

## A MESSAGE FOR LEGISLATORS/ POLITICIANS ON OBESITY TREATMENT AND PREVENTION POLICIES

Obesity is a hot topic in health care reform. It is said to have reached epidemic proportions, posing drastic threats to public health, increasing morbidity, mortality and health care costs, and lowering quality of life. These concerns have spawned a variety of obesity prevention and treatment efforts.

Despite good intentions, these obesity policies have backfired, causing more problems than they solve. Americans *are* trying to lose weight, but efforts at weight management generally result in repeated cycles of damaging weight loss and regain, food and weight preoccupation, reduced self-esteem, feelings of failure, and increased risk for life-threatening eating disorders. As Americans strive to shed pounds, they move further away from the original intent of improved health.

The focused attention on weight has also led to an increase in stigmatization and weight discrimination, to the extent that discrimination based on weight now equals or exceeds that based on race or gender. Weight-based discrimination reduces quality of life and worsens health.

Every time you make fat the problem, these are side effects, however unintended they may be.

We've got some tough decisions looming in health care policy. As we consider various health reform policies, whether they're about nutrition labeling in restaurants, taxing beverages and snack foods, incentivizing health behaviors, or building school gardens, let's direct them towards health promotion instead of obesity prevention. When we consider health insurance, let's ensure that people of all sizes have equal access to compassionate and unbiased health care.

Excerpt from *Health at Every Size: The Surprising Truth  
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We need to remove the obstacles that get in the way of people of all sizes making healthy choices. Health policies that are promoted for their own sake, rather than as obesity prevention measures, are more likely to bring about desired results—and without the damaging consequences that come when done in the name of obesity prevention. All people deserve access to good food, useful nutrition information, and exercise opportunities. Everyone should feel welcome in the White House garden—which just won't happen when it is promoted for the prevention of obesity.

There is an evidence-based, compassionate alternative to the war on obesity. It's called Health at Every Size. It involves switching our focus from weight to the behaviors that make people healthy. Everyone can benefit from good health behaviors.

More information can be found in *Health at Every Size: The Surprising Truth About Your Weight* ([www.HAESbook.com](http://www.HAESbook.com)) and at the HAES Community Resources ([www.HAESCommunity.org](http://www.HAESCommunity.org)).

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