

**Academy for Eating Disorders – Binge Eating Disorder Assoc. – Eating Disorder Coalition
–International Association of Eating Disorder Professionals – National Eating Disorders
Association.**

January 7, 2009

Michelle Obama, First Lady of the United States

Dear Mrs. Obama:

This letter is written on behalf of several organizations representing clinicians, researchers, educators and others concerned with the impact of eating disorders on the health and well-being of children, adolescents and adults. These organizations include the Academy for Eating Disorders (AED), the Binge Eating Disorder Association (BEDA), the Eating Disorder Coalition (EDC), the International Association of Eating Disorder Professionals (IAEDP), and the National Eating Disorders Association (NEDA).

First, we would like to applaud your plan to develop an initiative to promote healthy lifestyle habits in children. We agree that this is vitally important, but we believe the emphasis should be on behavior rather than weight. We would like to offer our support in helping to develop a program based on the latest scientific evidence and best clinical practices to ensure the optimal outcomes for your efforts.

In this spirit, we are including links to resources that summarize key points we would like to share with you. In addition, leading experts in the field would welcome the opportunity to meet with you to facilitate the development of an evidence-based proposal/strategy to address this important health issue.

Unfortunately, many strategies in the global “war against obesity” have had unintentional negative consequences. Eating disorder organizations assert that the well-intentioned, but under informed and unproven strategy of focusing on weight fuels weight-prejudice and neglects groups which may be in equal need of improving their health and lifestyle. There is also the concern that these programs may contribute to negative self-esteem, body dissatisfaction, and eating disordered behaviors. Weight alone does not provide the full picture regarding health status; consideration of lifestyle, activity patterns, and physical and mental health measures are extremely important. Further, assuming illness based on weight alone, without proven cause and effect, may lead to harmful and discriminatory practices.

National and international eating disorder organizations have joined forces to recommend that health professionals, school administrators, employers, and health policy makers focus more on health and lifestyle for all populations rather than on weight.

- The AED has developed “Guidelines for Obesity Prevention Programs” (<http://www.aedweb.org/media/Guidelines.cfm>), which are intended to address potential issues in combating rising weights.
- Additionally, the EDC has developed talking points regarding BMI testing (<http://www.eatingdisorderscoalition.org/documents/TalkingpointsBMI.pdf>).

We request that our representatives have an opportunity to meet with the involved members of

White House staff about this planned initiative and offer our feedback. We would like to be able to endorse your program and help promote it.

Sincerely,

Susan Paxton, Ph.D. , Board President, AED

Lynn Grefe, CEO , NEDA

Jeanine Cogan, Ph.D., Policy Director, EDC

Chevese Turner, President, BEDA

Bonnie Harken, Managing Director IAEDP