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National Report on Obesity Shows Level Rates in Illinois, but More Work Remains

Chicago – Trust for America’s Health released its annual report on obesity, The State of Obesity (www.stateofobesity.org), and Illinois’ obesity rates remained level, the 25th highest in the nation. The report found that the adult obesity rate in Illinois is 29.4 percent, with a slightly higher rate for Latinos (29.9 percent) and a significantly higher rate for African Americans (38.7 percent). Illinois remains the 9th highest state for adolescent obesity with 19.3 percent of 10-17 year olds obese.

The Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity (IAPO), a coalition of more than 140 organizations, has worked since 2010 to develop comprehensive solutions to help turn the tide on obesity and its related diseases- diabetes, heart disease and some cancers. "It's encouraging that rates in Illinois are beginning to stabilize," said Elissa Bassler, Executive Director of IAPO, "but with adult obesity rates at nearly 30 percent, our focus must remain on improving the policies and environments that shape how we make decisions about what we eat and how active we are."

On Sept. 17-18, IAPO partners from throughout the state will convene in Bloomington-Normal for an all-IAPO Conference to discuss community successes, best practices and initiatives that advance obesity reduction and prevention in Illinois.

One IAPO initiative that shows promise in reducing obesity and related diseases is the Healthy Eating Active Living (HEAL) Act, a proposal that helps invest funds into important prevention programs such as physical education and nutrition education in schools, farmers markets in communities and diabetes and heart disease prevention programs for children and families. It is estimated that the HEAL Act would raise more than $600 million in the first year to invest in health and wellness through revenues generated by a modest excise tax on sugar-loaded beverages.

IAPO plans to work with legislators to reintroduce the HEAL Act in the 2015 spring session of the Illinois General Assembly.

One in three children and two-thirds of adults are overweight or obese in Illinois, and 40 percent of children are expected to develop diabetes in their lifetime. Research estimates that obesity-related diseases such as diabetes and heart disease cost the Illinois healthcare system $6.3 billion a year.

"With sugar-loaded beverages representing 47 percent of the added sugars in the American diet, and research continuing to show the harmful and dangerous impacts of sugar, this proposal tackles an important issue for improving the health and financial well-being of all Illinoisans," said Mark Peysakhovich, Government Relations Director with the American Heart Association Midwest.
"IAPO members focus on comprehensive solutions to obesity reduction and prevention, including working to implement high-quality physical education in our schools, working with schools and childcare providers to ensure implementation of new nutrition and physical activity standards, helping communities implement active transportation opportunities for residents, and working with employers to offer healthy worksite environments for their employees," said Sandy Noel, a Steering Committee member of IAPO and retired physical educator. "The HEAL Act would support partners across the state in creating a healthier Illinois."

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