disability in the United States, and the economic impact is staggering. Fully 75 percent of the \$1.8 trillion the United States spends annually on healthcare is spent on the treatment Americans with chronic diseases. Yet only two percent of annual health care spending in the United States goes toward the prevention of chronic diseases.

The HeLP America Act consists of the following:

**Title I: Healthier Kids and Schools**

More kids across America are suffering from overweight and obesity. Since 1965, there has been a 300 percent increase in the number of children ages 6-11 that are overweight. These conditions will have a negative impact on long term health, as they contribute to increases in diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and other chronic conditions.

One goal of the HeLP America Act is to improve the overall wellness of our children by improving nutrition, increasing physical activity, helping diagnosis and prevent mental illness, and providing alternatives to the competitive foods that are sold in vending machines and on a la carte menus in schools. Title I will help kids develop good habits by putting fresh fruits and vegetables in school, and taking junk food out. It also takes on the tidal wave of ads in schools and on TV pushing junk foods on our kids.

#### Title II: Healthier Communities and Workplaces

Title II seeks to assist businesses and communities in offering a range of opportunities for people to start leading healthier lives. It also seeks to expand our knowledge on the prevalence and impact of mental and behavioral health status and risks. Initiatives include providing tax credits to businesses that offer comprehensive programs to promote employee health and encouraging new road construction that accommodates bicycles and pedestrians.

#### Title III: Responsible Marketing and Consumer Awareness

Having accurate information about the nutritional value of the food people eat is the first step toward improving overall nutrition. In an effort to increase the information available to consumers about the foods they are buying and promote a culture of more responsible marketing, the HeLP America Act seeks to implement mandatory menu labeling at chain restaurants, and restore the rulemaking authority of the FTC to issue restrictions on unfair advertising to children. The bill will also give the FDA authority to reduce smoking by preventing tobacco advertising which targets children.

#### Title IV: Reimbursement for Prevention Services

At times, the costs can be prohibitive for seeking preventative screenings for chronic diseases and mental health disorders, counseling to improve nutrition and physical activity, and treatment for substance abuse and smoking cessation. Title IV would provide reimbursements and expand current federal health care programs to cover counseling and preventative services.

Harkin has promoted preventive healthcare throughout his career with such measures as increased access to breast cancer screenings, the school fruit and vegetable pilot program, the Menu Education and Labeling Act (MEAL), and tobacco control. In the last several months, Harkin has spent time visiting and talking with schools, employers and other community organizations in Iowa and nationwide who are doing innovative things to promote wellness. Harkin also recently held a hearing in Iowa to learn more about the medical and financial costs of chronic conditions such as obesity, tobacco use and mental illness. ###

#### Title I. Healthier Kids and Schools

Fruit and Vegetable Program: Expands the Harkin Fruit and Vegetable Program to more schools and creates healthy cooking demonstrations. School Wellness Policy: Requires schools to formulate wellness policies that include goals for nutrition education and physical activity. Competitive Foods in Schools: Restores authority of the Secretary of Agriculture to regulate the sale of junk foods in schools. Healthy School and Child Care Nutrition Environment Incentive Grants: Competitive grants to schools and child care centers to create healthy school environments. Mental Health Services in Schools: Grant program to provide mental health screenings and mental health prevention programs at schools.

## Title II. Healthier Communities and Workplaces

Healthy Workforce: Provides tax credits to businesses that offer comprehensive programs to promote employee health; also grants for small businesses. Healthy Community Grants: Grants to communities to establish coordinated chronic disease prevention programs. Working Well and Living Well with a Disability: Grant programs to facilitate healthy lifestyles for individuals with disabilities. Complete Streets Incentive program: Creates standards and incentives to provide for sidewalks, bike lanes and intersections on new and reconstructed federal and local roads. Mental Health Surveillance: SAMHSA will enhance existing public health surveillance systems to include data on mental and behavioral health status and risks. FDA regulation: FDA authority to regulate tobacco to protect public health.

## Title III. Responsible Marketing and Consumer Awareness

Restaurant Labeling: Requires nutritional information on menus of chain restaurants. Protect Kids from Unfair Junk Food Advertising: Restores the rulemaking authority of the Federal Trade Commission to issue restrictions on advertising with respect to children. Food Advertising in Schools: Gives Secretary of Agriculture authority to prohibit the marketing and advertising of food in schools participating in the School Lunch or Breakfast programs. Tobacco Marketing: Eliminates tax deductibility of tobacco advertising, and funds counter-advertising.

## Title IV. Reimbursement for Prevention Services

Medicare expansion and co-payment elimination: Coverage of counseling for nutrition and physical activity, mental health screening, substance use including smoking cessation and injury prevention. Smoking cessation: Coverage required under Medicare, Medicaid, and FEHBP. Preventive Health Services for Women: Authorizes the Wise Woman program that provides breast and cervical cancer, osteoporosis and cardiovascular screenings for low-income women.

## Title V. National Health Promotion Trust Fund

Creates a trust fund through offsets to pay for new programs in the bill and expands funding for existing prevention programs such as PEP and the CDC Division of Nutrition and Physical Activity.

#### Title VI. Research

Expansion of Research Regarding Obesity: Expand on the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force on Obesity conclusions to conduct and expand research on obesity prevention, treatment, and control in the primary-care setting with various populations utilizing nutrition and physical activity counseling.

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