



RICHARD H. CARMONA, M.D., M.P.H., FACS
17th Surgeon General of the United States (2002-2006)

September 12, 2011

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services
Hubert H. Humphrey Building
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Re: Essential Health Benefits Recommendations from the STOP Obesity Alliance

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

The Strategies to Overcome and Prevent (STOP) Obesity Alliance Essential Health Benefits Task Force recently submitted to you recommendations regarding Essential Health Benefits. As the 17th Surgeon General of the United States, Health and Wellness Chair of the STOP Obesity Alliance, and president of the non-profit Canyon Ranch Institute, I am writing to express my unqualified support of the Alliance's recommendations.

My colleague Dr. David Satcher, the 16th Surgeon General of the United States, was prescient when he declared obesity to be an "epidemic" in the 2001 *Surgeon General's Call To Action To Prevent and Decrease Overweight and Obesity*. Now, a decade later, we have an unprecedented opportunity to establish coverage standards that could lead to a seminal change in how we address and start reverse the most prevalent public health issues of our time.

The science shows that obesity should not be treated differently than any other health condition. Nor can obesity be labeled as simply a matter of self-control. Obesity is extremely complex, and addressing it will require new skills and new approaches among our health professionals and their patients. I see that as a positive.

In our nation's history, our collective "medical team" of physicians, nurses, nutritionists, and other allied health professions has overcome any number of diseases and conditions that were first regarded as challenging or even unsolvable. Addressing obesity is an opportunity to improve prevention, advance health literacy, and diminish health disparities in communities where obesity and related chronic diseases occur at significantly higher rates due to the social determinants of health.

The health of our children is receiving much attention and rightfully so. They are our future. They interact with their parents and other family members, with teachers and faith leaders, and in some neighborhoods with social workers and governmental agency representatives. We are our children's role models, and if adults are limited in being able to prevent and eliminate obesity, then the children will not flourish.

It is imperative that our nation's health policies make obesity intervention and prevention services more readily available at no cost or with cost sharing as detailed in the STOP Obesity Alliance Essential Health Benefits Task Force recommendations. The alternative is unacceptable. As a nation, and more specifically as policymakers and health professionals, we must identify and apply health literate approaches that will engage the American people, our health care infrastructure, and every business, school, and community across our nation in joining us to develop solutions to the obesity and chronic disease epidemic.

Should you wish to discuss this topic, please let me know, and I will be happy to call you.

Thank you for your attention to the STOP Obesity Alliance Essential Health Benefits Task Force Recommendations.

In Good Health,



Richard H. Carmona, M.D., M.P.H., FACS

cc: Howard K. Koh, M.D., M.P.H., Assistant Secretary for Health, Department of Health and Human Services
David Satcher, M.D., Ph.D., 16th U.S. Surgeon General
William H. Dietz, M.D., Ph.D., Director, Division of Nutrition, Physical Activity, and Obesity, Centers for Disease Control
Cheryl Ulmer, Study Director, Determination of Essential Health Benefits, Institute of Medicine
Christine Ferguson, J.D., Director, STOP Obesity Alliance