

## Harkin Presses For Comprehensive Wellness Initiative To Fight Chronic Disease, Obesity And Reduce Health Care Costs

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Senator Tom Harkin (D-IA) today reintroduced major legislation to create a healthier future for America by giving our citizens access to better preventive care and consumer information to encourage healthier lifestyles. The Healthier Lifestyles and Prevention America Act, also known as the HeLP America Act, provides all sectors of our society - child care centers, schools, workplaces, health care providers and communities - with the incentives and tools they need to reach the goal of making America a healthier place.

"Promoting healthy lifestyles and preventing chronic disease will not happen overnight. While the prevention and wellness measures included in the new health reform law were an important step forward, much more needs to be done," **said Harkin.**

"We need to integrate health and wellness into all elements of American communities – from our schools and workplaces to our grocery store aisles and restaurants. By providing people the information and resources they need to live longer, healthier lives, the HeLP America Act will empower people to take care of their health, boosting overall quality of life and lowering our spiraling health care costs."

Among other benefits, the HeLP America Act will:

- **Provide fresh fruits and vegetables to all low income elementary schools** by expanding the Harkin Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program
- **Create a healthier workforce** by providing tax credits to businesses that offer comprehensive workplace wellness programs to their employees and allowing employers to deduct the cost of employees' athletic facility memberships
- **Reduce Americans' sodium consumption** by developing two-year targets for sodium reduction in packaged and restaurant foods
- **Help Americans make informed choices about their food** by establishing uniform FDA guidelines for the use of "healthy" symbols on the front of food packages
- **Ensure Individuals with Disabilities have access to community sports** by creating competitive grants for the implementation of community-based sports and athletic programs for people with disabilities, including youth with disabilities.

Chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, and diabetes are among the leading causes of death and disability in the United States, and the economic impact is staggering. More than seventy-five percent of the \$2.5 trillion the United States spends on health care annually is due to chronic disease. Yet less than five percent of annual health care spending in the United States goes toward chronic disease prevention.

Harkin has promoted preventive healthcare initiatives throughout his career, including increased access to breast cancer screenings, the school fruit and vegetable pilot program, the Menu Education and Labeling Act (MEAL), and tobacco control. Most recently, as Chairman of the Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions (HELP) Committee, Harkin championed the prevention and wellness measures that are included in the Affordable Care Act, which was signed into law last March. The Prevention and Public Health title of health reform law creates incentives to prevent chronic disease and rein in costs across the full health care spectrum. A full summary of the provisions is available here: <http://harkin.senate.gov/documents/pdf/4c2b8b9dc4e74.pdf>

A full summary of the HeLP America Act is below:

## **Healthy Lifestyles and Prevention (HeLP) America Act of 2011**

### **Healthier Kids & Schools**

- **Nutrition and physical activity in child care quality improvement:** Supports State efforts to provide resources to child care providers to help them meet high-quality physical activity and healthy eating standards.
- **Access to local foods and school gardens at preschools and child care centers:** Enables child care providers to participate in the USDA's farm-to-school initiatives.
- **Fruit and vegetable program:** Expands the Harkin Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program to all low income elementary schools nationwide.
- **Equal physical activity opportunities for students with disabilities:** Directs the Department of Education to provide oversight, guidance, and technical assistance to ensure that schools provide equal opportunities for students with disabilities for PE and extracurricular athletics.

### **Healthier Communities**

- **Joint use agreements:** Directs the HHS, in coordination with Department of Education, to develop and disseminate guidelines and model joint use agreements to facilitate community access to spaces for physical activity.
- **Community Sports for Individuals with Disabilities:** Competitive grants to public entities and nonprofit private entities to implement community-based sports and athletic programs for people with disabilities, including youth with disabilities.
- **Community gardens:** Grants from the USDA to establish, expand, or maintain community gardens.
- **Physical Activity Guidelines for Americans:** Requires HHS to issue physical activity guidelines for preschool children and to update the guidelines for all ages every 5 years.
- **Tobacco Taxes Parity:** Increases the excise tax on small cigarettes; equalizes excise taxes for pipe tobacco, roll-your-own tobacco, and smokeless tobacco; and clarifies the definition of small cigars.
- **Health in all policies:** Requires HHS to conduct a health impact assessment of major non-health legislative proposals and to detail staff to other departments to assist them with consideration of health impacts of their activities.

### **A Healthier Workforce**

- **Healthy Workforce:** Provides tax credits to businesses that offer comprehensive workplace

wellness programs to their employees to improve health and wellbeing.

- **Workforce Health Improvement:** Allows employers to deduct the cost of athletic facility memberships for their employees and exempts this benefit as taxable income for employees.
- **Workplace Breastfeeding Taskforce:** Establishes a federal taskforce for the promotion of breastfeeding among working mothers.
- **Healthy Federal Workplaces:** Requires menu labeling in federal food facilities, the development of nutritional guidelines for food procurement and vending machines on federal property, the development of guidelines for stair placement and signage, and bicycle parking in federal properties.

### **Responsible Marketing and Consumer Awareness**

- **Reducing Sodium Consumption:** Directs the FDA to develop two year targets for sodium reduction in packaged and restaurant foods.
- **Improved food labeling:** Removes nutrition labeling exemption for foods sold exclusively to restaurants.
- **Healthy Symbols:** Instructs the FDA to develop uniform guidelines for the use of nutrient labeling symbols or systems on the front of food packages.
- **Protect Kids from Unfair Junk Food Advertising:** Restores the rulemaking authority of the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to issue restrictions on unfair advertising with respect to children, and gives the FTC Administrative Procedure Act rulemaking authority.
- **Health Literacy:** Strengthens federal initiatives to improve the health literacy of consumers by making health information more understandable and health care systems easier to navigate through continued research and dissemination of effective interventions.
- **Tobacco Marketing:** Eliminates tax deductibility of tobacco advertising, and funds counter-advertising.
- **Incentives to reduce youth tobacco use:** Requires HHS to carry out an annual youth tobacco use survey and creates a penalty for tobacco manufacturers if youth use of their tobacco products does not decrease.

### **Expanded Coverage of Preventive Services**

- **Preventive Services in Medicaid:** Requires coverage of preventive services recommended by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force (USPSTF) and the CDC without cost-sharing for Medicaid beneficiaries.
- **Preventive Services for Federal Employees:** Requires coverage of preventive services recommended by the USPSTF, CDC, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) for children, and workplace wellness program in the Federal Employee Health Benefits (FEHB) Program.
- **Health Professional Education on Health Eating:** Establishes a program administered by CDC and HRSA to train health professionals to better identify patients at-risk of and treat patients who are overweight, obese, or have an eating disorder.

### **Research and Surveillance**

- **Grants for body mass index analysis:** Provides grants to States to include BMI data in existing state-wide immunization databases.
- **National Assessment of Mental Health:** Requires the Administrator of the Substance Abuse

and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) to build on existing or create new monitoring systems that assess mental and behavioral health status and risks.