

Successful Steps Program Has Helped New Yorkers Achieve Healthier Lifestyles, Fight Obesity, Reduce Smoking

Washington, DC - Senators Hillary Rodham Clinton and Charles Schumer, along with Representatives Maurice Hinchey, Brian Higgins, Nita Lowey, Eliot Engel, John McHugh, Michael Arcuri, and John Hall today asked that as the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) prepares to redesign the Steps to a Healthier US Program (Steps Program), that it maintain existing initiatives that have a proven track record of producing positive health changes. In a letter to CDC Director Julie Louise Gerberding, the bipartisan coalition stressed that there is a need to maintain the programs within Steps that have already yielded positive results for New Yorkers, like those that target the underlying risk factors of physical inactivity, poor nutrition, and tobacco use.

“The Steps program has been a valuable tool that has shown real benefits in helping New Yorkers achieve their goals of living more active, healthy lifestyles,” stated the lawmakers. “These valuable initiatives that are at work throughout New York have helped people lose weight, quit smoking, and lead more active lifestyles. With such positive results we should be doing all we can to make sure that these programs and others like them are maintained for the benefit of all New Yorkers.”

According to the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), a scheduled \$10 million reduction in the Steps program will be “directed to a redesigned” program to “better disseminate lessons learned.” However, the Steps program has had real measurable success throughout New York State, and there is a need to ensure that current programs that are producing positive health changes are continued. As a result, it is critical that the CDC provide plans for redesigning the program, and detail the ways in which they would maintain support for the communities that are currently succeeding with Steps programs.

The Steps Program is a national, multi-level program coordinated by HHS and the CDC. The Steps Program funds communities to implement chronic disease prevention and health promotion programs that target three major chronic diseases—diabetes, obesity, and asthma and their underlying risk factors of physical inactivity, poor nutrition, and tobacco use.

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A copy of the letter to Dr. Gerberding follows:

February 20, 2008

Julie Louise Gerberding, M.D., M.P.H.

Director

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

Department of Health & Human Services

1600 Clifton Road, N.W.

Atlanta, Georgia 30329

Dear Dr. Gerberding:

As representatives of communities with successful Steps to a Healthier US programs, we are writing to request additional information about your future plans for this initiative. The FY 2009 Budget in Brief released by the Department of Health and Human Services notes that a scheduled \$10 million reduction in this program will be “directed to a redesigned Steps program

to better disseminate lessons learned.” Since the Steps program has worked so well in our areas, we would urge you, as you begin the process of redesigning the program, to maintain currently existing programs that are producing positive health changes.

As you know, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has documented the multiple successes of the Steps program in New York. In Broome County, a weight management program called “Mission Meltaway” reached over 2,500 people, who lost an average of more than five pounds each. In Chautauqua County, a Steps program resulted in a decrease in smoking rates. The New York State Smokers Quitline saw calls from this area quadruple as a result of the increased awareness from the Steps program. In Jefferson County, school district participants in a Steps program had their health status improve to the point where it translated into an overall premium decrease for district employees. And in Rockland County, more than 100 teachers have been trained in methods to increase physical activity in their classrooms.

Given that these programs have had a quantifiable success in improving the health and well-being of many New Yorkers, we want to see these programs continued in our state. While we support dissemination of these techniques and results so that we can improve health across the nation, we also do not want to halt efforts that have worked to reduce obesity and increase health outcomes. As a result, we would ask that you provide us with your plans for redesigning the program, and detail the ways in which you plan to maintain support for the communities that are currently succeeding with Steps programs. We would also ask that you share the timeline for moving forward with the redesign of this program.

We look forward to working with you to continue the successes achieved by the Steps program and to ensure that we can continue to make progress in improving the health status of New Yorkers and all Americans.

Sincerely,

Various Members of the New York Delegation