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CONVERGENCE PARTNERSHIP URGES SUPPORT FOR PREVENTION AND EQUITY

Now that the fiscal cliff has been avoided with community prevention intact and the debates about future budgets heat up, the Convergence Partnership—a collaboration of major national private foundations and health care organizations—is confident that there has never been a better time to continue national investments in community prevention efforts, particularly in communities plagued by health inequities.

By changing the environments, policies, and institutions that most touch our lives—from our neighborhoods and workplaces to our childcare centers and schools—community prevention is a necessary component in the reduction and long-term elimination of inequities. Investing in community prevention ensures that all communities, especially historically underserved and under-resourced communities, can be healthy and safe, and can offer the resources and infrastructure needed for all to thrive. Across the country hundreds of thousands of people in disadvantaged neighborhoods and communities are already benefitting from targeted community-prevention initiatives that are bringing access to healthy food, safe environments for physical activity, and clean air. But our work is not done.

If we are to achieve a healthy, thriving nation and economy, we can no longer rely predominantly on a one-by-one individual treatment approach. Instead we must expand our national focus beyond individuals to include strategies and efforts that make communities healthy and safe. For instance, several states and cities, including El Paso and Philadelphia, and the state of Mississippi that have adopted a comprehensive, multifaceted approach to children's health are showing, for the first time, actual *decreases* in rates of obesity. These locales are directly addressing children's food and activity environments—increasing the availability of healthy foods in schools and neighborhoods and increasing opportunities for physical activity. These comprehensive strategies are a step in the right direction, and more work is needed to ensure targeted approaches reach those who are bearing the greatest burden of this epidemic. We must continue to craft and refine what works to truly bring health to all.

At a time, following the Connecticut tragedy, when the nation's attention is particularly focused on preventing violence, the need to emphasize safe and equitable communities is more clear than ever. Comprehensive, community based solutions are effective in promoting safety and in fostering thriving communities. The Convergence Partnership has invested in preventing violence, and encouraging physical activity, as a joint strategy.

Improving health and safety overall is an essential element to long-term economic recovery. More than seven of ten deaths among Americans each year are caused by *preventable* chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, stroke, and diabetes and preventable injuries including violence and car crashes.ⁱ Preventable chronic diseases alone cost U.S. businesses nearly \$43 billion a year.ⁱⁱ Community prevention saves money for struggling families and distressed communities and serves as a down payment on healthcare reform by reducing both public (government) and private health care expenditures.ⁱⁱⁱ Workplace wellness programs build a healthier workforce and a better bottom line: for every dollar a workplace spends on wellness programs, medical costs fall by about \$3.27.^{iv} Our local and national economies deserve the extra boost that accompanies healthy communities.

The Convergence Partnership is committed to supporting federal community prevention efforts, advocacy for needed policies, and environmental change strategies. To allow everyone to thrive we need:

- **Community prevention efforts that support equitable health outcomes.** Not all communities are created equally when it comes to opportunities for health, productivity, and safety. Prioritizing investments where there are the greatest needs—from isolated rural communities to urban neighborhoods of color—results in triple-bottom-line benefits to people, places, and the economy. Without an explicit focus on improving health equity, the burdens on our health system, workforce, and social fabric will be severe, seriously harming the economic and social vitality of the nation as a whole. Community prevention enhances the lives of residents and improves neighborhood infrastructure and the local economy. Safety and violence prevention strategies help neighborhoods and communities thrive, allowing children and families to meet their basic needs—getting to school and work, and completing the tasks of daily living, from food shopping to physical activity. New grocery stores bring fresh, healthy food, provide good jobs, and often serve as “anchors” for other retail stores because they generate foot traffic, keeping resident dollars in the community rather than spending them elsewhere, thus improving the local economy and generating more jobs. Bike paths, pedestrian walkways, and smart public transit help create vital community centers and make it easier and faster for residents to shop at local businesses and improve residents’ access to jobs, schools, and other resources. Zoning policies and well-designed safe streets and parks help develop active, healthy neighborhoods with greater economic development and opportunities for physical activity. Emerging practice-based evidence also indicates that such community changes are increasingly linked to improved health outcomes and are cost-saving as well.
- **Community prevention that brings together different fields and sectors.** Decisions made by different stakeholders—from community leaders to transportation, education and

housing departments—can all have a positive impact on health, equity, and safety. Efforts that cultivate collaboration and synergy between diverse groups, agencies, and departments—representing multiple disciplines and sectors—are more comprehensive in scope and impact, better leverage existing resources, and benefit from a diverse range of experiences.

We all deserve to live in communities that focus on prevention and support our collective health.

The federal budget decisions and priorities that are made today set the path for our nation's health for decades to come.

The Convergence Partnership supports continued and strengthened federal investments that advance our community's health, especially in the most disadvantaged communities, and stands ready to help. We have to invest in what works. It's time for a new health paradigm: prevention and equity first.

ⁱ *Chronic Disease: The Power to Prevent The Call to Control*. (2009). Retrieved from Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website: <http://www.cdc.gov/chronicdisease/resources/publications/AAG/pdf/chronic.pdf>

ⁱⁱ Gallup Poll, "Mean Unhealthy Days per Month and Estimated Annual Loss as a Result of Absenteeism, by Health Group Among U.S. Full-Time Workers," Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index: Jan.2-Oct.2, 2011

ⁱⁱⁱ Lambrew JM. A Wellness Trust to Prioritize Disease Prevention. The Hamilton Project, Brookings Institution. 2007. Discussion paper. Available at: <http://www3.brookings.edu/views/papers/200704lambrew.pdf>

^{iv} http://www.healthsciences.org/enews2010/news_workplacewellness.html