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THOUGHT LEADERS CALL FOR CHANGES IN THE POLICIES AND SYSTEMS GOVERNING HOW AMERICA FIGHTS OBESITY

STOP Obesity Alliance Sets 100 Day Plan of Action

Washington, D.C. - With more than 33 million Web site options offered under the search term "obesity," the widespread interest in addressing this growing national epidemic is clear. Less clear is any expert consensus on the societal role and systems changes needed to reverse this health crisis.

To help cut through the clutter, the Strategies to Overcome and Prevent (STOP) Obesity Alliance, a powerful collaboration of consumer, provider, business, labor, health insurance and quality organizations, met for the first time in Washington to lay out a roadmap for identifying new approaches in America's race against obesity that must accompany the personal responsibility of individuals.

"The growth of obesity and its related health problems have exploded over the past ten years, signaling an urgent need to change how we manage the condition," said STOP Obesity Alliance director Christine Ferguson. "But there has been a real disconnect between our ability to make societal changes and what we know from a medical and public health perspective. Whether this is rooted in the belief that obesity is a matter of personal responsibility or that treatments are ineffective, it's in our national interest to find a new direction."

At a recent meeting at George Washington University Hospital, The Alliance's Steering Committee committed to developing innovative and practical strategies to help reverse America's rising trend in overweight, obesity and preventable weight-related chronic diseases such as diabetes and heart disease. Group members said the approach will complement other efforts focusing on personal actions by:

- Identifying and addressing the different barriers - some systemic, some cultural - that prevent effective weight management;
- Re-defining success based on criteria other than societal norms;
- Highlighting research-based initiatives to improve patient care and prevention; and
- Identifying, recommending and promoting innovations in health care delivery and financing systems.

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Steering Committee members agreed to undertake a set of actions targeted to thought and policy leaders. In the next 100 days, the Alliance will:

- Issue a **Stigma of Obesity** brief in the fall and a formal white paper by end of the year, presenting scientific evidence on the effect stigma has on obesity-related health outcomes. The white paper will include a definition of sustained weight loss success and evaluate treatment and interventions.
- Co-host, in partnership with The Obesity Society, a **presidential candidate public policy forum** called, "**Obesity: What the Next President Should Do.**" The forum will feature a roundtable discussion among presidential candidates' top health and policy advisors on how the candidates view obesity and prevention as a part of comprehensive health reform.
- Develop and present specific **policy recommendations that take an innovative and practical approach to the systems that affect obesity.**

Researchers at George Washington University presented the Steering Committee with medical and scientific data demonstrating the role stigma plays in America's battle with obesity, the current definitions of successful weight loss and beliefs of the futility of treatments. The Committee discussed paths to overcome barriers and break the cycle of failure that most adults experience in achieving and sustaining weight loss.

"Obesity is a major health and economic crisis in the United States. While there have been valiant efforts to educate Americans on the importance of eating right and exercising, we must look beyond the obvious to tackle this complex issue affecting millions - myself included," said Armeta Dixon, Vice President of 1199SEIU, United Healthcare Workers East. "Personal weight loss and weight management must be paired with changes in the larger system to fully address this reversible trend."

About the STOP Obesity Alliance

The STOP Obesity Alliance is directed by Associate Professor Christine Ferguson, JD, PI of The George Washington University's Department of Health Policy and former Health Commissioner for the State of Massachusetts. The Alliance is comprised of the American Academy of Pediatrics, American Diabetes Association, American Heart Association, America's Health Insurance Plans, American Medical Group Association, Disease Management Association of America, National Business Group on Health, National Committee for Quality Assurance, National Quality Forum, The Obesity Society 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.

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