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Analysis Suggests Menu Labeling Could Help Average California Adult Avoid Over 2 Pounds of Weight Gain a Year

DAVIS, CA, AUGUST 14, 2008....Look up at a fast-food menu board and shed a pound? It may sound too good to be true, but according to a paper released today by the University of California's Center for Weight and Health, new research shows that California adults could avoid gaining 2.7 pounds a year if calories were posted on fast-food menu boards statewide.

The analysis combines findings from two key sources to understand how calories posted on fast-food menu boards could shape the health of California. A 2008 New York City study found that patrons of fast-food restaurants where calorie counts were shown consumed 52 fewer calories per visit. And a 2007 consumer survey shows that California adults who eat at fast-food chains do so an average of 3.4 times per week. Based on conservative math, the UC Berkeley Center for Weight and Health calculates that menu labeling of calories in California could reduce caloric intake by over 9,000 calories per person annually.

"Menu board labeling has the potential to dramatically alter the trajectory of the obesity epidemic in California," UC Berkeley states in its report, *Potential Impact on Menu Labeling of Fast Foods in California*. The analysis suggests that by posting calories on fast-food menu boards California could shift from a net gain in weight each year to a net loss.

Given that more than 60 percent of California adults are either overweight or obese, the implications of this analysis could be enormous. Statewide, the Center for Weight and Health projects that by making calorie information visible at the point of purchase, the state could drop a whopping 40 million pounds a year.

"Weight gain is a simple mathematical formula," insists Dr. Harold Goldstein of the California Center for Public Health Advocacy, a cooperator on the report. "If you can skim 50 calories off your diet each time you eat out, you are going to reduce your weight gain and might even lose weight. This analysis suggests that a painless way to make that happen is to put calorie information on menu boards for everyone to see. It will be of great benefit to the 82 percent of California adults who regularly eat at fast-food chains."

In just two decades, Americans have fallen in love with eating out, consuming nearly half their calories away from home. Fast-food outlets, according to the analysis, are the largest single source of those meals. Unfortunately, knowledge of the nutrition content of fast food is hard to

come by. “Even nutrition professionals underestimate the calories contained in meals typically available at fast-food restaurants by 200 to 600 calories,” the analysis states.

The Center for Weight and Health conducts independent research on the prevention of obesity and related conditions, while developing science-based solutions to weight-related health problems for children and families. Their analysis was conducted in cooperation with the California Center for Public Health Advocacy, an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization leading efforts in California to understand and address the state’s growing obesity crisis. The full paper is available online at <http://www.publichealthadvocacy.org>