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March 30, 2011

The Honorable Fred Upton
Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Henry Waxman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Joe Pitts
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Health
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone, Jr.
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Health
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairmen Upton and Pitts and Ranking Members Waxman and Pallone:

We are writing to express our serious concern about legislation, H.R. 1217, that would repeal the Prevention and Public Health Fund in the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act and rescind any unobligated funds. Such a change to current law would significantly reduce the funding available to implement proven disease-prevention programs, including programs that reduce the health and economic toll of tobacco use.

The Prevention and Public Health Fund was created because prevention programs have been chronically underfunded despite their capacity to avert disease, save lives, and restrain the rate of growth of health care costs. Evidence continues to accumulate that public health programs and policies can effectively modify known risk factors before they lead to costly, debilitating diseases.

Investing in tobacco prevention and cessation programs is especially promising. Tobacco use is the leading preventable cause of death in the United States, responsible for more than 400,000 deaths and nearly $100 billion in health care costs each year. Reducing tobacco use would reduce premature deaths and treatment costs from cancer, heart disease, and respiratory disease. According to the National Cancer Institute, “Avoiding tobacco use is the single most important step Americans can take to reduce the cancer burden in this country.”

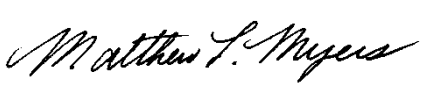
Fortunately, there are proven programs and policies to prevent tobacco use and help tobacco users quit. State-operated tobacco quitlines provide telephone-based tobacco cessation counseling and other services to help tobacco users quit. About 45 percent of smokers try to quit each year but, because of the addictive power of nicotine, only three to five percent of smokers are able to quit without any assistance. Quitline counseling can more than double a smoker’s chances of quitting, and quitline counseling combined with medication (such as nicotine replacement therapy) can more than triple the chances of quitting. Additional funding for quitlines from the Prevention and Public Health Fund would enable states to improve access to and enhance services provided by their quitlines. Public education campaigns, especially when part of a comprehensive tobacco reduction program, also have proven to be effective at reducing tobacco use. Using the Prevention and Public

Health Fund for public education campaigns would help counter tobacco industry messages, reduce the number of young people who begin using tobacco products, promote cessation for adult users, and inform them where to receive help with quitting.

Some Members have expressed concern that the Administration will solely determine how resources from the Prevention and Public Health Fund are allocated. But the law specifically preserves Congress's role in determining how these funds are allocated. The law requires that the Prevention and Public Health Fund be spent on prevention, wellness, and public health activities that have been authorized by Congress and gives the Appropriations Committees the opportunity through the annual appropriations process to direct how the Department of Health and Human Services allocates these funds.

If we are to improve health and spend wisely, we need to make smart investments in effective health promotion and disease prevention programs. Not investing in prevention now will mean higher medical bills later. H.R. 1217 would take away a crucial tool for transforming our health system into one that values prevention as much as treatment of disease.

Sincerely,



Matthew L. Myers
President
Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids