



Hello,

Thank you for this opportunity to respond to the invitation to provide comments to the Transition Team for the National Institutes of Health.

As the former Executive Vice President of the Obesity Society and prior to that, the Executive Director of the American Obesity Association, I have some 11 years experience with obesity policy at the national level. Prior to my involvement, I was an active participant in the creation and implementation of the Decade of the Brain and the creation of the National Institute on Deafness and other Communication Disorders. Overall, I have about 30 years experience in federal health policy.

My proposal to the Transition Team is that President Obama create a National Institute of Obesity Research at NIH. I am aware that the NIH and many of its supporters decry the 'proliferation' of institutes and centers and many also want to limit 'disease-specific' funding. Be that as it may, the current system does have a large number of Institutes and Centers as well as being the beneficiary of disease specific attention from Congress.

Obesity is now recognized as a major health problem in the United States and abroad. Yet the federal government's efforts are distributed over numerous agencies, with no one entity charged with responsibility for advancing our understanding of obesity, leading researchers and clinicians in positive directions and creating leadership for both federal, state and local efforts at prevention.

Over the past 10 years the budget for obesity research has improved dramatically. However, it is still far less that the conditions it causes, such as diabetes and heart disease. A National Institute of Obesity Research can (1) provide focus and leadership for researchers on this complex disease at the environmental, genetic, and behavioral levels, (2) lead other federal agencies in their responsibilities, (3) communicate to health care professionals and consumers accurate, scientifically sound information on obesity, (4) be positioned to take advantages of new scientific insights, (5) provide US leadership on global issues relating to obesity, (6) assist in the development of more efficient and accurate clinical trials of new therapies, and (7) have a leader, the director, who can be effective at the higher levels of federal policy-making than is now the case.

Finally, the creation of such an Institute can fundamentally re-define obesity away from an individual failing to recognition as a serious, complex disease.

In 2008, both the Democratic and Republican party platforms recognized obesity for the first time. (Downey, M Obesity and the Political Process, Editorial, Obesity, Nov. 2008;16(11):2391-2392.) Now is the best time for the Obama Administration to take a bold step to resolving the obesity issue. I would be pleased to provide any additional information.

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