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RESOURCES: DIABETES

What is diabetes? Diabetes—the full name is diabetes mellitus—occurs when the body does not produce or properly use insulin, a hormone that regulates glucose levels in the blood. Improper glucose regulation can cause serious health complications, including heart disease, blindness, kidney disease, and death. Two main types of diabetes account for nearly all cases: Type 1, in which the body cannot produce insulin, and Type 2, in which the body either does not produce enough insulin or cannot use insulin properly. There are no known ways to prevent Type 1 diabetes. Type 2, which accounts for 90-95% of diabetes cases, can be prevented or delayed with proper nutrition and physical activity.

Previously called “adult-onset diabetes,” Type 2 diabetes is now seen in large numbers of children, accounting for almost 50% of new diabetes cases in some communities.¹ Though there are several risk factors for Type 2 diabetes—including family history, older age, physical inactivity, and being of certain racial/ethnic groups—primary risk factors are overweight and obesity.

Diabetes Rates Are Rising. California is in the midst of an unprecedented diabetes epidemic. Far more adults and children have the disease than ever before. As of 2001, more than 1.4 million adults² and more than 12,000 adolescents in California had been diagnosed with diabetes.³ The increase in diabetes among adults and the emergence of Type 2 diabetes in children are associated with a dramatic rise in obesity and overweight.⁴

Financial Costs Associated with Diabetes. In California, the total direct and indirect cost of diabetes has been estimated to be more than \$17.9 billion per year.⁵ Projected future increases in both diabetes and overweight forecast staggering increases in chronic health conditions and overwhelming personal, social, and economic hardship in the years to come.

CCPHA Resource. **CCPHA’s 2004 Study, *An Early Warning Sign: Diabetes Deaths in California Legislative Districts***, reported on our analysis of diabetes-related deaths in each legislative district of California. This analysis complements CCPHA’s 2002 study on the prevalence of overweight and unfit children in California and provides additional insight into the relationship between diabetes and overweight in the state’s legislative districts.

Next Steps. With strong and committed political leadership, much can be done to prevent, treat, and manage diabetes. Policies must be established that address the underlying social and environmental causes of both diabetes and overweight in order to spare Californians a future of chronic health problems, decreased life expectancy, and unparalleled increases in long-term health care costs.

Footnotes.

¹ American Diabetes Association (ADA), *Diabetes Care*. 2000; 23(3): 381-389.

² Mokad, JAMA, 2003; Diamant AL et al, *Diabetes in California: Findings from the 2001 CGIS*, Los Angeles: UCLA Center for Health Policy Research, April 2003.

³ Diamant, *Diabetes in California*, 2003.

⁴ Ford, ES, et al. *Am J Epidemiol.* 1997; 146(3): 214-222.

⁵ California DHS, *Fast Facts on Diabetes*, August 2003.

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