

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 22, 2011

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert R. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius,

As you continue to consider policies to prevent serious illnesses, we would like to share our strong support for the effort to reduce instances of diabetes. As you are aware, 25.8 million Americans have diabetes. Another 79 million have prediabetes, putting them at increased risk for developing type 2 diabetes. This serious illness and its complications, including prediabetes and gestational diabetes, cost our nation an estimated \$218 billion annually. Clearly, this growing epidemic is a serious threat to both the health and fiscal stability of our nation.

Though the statistics are alarming, we do have tools available to fight diabetes and prevent new cases. Research has shown that with certain lifestyle interventions, type 2 diabetes is largely preventable. The Diabetes Prevention Program was a groundbreaking clinical trial carried out by the National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases. It found that with lifestyle changes and moderate weight loss, individuals with prediabetes can decrease full onset by 58 percent (and 71 percent in people over 65). Further research has demonstrated that these results can be replicated in a community setting for a cost of less than \$300 per participant.

Passed into law in 2010, the National Diabetes Prevention Program (NDPP) is based on the successful outcomes of the clinical trials. The goal of the NDPP is to prevent full-blown type 2 diabetes in the 79 million Americans with prediabetes by building a national network of community programs to offer support and guidance to those at risk. Further, the NDPP is established as a public-private partnership in which results-based performance is driving incentives.

Currently, the YMCA, in coordination with private insurers and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), delivers the diabetes prevention program to individuals with prediabetes and will be operating 116 sites in 24 states by the end of this year. While the YMCA and CDC have shown success with this program in several locations, without a strong federal investment, the NDPP will not become a true national network capable of reaching the majority of Americans at risk.

A federal investment will result in improved health for millions of Americans and also yield significant cost savings. In a 2009 report, the Urban Institute predicted the country can save as much as \$190 billion over 10 years by bringing this community-based diabetes prevention program to scale. The Urban Institute report also recognized that a large portion of the diabetes burden would fall to the elderly and the poor and estimated 75 percent of the savings, or \$142.9 billion, would be in savings to Medicare or Medicaid.

In addition to the potential cost savings, funding for the NDPP is an investment and not a long-standing financial commitment. It is estimated that sites will be self-sustaining within three years. An upfront investment will kick start a permanent system of evidence-based prevention programs that pay for themselves. In addition, this program will benefit employers. As United Health Group Vice President Tom Beauregard stated, "The pilot data showed that paying for these services works – people get and stay healthier, leading to dramatically lower health care costs for employers and the health care system."

Once again, diabetes is a serious and costly disease. The CDC estimates that if current trends continue, one in three adults will have diabetes by the year 2050. As the rates of diabetes grow, and more individuals are subject to dangerous complications – such as heart disease, stroke, lower-limb amputation, blindness and kidney disease – the healthcare costs will also increase. In order to bend the cost curve of the diabetes epidemic, we must create a network that will reach the individuals who are at risk. Americans will also live happier and healthier lives by avoiding the complicated and painful symptoms of type 2 diabetes.

The NDPP meets the dual goals of improving the overall health of our nation and reducing long-term healthcare spending. Taking advantage of this extraordinary public-private opportunity will help stop the devastating and costly toll diabetes is taking on the health of our nation. We respectfully request that you fund the NDPP and make this important investment.

Thank you very much for your time and attention to this important matter. We look forward to working closely with you to reduce the impact of the diabetes epidemic.

Sincerely,

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