



**Strategic Alliance for Healthy Food and Activity Environments**  
**Testimony to the Senate Select Committee on Obesity and Diabetes**

*Informational Hearing on*

*“The Governor’s Obesity Prevention Plan: Status of Implementation”*

February 20, 2008

My name is Larry Cohen, Executive Director of Prevention Institute. Today I am speaking on behalf of the Strategic Alliance for Healthy Food and Activity Environments. We very much appreciate being invited to participate in this hearing. We believe there is a great opportunity for the State to do more to address the host of chronic diseases that are among the leading causes of illness and death in California.

The Strategic Alliance encompasses a broad range of interest groups within California – including local public health department and WIC agency staff, bike and pedestrian advocates and community food security proponents, California Parks & Recreation Society, and the California Pan Ethnic Health Network. We formed to reframe the debate and share a common vision that changing community norms and environments is a powerful means *necessary* to promote the health and well-being of all Californians.

We were enthusiastic that the Governor made chronic disease prevention a high priority. When the Governor announced plans for the Action Summit on Health, Nutrition, and Obesity, we were ready to support the effort and, at the request of the administration, convened Stakeholder Listening Sessions to highlight priorities for the Summit. The Alliance produced *Taking Action for a Healthy California*, a policy brief outlining the ten highest priorities for action and provided consultation to the Department of Health Services staff as they developed the CA Obesity Prevention Plan, which incorporated many of the priorities of Taking Action. I attended the Summit and was a member of the follow-up advisory committee.

California has a well crafted plan that includes many of the necessary arenas for action to improve health outcomes. There are excellent staff in place. Now it is time to move from planning to action. In fact it is beyond time. We saw the Summit as a kick-off point and are frankly disappointed that given the public health crisis that was described the level of response has not reflected that urgency.

The State is missing an important opportunity for prevention. The majority of health care expenditures in California go to treat individuals with multiple chronic conditions including diabetes, heart disease, hypertension, which are related to unhealthy food and physical activity environments. Investing in prevention makes good economic sense. Beyond direct health care costs and disability expenditures, the state’s economy is losing due to workers absences, lowered

productivity, and tremendous stress on families. It has been projected by the California DHS that these costs are \$28 billion annually as of 2005.

We want to thank the legislature for continuing to place a high priority on healthy eating and physical activity environments. There are many bills introduced by you and your colleagues that embrace the improvements that are needed. Let me share Strategic Alliance priorities for action:

### **Starting Points for Action --**

#### **Establish Interdepartmental Collaboration and Accountability for Implementation of the State Obesity Prevention Plan**

Create a central point of contact within the state government to serve as lead and liaison in working across and within different sectors, including government agencies and departments, to create active living and healthy eating environments. Provide regular reporting on the status of implementation of the state plan and improvements to food and physical activity environments across the State.

#### **Yield the Greatest Health Benefits from Investments Already Being Made in California's Infrastructure Through:**

##### **Healthy Places Oversight**

Charge the California Department of Public Health to provide technical assistance and grants to local public health agencies and community organizations to evaluate land-use planning decisions to ensure that they create communities that promote health (AB 1472).

##### **Complete the Streets**

Promote funding, training, and guidelines to support complete streets throughout California. Complete streets are designed not only for cars, but for all modes of transportation, including pedestrians, bicycles, and people with disabilities, so that all users can travel safely and independently. (AB 1538)

#### **Make State Facilities Models for Healthy Worksites**

Offer healthy foods and beverages, encourage physical activity, and provide lactation accommodation. Provide health plan benefits that cover prevention and wellness activities.

#### **Joint Use**

Facilitate joint-use of public facilities for active recreation. The state should reduce barriers to collaboration between multiple jurisdictions so that communities can fund and implement joint-use partnerships that will create greater opportunities for recreation during school hours and after-school.

#### **Institute Menu Labeling:**

Reduce the impact of unhealthy fast food. Require chain restaurants with 14 or more branches in the state to publish nutrient information on menu boards and menus (SB 120).

### **Critical Areas for Long Term Investment –**

### **Healthy Food Retail**

Expand the availability of affordable, high quality fruit, vegetables, and other healthy foods in underserved communities. Develop a state fund to provide grants and loans on a competitive basis for land acquisition, business plan development, feasibility studies, refrigeration units, outside technical assistance, and other startup costs for farmers markets and locally owned retail food markets (SB 48). Fund the Healthy Purchase Pilot to provide incentives to Food Stamp recipients for fruit and vegetable purchases and support for corner stores.

### **Active Recreation**

In accordance with the California Recreation policy, “Californians should have safe access to a park or other recreation area within walking distance of where they live.” At a minimum, the state should keep all state parks open and maintain lifeguard staff levels at all public beaches. The Governor should authorize the bond funds approved by the citizens in Proposition 84 (passed in 2006) and the park funds allocated in Proposition IC, the housing bond to develop parks and recreation facilities in underserved areas.

### **Preschool, School, and After School Environments**

Create pre-school, child care, school and after school environments that reinforce health education messages and support healthy choices. Provide at minimum 30 minutes of daily physical activity. Improve the nutritional quality of meals including with reactivation of the California Fresh Start Program to provide additional servings of fruit for school breakfast. Implement and enforce healthy food and beverage standards for competitive foods. Eliminate the advertising of unhealthy foods and beverages in all of these venues.