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Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
Chairman, Committee on Energy and Commerce
“The Battle Against Diabetes: Progress Made; Challenges Unmet”
Subcommittee on Health
July 1, 2010

Thank you, Chairman Pallone, for convening today’s hearing. The term “diabetes” describes a host of related health conditions that are familiar to us.

The facts are staggering:

- More than 20 million Americans have diabetes.
- Almost 60 million more are at risk for diabetes.
- It is the leading cause of blindness and kidney failure.
- People with diabetes are at least twice as likely to die of heart disease or have a stroke.
- Diabetes is the seventh leading cause of death.

Diabetes affects all age groups, both sexes, and every race and ethnicity. However, older Americans and certain racial and ethnic groups are several times more likely to have diabetes than others.

By my tally, over 25 members of this Subcommittee – members on both sides of the aisle – are part of the Congressional Diabetes Caucus. The Caucus counts among its members Chairman Pallone, Chairman Emeritus Dingell, Ranking Member Shimkus, Ranking Member Barton, as well as myself. Representative DeGette, the Vice Chair of our Committee, currently serves as Co-Chair of the Diabetes Caucus.

I’d like to recognize and commend all of my colleagues for their efforts in support of diabetes research and related activities.

This high level of interest in diabetes underscores just how important the issue is. That is why I am glad that we are taking the opportunity to learn about landmark research accomplishments, ongoing efforts to translate what we know works into practice, and research questions we have yet to answer.

Research has shown genetic causes, effective prevention for type 2 diabetes, and ways to delay and prevent complications. The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK), Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), and other agencies within the Department are working to ensure that our government has a coordinated effort to advance diabetes research and improve the health of those affected by this condition.

Still, there is work to be done.

- We must continue our efforts to prevent women with gestational diabetes from developing type 2 diabetes later in life.
- We are not yet able to prevent type 1 diabetes.
- Nor have we perfected the link between the continuous monitoring of blood glucose and the administration of insulin – the so-called “artificial pancreas.”
- And just this week, two new studies on the drug Avandia underscore the need to better understand – and better treat – type 2 diabetes.

Underpinning all of this is the importance of a broad public health approach to diabetes. We clearly need sustained investments in research. But equally important is ensuring that people who have or will develop diabetes have the information, support, and resources they need. Many experts emphasize the point that diabetes is 24 hours, seven days a week. This is precisely why support from health providers, families, and within workplaces and communities is essential to maximize each person’s health and well-being.

I want to thank the witnesses for appearing before us today. I look forward to hearing their testimony. With that, Mr. Chairman, I yield back.