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Study Findings Suggest Zip Code May Be Key Indicator of Community's Health

Sacramento, CA, February 26, 2004... Wondering how long you'll live? Your likelihood of dying of diabetes? The chances your child will be overweight? Check your zip code. Based on a new study released today by the California Center for Public Health Advocacy (CCPHA), location seems to be a key factor in predicting susceptibility to chronic diseases.

In their analysis of diabetes death rates by state legislative district, the Center discovered a shocking correlation between those rates and the prevalence of overweight and unfit children in the same districts. The findings suggest that environmental factors, such as the proliferation of junk foods, limited opportunities for physical activity and aggressive food marketing campaigns, are adversely shaping the health of adults and children in those communities.

"It's a sad and striking correlation," says Dr. Harold Goldstein, CCPHA's executive director. "Clearly something is driving poor health behaviors in these districts. Our state and local leaders must mobilize to correct these fundamental problems in order to protect their people."

While the study, *An Early Warning Sign: Diabetes Death Rates in California Legislative Districts*, cites the staggering 67 percent increase in diabetes among California adults in just eight years as evidence of a statewide crisis, it unveils even more frightening conditions in specific communities. Death rates are as much as four times as high in some legislative districts (notably in Los Angeles County, San Bernardino County and the Central Valley) as in others. The study also found a strong relationship between

diabetes death rates and the prevalence of overweight and unfit children. Across legislative districts, the higher the death rate from diabetes, the higher the percentage of both overweight and unfit children in a district.

“For public officials and health professionals, these diabetes death rates are an unmistakable warning sign of California communities on the brink of even more serious health problems,” suggests Goldstein. “We know excess weight is a prime contributing factor to diabetes and other chronic diseases. Ignoring the epidemic of diabetes and childhood overweight puts our children at risk of becoming the first American generation to die younger than their parents.”

Given the implications of these findings for the entire state, the Center calls on policymakers to address the environmental factors that place communities at risk by, among other things, restricting marketing and advertising of unhealthful foods and beverages to children, mandating nutritional information at chain restaurants and improving access to health care in order to prevent, delay, manage and treat diabetes.

The CCPHA is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit organization founded by the California Public Health Association-North and the Southern California Public Health Association. Funding for the study was provided by The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Copies of the study and individual Senate and Assembly district fact sheets are available at the CCPHA Web site at: <http://www.publichealthadvocacy.org>.