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Obesity Prevention and Remediation: What the Government Can Do

Government can do more to foster sensible eating habits (most importantly, portion control) in consumers:

- Improve communication and cooperation among agencies (HHS, USDA) to eliminate consumer confusion about what constitutes a food serving
- Foster and support research to identify effective consumer education strategies about portion control
- Support implementation of research findings as the basis for a national campaign to embed portion control as a cultural value

Government can do more to foster identification of etiological factors and to provide rigorous, methodologically sound and comprehensive program evaluation. Central to this effort is the National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (NHANES) which is conducted jointly by HHS and USDA:

- Stabilize funding for NHANES – the “gold standard” of detailed information on obesity -- by making it a line item in the CDC budget as part of the nutrition monitoring reauthorization legislation
- Coordinate with USDA to adopt NHANES dietary component as a line item with special emphasis on collecting additional information on food consumption, diet and health knowledge, and for updating food composition tables.
- Staff NHANES appropriately to permit the rapid collection of data and to identify etiological factors feeding the obesity epidemic
- Establish Community HANES to permit consistent evaluation of government-funded obesity intervention programs
- Establish Longitudinal HANES to focus on vulnerable populations (children, Hispanic Americans, African Americans, American Indians, the elderly) at high risk for obesity

Government can do more to foster physical activity among all age groups:

- Improve communication and cooperation among agencies (HHS and DOT) to foster safer communities that support pedestrian walking and biking including: “walk to school” and “safe routes to school” programs
- Improve communication and cooperation among agencies (HHS and DOE) to design incentives for schools to build and maintain facilities and programs that support sound physical education and physical activity within the school day as well as before and after school and on weekends
- Foster improved physical activity assessment in NHANES
- Foster behavioral research to identify motivators as well as barriers to behavioral change for diet and physical activity and methods of “locking in” improved behaviors.
- Establish and fund initiatives to embed a healthier lifestyle as a cultural value.

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