

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**November 2, 2007**

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**NEW ACADEMIC ANALYSIS IDENTIFIES THREE BARRIERS TO ACHIEVING HEALTHY  
AND ACHIEVABLE POLICIES TO COMBAT OBESITY IN AMERICA**

***17<sup>TH</sup> U.S. SURGEON GENERAL RICHARD H. CARMONA JOINS THE STOP OBESITY ALLIANCE  
AS HEALTH AND WELLNESS CHAIRPERSON,  
SAYS REPORT FINDINGS MAY OPEN DOORS TO POSITIVE CHANGE***

**WASHINGTON, D.C., November 2, 2007** –The Strategies to Overcome and Prevent (STOP) Obesity Alliance today received a new academic analysis that identifies three barriers to combating obesity in America: unrealistic definitions of success, negative perceptions of treatment, and the stigma of obesity. Authored by a research team at The George Washington University (GW) School of Public Health and Health Services (SPHHS) Department of Health Policy, the research examines the disconnect between the mounting scientific data demonstrating the negative health and economic results of overweight and obesity, and insufficient public and private sector efforts to combat those results.

Members of the STOP Obesity Alliance welcomed Richard H. Carmona, M.D., M.P.H., FACS, as Health and Wellness Chairperson for the Alliance Steering Committee. Dr. Carmona is the 17<sup>th</sup> Surgeon General of the United States (2002-2006), vice chairman of Canyon Ranch, president of the non-profit Canyon Ranch Institute, and distinguished professor at the Mel and Enid Zuckerman College of Public Health at the University of Arizona. The Alliance Steering Committee, which includes consumer, provider, business, labor, health insurance and quality-of-care organizations, met with Dr. Carmona this morning before he delivered a keynote address at GW University. In his remarks, he said that identifying cultural and systemic challenges is an important early step in reducing the prevalence of overweight and obesity and helping to prevent chronic disease in America.

“Overweight, obesity, and the conditions they can lead to — such as diabetes and heart disease — are very often preventable. But prevention is still a radical concept to most Americans,” said Dr. Carmona. “As a nation, we must join together and move from being a treatment-oriented society to being a prevention-oriented society.”

According to Christine Ferguson, J.D., P.I., associate research professor at GW’s SPHHS and the director of the STOP Obesity Alliance, the academic analysis provides an opportunity to shift how we approach the obesity epidemic.

“Programs and products targeting obesity are pervasive in America today, yet its incidence continues to rise,” said Ferguson, “The Alliance is challenging the private and public sectors to examine new obstacles, re-evaluate older approaches, and focus on a new model for overcoming obesity.”

The Alliance requested the analysis from GW following its first Steering Committee meeting in July. The report will serve as the research foundation for policy recommendations that the Alliance will release this year.

The GW research and analysis focuses on three barriers, which include:

- **The definition of success:** There is no agreement today on what constitutes successful weight loss. The result is that people generally have unrealistic expectations of weight loss, and those expectations are often not focused on their individual health needs.
- **Perceptions of treatment:** With treatment results held to unrealistic definitions of success, many patients and health care professionals believe that the time and effort associated with weight-loss treatments are not justified by the outcomes.
- **Stigma:** Research shows that as obesity increases in prevalence throughout America, so do stereotypes and discriminatory attitudes. This stigma reinforces a perception that obesity is solely an individual, not a societal, responsibility.

“We must apply evidence-based science to break down the barriers that prevent people from achieving and maintaining a healthy weight,” Dr. Carmona said. “If we choose to turn away from this challenge and continue to focus on treating disease only after it occurs, instead of preventing disease, we risk becoming a nation burdened with chronic diseases that we cannot afford to pay for, and a population that is too ill to be productive and successful.”

For more information on the STOP Obesity Alliance, please visit [www.stopobesityalliance.org](http://www.stopobesityalliance.org).

#### **About the STOP Obesity Alliance**

The STOP Obesity Alliance is directed by Associate Professor Christine Ferguson, J.D., P.I. of The George Washington University’s Department of Health Policy and former Health Commissioner for the State of Massachusetts. The Alliance Steering Committee is comprised of the following public and private sector organizations: the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Diabetes Association, American Heart Association, America’s Health Insurance Plans, American Medical Group Association, DMAA: The Care Continuum Alliance, National Business Group on Health, National Committee for Quality Assurance, National Quality Forum, The Obesity Society, Trust for America’s Health, and the Service Employees International Union. The Alliance is sponsored by sanofi-aventis U.S. LLC, a world leader in the pharmaceutical industry with a commitment to improving public health and a heritage in therapeutic areas including cardiovascular and metabolic diseases.

#### **About the George Washington University School of Public Health and Health Services**

SPHHS is part of The George Washington University Medical Center, an internationally recognized interdisciplinary academic health center that has consistently provided high quality clinical care, education and research in the Washington, DC metropolitan area for more than 176 years.

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