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Remarks at FDA Public Meeting on Obesity

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Speech Length: 8-10 minutes

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Thank you for that kind introduction.

I want to thank the FDA's Obesity Working Group for hosting this meeting. The commitment that you have shown to this issue is exceptional.

As you know, Secretary Thompson's goal for all of us at HHS is to do everything possible to ensure that Americans are strong, healthy, and independent.

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The Secretary has been a leader in the movement to put prevention first. He is a tremendous advocate for the science being conducted by researchers here at NIH and at FDA.

This research, funded and supported by the American people, has brought us wonderful treatments and cures for many diseases and chronic conditions.

But we must do more to prevent these diseases before they ever happen.

Prevention

7 of every 10 Americans who die each year die of a chronic disease.

Most of these diseases are preventable by simple steps:

- healthy eating,**
 - physical activity,**
- and**
- not smoking.**

Tobacco use is still the single most preventable cause of death and disease, causing 440,000 deaths each year and resulting in annual cost of more than \$75 billion in direct medical costs.

After tobacco, obesity-related illnesses are the leading, killer of Americans. Today, obesity-related diseases are the *fastest-growing* cause of death in our nation.

Obesity

More than 300,000 Americans will die this year alone from heart disease, diabetes, and other illnesses related to overweight and obesity.

In the year 2000, the total annual cost of obesity in the United States was estimated at \$117 billion, including the costs of medical care.

As Secretary Thompson says, “95% of the \$1.4 trillion America spends on health goes to direct medical services, while only 5% is allocated to preventing disease and promoting health.”

The good news is that obesity and its co-morbidities are *preventable* through healthy eating — nutritious foods in appropriate amounts — and physical activity.

The bad news is that Americans are not taking steps to prevent obesity and its co-morbidities.

We need a paradigm shift in our approach to health and health care.

There is no greater imperative in American health care than switching from a treatment-oriented society to a prevention-oriented society.

Childhood Obesity

We simply must invest more in prevention, and the time to start is during childhood.

15% of our children and teenagers are already overweight.

Excess weight significantly increases our kids' risk factors for a range of health problems, including diabetes, heart disease, asthma, and emotional and mental health problems.

Unless we do something now, millions of our children will grow up to be overweight adults.

As a mother and a physician, I refuse to stand by and see that happen.

We must take some simple and important steps to reduce obesity, and we must all work together.

HealthierUS and Steps

President Bush is leading the way through the *HealthierUS* prevention initiative.

***HealthierUS* promotes the fundamentals of good health:**

- **physical activity,**
 - **healthy eating,**
 - **getting check-ups,**
- and**
- **avoiding risky behavior.**

Secretary Thompson is leading our Department's efforts to advance the President's prevention agenda through *Steps to a HealthierUS*.

Through *Steps*, HHS is supporting the President's work in communities around the nation.

And in keeping with Secretary Thompson's high goals for all of us at H-H-S, *Steps to a HealthierUS* aims for nothing less than Americans living longer, better, and healthier lives.

***Steps* emphasizes innovative community initiatives and cooperation among policy makers, local health agencies, and the public to invest in disease prevention.**

In September, Secretary Thompson announced 12 *Steps* grants totaling \$13.7 million to promote community initiatives to promote better health and prevent disease.

Recipients of the grants are reaching 23 communities, including one tribal consortium, 15 small cities or rural communities, and 7 large cities.

One of the *Steps* programs that I want to tell you about today is managed by the Inter-Tribal Council of Michigan.

Working within a community that has the second-highest rate of diabetes in the nation, this program is tapping into a resurgence of interest in passing on traditional wisdom and cultural practice — including the population’s history and knowledge of nutritious traditional foods such as fish, berries, and wild rice.

This is just one example of a wide range of innovative *Steps* projects, and I encourage you to learn more about them by visiting the *Steps* web site.

Closing

In closing, I will just add that the Secretary and I appreciate all of you being here today.

And most of all, we appreciate the dedication that you bring to this effort of fighting obesity.

You are in great company:

This Administration is committed to community-based, evidence-based, scientifically sound public health policies and initiatives to ensure Americans' health and well-being today and in the future.

We're starting to see some results.

Those of you here today are health professionals, researchers, and policymakers — and you are also parents and role models in your communities.

I charge you to make healthy personal choices in your own lives, and to set good examples for all the children around you.

And I ask you to work with me to support our efforts to put prevention first and to end our nation's obesity epidemic before it has a chance to reach into another generation of Americans. Thank you.

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Exploring the Connections Between Weight Management and Food Labels and Packaging Workshop

Sponsored by: The Food and Drug Administration and the Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and the Office of Assistant Secretary for Planning and Evaluation in the Department of Health and Human Services is sponsoring a workshop to discuss the connections between weight management and food labels and packaging. This meeting will be held on Thursday, November 20th, 2003 from 8:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. at the Lister Hill Auditorium located on the campus of the National Institutes of Health. Registration for the workshop and additional information about the workshop are available at <https://secure.z-techcorp.com/cmt>.

The workshop will examine available data to identify options for making food labels and packaging more relevant to consumers' weight management decisions. Stakeholders and experts will present data and analysis regarding the relationship between food labeling and weight management. Expert panels will focus on specific questions on food packaging and labeling, and on messaging in the restaurant environment relevant to overall weight management.

Seating is limited; we recommend that those interested in attending this meeting register at <https://secure.z-techcorp.com/cmt> as soon as possible. On line registration will close November 7th and on site registration will be available on a space available basis.