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**Written Statement from the
American Psychological Association
for the
Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions
Subcommittee on Children and Families
on
Childhood Obesity: The Declining Health of
America's Next Generation
July 23, 2008**

On behalf of the 148,000 members and affiliates of the American Psychological Association (APA), we thank you for holding this important series of hearings to discuss childhood obesity.

APA is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world's largest association of psychologists. Comprised of researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants, and graduate students, APA works to advance psychology as a science, a profession, and a means of promoting health, education and human welfare.

In the last quarter century, the prevalence of obesity in children and adolescents has increased more than threefold (Ogden et al., 2006). Recent evidence suggests that prevalence rates remain high, affecting between 11 percent and 27 percent of children and adolescents depending on age and ethnicity (Ogden, Carroll, & Flegal, 2008). In addition, it is currently estimated that 30 percent of girls and 16 percent of boys in U.S. high schools suffer from disordered eating (Austin, Ziyadeh, Leliher, Zachary, & Forman, 2001). Obesity and disordered eating and their associated morbidities often co-occur over time and share both risk and protective factors. Therefore, APA supports joint prevention efforts to address the physical and mental health complications associated with these problems (Neumark-Sztainer et al., 2006; Neumark-Sztainer, Wall, Haines, Story, & Eisenberg, 2007).

It is of paramount importance to promote healthy lifestyle changes without inadvertently perpetuating weight stigmatization or promoting disordered eating. Therefore, APA recommends that emphasis be placed on behavior and health outcomes for children and families across the weight spectrum. Specifically, we support legislative initiatives aimed at improving nutrition and physical activity; increasing body satisfaction; decreasing weight stigmatization and weight-related teasing; promoting responsible marketing to children; and supporting healthy home environments.

We strongly support efforts to educate families on the importance of family meals at home and support innovative initiatives to help families across all socioeconomic levels successfully implement family mealtimes. In addition, APA encourages efforts to increase the availability of healthy food options, including fresh fruits and vegetables and sources of calcium, in day care settings, preschools and schools. Furthermore, we support initiatives that enable increased opportunities for physical activity through ensuring that schools offer the recommended daily levels of physical activity to students.

In addition, we acknowledge that to promote active family lifestyles, all family members need access to opportunities to be physically active, to live in communities that provide safe spaces for physical activities, and to have access to a variety of affordable healthy foods (Sallis & Glanz, 2006). We believe that the consideration of issues related to socioeconomic status and culture is critical to the development of policies and initiatives addressing weight-related concerns. As prevention efforts will have the greatest impact in reducing the individual and societal consequences of childhood obesity, more research

is also needed to develop and implement appropriate interventions to promote the adoption of healthy eating and activity early in childhood.

In closing, the American Psychological Association would like to thank you for the opportunity to share our comments related to childhood obesity. We appreciate the Subcommittee's ongoing commitment to children's health and look forward to serving as a resource and partner as you work on this and other important issues affecting children and their families.

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