

**To:** Public Health Committee  
**From:** Joni Czajkowski, Senior Director of Government Relations / Advocacy  
American Heart Association  
**Re:** House Bill, 5705 An Act Concerning The Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease Through  
Community-Based Physical Activity Programs  
**Date:** March 3, 2008

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Good morning, Senator Handley, Representative Sayers and members of the Public Health Committee. On behalf of the American Heart Association, I would like to first thank the Committee for passing this bill in the 2007 and ask that you support additional year two funding as outlined in House Bill, 5705 An Act Concerning The Prevention of Cardiovascular Disease Through Community-Based Physical Activity Programs.

In 2007, the State Department of Public Health's Women's Healthy Heart program was provided \$500,000 by the General Assembly for competitive grants requiring a fifty percent match to municipalities for the promotion of healthy lifestyles. Additionally, the Department was given \$500,000 for physical fitness and nutrition programs for children ages eight to eighteen. The American Heart Association has worked closely with the State Department of Public Health promoting both programs. To date, five municipalities applied for the funds and five proposals were awarded.

#### **Background**

We know that heart disease is Connecticut's leading cause of death and that stroke is the State's No. 3 killer. The good news is that the overall numbers of deaths due to CVD have diminished over the last few years. However, the extremely bad news is that all of these gains will be wiped out if we don't take immediate action to reduce the prevalence of CVD factors in this state. Outside of the reduction of the number of smokers and tobacco users, the prevalence of just about every other major modifiable risk factor for heart disease and stroke has increased in Connecticut. Did you know ...

- 80 percent of adults in Connecticut have no regular physical activity, while 27 percent are completely sedentary;
- More than half of Connecticut's adults are overweight, while nearly 20 percent are obese. Since 1991, obesity rates in Connecticut have doubled.;
- 24 percent of Connecticut adults have high blood pressure, a major risk factor for stroke;
- Nearly 28 percent of Connecticut's adults display 3 or more risk factors for heart disease and stroke.

These numbers should jolt all of us into action. We have to address these problem statistics, because we are starting to see these risk factors develop in our children. We know that obesity is a major risk factor for cardiovascular disease, but it also has negative influence on the development of other risk factors, like high blood pressure, diabetes and physical inactivity.

**Why this bill is needed:**

- In Connecticut, cardiovascular diseases account for 11,000 deaths each year, 6,000 of which are women.
- In 2006, it is estimated that heart disease and stroke will cost the residents of Connecticut **\$4.7 billion dollars**. This figure includes direct costs of health expenditures and indirect costs of lost productivity resulting from illness, death and disability.
- More of the nation's workforce is in sedentary occupations, which leads to physical inactivity, which leads to greater risk for heart disease and stroke.
- The creation of local physical activity programs would go a long way in improving the lives of children and adults. Adults gain two hours of life expectancy for each hour of regular exercise, even if they don't begin exercising until middle age.

This current generation of children is the first in American history predicted to have a shorter life span than their parents. Why...because the childhood obesity rates have skyrocketed, especially in our state. With the cost of health care on the rise it is imperative that we seek out preventive measures. I thank the members for your time and consideration and welcome the opportunity to set up a meeting to further discuss the finer points of the bill.

SOURCE: CT Behavioral Health Risks: High Risk Populations for Cardiovascular Disease. May 2002, CT DPH/ Trust for America's Health (healthyamericans.org)