



MAR 24 2004

The Honorable Jong-wook Lee, M.D.  
Director-General  
World Health Organization  
Avenue Appia 20  
1211 Geneva 27  
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26-Mar-04

DGO NMH HPM

Dear Mr. Director-General:

On February 27, along with fifty other Member States, the United States was pleased to submit comments on the World Health Organization (WHO) draft *Global Strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health*. As part of our submission, I also shared information on a number of initiatives Secretary Tommy G. Thompson and our Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) have undertaken to the promote of better health and the prevent diseases related to overweigh and obesity in the United States.

As part of the commitment by the United States to work with other countries and the WHO Secretariat to present to the 57<sup>th</sup> World Health Assembly a strong global strategy on diet, physical activity and health to serve as the basis for the actions of Member States, I want to provide you with further updates on our progress to improve diet and physical activity in our country. I request that you include this letter in the relevant section of the WHO website, [www.who.int/hpr/qs.strategy.country.shtml](http://www.who.int/hpr/qs.strategy.country.shtml), as an addendum to the U.S. submission from February.

**Strategic Plan of the Obesity Research Task Force, National Institutes of Health, HHS.** On March 9, Secretary Thompson announced a new research strategy of the National Institutes of Health within HHS. An NIH obesity research task force, convened by the NIH Director last spring, developed the dynamic strategy. Its purpose is to intensify research to better understand, prevent, and treat obesity through:

- behavioral and environmental approaches to modifying lifestyle;
- pharmacologic, surgical and other medical approaches, and
- breaking the link between obesity and diseases, such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and some forms of cancer.

The draft strategic plan, currently in an open comment period, represents a cohesive, multi-dimensional research agenda for addressing obesity challenges. It includes short-, intermediate-, and long-term goals for basic, clinical, and population-based obesity research achievements, along with strategies for achieving those goals that likewise range

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in timeframe. Building on scientific advances from previous NIH-supported efforts, the strategic plan seeks to maximize collaboration across NIH and capitalize on its expertise and interest in developing obesity research initiatives.

**Food and Drug Administration (FDA) Strategy to Help Reduce Obesity.** On March 12, Secretary Thompson released a new FDA report that outlines another element in HHS' comprehensive strategy for combating the epidemic of obesity that threatens the health of millions of Americans, with a focus on the message, "calories count." The FDA Obesity Working Group's long- and short-term proposals are based on the scientific fact that weight control is mainly a function of caloric balance. The Group's report includes recommendations to strengthen and clarify food labeling, to educate consumers about how to maintain a healthy diet and weight, and to encourage restaurants to provide calorie and nutrition information on their menus. It also recommends increasing enforcement to ensure food labels accurately portray serving size; revising and reissuing guidance on developing obesity drugs; and strengthening coordinated scientific research to reduce obesity and to develop foods that are healthier and low in calories.

**New Study by the HHS Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).** A CDC study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in early March shows that deaths in the United States from poor diet and physical inactivity rose by 33 percent over the past decade and could soon overtake tobacco and the leading preventable cause of death. The study, "Actual Causes of Death in the United States, 2000," finds that 400,000 deaths in the United States in 2000 (17 percent of all deaths) were related to poor diet and physical inactivity. Only tobacco use caused more deaths (435,000). The study reinforces that programs to increase physical activity, improve diet, and increase smoking cessation must continue to be high priorities in the United States.

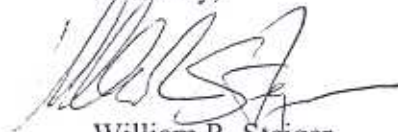
**An Innovative Public Awareness and Education Campaign.** The *Healthy Lifestyles & Disease Prevention* initiative, which includes multi-media public service advertisements (PSAs) and a new interactive website – [www.smallstep.gov](http://www.smallstep.gov) -- encourages Americans to make small activity and dietary changes within their current lifestyles – versus drastic changes – to ensure effective long-term weight control. The PSAs were developed for HHS in cooperation with the Advertising Council, and provide examples of the power of small steps for sustained weight control and good health. The New York advertising agency McCann Erickson, through the Advertising Council, created the campaign on a *pro bono* basis. The PSAs available at [www.adcouncil.org/campaigns/healthy\\_lifestyles](http://www.adcouncil.org/campaigns/healthy_lifestyles), and will run and air in advertising time and space donated by media outlets.

The Department's goal to ensure that our programs use the best, scientific approach to make a difference in the lives of individuals, families, and communities in our country through improved diet and nutrition, increased physical activity and healthier lifestyles. The draft WHO global strategy on diet, physical activity and health holds much promise in the fight against the global epidemic of overweight and obesity and the increasing global chronic disease burden.

Page 3

Please do not hesitate to contact me (202-690-6174) should you have any questions or need additional information on our recent efforts.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'W. Steiger', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

William R. Steiger  
Special Assistant to the Secretary  
for International Affairs